

RIDESAFE
RIDE SAFE
@ridesafe.app

BOOK YOUR RIDE NOW

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

3 Kuwait gears for diving commemoration trip



6 Harris secures nomination, dismisses Trump debate date



13 Thousands throng Beirut show as Hezbollah vows revenge



15 Khelif wins bout to ensure medal amid gender row



Fears of Middle East war grow

US to deploy warships, jets • Zionists kill 15 at Gaza school, 9 in West Bank • Aqsa imam arrested



(Left) Demonstrators brandish placards and flags of Palestine during a rally in Rabat on Aug 3, 2024, protesting the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. (Right) Protesters rally in London during the "National March for Gaza", calling to end the genocide, stop arming the Zionist entity and no Middle East war on Aug 3, 2024. — AFP photos

TEHRAN: Fears of a regional Middle East war grew on Saturday after the assassination of Hamas' political leader, blamed on the Zionist entity, triggered vows of vengeance from Iran-backed Middle East groups. The United States said it would move additional warships and fighter jets to the region as the Iran-aligned "Axis of Resistance" readied its response to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh.

The groups from Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria have already been drawn into the nearly 10-month war in Gaza between the Zionist entity and the Palestinian movement Hamas. Iran on Saturday said it expects one of those groups, Lebanon's Hezbollah, to hit deeper inside the Zionist entity and to no longer be confined to military targets.

With such talk growing, the Pentagon said it was bolstering its military presence in the Middle East to protect US personnel and defend the Zionist entity. An aircraft carrier strike group led by the USS Abraham Lincoln will replace one helmed by the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the region, the Pentagon said. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin also ordered additional ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers

Continued on Page 6



Shah advances as Daihani, Roumi fail to make cut



Ameena Shah

PARIS: Kuwaiti sailor Ameena Shah continued her brilliant performance at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games for the second day in a row on Saturday, passing six races out of 10 with 257 points over two days. However, Kuwaiti athlete Amal Al-Roumi's participation came to an end as she finished 8th in the women's 100-meter qualification round. Kuwaiti shooter Mohammad Al-Daihani also came up short in the qualification stage of the men's skeet shooting competition. (See Page 16)

CSC's faceprint attendance rule sparks debate

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Chairman of the Civil Service Commission Sharida Al-Maousherji issued a decision on Friday mandating the use of biometric systems, including facial recognition, to record employees' attendance, presence and departure during official working hours.

Somalia beach attack kills 32

MOGADISHU: An Al-Shabaab suicide bomber and gunmen attacked a busy beach in the Somali capital Mogadishu killing at least 32 people and wounding scores more, in one of the deadliest strikes in the East African country in months, police said on Saturday. The Al-Qaeda-linked militants have been waging an insurgency against the internationally-backed federal government for more than 17 years and have already targeted the Lido beach area, popular with business people and officials. Unverified videos shared online in

attendance, presence and departure during official working hours.

Employees must clock in within 60 minutes following the first two hours of their shift and again at the end of the day. Employers have the discretion to integrate additional electronic means alongside the facial recognition system to suit their operational needs. The Civil Service Bureau is also granted the authority to set alternative times for biometric verification based on the specific circumstances and requirements of various departments.

The new policy sparked considerable debate on social media. Opinions are divided, with some supporting the

move to enhance efficiency, while others raise concerns about its practicality and impact on employee morale. Supporters argue that the new system will ensure accountability and reduce instances of employees clocking in and out without actually being present.

Bu Ali, a civil service employee, noted many employees currently log their attendance with their managers' knowledge, despite having no work to do. He suggested that the government should focus on evaluating employee productivity through the actual work completed rather than just physical presence.

Continued on Page 6



Sharida Al-Maousherji

US scraps plea deal with 9/11 mastermind

WASHINGTON: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday scrapped a plea agreement with 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, just two days after the announcement of a deal that reportedly would have taken the death penalty off the table. Deals with Mohammed and two alleged accomplices announced Wednesday had appeared to have moved their long-running cases toward resolution - but sparked anger among some relatives of those killed on Sept 11, 2001, as well as criticism from leading Republican politicians.

the immediate aftermath of the attack late on Friday showed people scattering along a street, with a number of clips purportedly showing bloodied bodies lying on the beachfront. "More than 32 civilians died in this attack and about 63 others were wounded, some of them critically," police spokesman Abdifatah Adan Hassan told reporters during a press conference.

"Targeting and blasting to kill 32 members from the civilian population means these Kharijites are not going to target only government centers, soldiers and officials," he said, using the term Somali officials adopt to describe Al-Shabaab. The assault, for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility in a post on a pro-Shabaab website, began

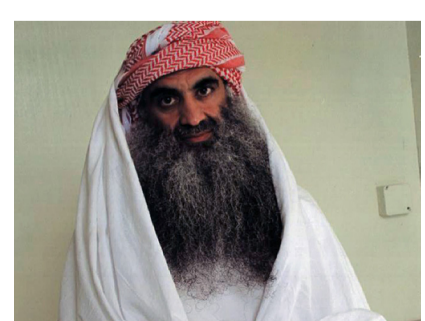
Continued on Page 6

"I have determined that, in light of the significance of the decision to enter into pre-trial agreements with the accused... responsibility for such a decision should rest with me," Austin said in a memorandum addressed to Susan Escallier, who oversaw the case. "I hereby withdraw from the three pre-trial agreements that you signed on July 31, 2024 in the above-referenced case," the memo said.

The cases against the 9/11 defendants have bogged down in pre-trial maneuverings for years, while the accused remained held at the Guantanamo Bay military base in Cuba. The New York Times reported this week that Mohammed, Walid bin Attash and Mustafa Al-Hawsawi had agreed to plead guilty to conspiracy in exchange for a life sentence, instead of facing a trial that



MOGADISHU: Relatives carry the body of a woman killed during an attack on Aug 3, 2024. — AFP



Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

could lead to their executions.

Much of the legal jousting surrounding the men's cases has focused on whether they could be tried fairly after having undergone methodical torture at the hands of the CIA in the years after 9/11. The plea agreements would have avoided that thorny issue,

but they also sparked sharp criticism from political opponents of President Joe Biden's administration.

Republican lawmaker Mike Rogers, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, sent a letter to Austin that said the deals were "unconscionable", while House Speaker Mike Johnson said they were a "slap in the face" to the families of the nearly 3,000 people killed in the Sept 11 attacks. And Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's running mate, JD Vance, described the agreements as a "sweetheart deal with 9/11 terrorists", saying during a campaign rally: "We need a president who kills terrorists, not negotiates with them."

Mohammed was regarded as one of Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden's most trusted and intelligent

Continued on Page 6



Arab League and OIC urge inquiry into Zionist crimes

Arabs commemorate international day for solidarity with hostages and detainees

CAIRO: Commemorating the international day for solidarity with hostages and detainees, the Arab League strongly condemned Zionist occupation's treatment of the prisoners and captives held under their custody. The Arab League released a statement on Saturday, vehemently calling on the international community, media outlets and humanitarian organizations across the board to take responsibility, voice their solidarity and expose the limitless violations by Zionist occupation.

These violations, the statement continued, including deliberate starvation, physical torture, sexual aggression, and many more, are only happening as a result of the international community's silence, the pan-Arab organization lamented. It is imperative that the international community immediately intervene and stop the physical and mental abuse that prisoners are subjected to in detention camps, as it is imperative to pressure the occupation to cease their humanitarian crimes and international law violations, the statement added.

The Arab League demanded that all concerned parties must start an investigation on occupation detention camps and the countless abhorrent crimes happening inside them, and hold everyone responsible accountable according to international law, the statement added.

The statement pointed to the remarks of Itamar Ben-Gvir, the Minister of National Security, in which he affirmed that Palestinian detainees would get the bare-minimum of their rights, as he called for legislating capital punishment while also preventing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from visiting any prisons or detention camps. These inhumane and barbaric behaviors of the Zionist occupation not only reflect how they approach the war on Gaza, but also their continuous unjustifiable raids on the West Bank, the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has expressed deep concern regarding the increased violent acts and severe violations committed by Zionist occupation authorities against

Palestinian prisoners. "These violations have been well-documented by various legal entities and include acts such as execution, torture, starvation, rape, isolation, and forced disappearance," the OIC said in a press release.

The detainees from the Gaza Strip have been particularly affected, resulting in the deaths of eighteen Gazan prisoners in Zionist occupation prisons since October 7, 2023. Additionally, there are many other detainees killed, but their identities have not yet been disclosed. The OIC has strongly denounced the ongoing indiscriminate detention drives carried out by Zionist authorities, according to the statement.

"These actions have resulted in a significant increase in the number of Palestinian detainees, with the current count exceeding 9,700 individuals. Among them are 80 female detainees, 52 journalists, and over 250 children, in addition to more than 3,380 individuals held in administrative detention without formal charges or trial," it regretted, adding that nearly 600 detainees are serving life sentences. The OIC requested an immediate international inquiry into the cruel conditions and continuous infringements against Palestinian detainees in occupation prisons.

"These actions are considered war crimes and crimes against humanity, and they blatantly breach the standards and regulations set forth by international humanitarian law, the Human Rights Charter, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and other pertinent international agreements," the statement added. The OIC urged the international community and human rights organizations to take action to compel Zionist authorities to treat Palestinian prisoners in line with international conventions. It reiterated the support for protecting the rights of Palestinian prisoners, pledging to convey their grievances to the international community in pursuit of freedom and justice.

5 killed in West Bank

In another development, a Zionist drone strike



GAZA: Palestinians dig graves at the Al-Zawaida Cemetery, after Zionist bombardment of the Al-Bureij refugee Camp, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

killed five people in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, the Palestinian press agency Wafa reported, while the military said it struck "five terrorists" on their way to carry out an attack. According to Wafa, Zionist military drone targeted a vehicle "with two missiles" which caught fire, killing five men. The director of the Thabet Thabet Hospital in Tulkarem said in a statement that "five martyrs" had arrived at the facility after "a drone strike on a Palestinian vehicle close to the village of Zeita in Tulkarem".

Zionist military said its air force "struck five ter-

rorists in a vehicle... who were on their way to carry out" an attack. "The Zionist police are currently conducting a counterterrorism activity in the area of Tulkarem", the military said in a statement. At the scene of the strike a witness told AFP, "I live less than 50 meters from here. We came (after) the sound of an explosion and saw a vehicle on fire" on the road towards Zeita, to the north of Tulkarem. "Next to it, we saw a body lying on the road. Inside the vehicle, there were three charred bodies, from what we were able to see, completely burnt," added Nasser, who declined to have his last name published. — Agencies

Great turnout at Kuwait's pavilion at Jerash Festival

AMMAN: Kuwait Pavilion witnessed a great turnout at Jordan's Cultural Jerash Festival in its 38th edition. The Kuwait pavilion included books, most of whose titles focused on publications related to Arab identity, culture, and the Palestinian cause within the framework of Kuwait's participation that aims to enhance Arab culture, mainly amid the sufferings of Palestinians in Gaza.

The Kuwait pavilion also included handicrafts and traditional weaving crafts (Sadu), in addition to displaying traditional Kuwaiti popular food, which received great interaction from visitors. Kuwaiti delegation member Sarah Khalaf told KUNA that described the Kuwait Fine Art gallery, which included paintings by Abduldredha Baqir, Ibtisam Al-Asfour, Thuraya Al-Baqsam, Lina Hejazy, Anbar Waleed, Shua'a Al-Helfi and Marzouq Al-Jenae. The Kuwaiti delegation is led by Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters Dr Mohammad Al-Jassar. — KUNA



AMMAN: Participants are pictured during Jordan's Cultural Jerash Festival - 38th edition. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Kuwait Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, Ambassador Sheikh Jawaher Ibrahim Duaj Al-Sabah, with Egyptian officials.

Kuwait commends deep-rooted ties with Egypt

CAIRO: Kuwait Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, Ambassador Sheikh Jawaher Ibrahim Duaj Al-Sabah, has commended the deep-rooted Kuwaiti-Egyptian interrelations. This came in remarks to KUNA, following her meeting with the Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights and Social Affairs, Ambassador Khaled Al-Baghli. This meeting was held on the sidelines of her participation in the 54th session of the Arab Human Rights Committee, which was hosted in Cairo by the Secretariat General of the Arab League.

The two officials discussed means to bolster cooperation to protect and promote human rights, whether bilaterally or globally, as Sheikh Jawaher Al-Sabah affirmed the two nations' commitment in that regard. Sheikh Jawaher Al-Sabah expressed her gratitude to Ambassador Al-Baghli for hosting her at the headquarters of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and looks forward to his visit to Kuwait and further exploring different venues of cooperation between the two countries.

Protecting human rights

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights has affirmed Kuwait's dedication to safeguarding and promoting human rights through its adherence to various international treaties and conventions. In a statement to KUNA following Sheikh Jawaher's meeting with Jaber Al-Marri, Chairman of the Arab Human Rights Committee, Sheikh Jawaher



KUWAIT: Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights with Chairman of the Arab Human Rights Committee. — KUNA photos

discussed the procedures for submitting and reviewing Kuwait's second periodic report to the Charter Committee, scheduled to be submitted by the end of 2024. Sheikh Jawaher highlighted Kuwait's efforts in advancing human rights both in legislation and practice, emphasizing that Kuwait was a pioneering nation in this field within the region.

On his part, Al-Marri expressed the Committee's readiness to support Kuwait in preparing the periodic report, which is to be presented during the next session at the League of Arab States headquarters by the end of this year. Al-Marri praised Kuwait's efforts to enhance human rights and its commitment to supporting the right to development and humanitarian efforts to assist those in need; he also recalled the humanitarian work of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was honored by the United Nations as a humanitarian leader. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Farmers harvest dates from palm trees at a farm. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

PAAET launches its admission plan for next academic year

Application process for applied colleges, institutes will be conducted electronically



KUWAIT: On Saturday, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) launched its admission plan for the academic year 2024/2025. The application process for applied colleges, institutes and training courses will be conducted electronically and will continue until January 15. Dr Fawzi Al-Doukhi, Dean of Admission and Registration at PAAET, announced that male and female students holding secondary certificates and their equivalents can access the Authority's electronic registration system to complete the application process.

Dr Doukhi explained that the staff at the authority's pavilion at The Avenues mall are fully prepared to respond to students' inquiries daily from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm until next Tuesday. He stressed the importance of entering data correctly within the specified period and reviewing the information related to the announced percentages and eligible categories.

He added that the deanship of admission and registration will be available in the admission hall (No. 7) at the Authority's building in Adailiya during official working hours to assist students and resolve any issues throughout the registration period. Entry to the hall will be limited to students only, without their parents.

Dr Doukhi noted that most students will not need to visit the admission halls, as registration is primarily electronic. However, certain groups, including holders of old secondary certificates (from 2011 onwards), holders of foreign and bilingual secondary certificates from within Kuwait and holders of certificates from outside Kuwait, will need to visit the halls to complete specific procedures. These students must make an appointment through the authority's website.

Students can access their forms throughout the

application period, make amendments, and change their preferences without needing to visit the admission halls. This procedure will conclude at the end of the application period on January 15. Dr Doukhi also mentioned that alongside the admission and registration plan, the plan for submitting grants to the director general is open and will continue until the end of the application period.

He emphasized the need for students to ensure all application requirements are completed, submit the required documents, and attend tests and interviews on time to avoid missing application opportunities. Dr Doukhi urged all students and parents to visit the authority's pavilion at The Avenues mall during the initial phase to address any inquiries and questions about applying to PAAET's colleges and institutes. He wished all students success in choosing the right path and achieving their future ambitions. — KUNA



Dr Fawzi Al-Doukhi



PAM, AMIDEAST sign agreement

KUWAIT: Within the framework of the state's keenness to contain young people, prepare them functionally, and pave ways for their development and to create a generation capable of being successful, the Acting Director General of the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM), Marzouq Al-Otaibi, and Director

of the American Institute for the Middle East, AMIDEAST, signed a cooperation agreement regarding the program to empower women and to encourage them to work in the private sector.

Al-Otaibi welcomed AMIDEAST Foundation members and US Embassy representatives and praised the important role of the training programs in developing professional skills. For his part, Omar Al-Qabani, representative of the American Middle East Institute - AMIDEAST, expressed his gratitude for the efforts made by the Public Authority of Manpower in supporting Kuwaiti youth and refining

their skills through specialized training courses. He expressed the institute's readiness to harness its energies for community service in Kuwait.

At the end of the meeting, an agreement was signed by the two parties to coordinate cooperation between them according to specific frameworks and mechanisms with the aim of developing skills, training, and job readiness in several fields, which would create a strategic humanitarian partnership that serves all segments of Kuwaiti society and spread awareness among Kuwaiti youth regarding work in the private sector.



MoI arrests fake iqama traffickers

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Residency announced Saturday the arrest of persons accused of selling residencies by fraud through fake companies. The gang brought hundreds of workers by fraud to the country in exchange for money, reaching KD 500 for an internal transfer of a residency and KD 2,000 for bringing a foreign worker to the country, the directorate said in a statement.

All involved in the case have been arrested and referred to competent bodies, it noted. The move was taken upon directives of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of Defense Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, in line with the ministry's efforts to arrest residency traders, it pointed out, affirming keenness on decisively combating law violators. — KUNA

Many smokers quit as 'chests cannot stand two fires'



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: "Kuwait's summer witnessed an increase in the number of individuals who quit smoking, as the chests cannot stand the two fires," said the Chairman of the Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer, Dr Khalid Al-Saleh. He added that the Smoking Cessation Clinic recorded a notable increase in the number of those wishing to stop the habit.

The society presents the best expertise and material support in order to assist those who want to stop smoking, as it follows the approach and steps that were approved by the national program for smoking prevention of the Health Ministry. The number of individuals who visited the society's clinic in Qadisiya from May 2024 until July 2024 was 88. The clinic is open on Wednesdays from 5:00 pm until 8:00 pm. The Smoking Prevention Clinic that was opened at Sabah Al-Salem University City in May 2024 is also witnessing a record number of students who want to quit smoking this summer semester. The clinic opens every Tuesday from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm, and the numbers are expected to increase at the start of the new academic year.

Meanwhile, the society will organize an international conference in cooperation with the National Program for Smoking Prevention under the theme "Lesion of smoking and conflict of interests" on October 27th-28th, 2024, under the patronage of Health Minister Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi. A large number of experts have been invited. The conference will focus on "World's interest in tobacco economics and its effect." Several Gulf and regional entities will also participate.



KUWAIT: The Maritime Heritage Revival Committee is intensively preparing for the 33rd diving commemoration trip, to be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from August 10 to 15.

Kuwait gears for diving commemoration trip

KUWAIT: The Maritime Heritage Revival Committee at the Kuwait Marine Sports Club is intensively preparing for the 33rd diving commemoration trip, to be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from August 10 to 15. Chairman of the Committee Ali Al-Qabandi highlighted that all participating youths have joined the camp at the club's headquarters in Salmiya.

They are undergoing practical and theoretical

training in traditional diving practices, including enduring hardships, hot weather, preparing diving ships and learning marine arts. Qabandi praised the strong turnout of Kuwaiti youth, noting that the number of participants meets the permitted quota for each of the four ships involved in the trip. These ships, gifts from the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, were launched on Saturday morning.

He detailed the trip's activities, starting with the completion of the training camp on Thursday. The Dasha (embarkation) ceremony will take place at 8:30 am on Saturday at the club's coast. The young divers will depart from the club's coast aboard Al-Nawakhada, Al-Majdamiya and Al-Ghasa ships, heading to a diving area in Khairan to practice tra-



ditional diving. Reporters and media photographers will have the chance to follow the trip closely by visiting the Khairan area on the morning of Tuesday, August 13. The trip will conclude with the Gafal Day (closing) ceremony at 5:30 pm on Thursday, August 15, when the ships return to the club's coast.

A large popular celebration will be held, featuring marine arts presentations, and parents will participate in welcoming their children on the beach, reminiscent of past traditions. Al-Qabandi emphasized that the diving trip holds significant national and cultural importance. It garners high parental support, widespread popular attention and follow-up from GCC countries, international media and heritage enthusiasts, particularly those interested in Kuwaiti heritage.

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 359
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 361
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

GCC states, Turkey pin high hopes on free trade zone

ANKARA: Ongoing negotiations between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states aim to set up one of the largest free trade zones in the world, Turkish officials said. Citing some officials who spoke on condition of anonymity, Anadolu Ajansi said when a free zone deal was signed by Turkey and the GCC members. The two sides will have one of the main free trade zones in the world. The volume of trade between Turkey and GCC states reached \$31.5 billion by 2023, it revealed.

Turkey and the GCC aim for a deal suitable for global economic conditions to provide new opportunities for the private sector, it said. Ankara seeks to boost its exports to Gulf countries, mainly agriculture and technology, through a free trade zone deal whose first round of negotiations began two days ago, it stated. Many Turkish companies have become global trademarks in varied sectors, including telecommunications, contracting, and health tourism, that play active roles in the Gulf countries.

It elaborated that the Turkish contracting sector has accomplished so far 856 projects worth \$77.5 billion in GCC states. It went to say that the GCC states further aim to invest in Turkey's food, logistics, transportation, pharmaceutical, hospital management, infrastructure, and technology sectors. The two sides will continue negotiations via the Internet, and they will meet in Riyadh in the last quarter of this year for the second round of the talks. — KUNA

August will witness a range of astronomical phenomena

KUWAIT: August will witness a range of astronomical phenomena that can be seen with the naked eye if the sky is clear during the night, the Ojeiri Scientific Center said on Saturday. The center added that starting from two o'clock in the morning on Sunday, the planet (Mars) will shine in conjunction with the star, which is characterized by its large size and orange color, and the pair will remain visible.

He explained that the new moon of the month will also be born on Sunday and will be seen the next day in conjunction with the planet (Venus) and its star, which is considered one of the brightest stars in the night, indicating that the pairing condition will be immediately after sunset. The center stated that Tuesday, the sixth of August, will witness the conjunction of the planet Venus and the planet Mercury immediately after sunset and the situation will end at night. — KUNA

KUNA launches ninth journalism program for university students



KUNA's Director General Fatima Al-Salem addresses the students. — KUNA photos



General coordinator of the program Wafaa Ramadan explains the program's agenda.



Head of the Information and Research Center Ebtahal Al-Muzaini is pictured during the orientation program.

KUWAIT: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) has launched its ninth journalism training program and will conclude on September 1 to qualify university students from Kuwait University with journalistic skills. During the orientation Wafaa Ramadan, the Head of Coordination and Follow-up Department and general coordinator of the summer program (2024-2025), said that KU-

NA's continued effort with the program honors the agency's academic work.

Ramadan added that the program would start on Sunday with workshops on how to write a proper news article and then proceed to apply what they learned in practice with the help of experienced news editors working in the editorial hall. The students will be separated into 3 groups

once in the editorial hall and will rotate weekly in all departments: the local bulletin department, the Arabic bulletin department, the foreign bulletin department, the electronic department, and the artificial intelligence department. Ramadan highlighted that the students participating will be given two certificates and a financial reward at the end of the program. — KUNA



Late Information Minister Bader Al-Ya'agoub checking the damage. — KUNA



Iraqi forces damaged KUNA severely.

Invasion could not confiscate KUNA's will, national role

KUWAIT: When the invasion began at the dawn of August 2, 1990, Iraqi forces seized the facility's equipment and arrested its staff. Although the Iraqi forces committed crimes against all institutions, including KUNA, whose equipment and archives were seized, the invasion was not able to confiscate the agency's will and national role. Therefore, KUNA had the ability to complete its media message within a short period of time.

Practices of the Iraqi forces did not prevent KUNA from transmitting news from its office in London. Thus, Arab and international news agencies were informed that London became the main office of KUNA. KUNA started to transmit from London due to the substantial presence of global and Arab media organizations. Its message was based on the assertion of Kuwait's legitimacy and independence as a sovereign state recognized by the UN and international and regional organizations.

As soon as transmission resumed, the agency started forming an administrative team able to achieve its tasks. The agency provided subscribers with news via fax and appointed technical, professional, and administrative calibers outside Kuwait. The first general statement transmitted by the agency to all its offices and correspondents was to continue transmission and intensify efforts during that

phase to serve the homeland.

After announcing the intention to hold a Kuwaiti popular conference in Jeddah on October 13, 1990, KUNA decided to start complete transmission through its national cadres from London via its new network. The transmission process coincided with holding the conference, and KUNA resumed transmitting its English service in addition to the Arabic one. From October 3, 1990, until November 1991, KUNA was able to transmit about 16,110 news items.

Following the liberation in November 1991, the agency started transmitting items from its headquarters in Kuwait, and its plan of action was completed by 1992. Kuwait's media has played a pivotal role at that period and was able to expose the Iraqi forces' practices. It also contributed to the steadfastness of citizens over seven months until the country was liberated on February 26, 1991. — KUNA



Iraqi invaders seized KUNA's equipment and archives.



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Bangladesh students call for nationwide civil disobedience

What Putin, Biden might gain or lose from prisoner swap

Page 6

Page 7



LIVERPOOL: Police officers face protesters outside the Liver Building in Liverpool on August 3, 2024 during an 'Enough is Enough' anti-immigrant rally. — AFP

Fearful UK mosques on alert over far-right protests

Anti-immigrant rhetoric pushed by politicians emboldening extremists to come out: Activist

LONDON: British Muslims voiced fear about far-right protests that have targeted UK mosques in recent days, as community leaders bolstered security at Islamic centers. UK police monitored several far-right protests and counter-demonstrations on Saturday after a third night of rioting linked to misinformation about a mass stabbing that killed three young girls sparked fears of more unrest.

The violence, which has seen scores of arrests across England, presents the biggest challenge yet of Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer's month-old premiership. It has also put hard-right agitators linked to football hooliganism in the spotlight at a time when anti-immigration elements are enjoying some electoral success in British politics.

By early afternoon Saturday, demonstrations were underway in several UK cities, including Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Portsmouth and London, as well as Belfast in the province of Northern Ireland. There were no immediate reports of violence. Police are on high alert after 10 people were arrested and four officers required hospital treatment following a riot in the northeastern English city of Sunderland late on Friday.

Other images shared on social media showed balaclava-clad youths throwing bricks and other missiles as fireworks and flares were let off, while shops were also looted. "This was not a protest, this was unforgivable violence and disorder,"

Northumbria Police Chief Superintendent Mark Hall told reporters.

The unrest followed two nights of disturbances in several English towns and cities in the wake of Monday's frenzied knife attack in Southport, near Liverpool on England's northwest coast. They were fueled by false rumors on social media about the background of British-born 17-year-old suspect Axel Rudakubana, charged with several counts of murder and attempted murder over the attack at a Taylor Swift-themed dance party.

'Thugs'

In Southport, the mob threw bricks at a mosque, prompting hundreds of Muslim places of worship across the country to step up security amid fears of more anti-Islamic demonstrations. Police blamed supporters of the disbanded English Defence League, an anti-Islam organization founded 15 years ago whose supporters have been linked to football hooliganism.

In Sunderland on Friday, protesters shouted Islamophobic chants, set a police station and two cars on fire and threw beer cans and bricks at police outside a mosque. "The Muslim community is deeply anxious right now, really distressed about what they've seen," Zara Mohammed, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), told AFP on Friday.

Far-right social media channels have advertised "enough is enough" anti-immigrant rallies, while anti-fascism groups have vowed to stage counter-protests. In Belfast, a small group gathered in the city center and chanted "Islam out". In Hull, one group of demonstrators chanted "You're not British any more," while counter-protesters shouted "Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here," the BBC reported.

'Solidarity'

Anti-racism campaign group Hope Not Hate has identified more than 30 events planned for Saturday and Sunday. On Thursday night, the MCB held a meeting with mosque leaders to discuss security ahead of the further threat of violence this weekend. One of the leaders present reported receiving "threatening calls saying 'We are going to attack you'", while others wondered whether they should go ahead with planned activities, such as children's classes and women's meetings, Mohammed said.

On Friday evening in Liverpool, near Southport, the Abdullah Quilliam mosque was able to count on the support of large numbers of local residents, not all Muslim, who turned up to protect the building after rumors circulated online about plans to target it. "I'm here in solidarity for another community who are my neighbors really. These are all people who

live in my streets. These are people who live in my city," Daniel, who did not give his surname, told AFP.

At the end of Friday prayers at the London Central Mosque, many worshippers interviewed by AFP said they were worried about the anti-Islamic violence of the last few days. "Before it was hidden but now people dare to say what they really think and it is very frightening," said Hishem Betts, a 24-year-old student. Imran Mahmood, a 52-year-old computer programmer, voiced alarm that social media rumours may have encouraged some people to direct their ire at mosques. "Instead of looking at the facts, they started blaming Muslims. It is brainwashing," he said.

'Emboldened'

"It is just really shocking to see how coordinated and planned this is, how quickly a disinformation fake news campaign has resulted in this," the MCB's Mohammed said of the Islamophobic protests. But it "hasn't come out of a vacuum", she added, pointing to "a strain of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment" in the country, including from political leaders. "This is not something new but the scale is becoming wider," said Iman Atta of the Tell Mama project, which records incidents of Islamophobia. She said that "language" used around migration helps "drive those who are extreme to actually become more emboldened to come out". — AFP

Food blogger serves 'hope on a plate' to Gaza's war-weary kids

JERUSALEM: Sitting in a tent in southern Gaza, Palestinian food blogger Hamada Shaqoura surveys cans of beans and tinned meal and longs for something that could conjure a sense of home. Before the Zionist assault on Gaza destroyed his home and uprooted his family three times, the 32-year-old was a YouTuber reviewing Gaza City's buzziest burger, pizza and noodle spots. To satisfy his craving for comfort food on a war-rations diet, he taught himself to cook using food aid packages and whatever fresh vegetable he can scrounge up. "I had an idea to turn this canned food we have been eating for months into something new, to make delicious food for kids," he tells AFP in a video call from Khan Yunis.

Shaqoura's cuisine includes beef tacos "Gazan style", pizza wraps and a deep-fried "golden sandwich", which he films as he cooks and offers up to the tent camp's hungry children. "Zakee (delicious)!" a boy beams in a video after biting into a sweet "fettuccine crepe" — strips of fried batter mixed with apples and chocolate sauce.

Despite patchy internet Shaqoura offers a different side of the conflict to document what he calls "resilience and persistence" amidst the rubble of war-devastated Gaza. Online he is known as Hamada Shoo and his blogs have attracted nearly half a million followers on Instagram, as well as donations from his fans. "I want to feed as many mouths as I can," he said. Barefoot children tending empty pots and bowls run through the ruins of Khan Yunis in his tent, where the war chef cooks up pea stew in huge pots over an open-pit fire.



GAZA: Palestinian food blogger Hamada Shaqoura cooks and serves food from aid supplies in these screenshots taken from videos he posts on his Instagram account.

Fighting famine

While the United Nations has not officially declared famine in Gaza, experts say hunger is rampant in the Zionist besieged territory with little food aid reaching the 2.4 million population. More than 30 Palestinians have died from malnutrition since the Zionist war on Gaza has devastated infrastructure across Gaza. The Zionist entity denies any starvation and blames the United Nations and aid agencies for ineffectively distributing supplies. But Palestinians have told AFP of being forced to skip meals and having to boil weeds for their children to survive.

"There is real famine" in northern Gaza, says Shaqoura who fled from there in March, and little to go around in the south of the battered territory. He says he is determined to help feed children.



"That is my motivation"

Shaqoura, who had just got married when the war erupted and was planning to work in the food industry, is one of several Gaza food bloggers. Their goal is to try and provide through food "dignity and a sense of liberation" to beleaguered Gazans, not just comfort, he says. Cooking something that people can identify with is part of the "everyday struggle to stay human and retain your dignity in the face of a brutal occupation intended to strip you of that humanity year after year", says Laila El-Haddad.

Gaza developed a "distinct" cuisine, with its spirit of innovation forged by two decades of Zionist blockades and sieges, said the food expert. Shaqoura says he serves "hope on a plate" as an antidote to the deprivations and grief overwhelming Gaza. — AFP

Nigerian police teargas and arrest hardship protesters

ABUJA: Nigeria's police on Saturday arrested dozens of protesters and fired teargas to disperse those trying to march to government offices in the capital Abuja on a third day of demonstrations over a cost-of-living crisis. In northern Kano state, at least one person was shot in the neck and rushed to hospital, witnesses said.

At least 13 people were killed on Thursday when protests turned violent, Amnesty International said, blaming police for using live rounds. Police said on Saturday that in three days of protests seven people had died, but they denied responsibility. Nearly 700 people had been arrested during the protests and nine officers injured, police added in a statement.

Police have sought to confine protesters to the outskirts of major cities to avoid disruptions to business and traffic. On Saturday, demonstrators gathered at a major stadium in Abuja but police used teargas to disperse them when they attempted to march on a major road into the center of the city. "Many Nigerians are feeling the same pains, so I believe they will come out and protest. I will be here till midnight," said protester Julius Chidiebere before police fired teargas.

Damilare Adenola, leader of the Take It Back group organizing protests in Abuja, said Friday that the crackdown was ruthless, "but only made us more resolute." "Hunger is the greatest motivation of this protest — that is why we are calling for the end of bad governance," said the 29-year-old activist. In the commercial hub of Lagos, more than 1,000 protesters gathered peacefully to denounce economic hardship worsened by President Bola Tinubu's reforms that started last year with the removal of a popular petrol subsidy and the devaluation of the currency, which sent inflation soaring. — Agencies

International

Harris secures presidential nomination

Trump agrees to Fox News debate with Democratic opponent on September 4

WASHINGTON: US Vice President Kamala Harris effectively secured the Democratic party's presidential nomination Friday, confirming her remarkable rise to party standard bearer in November's showdown against Republican Donald Trump. Harris, 59, was the sole candidate on the ballot for a five-day electronic vote of nearly 4,000 party convention delegates. The first Black and South Asian woman ever to secure a major party's nomination, she will be officially crowned at a Chicago convention later this month.

Harris said on a phone-in to a party celebration she was "honored" to have amassed the required support by the second day of the marathon virtual vote and declared: "We are going to win this election." "And it is going to take all of us ... We are going to talk with people about the fact that we are all in this together, and we stand together," Harris said. "And so, let's let folks know that our campaign is about the future. And it's about an expansion of rights and freedoms, and for the opportunity of everyone to not just get by, but to get ahead."

In the two weeks since Joe Biden ended his re-election bid, Harris has gained full control of the party, smashing fundraising records, packing arenas and erasing the polling leads Trump had built over the president. "I couldn't be prouder," Biden posted on X after her nomination.

The nomination milestone came with Harris preparing to hit the campaign trail next week for a swing across seven crucial election states alongside her yet-to-be-named running mate. The roll call — held earlier than usual and online due to altered state registration rules — marks the official beginning of the 2024 convention, with the traditional festivities starting when the



US Vice President Kamala Harris

party faithful descends on Chicago on August 19.

Fox debate

Harris will also get busy preparing for her first debate this year. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said late Friday that he had agreed to debate his Democratic opponent on Fox News on September 4. "I have agreed with FoxNews to de-



Former US President Donald Trump

bate Kamala Harris on Wednesday, September 4th," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. It was not immediately clear if Harris had agreed to the debate.

The former prosecutor and ex-California attorney general last month dared Trump to debate her face-to-face. "Well Donald, I do hope you'll reconsider to meet me on the debate stage, because as the saying goes, if you've got something to say, say it to my

face," Harris said at a campaign rally in Atlanta.

In his post, Trump said the debate will be held in Pennsylvania, and moderated by Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum in front of a full audience. Fox News confirmed that the debate would have "spectators" and follow similar rules to the June 27 CNN debate between Trump and Biden.

Wave of momentum

Trump's White House bid was turned upside down on July 21 when 81-year-old Biden, facing growing concerns about his age and lagging polling numbers, withdrew his candidacy and backed Harris. Energetic and two decades younger than 78-year-old Trump, the vice president has made a fast start, raising \$310 million in July, according to her campaign — more than double Trump's haul.

In a sign that the Harris campaign is thinking big, US media reported that a raft of senior advisors from Barack Obama's historic candidacies in 2008 and 2012 have taken up top positions with her. While Biden made high-minded appeals for a return to civility and the preservation of democracy, Harris has focused on the future, making voters' hard-fought "freedom" the touchstone of her campaign. She and her allies have also been more aggressive than the Biden camp — mocking Trump for reneging on his commitment to a September debate and characterizing the convicted felon as an elderly crook and "weird."

Meanwhile Trump and his Republicans have struggled to adapt to their new adversary or hone their attacks against Harris — at first messaging that she was dangerously liberal on immigration and crime before pivoting to falsely accusing her of pretending to be Black for political purposes. — AFP

What Putin, Biden might gain or lose from prisoner swap

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON: When eight Russian citizens including a convicted hitman touched down in Moscow on Thursday in a historic prisoner swap with the West, President Vladimir Putin greeted them like heroes. "I want to congratulate you all on your return to your Motherland," Putin beamed, assuring the group that also included cybercriminals and spies that Russia had not forgotten them for "even a minute".

Putin's message — both to those released on Thursday and his agents across the world — was clear: Even if you get caught, the Kremlin has your back. A total of 24 people were freed in Thursday's exchange — 16 headed to the West and eight to Russia — in the biggest prisoner swap deal since the Cold War.

Russia released US journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva, ex-marine Paul Whelan as well as high-profile domestic dissidents. In return, it secured the largest number of alleged Russian spies freed in a single exchange for over a decade, as well as FSB security service assassin Vadim Krasikov. "For the target audience, Putin brought back his soldiers, the heroes of a hybrid Third World War," said Russian political analyst Konstantin Kalachev. "And the audience is not just special services, but millions who feel like citizens of a country at war with a stronger enemy," he added.

For Putin, the main prize was Krasikov — an elite FSB officer arrested in Germany in 2019 for murdering a former Chechen separatist on what Berlin said was Moscow's orders. Putin, previously director of the FSB and an officer in its Soviet incarnation the KGB, had long pushed for Krasikov to be included in a prisoner swap deal, an idea that Germany had resisted. The deal will have "strengthened loyalty" among other spies and assassins, said Abbas Galymov, an independent political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter. "Putin can count on them to work with greater dedication," he added.



MOSCOW: Russia's President Vladimir Putin welcomes Russian citizens released in a major prisoner swap with the West, at Moscow's Vnukovo airport on August 1, 2024 in this photo by Sputnik. — AFP photos

'You're stuck with me'

In the US, the swap is helping burnish Biden's legacy and shine some reflected glory on Kamala Harris's election hopes. In a powerful piece of political theater, Biden and Harris hugged Gershkovich and two other American prisoners as they arrived back on US soil at Joint Base Andrews near Washington. "Joe Biden said he was going to do everything he could to help Kamala Harris get elected. Putting her in that photo op at Air Base Andrews was a part of that," Frank Sesno, a professor at George Washington University and former White House correspondent, told AFP.

The 81-year-old president insisted that he wasn't rushing to seal a legacy. Asked on the tarmac late Thursday how important it was to him to get the exchange done knowing he would not seek a second term, he replied that it had "nothing to do" with that. "I'd still get it done even if I was seeking a second term. You're stuck with me as president for a while, kid," said Biden.

Like Biden, Harris has been a staunch backer of Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022. Asked what role Harris had played in the swap, US National

Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Thursday that she was "very much a core member of the team that helped make this happen." This included meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at a "timely moment" earlier this year when Biden was trying to persuade him to free a Russian assassin who was key to the deal.

But the upshot is not just that Biden wants to secure his legacy and help Harris while doing so — instead, the two goals appear to be one and the same. "Part of his legacy now is to get her elected," said Sesno. "If Donald Trump is elected and then undoes a lot of things Biden did, that tarnishes and overshadows his legacy," he said. "What Joe Biden is going to do from here to Election Day is trying to be sure that anything that his administration can claim credit for, Kamala Harris gets a piece of the sunshine."

Trump strongly criticized the prisoner swap, saying it was a "win" for Russian President Vladimir Putin and could spur other adversaries to detain US nationals. But the former president's previous boasts that only he could secure Gershkovich's release had played into Biden's hands now that the Democrat had done so himself. "He got gazzumped by Biden-Harris," said Sesno.

"In some ways they have Donald Trump to thank for the credit that they get for bringing him back."

'Win-win'

For the West, the exchange has raised fears Putin could become even more emboldened to take prisoners in what it blasts as "hostage diplomacy". The Kremlin said Friday it was determined to see the release of more Russians it believes are wrongfully imprisoned in the West. Over the last two years, Russia had been "blatantly" detaining Westerners for a possible swap "as negotiations with the West stalled" amid the Ukraine offensive, said Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

Russia may see the exchange as a great success and "wonderful victory", political analyst Ekaterina Schulmann said in an interview with Russia's independent TV Rain. But the reality was more nuanced. "Russia is getting eight clumsy losers who couldn't do their job and got caught," she said. "While it is giving away people who, if they want to and if they are able, will become significant political public figures." — AFP



MARYLAND: US Vice President Kamala Harris smiles as US President Joe Biden hugs former US Marine Paul Whelan as he arrives at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on August 1, 2024.

Fears of Middle East war grow...

Continued from Page 1

and destroyers to the Middle East and areas under United States European Command, as well as a new fighter squadron to the Middle East.

On Friday, thousands of people in Qatar attended funeral prayers for Haniyeh, who was buried north of the capital Doha two days after his death. Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Saturday said he was killed by a "short-range projectile" fired "from outside the accommodation area" where he was staying. Haniyeh had been in Iran to attend the swearing-in of President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday. The Zionist entity, accused by Hamas, Iran and others of the attack, has not directly commented on it.

The killing of the Qatar-based Haniyeh is among a series of tit-for-tat attacks since April that had already heightened fears of a regional conflagration. His death came hours after the Zionist entity struck south Beirut, killing the Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukr. Haniyeh's deputy was killed in south Beirut early this year in a strike which a US defense official said the Zionist entity carried out. In another high-profile killing, the Zionist army on Thursday confirmed that an air strike in July killed Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif in Gaza.

A Zionist airstrike on a school sheltering displaced

persons in Gaza City killed at least 15 Palestinians on Saturday, hours after two strikes in the occupied West Bank killed nine Palestinians including a local Hamas commander, Hamas said. A Hamas statement said one of those killed was a commander of its Iktarm brigades, while its ally Islamic Jihad claimed the other four men who died in the strike as its fighters. Hamas said all nine of those killed in the two Zionist attacks in the West Bank were fighters.

In the Gaza Strip, at least 15 people were killed in the Zionist strike on a school sheltering displaced persons in Gaza City's Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, the government media office said. Earlier on Saturday, Zionist strikes in the enclave killed six people in a house in the southern area of Rafah and two others in Gaza City, Gaza health officials said. At least 39,550 Palestinians have been killed in the Zionist military campaign in Gaza, according to Gaza health officials, mostly women and children.

A senior Muslim cleric was detained on suspicion of inciting "terrorism" on Friday after he mourned Haniyeh at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque, his lawyer told AFP. Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, 85, the former grand mufti of Jerusalem and current head of its Supreme Islamic Council, called Haniyeh a "martyr" in his sermon at the mosque in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, the lawyer said.

Zionist police, without naming Sabri, said they had "opened an investigation into an imam suspected of making inciting statements and supporting terrorism during a sermon given (on Friday)". A man in his twenties was also arrested for making "inciting statements" during Friday prayers, the police statement added. — Agencies

ing the explosives and recruiting members of the team that killed 17 sailors in an attack on the USS Cole. After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, he took refuge in neighboring Pakistan and was captured there in 2003. He was then held in a network of secret CIA prisons.

Hawsawi is suspected of managing the financing for the 9/11 attacks. He was arrested in Pakistan on March 1, 2003, and was also held in secret prisons before being transferred to Guantanamo in 2006. The United States used Guantanamo, an isolated naval base, to hold militants captured during the "War on Terror" that followed the Sept 11 attacks in a bid to keep the defendants from claiming rights under US law. The facility held roughly 800 prisoners at its peak, but they have since slowly been repatriated to other countries. Biden pledged before his election to try to shut down Guantanamo, but it remains open. — AFP

CSC's faceprint attendance rule...

Continued from Page 1

"Many employees have no work to do and have offices to be at, and this is the disguised unemployment that the government has created over the years," Bu Ali explained. He also criticized the timing of the announcement, saying, "Who issues a decision on Friday, when people are chilling on their off day, unaware of the news?"

Critics expressed several concerns. Fajer Mishari questioned the Civil Service Commission's focus on attendance rather than addressing broader issues like educational outcomes, labor market needs and employee satisfaction. "Where is the study of educational outcomes and the actual needs of the labor market? As well as the projects to achieve job satisfaction, leadership development, training programs, etc. Is it reasonable that no issues are left except for the fingerprint?" Mishari remarked.

Athari Al-Enzi pointed out potential disruptions to workflow, suggesting that employees might abandon their tasks to meet biometrics requirements, thereby reducing overall productivity. "So, suppose

Somalia beach attack kills 32...

Continued from Page 1

when a suicide bomber detonated a device and gunmen stormed the area. Officer Mohamed Omar told AFP that members of the group had "shot civilians randomly". He said security forces had ended the attack and killed five gunmen, while a sixth member of the group "blew himself (up) at the beach". Witnesses said there were many people at the popular location when the explosion occurred, describing how gunmen then stormed the area.

Hawo Mohamed, who lives near the scene, said at least seven people he knew had died in the attack. "The devastation is immense and there is blood and severed pieces of human flesh strewn in the scene," he

I am halfway through my work, and there is a client in front of me. Do I ask his permission to go for a faceprint and then get back to complete my work? Or if I had a meeting, whether in person or online, with external parties, how do I stop the meeting for biometrics? And is someone who forgets to faceprint halfway through the shift considered absent for the entire day?" Enzi asked sarcastically.

Hala Essa rued the absence of salary increases or strategic payroll alternatives over the past 16 years, coupled with weak living standards, traffic congestion and poor infrastructure. She argued that submitting biometrics every two hours does not address these fundamental issues. "Other countries have reduced working hours to four hours, and our government is still thinking about biometrics. Is it not enough for employees to endure no increases or promotions, traffic congestion and dilapidated streets?" she queried.

Ibrar Al-Ali echoed these sentiments, stating that the new system does not encourage productivity or motivation but merely ensures physical presence at government bodies and ministries without considering actual work performance. "It was better to think of ways to increase productivity and motivate them to do their work, and thus the productive person will naturally be committed. Even if the government takes biometrics every half hour, it cannot force employees to adhere to this path. This is work, not detention."

told AFP. Witness Abdulatif Ali was at the beach when the attackers struck and described the chaos and fear that unfolded late at night. "Everybody was panicked and it was hard to know what was happening because shooting started soon after the blast," he told AFP. "I saw many people strewn (on the ground) and some of them were dead and others wounded," he said.

Ahmed Yare witnessed the tragedy unfold from a nearby hotel. "I saw wounded people at the beachside. People were screaming in panic and it was hard to notice who was dead and who was still alive," he told AFP. Hospitals appealed for blood donations following the influx of wounded people, local media reported. Abdulkhalig Osman, a senior official at the Kalkaal hospital, told reporters that they had received scores of injured people. "Eleven of them were transferred to the operations unit for critical injuries and those with light injuries were sent home after receiving the necessary medical assistance," he said. — AFP

US scraps plea deal with 9/11...

Continued from Page 1

lieutenants before his March 2003 capture in Pakistan. He then spent three years in secret CIA prisons before arriving at Guantanamo in 2006. The trained engineer — who has said he masterminded the 9/11 attacks "from A to Z" — was involved in a string of major plots against the United States, where he had attended university.

Bin Attash, a Saudi of Yemeni origin, allegedly trained two of the hijackers who carried out the Sept 11 attacks, and his US interrogators also said he confessed to buy-

International

Bangladesh students call for nationwide civil disobedience

Protesters demand Sheikh Hasina's resignation

DHAKA: Student leaders rallied Bangladeshis on Saturday for a nationwide civil disobedience campaign as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government weathered a worsening backlash over a deadly police crackdown on protesters.

Rallies against civil service job quotas sparked days of mayhem last month that killed more than 200 people in some of the worst unrest of Hasina's 15-year tenure. Troop deployments briefly restored order but crowds hit the streets in huge numbers after Friday prayers in the Muslim-majority nation, heeding a call by student leaders to press the government for more concessions.

Students Against Discrimination, the group responsible for organizing the initial protests, urged their compatriots to launch an all-out non-cooperation movement from Sunday. "This includes non-payment of taxes and utility bills, strikes by government workers and a halt to overseas remittance payments through banks," the group's Asif Mahmud told AFP.

Students are demanding a public apology from Hasina for last month's violence and the dismissal of several of her ministers. They have also insisted that the government reopens schools and universities around the country, all of which were shuttered at the height of the unrest.

Crowds on the street have gone further, insisting Hasina leave office altogether. "She must go because we don't need this authoritarian government," Nijhum Yasmin, 20, told AFP from one of many protests staged around the capital Dhaka on Saturday.

"Did we liberate the country to see

our brothers and sisters shot dead by this regime?" The non-cooperation strategy deliberately evokes a historical civil disobedience campaign during Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war against Pakistan. That earlier movement was spearheaded by Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's independence leader, and is remembered by Bangladeshis as a part of a proud battle against tyranny. "Now the tables have turned," Illinois State University politics professor Ali Riaz told AFP.

"The regime's foundation has been shaken, the aura of invincibility has disappeared," he added. "The question is whether Hasina is ready to look for an exit or fight to the last." The premier had on Saturday offered "unconditional dialogue" with the students to address their demands, her press secretary Nayeemul Islam Khan told AFP. "She is ready to sit with them. She does not want conflict any more," he added. Mahmud told AFP that students had rejected the overture.

Hasina, 76, has ruled Bangladesh since 2009 and won her fourth consecutive election in January after a vote without genuine opposition. Her government is accused by rights groups of misusing state institutions to entrench its hold on power and stamp out dissent, including the extrajudicial killing of opposition activists. Demonstrations began in early July over the reintroduction of a quota scheme — since scaled back by Bangladesh's top court — that reserved more than half of all government jobs for certain groups.

With around 18 million young Bangladeshis out of work, according to government figures, the move upset graduates facing an acute employment crisis. The



DHAKA: Anti-Discrimination Student Movement held a rally at Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka on August 3, 2024, to demand justice for the victims killed in the recent countrywide violence during anti-quota protests. — AFP

protests had remained largely peaceful until attacks on demonstrators by police and pro-government student groups.

Hasina's government eventually imposed a nationwide curfew, deployed troops and shut down the nation's mobile Internet network for

11 days to restore order. Foreign governments condemned the clampdown, with European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell this week calling for an international probe into the "excessive and lethal force against protesters". Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan

told reporters last weekend that security forces had operated with restraint but were "forced to open fire" to defend government buildings. At least 32 children were among those killed last month, the United Nations said Friday. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Uganda detects two cases of mpox

KAMPALA: Uganda has detected its first two cases of mpox (monkeypox), the health ministry said on Saturday, a day after the Africa Union allocated \$10.4 million in funding to combat the outbreak. The cases were discovered in the western border district of Kasese, in the towns of Mpondwe and nearby Bwera, the director general of health services Henry Mwenda told AFP. "Our findings indicate the infections did not take place in Uganda but (came) from DRC," he said of the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. Nine people were under medical surveillance following contact with the two confirmed cases, he added. — AFP

US helicopter crash lands in Japan

TOKYO: A US military helicopter crash landed in a rice paddy southwest of Tokyo with no injuries on Saturday, national broadcaster NHK reported. There was no damage from the crash before 11 am (0200 GMT) in Kanagawa prefecture neighboring the capital, NHK said. The helicopter, which had a crew of 12 and had Navy markings, took off again about 1 hour and 40 minutes later. The US military blamed the incident on engine trouble but has not provided further explanation, the broadcaster said. Calls to the US Navy in Japan seeking comment were not answered. — Reuters

UK charges two more in arson case

LONDON: Two more people have been charged as part of the investigation into an arson attack on a Ukrainian business in London in March, an attack allegedly linked to Russia, British police said on Saturday. Jakeem Barrington Rose, 22, and Ugnius Asmena, 19, have both been charged with aggravated arson. Rose was also charged with two counts of possessing an offensive weapon. London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement. British authorities had previously accused five other men of being involved in the attack, including for offences under the National Security Act over "activity likely to benefit Russia", according to court records. — Reuters

Quake strikes off Filipino island

MANILA: An earthquake of magnitude 6.7 struck off the eastern shore of the island of Mindanao in the Philippines on Saturday, the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ) said. The quake was at a depth of 10 km (6.2 miles), GFZ said. The U.S. Geological Survey said pegged the magnitude at 6.8. The US National Tsunami Warning Center said that there was no tsunami threat from the earthquake. Philippine seismology agency PHIVOLCS said in an advisory it was not expecting damage from the offshore quake, but warned of aftershocks. — Reuters

Marriage-related degree course

HONG KONG: China's Civil Affairs University announced a new undergraduate marriage program to develop marriage-related industries and culture, drawing scorn of social media users who questioned the need for such a course as marriage rates decline. With the program due to start in September, the Beijing-based institution aims to "cultivate professionals to develop marriage related industries and culture", state media reported this week. Policymakers are struggling to reverse the fall in new births, which are closely linked to marriage rates, after China's population fell for a second consecutive year in 2023. — Reuters

Indian army teams scour landslide site for remaining dead

BENGALURU, India: Army teams pushed deeper into Indian tea plantations and villages struck by landslides that killed more than 300 people, working on the assumption that nobody was left alive to rescue. The number of fatal floods and landslides in India has increased in recent years and experts say climate change is exacerbating the problem.

Days of torrential monsoon rains battered the southern coastal state of Kerala before twin landslides struck before dawn on Tuesday, with more than 500 soldiers among the rescue crews. Military engineers laid a temporary bridge to speed up search efforts after earlier relying on jury-rigged ziplines to transport recovered bodies over raging waters.

"The assumption is that there is nobody left to be rescued," a statement issued late Thursday by the Kerala state government said. Around 8,000 people were taking shelter at emergency camps around the disaster site in Wayanad district.

State health minister Veena George said relief workers in the camps were counseling traumatized survivors and cremating dead animals in an effort to prevent disease outbreaks. George told AFP on Friday that 199 bodies had been recovered. But the final toll is certain to be higher, with rescuers reporting the gruesome discovery of more than 100 body parts in flood waters or buried in the muddy earth. Wayanad is famed for the tea estates that crisscross its hilly countryside and which rely on a large pool of laborers for planting and harvest. Many of the victims were workers and their families,



WAYANAD, India: This handout photograph taken on Aug 1, 2024 and released by Humane Society International, India, shows an aerial view of the tea plantations after landslides in Wayanad. — AFP

who lived in brick-walled row houses that were inundated by a powerful wall of brown sludge as their occupants slept. Uprooted trees and rocks were strewn about one abandoned village in front of overturned vehicles and partially collapsed homes.

Monsoon rains across the region from June to September offer respite from the summer heat and are crucial to replenishing water supplies. They are vital for agriculture — and therefore the livelihoods of millions of farmers and food security for South Asia's nearly two billion people.

But they also bring regular destruction in the form of flash floods and landslides. At least 572 millimeters (22.5 inches) of rain fell in Wayanad in the two days before the landslides, according to state government figures. Damming, deforestation and development projects in India have also exacerbated the human toll. India's worst landslide in recent decades was in 1998, when rockfalls triggered by heavy monsoon rains killed at least 220 people and buried the tiny Himalayan village of Malpa. — AFP

Lahore hit by record rain

LAHORE: Pakistan's second-largest city of Lahore was deluged with record-breaking rainfall on Thursday, the national weather agency said, with hospitals flooded, power interrupted and streets in the metropolis submerged.

The eastern city was lashed by almost 360 millimeters (14 inches) of rain in three hours, the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) said. "This was record-breaking rainfall," the agency's deputy director Farooq Dar told AFP. The previous record dates to July 1980, when 332 millimeters fell over three hours. "Look at all these buckets and how much water has accumulated. We're exhausted from trying to remove the water," Sadam, a 32-year-old shopkeeper, told AFP as he took stock of his considerable losses.

The PMD had forecast a wetter-than-usual monsoon season this year for Pakistan, one of the countries experts say is most vulnerable to extreme weather being spurred by climate change.

Over the past three days, 24 people have been killed by rainfall in the country's mountainous northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority said.

In Lahore, a city of 13 million in the eastern Punjab province, one person was killed by electrocution as a result of Thursday's cloudburst, according to local police. The city's commissioner declared an emergency and said offices and schools would be shut for the day.

Yasir Ali, a 26-year-old resident, said it was a "sad day for the nation". "For a poor person it is heartbreaking that he's been unable to go to work today," he told AFP.

Two government hospitals in Lahore reported flooding in their wards, and there were intermittent power outages continuing into the afternoon. Roads were also submerged, bringing traffic



A fruit vendor drinks tea at his stall along a flooded street amid rainfall in Karachi. — AFP

and businesses to a standstill. Ahmed Khan, 48, who earns a daily wage, appealed to the government "to pay some attention here and resolve this water

issue". Maryam Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab province, posted on X that "the entire government machinery is in the field" to drain the water. — AFP

Floods, mudslides kill two in China, raze homes, bridge

SHANGHAI: Floods and mudslides destroyed village homes and part of a highway in China's southwestern province of Sichuan on Saturday, killing at least two people and leaving 17 missing in two incidents, state media reported on Saturday. Overnight in Kangding, a mountainous region in Sichuan's western highlands, mudslides took down some

homes in a village, killing two, while 12 were missing, national broadcaster CCTV reported.

A bridge connecting two tunnels on an expressway linking Kangding and Ya'an collapsed on Saturday morning, causing three vehicles to fall off the highway. One of the six passengers has been rescued, CCTV said. It did not specify whether they had fallen off the bridge. China has been roiled by record rain and heatwaves this summer as scientists warn of more extreme weather fuelled by climate change. In the past decade, Sichuan and Hunan in the south have suffered the most damage from storms and floods, reporting cumulative economic losses of more than 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion) each, according to some estimates. In Xixing, a city

in Hunan province, 30 residents died after Typhoon Gaemi lashed the region with record rains in late July. Local officials said on Friday that 35 people were still missing. Across Hunan, the rains induced by China's most powerful typhoon so far this year have affected 1.15 million people and caused direct economic losses of about 6 billion yuan.

A highway bridge collapse triggered by flash floods in the northwestern province of Shaanxi killed 38 people, local authorities said on Friday in their latest tally of fatalities.

Despite search and rescue work in the past two weeks, 24 people remained missing after the Shaanxi bridge collapse, which plunged 25 vehicles into a river. — Reuters

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024

'Middle-income trap' blocks growth in developing countries: WB study

New research offers a 21st century playbook for high-quality growth

Risk identification and allocation in PPP projects

By Hassan Abdulrahim

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects play a crucial role in developing and maintaining public infrastructure by leveraging the strengths of both the public and private sectors. A fundamental aspect of PPPs is risk allocation, which significantly influences the project's success. Proper risk allocation encourages private sector participation and innovation, while improper allocation can deter investment and reduce project value.

The risk allocation general rule is "the risk should be allocated to the party best equipped to manage it". This section of Visionary Consulting Company's executive guide explores the primary risks in PPP projects and how they can be effectively allocated between public and private partners.

Land Availability: One of the initial risks in PPP projects is land availability. Without suitable land, infrastructure projects cannot proceed. Land may be unavailable due to legal issues, contamination, or preservation requirements for historical sites, causing delays. For instance, acquiring land for a new highway might be delayed if archaeological findings are discovered during preliminary surveys, necessitating additional time for preservation efforts. Typically, the public partner is better equipped to handle land acquisition risks due to their familiarity with legal procedures. Securing land before the tendering process is recommended to mitigate these risks and ensure the smooth progression of the project.

Construction Risk: Construction risk is another significant factor. This includes cost overruns and delays during the construction phase. Studies show that about 86 percent of public infrastructure projects exceed their initial budgets by an average of 28 percent. In contrast, PPP projects tend to stay within budget and are completed on time, as the private sector is not remunerated until construction is complete. Thus, construction risk is usually allocated to the private partner, who has the expertise and incentive to manage it efficiently. By aligning the private partner's financial interests with project completion, PPPs encourage timely and budget-conscious construction practices.

Operational risk: Operational risks arise after the construction phase, where maintaining an asset might be costlier than planned. Factors like higher salaries and input prices or service interruptions can increase operational costs. For example, a toll road might face higher-than-expected maintenance costs due to increased traffic volume and wear and tear.

These risks are typically borne by the private partner and can be mitigated through tariffs adjusted for inflation and long-term supply contracts. The private partner can also implement advanced maintenance techniques and technologies to control costs and ensure service quality.

Hand back risk: At the end of a PPP contract, the risk that the asset might be in poor condition when handed back to the public sector needs to be managed. This can be addressed by linking final payments to the asset's condition and stipulating maintenance standards in the contract. For instance, a PPP agreement for a hospital might include provisions that require the private partner to meet specific cleanliness and functionality standards before the asset is transferred back to the public sector. Such measures ensure that the public continues to benefit from high-quality infrastructure even after the PPP contract ends.

Demand risk: Demand risk involves the possibility that the number of users of a public asset may be lower than anticipated, leading to financial distress. Accurate long-term demand forecasting is challenging due to factors like economic and demographic changes or the emergence of competing services. For instance, a new airport might experience lower-than-expected passenger numbers if a competing airport opens nearby or if economic conditions reduce air travel. Shifting demand risk to the private partner can incentivize high-quality service delivery, but if the private partner has little control over demand, this risk should be shared. Public guarantees ensuring minimum revenue, concession period extensions, or exclusivity rights can help balance this risk. Public guarantees can provide a safety net, ensuring that the private partner receives a minimum revenue stream regardless of user numbers.

For example, a minimum revenue guarantee for a toll road ensures the private partner can cover operational costs even if traffic volume is lower than projected. Extending the concession period can allow the private partner more time to recoup their investment if initial demand is lower than expected. Exclusivity rights prevent competing infrastructure projects from being developed in the same area during the PPP term, protecting the private partner's revenue.

Financial Risk: Financial risks include the availability of funds once a project is awarded. Banks might refuse financing after due diligence, a risk shared by both partners. Involving banks early in the process and including financial commitments in bidding documents can mitigate this risk, although it might increase transaction costs. For example, requiring banks to provide conditional financing commitments during the bidding phase can reduce uncertainty and ensure funds are available when needed. Currency mismatch is another financial risk, particularly in developing countries, where project revenues in local currency might not cover foreign currency loan repayments if the local currency devalues. This risk can be managed by borrowing in local currency or by the public authority supporting the risk if local currency loans are unavailable. For instance, if a PPP project in an emerging market relies on local currency revenues but has foreign currency debt, the public authority might provide support through currency hedging mechanisms to protect against exchange rate fluctuations.

Political Risks: Political risks also impact PPP projects. These include changes in legislation or regulatory actions that could negatively affect a project's revenue. Political risk insurance and "change in law" provisions in contracts can offer protection. For example, if a government changes tax laws in a way that significantly increases the cost of a PPP project, the private partner can seek compensation under a "change in law" clause. Additionally, regulatory risks, such as a non-independent regulatory authority lowering tariffs, can jeopardize project viability. Guarantees regarding tariff setting and recourse against adverse regulatory actions can mitigate these risks. For instance, a PPP water supply project might include contractual guarantees that tariffs will be adjusted based on inflation or other economic indicators to ensure the project's financial stability. This protects the private partner from politically motivated tariff reductions that could undermine the project's viability.

Force majeure risk: Force majeure events, like natural disasters or civil wars, pose significant risks. Contracts should address whether the private partner should receive compensation for such events and under what conditions the contract should be terminated. Compensation mechanisms are crucial but should complement, not replace, insurance against force majeure risks. For example, a PPP project in a region prone to natural disasters might include provisions for compensation if a major event significantly impacts the project's operations. Insurance coverage for such events provides an additional layer of protection for the private partner. A well-structured force majeure clause ensures that both parties understand their responsibilities and rights in the event of unforeseen circumstances. This clarity helps maintain the project's stability and the partners' relationship, even during challenging times. Having outlined the primary risks that might face PPP projects, it is worth mentioning that risk allocation is vital in PPP project structuring and contract negotiation. A risk matrix, developed early in the project development process, can facilitate discussions and outline risk allocations. Effective risk allocation enhances project attractiveness and influences profit margins for private investors, ultimately contributing to the success of PPP projects.

A risk matrix is a tool that outlines potential risks, their impacts, and the party responsible for managing each risk. Developing this document early in the project ensures that both partners understand their roles and can prepare accordingly. For instance, a risk matrix for a PPP transportation project might list risks such as construction delays, cost overruns, demand shortfalls, and regulatory changes, specifying how each risk will be managed. Effective risk allocation not only attracts private investment but also promotes efficiency and innovation in project delivery and operation. By aligning the interests of both public and private partners, PPP projects can deliver high-quality infrastructure and services that meet public needs and provide value for money.

Ultimately, the success of PPP projects hinges on carefully balancing risks between the public and private sectors. This balance ensures that both partners are incentivized to perform efficiently and effectively, maximizing the benefits of the PPP model for all stakeholders involved.

Note: Hassan Abdulrahim is senior instructor, Economics & Finance, at Canadian College Kuwait and Deputy CEO at Visionary Consulting Company



BEIJING: People walk out of a subway in Beijing on August 2, 2024. More than 100 countries including China, India, Brazil, and South Africa face serious obstacles that could hinder their efforts to become high-income countries, according to a new World Bank study. — AFP

WASHINGTON: More than 100 countries — including China, India, Brazil, and South Africa — face serious obstacles that could hinder their efforts to become high-income countries in the next few decades, according to a new World Bank study that provides the first comprehensive roadmap to enable developing countries to escape the "middle-income trap."

Drawing on lessons of the past 50 years, the World Development Report 2024: The Middle Income Trap finds that as countries grow wealthier, they usually hit a "trap" at about 10 percent of annual US GDP per person — the equivalent of \$8,000 today. That's in the middle of the range of what the World Bank classifies as "middle-income" countries. Since 1990, only 34 middle-income economies have managed to shift to high-income status — and more than a third of them were either beneficiaries of integration into the European Union, or of previously undiscovered oil.

At the end of 2023, 108 countries were classified as middle-income, each with annual GDP per capita in the range of \$1,136 to \$13,845. These countries are home to six billion people — 75 percent of the global population — and two out of every three people living in extreme poverty. They generate more than 40 percent of global GDP and more than 60 percent of carbon emissions. And they face far bigger challenges than their predecessors in escaping the middle-income trap: rapidly aging populations, rising protectionism in advanced economies, and the need to speed up the energy transition.

"The battle for global economic prosperity will largely be won or lost in middle-income countries," said Indermit Gill, Chief Economist of the

World Bank Group and Senior Vice President for Development Economics. "But too many of these countries rely on outmoded strategies to become advanced economies. They depend just on investment for too long — or they switch prematurely to innovation. A fresh approach is needed: first focus on investment; then add an emphasis on infusion of new technologies from abroad; and, finally, adopt a three-pronged strategy that balances investment, infusion, and innovation. With growing demographic, ecological and geopolitical pressures, there is no room for error."

The report proposes a "3i strategy" for countries to reach high-income status. Depending on their stage of development, all countries need to adopt a sequenced and progressively more sophisticated mix of policies. Low-income countries can focus solely on policies designed to increase investment — the 1i phase. But once they attain lower-middle-income status, they need to shift gears and expand the policy mix to the 2i phase: investment and infusion, which consists of adopting technologies from abroad and spreading them across the economy. At the upper-middle-income level, countries should shift gears again to the final 3i phase: investment, infusion, and innovation. In the innovation phase, countries no longer merely borrow ideas from the global frontiers of technology — they push the frontier.

"The road ahead won't be easy, but it's possible for countries to make progress even in today's challenging conditions," said Somik V Lall, Director of the 2024 World Development Report. "Success will depend on how well societies balance the forces of creation, preservation,

and destruction. Countries that try to spare their citizenry the pains associated with reforms and openness will miss out on the gains that come from sustained growth."

South Korea is a standout example in all three phases of the 3i strategy, the report says. In 1960, its per capita income stood at just \$1,200. By end of 2023, that number had climbed to \$33,000. South Korea began with a simple policy mix to increase public investment and encourage private investment. That morphed in the 1970s to an industrial policy that encouraged domestic firms to adopt foreign technology and more sophisticated production methods. Korean companies responded. Samsung, once a noodle-maker, began manufacturing TV sets for domestic and regional markets. To do so, it licensed technologies from Japanese companies — Sanyo and NEC. Samsung's success fueled demand for engineers, managers, and other skilled professionals. The South Korean government responded in turn. The Ministry of Education set targets — and increased budgets — for public universities to help develop the new skill sets demanded by domestic firms. Today, Samsung is a global innovator in its own right — one of the world's two largest smartphone manufacturers. Other countries followed similar paths — including Poland and Chile. Poland focused on raising productivity with technologies infused from Western Europe. Chile encouraged technology transfer from abroad — and used it to drive domestic innovation. One of its biggest successes involved adapting Norwegian salmon farming technologies to local conditions, making Chile a top exporter of salmon. — World Bank

Sharp slowdown in US job growth boosts jobless rate

WASHINGTON: The US unemployment rate jumped to near a three-year high of 4.3 percent in July amid a significant slowdown in hiring, heightening fears the labor market was deteriorating and potentially making the economy vulnerable to a recession. The increase in the unemployment rate from 4.1 percent in June marked the fourth straight monthly increase, the Labor Department reported on Friday.

Its rise from a five-decade low of 3.4 percent in April 2023 to now the highest level since September 2021 all but guarantees a September interest rate cut from the Federal Reserve, with economists calling for a 50 basis point reduction in borrowing costs. They argue that the U.S. central bank is most likely behind the curve in easing monetary policy. The sharp slowdown in the labor market had been flagged for a while in sentiment surveys and a rise in the number of people on unemployment benefits. The Fed's rate hikes in 2022 and 2023 have weighed on demand for labor, with government data this week showing hires in June were the lowest in four years.

The employment report, which also showed the increase in annual wages

last month was the smallest in more than three years, prompted some Wall Street institutions, including Bank of America Securities, to pull forward their rate cut expectations to September from December. Goldman Sachs now anticipates three rate cuts this year instead of only two before the data.

"If Fed officials had seen this report, they would have cut rates by 25 basis

points this week," said Brian Bethune, an economics professor at Boston College. "There is absolutely no justification for continuing to exert an elevated level of monetary restrictiveness on the economy." Nonfarm payrolls increased by 114,000 jobs last month, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said. That was well below the 215,000 jobs per month added over the last 12 months, and the at least 200,000 that economists say are needed to keep up with growth in the population, accounting for the recent surge in immigration. — Reuters



NEW YORK: An employment sign is seen on the window of a department store on Aug 2, 2024 in New York City. — AFP

Business

NBK releases its Sustainability Report for 2023

Report highlights bank's key milestones and contributions towards ESG

- Nationalization rate reached 76.7 percent, while women representation reached 44 percent of the total workforce
- Women accounted for 28.8 percent of managerial positions
- NBK has raised the standard of green assets within its portfolio, extending financial support for clean technologies across various sectors

KUWAIT: Underscoring its pioneering role and corporate approach to fully integrate sustainability into the core of its business activities and operations, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has released its Sustainability Report for 2023, highlighting the key milestones achieved and contributions made towards implementing its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Strategy over the past year.

The Eighth Annual Sustainability Report showcases the strategic initiatives implemented by NBK during 2023 in relation to compliance with ESG standards, material issues, opportunities, challenges, and the noticeable progress made in its strides towards a sustainable future, which it embarked on since 2016. It also brings into focus the commitments it is determined to fulfill going forward.

The report also presents a holistic perspective on NBK's strategic approach to sustainability, which aims to positively impact the communities it serves, while driving sustainable growth in line with global best practices. In this report, NBK reinforces its com-

Sustainable Accounting Standards Board (SASB), and Boursa Kuwait's ESG Reporting Guidelines. To promote transparency and accountability in the banking sector, NBK obtained independent third-party verifications to the alignment of the 2023 report with the GRI standards, as well as the conformity of its GHG footprint for 2023 with the GHG Protocol.

Sustainable finance

Among the achievements highlighted in the report, the Bank's Sustainable Assets reached \$3.65 billion as of Dec 31, 2023, representing more than 36 percent of 2030 \$10 billion target. This includes designated financing and lending to our clients to support them achieve their environmental and social goals, investments in sustainable financing instruments, in addition to investing in the bank's physical assets that have an environmental or social impact.

In this context, NBK increased its investments in green assets through extending financial support for a wide array of environmental projects that focus on renewable energy, clean transport, green buildings, and sustainable water and wastewater management across various sectors, in efforts to accelerate the achievement of the UN SDGs.

The sustainability and sustainable finance landscapes are rapidly evolving as new research, regulations, frameworks, standards, and tools emerge globally. In 2023, NBK invested in the capacity building of its client-facing employees to ensure they are equipped with the requisite knowledge they need to proactively support clients through their own transition plans, providing 108 training hours in sustainable finance to 36 key champions. The report also highlights the new sustainable products launched for our retail consumers in 2023, expanding our consumer offerings to include eco-friendly electric vehicles (EV) and housing loans in partnership with prominent car dealers and sustainable product providers in Kuwait. By choosing any of the loans, consumers are now able to gain an advantage from competitive interest rates that are lower than the current commercial schemes, whilst benefiting from innovative and energy-efficient solutions.

Strong governance

Fundamental to effective implementation of the ESG strategy, the report presents the ESG governance framework NBK has developed and which the Board has approved. This dynamic ESG governance framework consists of a Sustainability and Climate Change (S&CC) Committee and five sub-committees, operating under the Board of Directors' oversight, responsible for managing ESG-related matters. The S&CC Committee and its five Sub-Committees convened several times during FY2023 to establish mandate and formalize the ESG Strategy Roadmap for FY2023-2025.

Instrumental to governance resilience is adequate management of climate-related risks and opportunities. NBK adeptly manages ESG trade-offs concerning strategic and operational decisions. In this context, NBK institutionalized alignment with the recommendations of Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) during the year and developed a roadmap for adequately integrating climate-related matters in the bank's enterprise risk management framework. We are establishing formal systems to identify, assess, and manage climate and



NBK headquarters building.

- The bank's sustainable assets reached \$3.65 billion, representing more than 36 percent of 2030 \$10 billion target
- Reduced overall disclosed GHG emissions by 10.43 percent compared to baseline year (2021)
- Reduced electricity consumption by 5.75 percent yoy, recycled 99.25 metric tons of paper
- Local suppliers represented 70 percent of NBK's total suppliers, and local procurement accounted for 84 percent of total procurement spending

ESG-related risks and opportunities associated with our activities and business relationships.

Environmental stewardship

The report also sheds light on the progress made in reducing environmental impact and improving resource management, highlighting the notable reduction achieved in overall disclosed GHG emissions by 10.43 percent compared to our 2021 baseline year, in addition to the reduction of electricity consumption by 5.75 percent YoY and 15.8 percent compared to our 2021 baseline year. To effectively manage environmental impact from operations, NBK implemented Building Energy Management System (BEMS) in 22 standalone local branches and approved the installation of solar panels in 24 branches by 2025.

On the same note, the report presents NBK's responsible waste management practices, which includes recycling 99.25 metric tons of paper, representing 87 percent of total paper usage. The recycling of paper resulted in saving 1,687 trees, 406.921 kWh of energy, and 694.743 gallons of water.

Work environment

Considering the working environment as a key aspect for fostering long-term organization success, the report highlights the Bank's ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, its sustainable approach to employee development and engagement, and promoting employee well-being. In 2023, women representation reached 44 percent of the total workforce, with 28.8 percent in managerial positions. ESG-related training hours reached 3,306 hours, with a focus on Sustainability Awareness, Sustainable Finance, and Climate Risk Management. NBK also took proactive steps in developing a Staff Complaint and Grievance Policy to promote a safe, transparent, and open working environment. We prioritized employee health and wellbeing through various targeted initiatives and enhanced policies, including providing employees with on-site specialized medical advice at NBK Clinic.

Supply chain

The report also underscores NBK's commitment to fully integrating ESG standards across the supply chain, as of 2023, local suppliers represented 70 percent of NBK's total suppliers, and local procurement expenditure accounted for 84 percent of total procurement spending. NBK has also revised its procurement policy with the inclusion of ESG principles, implementing a more sustainable procurement strategy and methodology.

Community investments

Community Investments totaled KD 28 million in 2023, a 22 percent increase from 2022, which includes committing KD 3.0 million for the restructuring of Shuwaikh Beach Waterfront in line with NBK's corporate social responsibility and sustainability principles. Approximately 56 percent of NBK's corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions were directed towards initiatives aimed at providing youth with market exposure, valuable experience, and essential financial knowledge. NBK's instrumental efforts were recognized with the award "Best Bank for Corporate Responsibility in the Middle East 2023" by Euromoney.

NBK continues to foster financial inclusion, accessibility, and literacy, facilitating KD 20 million in 2023 to small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), achieving a 12 percent yoy growth. This is coupled with the official launch of the 'Bankee' financial literacy program in Kuwait's public and private schools, with 15,940 students and around 3,400 teachers participating.

In efforts to foster and nurture local talent, Kuwaitization rate reached 76.7 percent as of Dec 31, 2023. Approximately 70 percent of management positions at NBK were occupied by Kuwaiti citizens within the reporting period. A key factor in increasing our Kuwaitization percentage is through new employee hires. In 2023, 84.5 percent of our newly-hired employees were Kuwaiti.



mitment to increasing value creation opportunities for all through a range of actions aimed at reducing environment impact, accelerating the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, and empowering communities by making banking accessible for all.

The 2023 report is centered around the four pillars of NBK's ESG Strategy Framework, formulated to tackle the critical issues that matter most to our stakeholders and are of significance to our business. The report outlines the achievements made in relation to each of these four pillars (Governance for Resilience; Responsible Banking; Capitalizing on Our Capabilities; and Investing in our Communities), and the related material issues, initiatives implemented, and future goals and targets.

Notably, NBK Sustainability Report for 2023 is aligned to both domestic and global sustainability or ESG reporting standards and frameworks including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG), the UN Global Compact (UNGC), Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol,

Burgan Bank announces winners of Kanz Account monthly draw

مبروك للرابحين في حساب كنز
Congratulations to the winners of the Kanz Account
August Monthly Draw
سند شهر أغسطس
2,000 دك
#KanzBurgan | 1804080

• MOHAMMAD ALI SHAMSAAH	• OSAMA ADLI GHAZAL	• أسماء بدلي غزال	• محمد علي شمساه
• AHMAD NASER ALMANSOUR	• REEM BANDAR ALSALMAN	• ريم بندر السلمان	• أحمد ناصر المنصور
• SAAD AYED ALRASHEDI	• KHLUD ABDULHADI BITTAR	• كلود عبدالحادي بيطار	• سعد أيده الرشدي
• MEHRDAD YOUSSEF ZADEH	• RANIA MOHAMMED BADAWY	• رانيا محمد بدوي	• مهرداد يوسف زاده
• MUSTANSIR MOIZ RAIPURYAWAIA	• OMAR MOHAMMAD ALJAHED	• عمر محمد الجاهد	• مستنصر موز رايبورياوا
• AMMAR HUSSAIN HUSSAIN	• NIDAL HASAN ALBATTAH	• نidal حسن البتاه	• اممار حسين حسين
• ADEL ABD ALNAB ABDULRAHEEM	• OMAR SALEM ALOSAIMI	• عمر سالم الوسايمي	• عادل عبد الناب عبد الرحيم
• KHALED SALEEM ALSALEM	• MARWA FATHY GHOBASHY	• مروة فathy غباشي	• خالد سالم السالم
• ALIAH ABDULKAREEM ALDHUWAHI	• MOHAMMAD ALI BUALBANAT	• محمد علي بوالبنات	• آليه عبد الكريم الدواهي
• MOHAMMAD ABDULRAZZAQ RZOUZI	• SULAIMAN ALI SALEH	• سليمان علي صالح	• محمد عبدالرزاق رزوي

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced on Saturday the names of the Kanz account monthly draw winners, who will each take home a KD 2,000 cash-prize. All Kanz customers who maintain a minimum balance of KD 200 for at least one week before the draw date are included in the draw, and their chances of winning increases with higher deposits.

The 20 lucky winners are:

- Mohammad Ali Shamsah
- Ahmad Naser Almansour
- Saad Ayed Alrashedi
- Mehrdad Yousef Zadeh
- Mustansir Moiz Raipuryawaiya
- Ammar Hussain Hussain
- Adel Abd Alnab Abdulraheem
- Khaled Saleem Alsalem
- Aliah Abdulkareem Aldhuwaihi
- Mohammad Abdulrazzaq Rzouzi
- Osama Adli Ghazal
- Reem Bandar Alsaman

- Khloud Abdulhadi Bittar
- Rania Mohamed Badawy
- Omar Mohammad Aljahed
- Nidal Hasan Albattah
- Omar Salem Alosaimi
- Marwa Fathy Ghobashy
- Mohammad Ali Bualbanat
- Sulaiman Ali Saleh

In addition to the monthly draw of Kanz account, Burgan Bank also offers a semi-annual KD 500,000 prize and a mega annual prize of KD 1,500,000. Kanz Account is accessible to any individual and can be opened in Kuwaiti Dinar or in major currencies (USD, EURO, GDP) with a minimum KD 200 requirement for account opening. More information on opening a Kanz account, the draws or any of the Bank's products and services, is available at any of Burgan Bank branches, through the Call Center at 1804080 and Burgan Bank website www.burgan.com.

Shoppers throng as Shein opens pop-up store in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Reneilwe Malahlela was one of almost a hundred shoppers queuing at the opening of Shein's first pop-up store in South Africa on Friday, keen to check out clothes and accessories often selling for the equivalent of less than \$10 each. "We like affordability because as a student in this economy, it just makes sense," the 24-year-old said.

Best known as an online retailer, Shein

has opened pop-up stores across the world to try to reach a wider audience for its ultra-cheap fashions, mostly made in China. The South African store, in a Johannesburg mall, will be open from Aug. 2-11.

Malahlela, wearing Shein black leather pants, a corset, biker jacket and a wig - also from the retailer - told Reuters she had been a regular shopper with the brand since 2020. Inside the pink-decorated store, young and old browsed tennis skirts priced at 151 rand (\$8.32) and strap handbags from 73 rand (\$4). Some, like 63-year-old Namhla Kandawaywa, saw a business opportunity.

"Our kids are sitting at home doing nothing. So when you come here you look

at opportunities ... for them to start buying in bulk and resell," the pensioner told Reuters, holding t-shirts and a pair of khaki pants. "I wanted to feel the texture because normally when you order things online, you can't really tell whether the texture is good or bad until you see it in front of you and by then it's already late."

Shein's critics say its low prices are the result of customs duty exemptions on low-value packages, or exploiting workers. The China-founded company says its success is down to its "on-demand business model and flexible supply chain" and that it is investing millions in strengthening governance and compliance across its supply chain. — Reuters

Chevron to move HQ from California to oil-loving Texas

NEW YORK: After more than 140 years in California, Chevron announced Friday that it will move its corporate headquarters to Texas in a shift that drew applause from the southern state's oil-loving politicians.

The oil company, once known as Standard Oil of California, will relocate its corporate headquarters from San Ramon in Northern California to Houston, long a global petroleum center and nearer to major US oilfields and petrochemical facilities. Chief Executive Mike Wirth and Vice Chairman Mark Nelson plan to move to Houston before the end of 2024, with all corporate functions transitioning to the Texas city within five years, Chevron said in a press release.

The company currently has about 7,000 employees in the Houston area and 2,000 in San Ramon. Chevron said it will keep some jobs in San Ramon connected to California operations.

The shift reflects the strikingly different approaches of the biggest two US states towards energy, with California enacting ag-



A signage is displayed at a Chevron gas station in Santa Monica, California. — AFP

gressive targets to combat climate change, including electric vehicle mandates, and Texas championing conventional oil drilling. Chevron's website dates its history in California to 1879 when predecessor Pacific Coast Oil Co. was founded in San Francisco

In September 2023, California officials including Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom announced a lawsuit against Chevron and four other oil giants for knowingly misleading the public on the dangers of climate change. Wirth told CNBC that he disagreed with California's overall approach to energy, saying the state is

"discouraging investment in the energy that runs its economy," harming consumers.

But Wirth said the pivot was not primarily a "dispute over politics," but a decision to place Chevron at the "epicenter" of the energy world with proximity to suppliers and universities from which to recruit.

Texas has become a major player in renewable energy, with significant wind and solar projects, but the state's Republican leadership embraced Chevron's announcement with a nod to its continued support of traditional petroleum. — AFP

Gulf Bank hosts anime painting workshop for Red cardholders

Session held in partnership with 'Art N Dine' as part of GB Masterclass series



Young Red cardholders participating in a workshop organized by Gulf Bank.

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to engage with the community, Gulf Bank organized a new session in the "GB Masterclass" series, with approximately 20 young Red cardholders participating in a workshop focused on step-by-step painting of anime figures.

This session was held in collaboration with Art N Dine, a company specializing in organizing modern artistic events that bring people together in attractive locations to paint while enjoying food, drinks, and live music. During the session, participants had the opportunity to create personalized artworks inspired by anime themes, learning to draw characters ranging from superheroes to science fiction, under the guidance of Art n Dine. They explored composition, various illustration styles, and received tips on creating character poses.

Gulf Bank is committed to interact and communicate

with the broader community, especially its customers, through various events. The bank aims to promote sustainability principles within the community through the GB Masterclass series, collaborating with experts and specialists who have extensive experience in fields relevant to the public and customers. The bank takes pride in its close connection to the community and is committed to fulfilling the aspirations of the public and its customers through a range of meaningful initiatives and events. Looking ahead, the bank anticipates introducing more initiatives in the future.

The Red card for high school and university students is the first prepaid card in the Middle East to offer cashback benefits for youth. Additionally, it features the highest cashback program in Kuwait, and is recognized as the first vertically designed card. Red cardholders benefit from numerous advantages and

discounts at their favorite stores, earning up to 15 percent cashback on monthly purchases, including local and international communication bills, cinema tickets, and dining. They can receive up to KD 300 annually in cashback. Red cardholders enjoy several perks, including discounts at their preferred restaurants through Gulf Bank's dining program. They can also receive instant discounts of up to 25 percent at over 550 restaurants and cafes across Kuwait.

Furthermore, they benefit from Gulf Bank's promotional offers program, which provides immediate discounts of up to 30 percent at over 300 retail stores. These offers cover a wide range of categories including travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and more as part of Gulf Bank's promotional program. Additionally, the card offers fraud protection through the 3D secure system for online transactions.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

UPS plan to sweeten holiday profits could turn off shippers

LOS ANGELES: UPS, the world's biggest package delivery courier, is the first major industry player to announce this year's holiday surcharges, unveiling hefty hikes that analysts say could backfire. The 2024 peak gift delivery season from Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve has just 17 operating days, versus the usual 20 or more days. That time crunch could push daily peak season volume to record highs, costing UPS extra for trucks, planes and staff to deliver holiday gifts on schedule, the company said.

UPS is hiking fees to boost revenue which has fallen after online budget retailers Temu and Shein made low-margin, slower deliveries a bigger percentage of the Atlanta-based company's business. Wall Street analysts and industry consultants doubt that seasonal demand will be strong enough to support UPS's hikes and said customers could go elsewhere. "UPS is trying to win a better pricing market into existence," said delivery pricing consultant Nate Skiver, founder of LFP Spend Management.

"We were surprised by the magnitude," Wolfe Research analyst Scott Group said of the surcharges announced on July 23. For the first time, UPS will levy a peak surcharge for commercial air shipments of items including COVID vaccines, which are in demand ahead of year-end gatherings, to free up cargo space and generate revenue. It will also reinstate a blanket per-package surcharge during the peak demand period. Overall, published UPS peak surcharges are up 10 percent or more from last year, shipping consultants said. "We think that the prices are going to stick because of what the environment is telling us from a demand perspective," UPS CEO Carol Tome said, noting that this year's peak season is the tightest since 2019.

UPS peak surcharges generally range from about \$1.50 per package for its most economical SurePost service to \$8.25 for overnight air service, consultant Satish Jindel said. Among rivals, FedEx typically matches UPS's seasonal shipping surcharges, but has yet to announce its holiday strategy. The US Postal Service has lots of excess capacity and any surcharge would not be more than 25 cents per package, Jindel said. Rapidly growing e-commerce companies Shein and PDD Holdings' Temu swamped the UPS network with shipments of goods like \$10 dresses and \$4 plastic toys direct from Chinese factories, depressing UPS earnings in the second quarter and prompting executives to cut their 2024 margin forecast. Shein and Temu, whose shipments can take a week or longer to reach shoppers, have accelerated a shift to slower, cheaper delivery services, deepening concern about slower profit growth at UPS.

Amazon.com, the biggest UPS customer whose delivery times range from overnight to a few days, also is exploring slower direct-to-consumer shipments from factories in China, consultants said. Amazon declined to comment. Market forces may prevent UPS's hikes from taking hold, industry experts said. Retailers seem to be offering earlier holiday deals again this year, a practice that flattens demand during the peak season. Jindel estimated that US delivery firms will handle about 90 million parcels per day during the holiday season, less than their capacity of 110 million parcels.

"When the capacity is so much greater than the demand, people are not going to be receptive to paying a peak surcharge," said Jindel, who helped found the company that became FedEx Ground.

And since the pandemic-fueled delivery boom ended in mid-2022, customers of UPS, FedEx and other package delivery firms have gained leverage in price negotiations. Couriers rolled back peak surcharges for many customers which asked for reductions last year when demand faltered. "You're going to see a lot more of these shippers start to stand up and push back," said Jey Yokeley, chief revenue officer at TransImpact, a consultancy that helps customers manage shipping budgets. — Reuters

Tech-heavy Nasdaq in correction as selloff deepens

NEW YORK: Worries over tech earnings and a slowing US economy slammed the Nasdaq Composite index on Friday as it extended recent declines to fall 10 percent below its record high, confirming it was in correction territory. The tech-heavy index fell 2.4 percent on Friday after a softer-than-expected jobs report spurred worries over whether the Federal Reserve will need to deliver hefty interest rate cuts at its next meeting to prevent the US economy from falling into recession. Disappointing earnings from Amazon and Intel also have spooked investors.

The Nasdaq has dropped 10 percent from its record close of 18,647.45 points on July 10. An index or stock is widely considered to be in a correction when it closes 10 percent or more below its previous record closing high. "This is an old-fashioned correction going on," said Tom Plumb, chief executive and portfolio manager at Plumb Funds. "We passed the economic torch from the perception of growth to the perception of needing government intervention with lower interest rates to stabilize the economy." Over the past 44 years, the index has slipped into correction territory after hitting a new high 24 times, or about once every two years, according to a Reuters analysis of LSEG data. In two-thirds of these cases, the index traded higher a month after entering correction territory, data showed.

The last time the index marked a correction after scaling a new high was on Jan. 19, 2022. The index then extended losses to fall 36 percent from its high before bottoming out in December of that year.

The Nasdaq is still up 11.8 percent year-to-date.

Vietnam still a non-market economy: US

WASHINGTON/HANOI: The US Commerce Department announced on Friday it will continue to classify Vietnam as a non-market economy country, a decision disappointing to Hanoi, which the US has been wooing in its efforts to push back against China. Vietnam has long sought an upgrade, which would have reduced the punitive anti-dumping duties levied on non-market economies marked by heavy state influence. Only 12 other economies are labeled as non-market by Washington, including China, Russia, North Korea and Azerbaijan. A change in status has been opposed by US steelmakers, Gulf Coast shrimpers and honey farmers and members of the US Congress representing them, but backed by retailers and some other business groups.

"Today, the US Department of Commerce announced its determination that Vietnam will continue to be classified as a non-market economy country for purposes of calculating US antidumping duties on imports from Vietnam," the department said in a statement after a year-long review. "This finding means that the methodology used in calculating US antidumping duties on imports from Vietnam remains the same," it said. Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade said up-

grading Vietnam would have been an objective and fair move.

"Vietnam regrets that despite several positive improvements in the Vietnamese economy recently, the US Department of Commerce still has not recognized Vietnam as a market economy country," it said in a statement. Vietnam has long argued it should be freed of the non-market label because of recent economic reforms, and it has said that retaining the moniker is bad for increasingly close two-way ties that Washington sees as a counterbalance to China. Opponents of an upgrade have countered that Hanoi's policy commitments have not been matched by concrete actions and it operates as a planned economy governed by the ruling Communist Party. They say Vietnam is increasingly being used as a manufacturing hub by Chinese firms to circumvent US curbs on imports from China.

A 284-page Commerce memo explaining the decision said it was taken despite Vietnam's "impressive reforms and economic growth." Washington has worked hard to foster closer ties with Vietnam in the face of growing strategic competition with China and the issue of whether to upgrade Vietnam has been awkward given the approaching US election in November and claims by each side that they stand for worker rights. Some analysts said before the announcement a failure to upgrade Vietnam could be negative for US-Vietnam relations. "Vietnamese leaders have seen this decision as an important benchmark in their improving relationship with the US

and the achievement of normalization between the two countries," said Edmund Malesky, a professor of political economy and director of the Duke Center for International Development. Murray Liebert, a senior associate of the Southeast Asia Program at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, called the decision "ridiculous."

"Vietnam's market is as free as many others not on the NME list," he said, adding that the decision seemed "out of whack" with US President Joe Biden's visit to Hanoi last year, when the two sides elevated ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has also promoted Vietnam as a "friend-shoring" destination to shift US supply chains away from China.

Hosuk Lee-Makiyama, director of the Brussels-based European Centre for International Political Economy, said that even if the Biden administration were to have taken the politically risky step of upgrading Vietnam, it would have been a pyrrhic victory given that any future Trump administration was certain to reverse it. Nazak Nikakhtar, a former Commerce Department official in the Trump administration now with the Wiley Rein law firm, said the decision reflected "ample" evidence from industry groups "that Vietnam's economy has not transformed to the extent that would warrant treatment as a market economy."

"Ignoring distortions in the economies of trading partners is unfair and prejudicial against American interests," she said. — Reuters



NEW YORK: Samara Cohen, ETF and Index Investments chief investment officer for BlackRock, speaks before ringing the closing bell at the Nasdaq MarketSite in New York City. — AFP

The S&P 500 .SPX, which has lost about 6 percent from its high, is up 12.1 percent for the year. The Nasdaq's tumble comes as investors turn more wary of the highly valued tech stocks that have led the charge higher for most of the year, driven by excitement over the potential of artificial intelligence.

Stocks are also heading into what is typically a seasonally rocky period. September and October tend to be volatile months for US shares. The Cboe Volatility index - Wall Street's most watched gauge of investor anxiety - averages 21.8 in October, the highest for any

month, according to LSEG data going back to 1992. "This isn't an unusual seasonality pattern. We had a similar selloff in August 2023, although perhaps this is more forceful," said James St Aubin, chief investment officer at Ocean Park Asset Management.

"I would look at this as the correction a lot of people were expecting to see coming into the summer. All kinds of things are piling on top of each other to make the market nervous," St Aubin added. Lackluster results from Tesla and Alphabet last month compounded worries about stretched valuations. — Reuters

China plans new carbon emission controls system

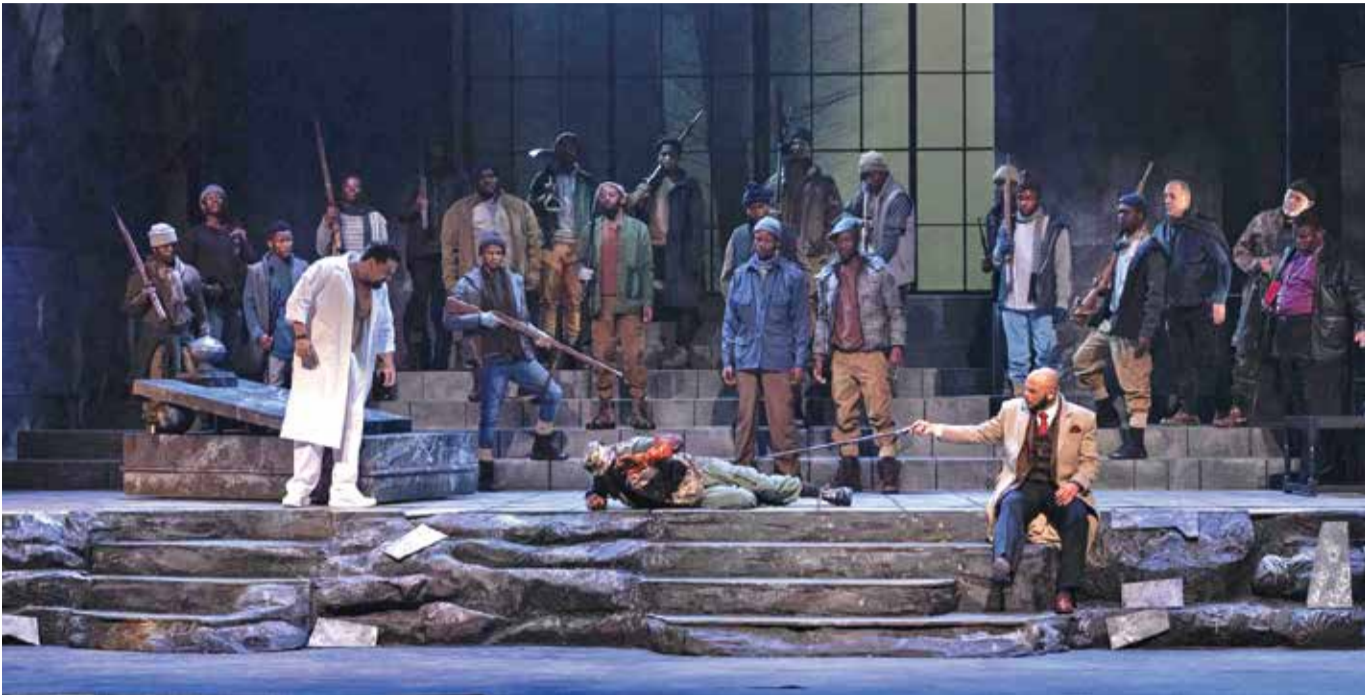
BEIJING: China will accelerate the development of a carbon emissions control system to help it achieve its goal of reaching a peak in the emissions of the climate-warming gases by 2030, the cabinet said on Friday. Beijing's energy policies have so far focused on "energy and carbon intensity" - energy and emissions involved in producing a unit of economic output - effectively tying its targets to overall economic growth.

Under a work plan announced by the State Council, a "dual-control" system will come into force during the 2026-2030 five-year plan period. Over that time intensity will remain the main measure, but total emissions controls will supplement it, and the focus will shift to emission controls thereafter.

Greenpeace welcomed Friday's move as a step towards decoupling of climate targets from economic growth. "China is setting for the first time a hard emissions cap, which will start guide emissions reduction after 2030," said Yao Zhe, global policy advisor for Greenpeace East Asia in Beijing.

"China is now gradually extricating emissions reductions from economic growth," Yao said. Carbon budgets will be created by China's provinces and municipalities, and the budgeting system will be tested before the end of 2025, the cabinet said in a statement. The plan also calls for an improvement in the statistical and accounting system for carbon emissions by 2025, with a focus on key industries such as power, steel, metals, building materials, and petrochemicals. — Reuters

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024



South African baritone Conroy Scott (right) gestures as he performs as Enrico while South African baritone Van Wyk Venter (left) as Normanno during the dress rehearsal.



Brittany Smith performs as Lucia during the dress rehearsal for Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor



Brittany Smith poses for a portrait dressed as Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor.

SOUTH AFRICA MAKES OPERA ITS OWN AT HOME AS ITS STARS SHINE ABROAD

South African opera has developed its own uniquely local style - both in the make-up of its casts and its dramatic themes - in the three decades since the end of apartheid, experts argue. With South African stars shining on the international stage, opera has boomed since racial barriers were scrapped in 1994, drawing in talent from the country's great choral traditions to carve out an important place in a hugely diverse cultural landscape.

Much of the change has been driven by the 25-year-old Cape Town Opera that is considered Africa's most successful company. The grandfather of it all is Italian-born Angelo Gobbato, a former singer who co-founded the company five years after apartheid ended and was honored in March with a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to South African opera.

When the company was starting out, Gobbato staged Donizetti's dramatic "Lucia di Lammermoor" with lead singers brought in from abroad. The cast of a just-ended 25th birthday run of the same opera was entirely South African and featured only one white singer - an illustration of the changes, he said.

After white-minority rule was scrapped, "we suddenly got a lot of interest from black students who wanted to be trained in opera," Gobbato, 81, told



South African soprano and Cape Town Opera House Soloist Brittany Smith (right) performs as Lucia as South African tenor Lukhanyo Moyake performs as Edgardo during the dress rehearsal for Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor at the Joburg Theatre ahead of the last dress rehearsal for the opera in Johannesburg. — AFP photos

AFP. "This was very unusual because at the Cape Town opera school we had so-called colored students - non-white students - but no black students."

Big-name singers

His students, who include the internationally acclaimed Pretty Yende and Levy Sekgapane, often came from community choirs trained in the Western signing fashion. "They responded very naturally to opera and they wanted to sing it," said Gobbato, who has now retired. And, as the casts have become

more representative of South Africa's racial make-up, so too have the audiences. "I feel like a grandfather," Gobbato said. "I haven't got physical children or grandchildren, but seeing students I am desperately proud of them and convinced that I have done something for the good of the country."

Opera in South Africa was once a niche performing art with mainly white audiences, said soprano Brittany Smith, the tragic heroine in this year's run of "Lucia di Lammermoor". Now, "Cape Town Opera is standing on the forefront

of reintroducing opera and making it more accessible to everyone and that makes us relevant," the 29-year-old told AFP while prepping for a rehearsal at the Nelson Mandela Theatre.

Smith highlighted the company's outreach programme that sends performers to schools and townships to show youngsters what it is all about. The dramatic themes of opera are relevant to today's South Africa, said her co-star Conroy Scott, a deep baritone who developed his voice in church choirs.

'A South African genre'

"It deals with real issues, with human emotion. It deals with issues that haven't really gone away - politics, sex, violence, child abuse, death," the 43-year-old added. Stagings of European opera classics post-apartheid have moulded a form that is distinctly South African in the portrayal of characters and music, with settings that are recognizable to local audiences, argued critic and author Wayne Muller.

A "La Boheme" was set in Cape Town's District Six area that was bulldozed by the apartheid authorities, Macbeth was played as a Central African militant leader, and Porgy and Bess confessed their love in the shacks of Soweto, he wrote in his 2023 book "Opera in Cape Town: The Critic's Voice".



Italian Opera singer and cofounder of the Cape Town Opera Angelo Gobbato poses for a portrait at his home in Cape Town on August 1, 2024.

"This process of transforming the arts and opera in South Africa has not ended by any means," Muller said.

"Nonetheless, there is an ease with opera as being African and the possibilities that even the standard Western European repertoire brings to make opera relevant here," the critic added. "Opera, as scholars and artists have expressed, has become a South African genre - an art form that is also from here." — AFP

Hartnett escapes heartthrob 'pigeonhole' with 'Oppenheimer,' 'Trap'

Josh Hartnett, the hunky young heartthrob of "Pearl Harbor" and "Black Hawk Down," is enjoying a remarkable renaissance after seemingly vanishing from Hollywood for two decades. Since last year, he has played a key role in the Oscar-sweeping "Oppenheimer," guest-starred in acclaimed TV hits "The Bear" and "Black Mirror," and is now the lead in M. Night Shyamalan's thriller "Trap." But, the 46-year-old told AFP ahead of Friday's release of "Trap," he never really went away - the industry is finally offering him the "unique" roles he always wanted. "These directors just now find me interesting," Hartnett said, via Zoom.



US actor Josh Hartnett poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the UK premiere of "Oppenheimer" in central London on July 13, 2023. - AFP

"Whereas maybe a few years ago, I was, I don't know, too young to be interesting?" he added, laughing. "Maybe I hadn't lived enough? I don't know what it was." In "Trap," Hartnett plays Cooper, a doting father who takes his young teen daughter to a Taylor Swift-esque pop star's concert. Yet we learn almost immediately that Cooper is a serial killer, and the entire gig is a police sting designed to ensnare him.

"The conceit of this movie, which is

so cool, is that we tell you right off the bat he's the bad guy," said Hartnett. "And yet we need you to... root for him as he gets out of the situation." The role is the kind of "high-wire act" that has appealed to him ever since Hartnett, at the peak of his fame, turned down a chance to play Superman and abruptly left Los Angeles in the 2000s. He returned to his home state of Minnesota, and later moved to England where he now lives - but never stopped acting. "I love a high-wire act and I also love the chance that maybe I'm going to fall flat on my face - it gets me excited," said Hartnett. "I feel a yearning to do that sort of work."

'Pearl Harbor'

"Trap" is a return to the genres that made Hartnett's name. His first credited film role was "Halloween H20," the 1998 horror sequel starring Jamie Lee Curtis. Hartnett quickly starred in teen thrillers "The Faculty" and "The Virgin Suicides." He then joined the Hollywood A-list, playing a heroic pilot opposite Ben Affleck in 2001's "Pearl Harbor." The World War II epic was savaged by critics, but turned a profit despite an eye-watering \$140 million budget.

That same year, Hartnett played a special forces soldier in "Black Hawk Down." But after quitting Los Angeles, sacking his agent and rejecting more generic "hero" characters, big movie roles dried up. Articles began appearing in the Hollywood press with headlines like "What happened to Josh Hartnett?"

For years, Hartnett worked mainly with younger directors, helping them get their movies made, often outside the Hollywood system. That appears to have finally changed, especially since Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer." "I don't need to help Chris Nolan make his film! But I was able to be a part of a world, and with a director that I think is one of the best working right now," he said. Hartnett played Ernest Lawrence, a respected colleague of Oppenheimer's who fell out with the brilliant physicist over his early Communist leanings and marital infidelities. Hartnett's role in "Trap" is decidedly less morally decent, despite Cooper's deceptive surface appearance as a sweet, loving father. — AFP

Justin Timberlake pleads not guilty to drunk driving charge

Pop singer Justin Timberlake pleaded not guilty to driving while intoxicated in a virtual appearance before a judge who ordered that his driver's license be suspended in New York state, US media reported.

On June 18, the 43-year-old entertainer was pulled over in the town of Sag Harbor, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of New York City, after police observed his BMW go through a stop sign and struggle to stay within road lanes.

The officer who pulled over the "Cry Me a River" singer said he was in no fit



Justin Timberlake performs onstage during the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Awards at Dolby Theatre on April 01, 2024 in Hollywood, California. — AFP

state to drive. "His eyes were bloodshot and glassy, a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage was emanating from his breath, he was unable to divide attention, he had slowed speech, he was unsteady afoot, and he performed poorly on all standardized field sobriety tests," the police report said. — AFP

Nigeria unveils elephant sculpture to highlight illegal tusk trade

Nigeria's minister of state for the environment unveiled an elephant-shaped sculpture made with confiscated ivory - the country's latest bid to raise awareness as it struggles to combat the illegal wildlife trade. The molded grey statue incorporates ground-down fragments from a record \$11 million, 2.5-tonne haul of seized tusks destroyed by the authorities in January, as well as pulverized pangolin scales. As he unwrapped the sculpture at the National Park Service headquarters in Abuja, minister of state for the environment Izaq Kunle Salako said it was a "symbol of renewed hope for Nigerian wildlife." But he warned that poachers were "very tenacious and do not give up easily."

"Demand for wild animal parts and derivatives persists with a surge in black markets," he said. "We must therefore be resolute, enforce our laws and upscale the deployment of technology in fighting these criminals." Salako said the sculpture, about the

height of a human, was intended as a "monument in memory of hundreds of elephants killed illegally and as a symbol of our unwavering commitment to wildlife conservation".

International trade in ivory has been banned since 1989 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. But it has not stopped wildlife traders operating in Nigeria, where the number of elephants has plummeted from hundreds of thousands to under 400 due to poaching and habitat loss, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society NGO.

The UN's Office on Drugs and Crime says Nigeria has also become the main transit hub for trafficking illicit wildlife products from East and Central Africa. Among these are the scales of African pangolins, small mammals coveted for use in traditional medicine including in China and Vietnam. — AFP

Zanzibar says Hollywood star Idris Elba to open film studio

Hollywood star Idris Elba has been allocated land in Zanzibar to set up a film studio in the Indian Ocean archipelago, a local minister said. The British actor and rapper, who has Sierra Leonean and Ghanaian roots, has previously spoken about his desire to develop the film industry in Africa.

"Idris Elba will be building a modern studio similar to Hollywood, Nollywood or Bollywood," Zanzibar's minister for investment Sharif Ali Sharif said on Thursday. He said the government of Zanzibar has granted Elba 80 hectares (almost 200 acres) of land in Fumba, on the island of Unguja, for the studio.

"I'm not sure how we will call it in Zanzibar, whether Zallywood or Zawood, I don't know," Sharif said jokingly as he addressed industry players at the Zanzibar International Film Festival. Local media said the studio could boost Tanzania's budding efforts to become a hub for international film production. The studio plan follows discussions last year between Elba and Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. — AFP



Idris Elba speaks onstage during the 30th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at Shrine Auditorium and Expo Hall on February 24, 2024 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



Nomadic roots, urban lives: The young Mongolians leading a transition

Freezing from horseback riding in the winter and helping her herder parents tend to livestock during summers spent outdoors — Bat-Erdene Khulan vividly remembers her childhood on Mongolia's steppe. She has since studied a master's degree in Luxembourg, found work as a financial consultant, and made Mongolia's capital city Ulaanbaatar her family home after moving away from her nomadic roots. For millennia, Mongolians have lived off the land with their livestock in round ger dwellings that they pack up and move with the seasons. A quarter of Mongolia's 3.4 million people still lead nomadic lives, according to the World Bank, but hundreds of thousands have moved over the past two decades into Ulaanbaatar, now home to half the population.



Chagdga Battsetseg piloting a boat along the Eg River in Hantay in Bulgan province.

And it is women like Khulan, who won a government scholarship for her master's and is now 36, who have led the transition. Speaking to AFP in the Ulaanbaatar apartment where she lives with her husband and their seven-year-old son, Khulan said many others raised on the steppe like her have rejected a life of physical labor and fighting the elements. "They choose to live differently in the city," she said, where they are offered greater access to modern amenities, education and welfare. Khorol Enkhuya, 42, a civil servant specializing in welfare, was also among them.

She was raised in Bayan-Unjuul south of Ulaanbaatar by parents who hoped she would follow in their footsteps as herders. "I read by candlelight," she told AFP at a cafe near Ulaanbaatar's Government Palace. "I read folk stories. It was the only book I had, but half of it was torn," she said. "I kept reading the same story again and again — my mum thought: 'She needs to pursue education.'" Her parents sent her 150 kilometers (93 miles) from home so she could attend secondary school. Life in the city was not easy, Enkhuya said, and during

her university years she cooked, cleaned, and babysat for families to pay rent while studying at night.

'Stay in the steppe'

Still, she felt lucky, as education was an opportunity that many older Mongolian women simply did not have. Around 50 kilometers from the capital, Khulan's mother, Sanduijav Altakhuyag, 60, told AFP she had missed out during the tumult of Mongolia's transition to democracy. "I want my kids to achieve what I didn't," she said. Khulan's parents have over the years moved closer to the capital city, though they still live as herders. Khulan tries to visit them as often as she can, dutifully helping her mother prepare lunch in the ger as her son, raised in the city, scampers through lush, green fields. Not everyone has the opportunity to balance city and rural life in this way, she told AFP.

The boys stay in the steppe, raising the animals, but girls go to cities, study and stay there working," Khulan said. That reflects traditional Mongolian patriarchal norms: the son inherits the livestock and responsibility for the family's livelihood. But Khulan said that often means their "right to study is violated".

'Lonely' young men

In Khishig-Undur, Bulgan province, 25-year-old herder Luvsanbaldan Batsukh said he missed the opportunity to study as much as he had wanted. He tried working two years as a construction worker in the city, but it wasn't to his liking. Now, he lives with his family in a small cluster of remote gers. He said life gets "lonely" in the winter, when temperatures plunge to well below zero and the days grow very short. Finding a partner to share that life with is hard. "The girls who grew up playing in the river here have moved to the city and don't want to come back," Batsukh said, gazing out into the field as his goats munched on grass.

Further north, fellow herder Gan-Erdene Ganbat, 27, pins his hopes for fame, fortune and marriage on his prize horse, a fixture at local traditional races. "If I have one thousand sheep, nobody knows me. If I have a single fast horse, the whole country will know me," he told AFP after tending to his stallion, his friends nearby giddy from the day's racing win.

He acknowledged the isolation many of his fellow young herders felt: a dwindling social circle, arrogance from city dwellers who look down on rural folks, and slim opportunities for dating. "Herders like us are very timid people. You talk to girls, but it's very difficult for us to attract them," he said. "Nowadays, women tend to do things their own way and they prefer the city." Herders like him aren't suited to that life, he insisted — despite

the opportunities available. "I tried to work in the city, but I realized I can't be a salaryman," he said. It's "difficult seeing a cement roof instead of your livestock", he said — a common refrain from herders, so accustomed to life outdoors and the freedom of the steppe.

'Fed up' with the city

Life in Ulaanbaatar isn't easy: traffic and noise pollution are rife, and for months each year the city is enveloped in thick smog. Many born-and-raised city dwellers in Mongolia believe that the countryside offers a better life, and some have joined a global back-to-the-land trend seen from China to the United

States. Among them is former skincare entrepreneur, Chagdga Battsetseg, who now fishes, herds goats and keeps bees for a living. "The pollution in Ulaanbaatar city where I was born and grew up reached the highest level... it was terrible," Battsetseg told AFP. "One day I just decided to go to the countryside."

Battsetseg shared her plans on social media — and learned "there were about four hundred people who wanted to join me". For Khurtsbaatar Enkhbilig, 43, a former publisher, the decision to move to the countryside and become a

herder was years in the making. "People are fed up with city life," he told AFP on his land in Khutag-Undur in northern Mongolia. His wife was initially opposed. But after several excursions out — and a promise they would have four solid walls and modern plumbing — she decided she could take the plunge. Some of Enkhbilig's new neighbors, also former city-dwellers, have stopped short of taking up a completely nomadic lifestyle.

For instance, ger-dwelling millennials Chimedtseren Uyanga and Battulga Tugsjargal work remotely for jobs in the city. But Enkhbilig has fully switched careers, posing proudly with his motorbike as his hundreds of goats bleat nearby. nature for his livelihood, and to a lack of the support networks and social welfare available in the city, "you have to learn things", he added.

'We don't understand each other'

Many say that the divide between rural and urban people is deepening, with both sides increasingly dismissive of the struggles the other faces. "People in urban areas are snobby," herder Ganbat complained. "They have the wrong impression of us," he said. This year, a devastating winter froze the ground and made it impossible for livestock to graze, killing millions of animals. While experts say climate change was largely to blame,



Chagdga Battsetseg talking during an interview with AFP.



Chagdga Battsetseg milking a goat in Hantay in Bulgan province.



Bat-Ulzii Bat-Erdene showing a book with pictures of a trip to Paris during an interview with AFP in his ger (Mongolian tent) in Batsumber Tuv province.



Bat-Erdene Khulan (center), a financial consultant who now lives in the capital Ulaanbaatar, poses with her parents Bat-Ulzii Bat-Erdene (right) and Sanduijav Altakhuyag outside a ger (Mongolian tent) in Batsumber in Tuv province. - AFP photos



States. Among them is former skincare entrepreneur, Chagdga Battsetseg, who now fishes, herds goats and keeps bees for a living. "The pollution in Ulaanbaatar city where I was born and grew up reached the highest level... it was terrible," Battsetseg told AFP. "One day I just decided to go to the countryside."

Battsetseg shared her plans on social media — and learned "there were about four hundred people who wanted to join me". For Khurtsbaatar Enkhbilig, 43, a former publisher, the decision to move to the countryside and become a

"All of us have a place where we are very much needed," he explained. "I moved here because it was a necessity." But he admitted that relations with the locals — who initially did not believe he was cut out for the job — have been tough. "When the locals started to become familiar with me, they thought that I would only last a year," he laughed. "They would say that only a wild person could do this."

"You are starting from the beginning — new connections, new understandings, it is like moving to a foreign country," he said. Adjusting to a complete reliance on

some city dwellers took to social media to accuse herders of worsening the blight with overgrazing to boost their earnings. Khulan worried people in Ulaanbaatar were "bullying" their countryside compatriots. "They are telling herders they are lazy, and blaming them for overgrazing, without asking the question of 'why?'" she said. In turn: "Herders don't understand that urbanites have their own difficulties." "Although we are communicating in the same Mongolian language, we don't understand each other." — AFP



Luvsanbaldan Batsukh herding his sheep and goats.



Luvsanbaldan Batsukh standing next to his horse while herding sheep and goats.



Luvsanbaldan Batsukh getting ready to leave his ger (Mongolian tent).

Lifestyle



A huge audience attends a performance by the world-renowned Lebanese dance troupe Mayyas.



Members of the Lebanese dance troupe Mayyas, who won America's Got Talent season 17 in 2022, perform in Beirut late on August 1, 2024. — AFP photos

THOUSANDS THROG BEIRUT SHOW AS HEZBOLLAH VOWS REVENGE

As Hezbollah's leader threatened the Zionist entity with crushing retaliation for killing their top commander, thousands in Beirut flocked to a dance extravaganza in a stark illustration of Lebanon's deep divisions. In the capital's southern suburbs - a Hezbollah stronghold - tens of thousands of black-clad women and men in military uniform joined Thursday's funeral procession for slain commander Fuad Shukur.

Across the city on the Beirut waterfront, nearly 8,000 people attended a spectacular dance show that evening by the Mayyas troupe that won the "America's Got Talent" television contest in 2022. "I am sad people are dying in southern Lebanon and Gaza, but resistance is not just about carrying a gun and fighting," said 45-year-old Olga Farhat.

"Joy, art and celebrating life is also a form of resistance," the human rights activist told AFP. Fireworks opened the dance show, hours after Hezbollah buried Shukur, who was killed in a Zionist air strike in the southern suburbs on Tuesday. The show entitled 'Qumi' - rise up in Arabic - was an ode to the Lebanese capital that has endured

decades of conflict, upheaval and a years-long economic crisis.

"There is a split in the country between those who don't care for war and feel that... Hezbollah wants to impose its collective identity on them, while the other group is fighting," Farhat said. "I understand both points of view, but we are tired of wars and crises, we want to enjoy life."

'We love life'

In the southern suburbs, thousands of Hezbollah supporters chanted "Death to America" and "Death to (the Zionist entity)". Across the city, dozens of Mayyas dancers performed a moving tribute to war-battered south Lebanon, from where Hezbollah has been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire with the Zionist army since the Gaza war began on October 7.

"I grew up during Lebanon's (1975-1990) civil war and I was raised to believe in the Palestinian cause," Farhat said. "But today I say 'Lebanon first'".

The raid that killed Shukur and an Iranian military adviser also cost the lives of three women and two young siblings, authorities said. In a video clip circulating



online, their bereaved mother said their lives were a "sacrifice for you, Sayyed (Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah)".

Speaking from the southern suburbs, Hussein Nasreddine, 36, said: "We love life like everyone else... but if the Zionist entity drags us into war, it is our duty to die as martyrs".

'Exact copy'

In June, the head of the Hezbollah bloc in the Lebanese parliament, Mohammad Raad, who lost a son in the

economic crisis, told AFP he refused to "reduce Lebanon to a battlefield".

Many politicians, especially from Lebanon's Christian community, have criticized Hezbollah for risking war with the Zionist entity. Peace-building expert Sonia Nakad said "the bigger the tragedy, the greater the division" in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, power is shared according to sectarian quotas, with communities so divided about the country's past that events following 1943 are missing from official history books.

Each party "wants the other to be an exact copy of them to be able to co-exist, while they are opposites in everything," she said. "The Lebanese have yet to renounce using violence against each other, no matter how big their disagreements," she said.

Foreign airlines have suspended or cancelled flights to Beirut but many Lebanese expatriates are still pouring in, although some have cut their holidays short. Rabab Abu Hamdan said she planned to go back to the Gulf after feeling "very stressed in the past few days". "Despite the difficult circumstances, Lebanon remains the best vacation destination," she said. — AFP



Fireworks light up the sky of Beirut as the world-renowned Lebanese dance troupe Mayyas perform in Beirut.

A crew member holds a mussel while harvesting mussels from a boat.



Belgium flexes its new locally sourced mussels

It is a popular tradition to eat mussels in Brussels but what may surprise many is that none of the molluscs visitors enjoy are locally sourced in Belgium. That is, until now. A Belgian supermarket group has taken on the challenge of harvesting local mussels, already reaping rich rewards, with business booming. Off the coast of Nieuwpoort, near the French border, a crane hoists mussel-clad ropes onto a boat. They are part of the 12-kilometre (seven-mile) network the Colruyt chain established in 2023.

Such a sight had never been seen in Belgium before and Colruyt hopes it will grow, especially to challenge the dominance of Dutch mussels in the local market. "We harvest a tonne in about four hours, with four people. We would like in the future to do three to four tons a day," says Stijn Van Hoestenbergh, as he takes an AFP team to a mussel farm he manages. This year Colruyt is counting on a harvest of 50 tons, up from six last year, and "maybe 200" in 2025, Van Hoestenbergh adds. It's not easy work, Van Hoestenbergh admits, because of the strong sea currents, storms and dense maritime traffic in the area.

A far cry from the wide and deep Scheldt estuary where the renowned Zeeland mussel grows in the south of

the Netherlands, which supplies much of the European market. "The Dutch part of the delta is a gigantic protected zone, which makes it easier to set up (mussel) farms than in the open sea," explains Jerome Mallefet, marine biology expert at Belgium's UCLouvain University. Establishing more mussel farms off the Belgian coast - described by Mallefet as "a motorway for boats" - is more difficult because of offshore wind turbines and trawling activity, the expert adds. Today, experts estimate



Stijn Van Hoestenbergh, project manager of a mussel farm owned by the Colruyt group, sorts used mussel lines at a harbour in Nieuwpoort. — AFP photos

that Belgium, one of the biggest consumers of mussels in Europe alongside Spain, France and Denmark, gets more than 90 percent of its mussels from Dutch farmers in Zeeland.

Foreign mussels roped in

Despite the progress, Colruyt has greater ambitions to muscle into the market since its supplies will at best meet one percent of the needs of Belgium, where around 20,000 tons of mussels are consumed a year. "It's

clear that there's room for growth," the company says. For now, Colruyt's "100-percent Belgian" mussels are delivered to four of its stores and around 15 restaurants in Belgium.

One of its arguments for developing the market is that the mussels are "sustainably" farmed since the ropes used are made from recycled fishing nets. Mussels are a seasonal foodstuff. The best time to eat them, say experts, is when the size and flesh have developed, usually from September to December.

On the historical Grand Place in Brussels, a major tourist destination in Belgium, a restaurant owner tells AFP he offers the highly popular traditional dish of mussels and fries on his menu all year round. Like his customers, his mussels come from around Europe. "We have many people eating mussels here... So we have Zeelandese mussels between June and February, and after that we have Danish mussels, or even German mussels, depending on demand," says Jean-Philippe Bosman, owner of the Le Roy d'Espagne restaurant. "Having a local producer is good but they would need to supply us with the quantities we want on time... and that is more complicated." — AFP



Stijn Van Hoestenbergh holds mussels while harvesting from the deck of a boat.



Stijn Van Hoestenbergh holds mussels while harvesting from the deck of a boat.

Sports

France win over Argentina sparks ugly scenes in Olympic grudge match

FIFA to investigate the chants, which targeted France's star striker Kylian Mbappe

PARIS: France's grudge match with Argentina ended in ugly scenes after Jean-Philippe Mateta scored the only goal to put the hosts into the Olympic semi-finals on Friday with a 1-0 win, joining Spain, Morocco and Egypt. Tensions spilled over at full-time in Bordeaux with rival players and staff clashing on the pitch and confrontations continuing down the tunnel.

Crystal Palace striker Mateta struck five minutes into the quarter-final, meeting Michael Olise's corner with a superb near-post header. That proved enough for the hosts, coached by Thierry Henry, to reach the last four, where they face Egypt. Friday's clash was the first meeting of the nations since Argentina players were recorded singing racist chants about their French counterparts as they celebrated winning the Copa America in mid-July.

FIFA announced it would investigate the chants, which targeted France's star striker Kylian Mbappe among others and included racist and homophobic insults. The Argentina team were met with a hostile welcome, where the crowd loudly jeered their national anthem as the sides met for the first time since the 2022 World Cup final, which the South Americans won on penalties.

Henry said midfielder Enzo Millot, who had been substituted late on, was shown a red card after the final whistle. "He wasn't on the pitch. Maybe you get sent off because you get a second yellow card to stop someone running through on goal, not when you are on the bench. I am really not happy about that," Henry told broadcaster France 3.

Giuliano Simeone and Julian Alvarez missed chances for Javier Mascherano's Argentina, and the exit of the two-time gold medallists means the win-

ner of men's football gold will not come from Latin America for the first time since Cameroon triumphed in Sydney in 2000. France could have won by a wider margin, but Olise had a late second goal disallowed for a foul in the build-up.

Spain and Morocco march on

They will now be heavy favourites to win a semi-final in Lyon on Monday against Egypt, who beat Paraguay 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in Marseille. Ibrahim Adel was Egypt's hero, scoring a late equaliser in normal time and then converting the winning penalty in the shoot-out, in which Paraguay's Marcelo Perez was the only player to fail to score.

Earlier a brilliant brace by Barcelona's Fermin Lopez helped fire Spain to a 3-0 win over Japan in Lyon. Lopez, a member of Spain's triumphant Euro 2024 squad, blasted in the opener from range in the 11th minute.

The Barcelona midfielder struck again on 73 minutes with another goal of the highest quality as he controlled a Sergio Gomez corner before volleying in from the edge of the box. Captain Abel Ruiz wrapped up the win for Spain, Olympic champions in 1992 and silver medallists three years ago in Tokyo.

Spain go through to a last-four clash in Marseille with Morocco, who outclassed the United States, winning 4-0 in Paris. Soufiane Rahimi opened the scoring from the penalty spot after he was fouled in the box just before the half-hour mark.

That was a fifth goal in four games for the tournament's top scorer. Morocco doubled their lead on 63 minutes when Abde Ezzalzouli set up Ilias Akhouch



BORDEAUX: France's midfielder #08 Maghnes Akliouche controls the ball in the men's quarter-final football match between France and Argentina during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Bordeaux Stadium in Bordeaux. — AFP

finish at the near post. Captain Achraf Hakimi, playing on his Paris Saint-Germain home ground, ran through to make it 3-0 and substitute Mehdi Maouhoub added another penalty in stoppage time.

"If we keep playing like this we will deserve to be in the final," said Akhouch. "Other countries might be talked about more than us but we know what we want. We came here to win." — AFP

Rangers held by Hearts on opening of Scottish season

GLASGOW: Rangers were forced to settle for a disappointing 0-0 draw against Hearts in the opening game of the new Scottish Premiership season on Saturday. With Scottish champions Celtic starting their title defence at home to Kilmarnock on Sunday, Rangers had an opportunity to issue a statement of intent to their title rivals.

But Philippe Clement's side produced an erratic display at Tynecastle characterized by poor finishing and a lack of cohesion in midfield. "I was not satisfied with the first half, the first half hour for sure," Rangers manager Clement said.

"We lacked intensity in the duels. With the ball, we were not calm enough, not brave enough to do the right things. The first half was for Hearts, the second half was for us. We had good chances to finish off the game.

"It's a progression in that way, and we need to say that it was a fair point." It was exactly the kind of concerning display Rangers fans had feared after Clement sounded a warning on the eve of Rangers' latest bid to win their first title

since 2021. The Belgian took over from Michael Beale last October and sparked an upturn in form that included a League Cup triumph and briefly brought them back into title contention before Celtic pulled away in the closing stages.

But just 24 hours after agreeing to extend his contract until 2028, Clement hardly inspired confidence when he admitted before kick-off that his squad was "probably not stronger" than last season and might need several months to get up to speed.

Rangers endured a difficult close-season marred by unconvincing friendly performances, debatable transfer activity and construction delays that meant their renovated Ibrox stadium was not available for the start of the season.

And Clement's cautious tone appeared prophetic as Rangers struggled to keep Hearts at bay in a frantic start. Scotland striker Lawrence Shankland, who scored 24 league goals last season, started for Hearts amid speculation over a potential move to Rangers.

Shankland took just 60 seconds to underline his quality with a stinging strike that forced a good stop from Jack Butland.

Rangers on the ropes

The Rangers goalkeeper was called into action again moments later to repel James Penrice's strike after a slick move carved open the visitors' defence. Rangers were on the ropes

and Yan Dhanda's curler ricocheted off the crossbar as Hearts pressure mounted.

Connor Barron made his Rangers debut after joining from Aberdeen, but Robbin Propper, who signed from FC Twente on Thursday, was denied his Rangers debut due to paperwork. Barron was inches away from putting Rangers ahead against the run of play but the midfielder's low drive was clawed to safety by Zander Clark.

Cyriel Dessers squandered an even better chance for Rangers when the striker scooped over from close range. Rangers finally had some momentum and Clark saved well from Dessers just before half-time. Dessers missed another golden opportunity early in the second half, the striker's luck completely out as he hit the bar from close range and watched in disbelief as the rebound cannoned off the post.

Vaclav Cerny came off the bench for his Rangers debut after signing on loan from Wolfsburg, before Clark's superb save stopped Tom Lawrence's half-volley dipping into the top corner. Held in check for long periods by the Rangers defence, Shankland managed to wriggle clear for a near-post effort that Butland parried away, but neither side could find a winner.

Motherwell host Ross County in Saturday's other game, with the remainder of the opening matches played across Sunday and Monday. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus returns a shot against Victoria Azarenka of Belarus during Day 7 at William H.G. Fitzgerald Tennis Center in Washington, DC. — AFP

Sabalenka beats Azarenka to reach Washington semis

WASHINGTON: Aryna Sabalenka withstood a shaky second set to defeat Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 6-4 in a Friday showdown of two-time Australian Open champions to reach the Washington Open semi-finals. Third-ranked Sabalenka fired eight aces in the match-up of Belarus rivals at the WTA and ATP hardcourt tuneup for the US Open.

"Always tough battles against her," Sabalenka said. "She always brings the best fight she can. I always enjoy playing against her. Just super happy to get through this tough match. I feel like with every set, I play better and better. Hopefully I can just (keep) building my level and by the US Open, I'll be 100 percent ready."

Sabalenka, who won her second consecutive Australian Open in January, and 20th-ranked Azarenka both withdrew from Wimbledon with shoulder problems but have shown no sign of injuries in the US capital this week.

"I'm super happy. I'm doing really great so far. Fingers crossed, the injury's in the past. I feel really good," Sabalenka said. "We're doing everything we can with my team to keep my shoulder strong and make sure (such an injury) will never happen again."

Top seed Sabalenka, who lost last year's US Open final to Coco Gauff, advanced to a Saturday semi-final against Czech Marie Bouzkova, who beat 19-year-old American Robin Montgomery, 6-3, 6-1. Sabalenka won their only meeting last year in Miami, dropping only three games.

"Even though the score was quite easy in our last meeting, it was a really tough battle. It wasn't that easy as it looks," Sabalenka said. "She's a great fighter." The other women's semi-final will send Spain's Paula Badosa against American Caroline Dolehide.

Sabalenka, 26, improved to 5-1 against Azarenka, 35, in WTA clashes with her fourth consecutive triumph, all in straight sets. Azarenka swatted a backhand long to give Sabalenka a break and a 4-2 lead but three double faults in the seventh game by Sabalenka handed a break back.

Azarenka sent a forehand beyond the baseline to surrender a break in the 10-minute 10th game and drop the first set in 52 minutes. In the second set, Azarenka double faulted away a break in the second game, but Sabalenka did the same in the fifth game. — AFP

Espargaro snatches surprise pole for British MotoGP

SILVERSTONE: Aprilia rider Aleix Espargaro surprised championship leader Francesco Bagnaia with a brilliant late lap on Saturday to snatch pole for the British MotoGP at Silverstone.

The 35-year-old Spaniard, who is retiring at the end of the year, reclaimed the lap record for Silverstone where he won 12 months ago with a time of 1 minute 57.309 seconds, which was 0.208sec ahead of Ducati's Bagnaia.

"This lap has been amazing," said Espargaro. "I risked a lot and the lap was just perfect. Unbelievable. I never thought with these conditions, it's quite cold, we could reach this time." He starts on the front row alongside Bagnaia and another Italian Enea Bastianini (Ducati) on the grid for the sprint race at 1400 GMT on Saturday and for Sunday's grand prix.

Jorge Martin (Ducati-Pramac), second in the championship 10 points behind Bagnaia, will start fourth ahead of compatriot Alex Marquez (Ducati-Gresini) and South African Brad Binder (KTM). It is the seventh pole of Espargaro's career and his second this season, following his success in Barcelona where he went on to win the sprint before coming fourth in the grand prix.

Bagnaia's chances of pole were hampered by a sponsor logo coming loose on his helmet

Bach: Boxing should be in LA Olympics

PARIS: Olympic chief Thomas Bach said on Saturday boxing should be in the next Games in Los Angeles despite a furor over the gender of two women boxers in Paris — but urged the sport to get its house in order fast.

Algerian Imane Khelif's bout with an Italian opponent that only lasted 46 seconds and Taiwanese fighter Lin Yuting's progress in Paris have sparked a row because both were disqualified

from last year's world championships after failing eligibility tests. Khelif fights again on Saturday.

The issue has been complicated by boxing's governance structure — the IOC seized control of the management of the programme from the International Boxing Association because of concerns about the way the body operated the sport.

In a press conference to review the first half of the Paris Games, International Olympic Committee president Bach was asked if boxing should still feature in the 2028 programme in Los Angeles given the problems raised in Paris.

"Very clearly yes," Bach replied. "Boxing is one of the most global

sports. Boxing is a sport with high social values." However, Bach stressed that boxing needed to find new international leadership.

"First of all, we want boxing in the programme of the Olympic Games. This is the target. But boxing can only be in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles if we have a reliable partner," he said. "So now the national boxing federations, they have to make their choice. It's up to them."

"If they want their athletes to win medals in Olympic Games in a fair competition, with an international federation with a good reputation, with good governance, with a clear anti-doping policy, with financial transparency, then they must find an inter-

national federation as a partner for the IOC. "It is in their hands."

Bach condemned the social media reaction to Khelif and Lin, with some including former US president Donald Trump framing the issue as men fighting against women. "Everybody in our world apparently feels obliged to say everything about everything without really considering the sometimes very complex circumstances," the German said.

Bach said anyone questioning the two boxers should "come up with a scientific-based new definition of who is a woman and how can someone who is born, raised, competing and having a passport as a woman cannot be considered a woman". — AFP



SILVERSTONE: (L-R) Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia, Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Aleix Espargaro and Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Enea Bastianini pose after taking part in the qualifying session of the MotoGP British Grand Prix at Silverstone circuit in Northamptonshire, central England, on August 3, 2024. — AFP

and flapping across his visor. "It went in front of my eyes," he said. "I am very angry about that. Things like this is not good."

Six-time MotoGP world champion Marc

Marquez, who is currently third in the championship standings, will only be seventh on the grid while Maverick Vinales slid off and will start from eighth. — AFP

Sports

PARIS 2024

Algeria boxer in Olympics gender row into semis, wins at least bronze

Boxing body offers prize money to beaten Italian

Olympics Gallery



PARIS: France's Teddy Riner and Italy's Gennaro Pirelli (blue) compete in the judo mixed team semi-final bout between France and Italy.



SAINT-DENIS: Norway's Markus Rooth competes in the men's decathlon pole vault.



PARIS: Japan's Hina Hayata (red) hits a forehand to South Korea's Shin Yubin (blue) during their women's table tennis singles bronze medal match.



SAINT-DENIS: Greece's #05 Ioannis Fountoulis shoots the ball in the men's water polo preliminary round group A match between Croatia and Greece.



PARIS: Belgium's Remco Evenepoel (L) and France's Valentin Madouas (R) cycle in Montmartre during the men's cycling road race.



PARIS: Silver medallist Brazil's Rebeca Andrade makes a heart with her hands after the artistic gymnastics women's vault final. —AFP Photos

PARIS: The Algerian boxer embroiled in a major gender controversy guaranteed herself at least bronze at the Paris Olympics after winning her quarter-final on Saturday on unanimous points.

Imane Khelif, who has found herself in the eye of a global storm along with another boxer from Taiwan, comfortably beat Hungary's Anna Luca Hamori to reach the semi-finals of the women's 66kg category.

The duo embraced at the end, before the judges' verdict was delivered, and Khelif left the ring in tears. Some of the crowd at North Paris Arena, where there were a large number of Algerians, chanted Khelif's name ahead of the bout and cheered her into the ring.

Hamori, who had said it was unfair to face Khelif, was booed into the venue but was magnanimous in defeat. Khelif faces Janjaem Suwannapheng of Thailand in the last four on Tuesday for a place in the final. Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting can also guarantee herself at least a bronze medal on Sunday when she faces Bulgaria's Svetlana Staneva in the quarter-finals of the women's 57kg. Losing semi-finalists in the boxing take home bronze.

Khelif and Lin were disqualified from last year's world championships after failing gender eligibility tests. The controversy ignited on Thursday when Khelif needed just 46 seconds to win her opening bout in the French capital, forcing an abandonment against her hurt and tearful Italian opponent Angela Carini. Carini, who suffered a badly hurt nose and was distressed, collapsed to the centre of the ring in tears. The 25-year-old Khelif and Lin, 28, both competed at the Tokyo Games three years ago, where they failed to win a medal.

They were then disqualified from the 2023 world championships, run by the International Boxing Association (IBA). The IBA said this week that the two boxers "did not undergo a testosterone examination but were subject to a separate and recognised test, whereby the specifics remain confidential".

The boxing in Paris is organised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which took over because of governance, financial and ethical issues at the IBA. The IOC has leapt to the defence of Khelif and Lin, with president Thomas Bach on Saturday saying they were born and raised as women, and have passports saying that.

Neither boxer is known to identify as transgender. Khelif's father Omar told AFP from their Algerian village: "My child is a girl. She was raised as a girl. She is a strong girl — I raised her to work and be brave."

Meanwhile, the International Boxing Association has pledged to award prize money to Italy's Angela



VILLEPINTE: Algeria's Imane Khelif (R) fights against Hungary's Anna Luca Hamori in the women's 66kg quarter-final boxing match during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the North Paris Arena, in Villepinte on August 3, 2024. — AFP

Carini, whose 46-second Olympics defeat to an Algerian boxer at the centre of a gender eligibility row has left the sport on the ropes.

Carini stopped her fight against Algeria's Imane Khelif after receiving two strong punches to the face, refused to shake hands with her opponent and then collapsed to the canvas sobbing. But the bout sparked controversy as Khelif had been disqualified by the IBA during last year's world championship after failing unspecified gender eligibility tests.

There is no suggestion that Khelif, who has fought on the women's circuit for years, including in the Tokyo Olympics, identifies as anything other than a woman. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) cleared her to fight at the Paris Games as they use the gender stated on the passport as their criterion for eligibility.

Khelif and Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting appear to be caught in the crossfire of a row between the IBA and the IOC, which ejected the boxing body from the Olympic movement after financial and ethical irregularities. Referring to Carini's reaction at the end of the bout, IBA President Umar Kremlev said: "I couldn't look at her tears."

"I am not indifferent to such situations, and I can assure that we will protect each boxer. I do not understand why they kill women's boxing," added Kremlev. "Only eligible athletes should compete in the ring for the sake of safety."

The IBA said it would reward Carini prize money "as if she were an Olympic champion." The association said it was awarding all gold medallists \$100,000, of which \$25,000 will go to the national federation and \$25,000 to the coach. It was not immediately clear how much Carini would be offered and the IBA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Carini has since apologised for not congratulating her opponent. "All the controversy made me sad and I'm sorry for my opponent too. It's nothing to do with her. She was here like me to fight," she told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I was angry because my Olympics had just gone up in smoke but I've nothing against Imane Khelif. On the contrary, if I saw her again, I'd give her a hug," she added. Khelif fights later Saturday in the women's 66kg quarter-final against Hungary's Anna Luca Hamori, with victory guaranteeing her medal, as all semi-finalists get at least bronze. — AFP

Yulo wins historic gymnastics Olympic gold for Philippines

PARIS: Carlos Yulo triumphed on Saturday in the men's floor exercise of the gymnastics in Paris for only the second Olympic gold in the history of the Philippines. The 24-year-old broke down in tears after matching the achievement of weightlifter Hidilyn Diaz, who won gold at the Covid-delayed 2020 Tokyo Games.

"I just went for it, I didn't hesitate," said Yulo. The former world champion perfectly executed his routine, ending with a sure-footed landing to score 15,000 points. It sealed the first gymnastics Olympic medal ever for the Philippines.

Defending champion and world titleholder Artem Dolgopyat of Zionist entity was pushed into silver with 14,966. "The past months (in general) were hard.

I had some problems with my leg and also the training was difficult," said the 27-year-old Dolgopyat.

"It's a hard time in Israel. I tried to do my best in the competition, to show everyone that Israel is very strong and that we can win medals." Britain's Jake Jarman, who had scored highest in qualifying a week ago, achieved 14,933 to take bronze at Bercy Arena.

Yulo had warned he was "shooting for the stars" in Paris after missing out on the podium in Tokyo. And his acrobatic and technically difficult routine proved a hit, scoring higher than the 14,766 he had garnered in qualifying. "I'm so overwhelmed. I'm feeling grateful for having this medal and for God. He protected me, as always," said Yulo, who has a chance of another medal in the vault final on Sunday.

"He gave me the strength to get through this kind of performance and perform this well." China's Xiao Ruoteng, the Tokyo floor bronze medallist, slumped to last in the eight-man final after hopping out of bounds after his opening jump to finish with 13,933.

Xiao had been bidding for gold to add to his silver in the men's team event and bronze in the all-around competition at the Paris Games. — AFP



PARIS: Winner Philippines' Carlos Edriel Yulo celebrates during the podium ceremony in the artistic gymnastics men's floor exercise final during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. — AFP

'Dreams come true' for Poland's Belarusian Olympian

SAINT-DENIS: Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, who dramatically defected at the Tokyo Games in 2021, never doubted she would compete in the Paris Olympics.

"Paris was my goal," Tsimanouskaya, who now represents Poland, told AFP in an interview in the picturesque Olympic village in a northern suburb of the French capital. "Dreams come true," said the 27-year-old, sporting a red T-shirt with "Polska" emblazoned across her chest.

A tattoo on her left forearm says in Russian, her native language: "Too strong to give up." In a highly-publicized row in Tokyo, Tsimanouskaya announced she feared for her life when officials from authoritarian Belarus tried to send her back home after she criticized her coaches. She found shelter at the Polish embassy and later fled to Poland.

The diplomatic incident came amid a brutal crackdown on dissent after disputed elections that returned strongman Alexander Lukashenko to power in 2020. Tsimanouskaya was one of more than 2,000 Belarusian sports figures who signed an open letter calling for new elections.

Three years on, the athlete appeared relaxed and



SAINT-DENIS: Polish Olympic athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya poses during a photo session at the Paris 2024 Olympic village, in Saint-Denis. — AFP

with a ready smile, saying she was happy to feel the Olympic vibe, this time minus the drama surrounding her defection. "I have a feeling that I am back in Tokyo," she laughed. "In a positive sense."

Health problems

The road to Paris was challenging. Although she received Polish citizenship nine months after defecting, it was uncertain when she would be able to race for Poland internationally. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 complicated her bid to change her sport nationality.

World Athletics, track and field's governing body, cleared her in August, 2023, just ahead of the World

Athletics Championships in Budapest.

Tsimanouskaya says she has worked hard to integrate. She learned Polish and said she feels treated well by peers and coaches. Still, the first year in her new home country was challenging; she received online threats and needed a bodyguard for months.

Even now, security is never far from her mind. She would prefer not to leave the confines of the Olympic village, and hopes to steer clear of Belarusian officials and athletes who compete in Paris under a neutral status as punishment for the country's role in the invasion of Ukraine. "KGB officers accompanied the Belarusian national team in Tokyo," she said. "I have been warned not to go anywhere alone."

Worst of all are health problems she has experienced over the past year. Doctors say that the stress of the past few years might be catching up with her. "I get sick every two months," Tsimanouskaya said. "It's either chills or fever." After the Paris Olympics, she hopes to focus on her health and prepare for the World Championships in Tokyo next year. Due to her health problems she might retire from elite sport earlier than she initially expected and the 2028 Los Angeles Games may be out of reach.

The campaign of online harassment has subsided but the Lukashenko regime still has Tsimanouskaya in its sights. In May, Belarusian authorities opened a criminal case against her and more than 250 other opposition figures who ran for the exiled Coordination Council. They were accused of "forming an extremist group" and "conspiracy to overthrow the government". — AFP

Golden glory for Marchand, McKeown in Olympics pool as Dressel flops

'It's only the beginning and I'm really excited... my next goal is LA'



NANTERRE: Britain's Benjamin Proud competes in the final of the men's 50m freestyle swimming event during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Paris La Defense Arena in Nanterre. — AFP

PARIS: French hero Leon Marchand cemented his Paris Olympics legacy with a fourth swimming gold of the Games on Friday and Australia's Kaylee McKeown made a slice of history, but it was a disastrous day for American superstar Caeleb Dressel.

Marchand was little known outside the swimming world before these Olympics, but he has become a national and international phenomenon in the space of a week with a quartet of titles. With the 400m medley, 200m butterfly and 200m breaststroke already in the bag, the 22-year-old rose to the occasion again in front of French President Emmanuel Macron in the 200m medley at a deafening La Defense Arena.

Roared on a partisan home crowd, he hit the wall first in 54.06 - the second fastest time in history - to ensure he will leave the Games as one of its biggest stars. "It's only the beginning. I'm really excited... my next goal is LA," he said, referring to the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

"Last night I slept like 11 hours. I was just so tired.

"But this morning I woke up, I was full of energy again. I don't think anything went wrong this week. It was just perfect." McKeown, 23, did not generate quite the same reception but her feat was also exceptional. She held off American arch-rival Regan Smith to win the 200m backstroke in an Olympic record 2:03.73, on the back of her 100m victory, to remain flawless over two Olympics with four golds from four individual events.

No Australian swimmer, man or woman, has ever completed a "double-double" - defending two different individual Olympic titles. Her teammate, Cameron McEvoy, thundered to the men's 50m freestyle gold in 21.25sec, with defending champion Dressel only managing sixth. Dressel, who won five golds at the Tokyo Games in 2021, returned to the pool but failed to qualify for his 100m butterfly title defence. Five-time world champion Marchand went into his race as favourite and with fans ready to accept nothing less than victory, he emphatically delivered, just missing Ryan Lochte's 13-year-old world mark.

China's Wang Shun powered ahead after the opening butterfly leg, but Marchand then switched through the gears to assume control, with Macron on his feet pumping his fist in celebration at the finish. Defending champion Wang came third, with Tokyo silver medalist Duncan Scott of Britain second again.

'Dear life'

Victory for world record-holder McKeown was another psychological blow to arch-rival Smith, whom she also beat to gold in the 100m. The pair enjoy a storied rivalry, swapping world records across both backstroke disciplines, but it was the Australian who soared when it mattered most.

"I probably took my race out a little bit too hard. I was pretty nervous going in there tonight," said McKeown. "I'm not one who gets overly nervous, probably more anxious than anything. I went out hard and just held on for dear life."

Canada's Kylie Masse won bronze. But there was no celebration for Dressel, with McEvoy striking

gold ahead of Britain's Ben Proud and French veteran Florent Manaudou, the London 2012 champion, earning bronze.

"It was incredible. From the start to the finish the flow of the race felt amazing," said McEvoy after winning his first gold at his fourth Olympics. "The crowd was extreme. I've never heard the crowd louder." Both Dressel and McKeown suited up again for semi-final action.

But Dressel only finished 13th fastest in the 100m butterfly behind Hungarian pacesetter Kristof Milak (50.38), who came second to the American in Tokyo. "The racing's been really fun here, walking out to that 50, even 100 fly, it's special," said Dressel. "I don't want to forget that."

"I'd like to be quicker, obviously. Not my week, that's all right." McKeown made no mistake in qualifying for the women's 200m medley alongside Canadian sensation Summer McIntosh, who already has two golds and a silver in Paris. American Alex Walsh was fastest into the final in a sizzling 2:07.45. — AFP



Aameena Shah

Kuwait's sailor Shah advances at Olympic Games

PARIS: Kuwait's sailor Aameena Shah made Saturday brilliant performance at 2024 Paris Olympic Games for the second day in a row. Shah, the first Kuwaiti and Gulf player taking part in Olympic sail contest, passed six races out of ten, with 257 points, over two days.

Shah, who will continue her competition Sunday got prepared for her amazing participation at the Games through joining overseas camps and taking international courses in some countries over the past

months to take part in this event with high levels.

Earlier, Kuwaiti athlete Amal Al-Roumi bid farewell to the 2024 Paris Olympics, coming eighth in the 800m running competition qualifications on Stade de France on Saturday, with 2:12.13 minutes. Al-Roumi joined the Kuwaiti mission in Paris last Tuesday, after concluding a training camp and taking part in an international tournament in Belgium.

Meanwhile, Shooter Mohammad Al-Daihani concluded his participation on Saturday in the 2024 Paris Olympics after being eliminated in the group stages of Skeet shooting competition.

Al-Daihani hit 120 out of 125 targets over two days of fierce competition at the Chateauroux Shooting Center. He shot 50 targets in his participation on Saturday, 25 in the first round and another 25 in the second round, in addition to 70 targets out of 75 on Friday, 24 targets in the first round, 24 in the second round, and 22 in the third round. — KUNA

AGCFF lauds Kuwait's efforts to host Gulf Cup

DOHA: The Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) expressed Friday its great appreciation to Kuwait's efforts made to host the 26th edition of Gulf Cup as planned from December 21 until Janu-

ary 3. All field visits were excellent and noticed tangible progress in Kuwait's preparations for this key event for the region's nations, the federation said in a statement.

It called on media outlets to transmit true and accurate news. The federation affirmed on Thursday that the championship would be held as scheduled. Acting president of Kuwait Football Association Hayef Al-Mutairi said in a brief statement on "X" that the expected Gulf Cup tournament would be organized from December 21 until January 3. — KUNA

'Cool' Turkish marksman unruffled by viral Olympic fame

PARIS: A Turkish Olympic shooting silver medalist said Thursday he was unfazed by his newfound fame, after his casual style with no headwear and a hand in his pocket made him an overnight Internet sensation.

Yusuf Dikec and partner Sevvat Ilayda Tarhan won silver on Tuesday for Turkey in the mixed team 10m air pistol, losing to Serbia in the gold medal match. But it was Dikec's posture that caught attention as much as the result, with the marksman wearing standard glasses, a team T-shirt and with his left hand casually slung in his pocket.

Other than his pistol, he notably had none of the specialised equipment used by athletes in the hyper-precise event, like headphones, special lenses or a hat. "Be cool like Yusuf Dikec. Congratulations on



CHATEAUROUX: Turkey's Yusuf Dikec competes in the shooting 10m air pistol mixed team gold medal match during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at Chateauroux Shooting Centre. — AFP

winning the silver medal in such a cool way," France's embassy to Turkey wrote in a post on X in Turkish. "The name's Dikec. Yusuf Dikec," said posts by other users in reference to cinema icon James Bond. — AFP