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Iran rejects calls to 'stand down'

Zionist minister storms Al-Aqsa Mosque • Putin tells Abbas of 'great pain'



(Left) Russian President Vladimir Putin meets Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Novo-Ogaryovo outside Moscow on Aug 13, 2024. (Right) Palestinian toddler Rim Abu Hayya, the sole survivor from her family after they were killed in Zionist bombardment that hit their house, is carried by her aunt Ayat in a tent shelter west of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Aug 13, 2024. — AFP (See Page 5)

TEHRAN: Iran on Tuesday rejected Western calls to stand down its threat to retaliate against the Zionist entity for the killing of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran late last month. The Islamic republic and its allies have blamed the Zionist entity for Haniyeh's killing on July 31 during a visit to the Iranian capital for the swearing-in of President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Iran has vowed to avenge the death, which came hours after a Zionist strike in Beirut killed a senior commander of Hezbollah, the powerful Iran-backed group in Lebanon. Western diplomats have scrambled to prevent a major conflagration in the Middle East, where tensions are already high due to the Zionist-Hamas war in Gaza.

In a statement on Monday, the United States and its European allies urged Iran to de-escalate. The White House warned that a "significant set of attacks" by Iran and its allies was possible this week, saying the Zionist entity shared the same assessment. The United States has deployed an aircraft.

Continued on Page 6

MoI: No transactions without biometrics

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry warned on Tuesday that Kuwaitis and expats who have not submitted their biometrics once the deadline passes will be barred from doing transactions with government bodies. The ministry had earlier said all Kuwaitis must submit their biometric data before Sept 30, while expats have until the end of the year to submit their biometrics.

Once these deadlines pass, people who fail to submit their data will be barred from processing any transaction with any government bodies. The ministry added that so far, as many as 2.5 million people, both citizens and expats, more than half the population, have submitted their biometric data. The ministry said so far it has not been decided whether to fine those who fail to submit their biometrics after the deadline.

Meanwhile, a leading Kuwaiti writer alleged in an article on Tuesday that expatriates consume and use the "lion's share" of public services in Kuwait for almost free and without any economic return, and accordingly their number must be slashed. "Reducing the number of expats, as a policy, must be implemented at government and popular levels," liberal writer Abdullatif Al-Duajj wrote in his column.

"Currently, expats, who represent three-quarters of the population of Kuwait, consume the lion's share of subsidies offered by the government. They consume fuel, water, electricity, use roads and even medications. They consume all of this for almost free, when at the same time, a majority of them, especially unskilled laborers, do not make any real contributions to development and (national) income," Duajj said.

"In fact, they hinder development and distort the environment, with little return, if any," he claimed. He lent support to any government plans or measures to reduce the number of expats, provided they are done within the legal framework and as long as the rights and dignity of expats are preserved. But Duajj said it was not clear if these government steps are being taken on a long-term basis or are temporary.

Pearl diving trip revives Kuwait's maritime heritage

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Participants of different ages continued their journey aboard traditional dhows off the coast of Khairan, as part of the 33rd annual pearl diving trip to honor and revive the legacy of their ancestors. Led by Shipmaster Hamed Al-Sayyar, the event focused on preserving maritime heritage and teaching younger generations about the struggles and perseverance of their forefathers. The participants emphasized quality over quantity in pearl harvesting, with a strong focus on education and training. The young divers reflected on the evolving nature of the trip and the challenges of pearl diving, encouraging others to join in future expeditions. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: Divers search for pearls off the coast of Khairan on Aug 13, 2024. — KUNA

Lisping Trump chats with Musk after tech delay

LOS ANGELES: Donald Trump ran through his checklist of conspiracy theories Monday in a rambling conversation with his uber-wealthy supporter Elon Musk that was initially derailed by what the tech titan said was a technical glitch. In a very one-sided conversation on X, Trump vented about a "zombie apocalypse" of immigration, repeatedly blasted President Joe Biden as "stupid", and mused on developing a new missile defense system based on the one that defends the Zionist entity.

The Republican standard-bearer also dismissed



Donald Trump



Elon Musk

climate change, whose sea-level rises he said would simply create more real estate opportunities. "The biggest threat is not global warming, where the ocean is going to rise one-eighth of an inch over the next 400 years," he told Musk. "You'll have more

oceanfront property, right? The biggest threat is not that. The biggest threat is nuclear warming, because we have five countries now that have significant nuclear power, and we have to not allow anything to happen with stupid people like Biden."

What was billed as a "no limits" conversation between the two started more than half an hour late, with many of those logging on unable to listen in live. Musk, the world's richest man according to Forbes, claimed the platform formerly known as Twitter had experienced a cyber "attack". The former president sounded at several points as if he had a lisp, something many listeners noted on X. The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment about Trump's speech.

The conversation was intended to help reinvigorate Trump's stuttering campaign, which has flagged since Biden dropped out of the race, to be replaced by a surging Kamala Harris.

Continued on Page 6

S Korea sniffer dog searches for Paris bedbugs

SEOUL: South Korea said on Tuesday it had deployed its first sniffer dog trained to detect bedbugs to prevent a possible infestation as athletes return from the Paris Olympics. South Korea won 32 medals, including 13 golds, to finish eighth overall in the medal standings, and around 140 of its athletes have returned to Seoul over the past week. The sniffer dog, named Ceco, was deployed at the main airport in Seoul as part of an initiative between the government and South Korea's largest pest control company, Cesco.

Ceco, a two-year-old beagle, is trained to detect the smell of pheromones unique to bedbugs and can locate

the blood-sucking pests within two minutes with an accuracy rate of 95 percent, Cesco said in a statement. "From August 9 to September 8 - the day the Paralympics concludes - bedbug detection dog services will be available at Incheon Airport for those who wish to utilize them," said a spokesperson for the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

The initiative also includes bedbug control experts with more than 10 years of experience to help search luggage. Aircraft disinfection has also been increased from once a month to once a week, focusing on the Paris-Incheon route. South Korea had been largely bedbug-free for years but infestations rose as travel rebounded after the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 950 cases were reported between November and February, official statistics show. Paris struggled with a bedbug outbreak last year, with a surge of reported sightings sending a shudder through France during the summer and autumn and prompting several school closures. — AFP



INCHEON, South Korea: This photo taken on Aug 8, 2024 shows a sniffer dog taking part in a demonstration of bedbug detection in passengers' luggage at Incheon International Airport. — AFP



Condolences pour in

Information Minister

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

Minister of Culture and Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi mourned His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, chief of the Kuwait National Guard. Minister Al-Mutairi expressed, through his account on social media platform (X), his sincere sympathies with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the entire Al-Sabah Family over the passing of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. He prayed to God Almighty to cover the deceased with the abundance of His mercy, and grant his family with patience and solace.



Governors

Kuwait's governors expressed on Monday their sincere condolences to the country's political leadership on the demise of the Chief of the National Guard, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. Al-Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hmoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Bader Sabah Al-Salem, Al-Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athby Nasser Al-Sabah, Hawally Governor Ali Al-Asfar and Al-Jahra Governor Hamad Al-Hebeshi, all expressed in different statements, their deep condolences to Al-Sabah Family on the tragic occasion, praying to Allah Almighty to have mercy on his soul, inspire his family with patience and solace.

Arab Parliament Speaker

Adel Al-Asoumi

Arab Parliament Speaker, Adel Al-Asoumi mourned the demise of the head of Kuwait National Guard, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. In a statement on Monday, Al-Asoumi offered his deepest condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Al-Sabah Family, and the people of Kuwait on the passing of HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



Foreign Minister

Abdullah Al-Yahya

Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Foreign Ministry members expressed grief and mourned the demise of the head of Kuwait National Guard, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The Ministry also extended their condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the entire Al-Sabah Family on this tragic incident.



Education Minister

Dr Adel Al-Adwani

Minister of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani extended his heartfelt condolences to the political leadership of Kuwait on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, chief of the Kuwait National Guard. In a statement, Ministry of Education conveyed Al-Adwani's prayers for HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and his sincere sympathies to His Highness the Amir, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the entire Al-Sabah Family. Minister Al-Adwani extended his condolences to His Highness the Premier Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



Turkish Ambassador

Tuba Nur Sonmez

I would like to offer my deepest condolences to Al-Sabah Family and to Kuwaiti people on the passing of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG). He was an exemplary statesman and a prominent figure in the Kuwait ruling family. Under his supervision, which spanned decades, the KNG has become a modern and sophisticated force. His contributions to Turkish-Kuwait relations were profound. The institutional cooperation between the Turkish Gendarmerie and the KNG have flourished under his rule. I pray for Allah Almighty's blessings upon him.



The Holy See Ambassador

Archbishop Eugene Nugent

It is with deep sorrow that I received the news of the demise of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. I express my prayerful condolences as well as those of the Catholic Church to the Al-Sabah Family

and to the people of Kuwait. We share in the grief of the nation at the passing of this man of vision who worked tirelessly to promote peace and prosperity in this beautiful land. May Almighty God grant rest to his soul and comfort his family.



Azerbaijan Ambassador

Emil Karimov

Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Kuwait expressed his deep sorrow and heartfelt condolences, both personally and on behalf of the embassy staff, to His Highness the Amir, the Crown Prince, the Al-Sabah Family, and the friendly people of Kuwait on the passing of the HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. He prayed that God grants him mercy and a place in paradise, and gives the family and loved ones patience and strength. He stated that the HH Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah was known for his dedicated service to his country and his significant humanitarian contributions across various fields and sectors, both within Kuwait and beyond.



Pearl diving trip connecting generations



Kuwaiti youths sail on traditional dhows during the annual pearl diving season.



KUWAIT: Participants of pearl diving trip perform a folklore dance. — KUNA photos

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Following their ancestors' legacy, participants in the 33rd annual pearl diving trip took to the waters on Tuesday, continuing their journey aboard traditional dhows off the coast of Khairan. The event not only celebrated the age-old practice of pearl diving but serves as a link between generations by uniting different age groups.

"This trip is important for us because it revives the past of our fathers and grandfathers and shows how they earned their living in a time before oil discovery," said Shipmaster Hamed Al-Sayyar, director of the Maritime Heritage Committee at the Kuwait Marine Sports Club. "We are committed to preserving and passing on this heritage, highlighting the struggles and perseverance of our ancestors to our children," he added.

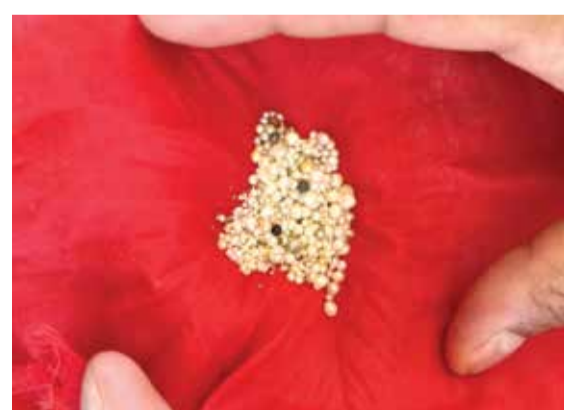
Starting as a small sailor to eventually leading these trips, Sayyar's first pearl diving trip was in 1987. "For me personally, this trip is particularly meaningful. Inspired by my father, Thamer Al-Sayyar, who came up with the idea of the program to commemorate diving heritage. I am deeply moved by this maritime heritage and constantly seek to explore and understand it more deeply," he said.

He noted that this year's participants showed their capabilities through the lessons learned and experiences gained at the marine camp. Although they collected a respectable number of shellfish, their focus was on quality rather than quantity. "We focused on teaching and training the youth rather than just collecting large amounts of pearls," Sayyar said.

Khaled Abdulhadi, a 20-year-old with six years of experience in pearl diving, told Kuwait Times about how he first became involved in this trip. "Most of my family and cousins are here, and they participate every year. So, around the age of 14, I decided to try it out myself. I fell in love with this tradition and have continued to come back each year," Abdulhadi said. Reflecting on how the trip has changed over time, Abdulhadi said, "nowadays, the trip is pretty much different than how it used to be. Before, it used to go on for months without end. Now, they wake up around 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning, have breakfast, and then prepare the ship before the captain arrives. By 8:00 or

8:30, we start diving and continue until the afternoon."

He highlighted the challenges of this activity. "The most challenging part is finding the pearls themselves. It requires a lot of patience to open the clams and search for the pearls. I feel a great sense of satisfaction after looking through clam after clam until I finally find one pearl," he said. All the participants' final message was encouraging others to join in next year, as they are in need of extra help. They worked with excitement and unity to collect pearls and will continue their efforts through to Thursday, when the event concludes. Afterward, they will go back to their families, eagerly anticipating next year's trip.

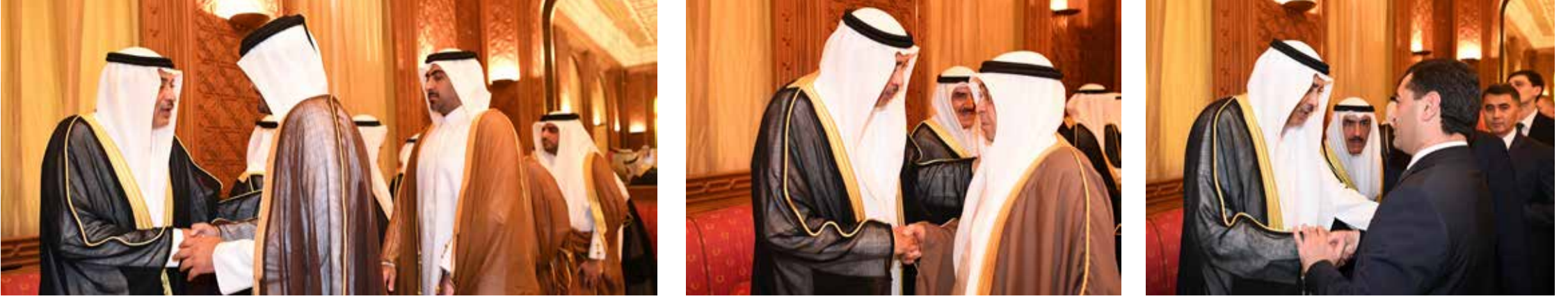


Small pearls collected from the trip.



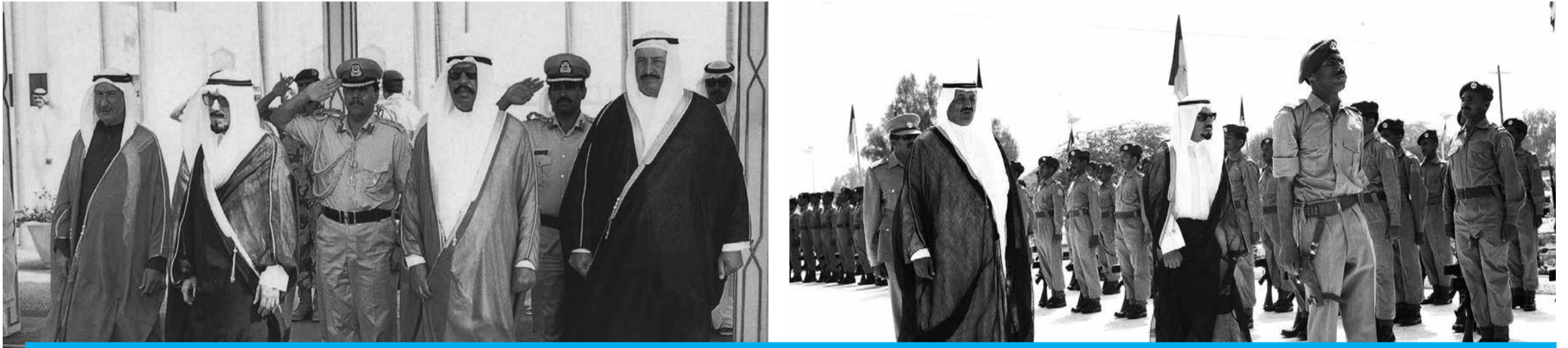
Process of extracting the pearls from shells.





KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah Family received on Tuesday representative of Qatari Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Chief of Olympic committee Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani and his accompanying delegation. The Qatari delegation came to offer condolences on the demise of chief of Kuwait National Guard HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. Also, His Highness the Crown Prince received representative of both Bahraini King Hamad bin Essa Al-Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and his accompanying delegation. His Highness the Crown Prince welcomed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyar Saidov and his accompanying delegation. The Uzbek guests offered condolences on the demise of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, chief of the Kuwait National Guard. — KUNA photos

Sheikh Salem Al-Ali: A role model



File photos show His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of the National Guard performing his official duties. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The late Kuwaiti leader, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of the National Guard, who passed away on Monday, set a prominent example for Kuwaiti men and the next generation. There is no doubt that His Highness is mostly praised for his establishment of the National Guard as an independent body from the armed forces and security agencies until it reached what it is now, a military institution characterized by discipline, order, governance, advancement, and the latest military technologies.

Since the establishment, His Highness laid down the rules of work in it, estab-

lished its administrative structure, and provided it with specialized military cadres. The first result was that a group of Kuwaiti sons joined the National Guard and received high military training. The force is now admired and appreciated by everyone. In 1967, an Amiri decree was issued to establish the Kuwait National Guard as an independent body from the army and police and affiliated with the Supreme Defense Council.

His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah was entrusted with its presidency to organize, prepare its cadres, and lay its foundations. He gave it the es-

sence of his experience and experiments until the National Guard became a towering military apparatus that undertakes its duties in defense and security in cooperation with the army and police.

His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali joined hands with his brother, the late Amir of the country, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to build the National Guard. The National Guard witnessed great development and achieved tremendous leaps in various military, administrative, and technical fields. His

Highness Sheikh Salem was keen to provide care and attention to the National Guard personnel and their families so that their performance would improve and they would have combat capabilities.

Thanks to God Almighty and the efforts of the loyalists, the National Guard has become today a strong wall and a great support in protecting the homeland. During the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the National Guard men rose to defend their homeland and fought valiantly in its defense. During the first days of the invasion, the National Guard forces played a great role in standing up

to the hordes of the occupier and inflicted heavy losses on its ranks.

A major battle took place between the occupiers and the Kuwaiti heroes, confirming the sacrifices of sons of Kuwait in general and the sons of the National Guard in particular. The National Guard camp was named after the liberation, "Steadfastness Camp," to commemorate the memory of this battle. One of His Highness' priorities is to protect the homeland and its citizens. His Highness always urged the officers and soldiers to protect their homeland and its citizens. — KUNA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الطَّيِّبَةُ اجْعِدِي إِلَىٰ بَرِّئِ رَبِّكِ وَأَرْضِي عِبَادَةَ اللَّهِ وَارْجِعِي
مَرْضَىٰ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمِ

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stc

Arabs condemn storming Al-Aqsa Mosque

CAIRO: The Arab League's Secretary General Ahmad Aboul Gheit strongly condemned Al-Aqsa Mosque's storming by extremists, led by two Zionist ministers, and forbidding Palestinians from entering the mosque. Aboul Gheit said in a statement on Tuesday that settlers, accompanied by Zionist police, desecrated Al-Aqsa Mosque's courtyards, noting that the occupation forces were stationed at the courtyard's gates and obstructed Muslim worshippers from entering the site. He added that the continuous storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque shows the ongoing violation against Palestinians and human rights laws.

Over 2,250 extremist settlers, led by Zionist ministers, stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque on Tuesday. The Islamic Waqf Department said in a press statement that settlers entered the mosque through Al-Maghariba (Moroccan Gate), raised the Zionist flag, and performed a religious ritual. Led by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Minister for the Development of the Periphery, the Negev and the Galilee Yitzhak Wasserlauf, dozens of settlers, following calls by extremists to mark the anniversary of the "Destruction of the Temple," spread out along Al-Silsila (Chain Gate) after entering the mosque, as confirmed by local sources.

Palestinian Presidential Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh condemned these actions in a press statement, warning of dangerous provocations by terrorist settlers and holding the Zionist government responsible for inflaming tensions among the Palestinian people, as well as Arabs and Muslims worldwide. Abu Rudeineh called on the US administration to immediately pressure the Zionist government to halt these provocations, maintain the legal status quo in Jerusalem, and cease attacks on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, warning that failure to do so could lead to uncontrollable regional escalation.

He underscored that peace and security in the region are unattainable without a just resolution to the Palestinian issue and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, encompassing both Islamic and Christian holy sites. — KUNA

Ministry of Health continues its efforts in digital transformation



Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Undersecretary of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah discuss digital transformation and mechanization of medical services at the Armed Forces Hospital.



Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and military officials pose for a group photo. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi discussed with Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah and Head of the Medical Services Authority Major General Dr Walid Malallah on Tuesday the importance of exchanging expertise and continuing efforts to achieve digital transformation and mechanization of medical services.

This came according to a statement issued

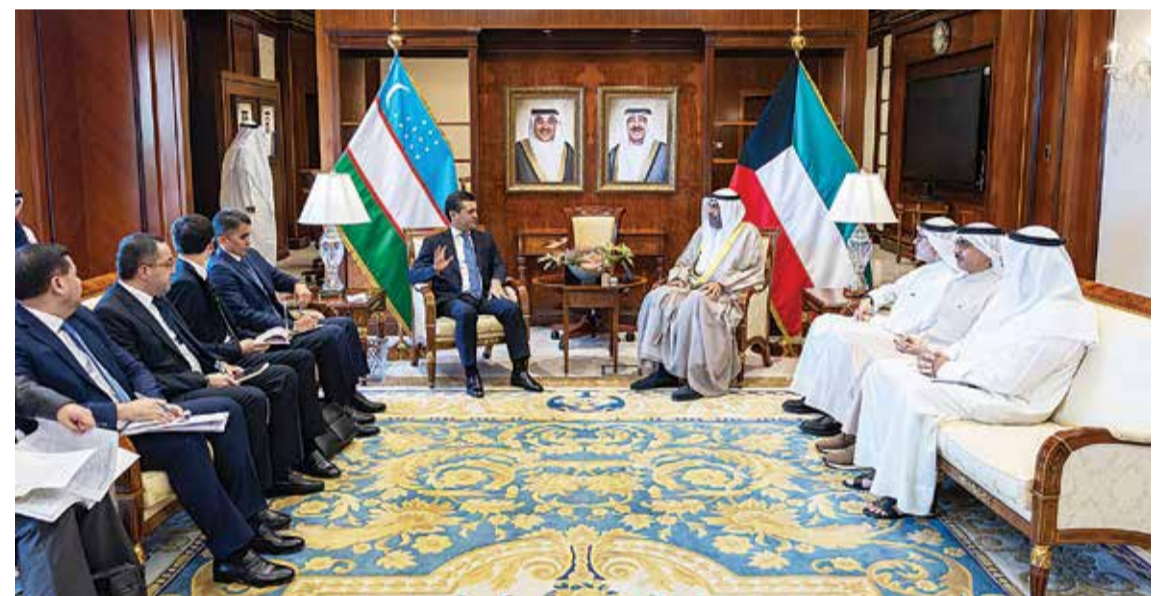
by the Ministry of Defense during Minister Al-Awadhi's visit to Jaber Al-Ahmad Armed Forces Hospital to view the efforts of digital transformation and mechanization of medical services at the hospital. Minister Al-Awadhi listened to a detailed explanation and presentation of what has been achieved in the field of digital transformation in the medical services.

The most important technological solutions

applied to improve the quality of medical services provided to patients and facilitate administrative and medical procedures were presented during the visit. This visit comes within the framework of the ongoing cooperation between the Ministries of Defense and Health to support the military health sector and develop its services. A number of officers of the Medical Services Authority attended the meeting. — KUNA

Kuwaiti, Uzbek FMs discuss ties, regional developments

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met Tuesday the visiting Uzbek counterpart Bakhtiyar Saidov, with the attendance of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah. During the meeting, they discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations in various fields as well as a range of regional and international issues of common concern, the Ministry said in a statement. A memorandum of understanding was signed between both countries' Ministry of Foreign Affairs on cooperation among diplomatic institutions. — KUNA



KRCS commits to providing support to Sudanese people

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) reiterated on Monday Kuwait's dedication to humanitarian support and international efforts aimed at alleviating the suffering in Sudan. KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi told KUNA that

the current humanitarian situation, exacerbated by floods and heavy rains in various states of Sudan, has led to widespread displacement and severe damage to property and buildings.

Al-Hasawi emphasized the urgent need for intervention from humanitarian organizations, underscoring that KRCS will persist in its support due to the dire humanitarian conditions, which have caused thousands of deaths and displaced millions. These relief efforts are part of Kuwait's broader role in global disaster response, he explained.

KRCS has worked with the Embassy of Kuwait in Khartoum and the Sudanese Red Crescent Society to quickly deliver aid that addresses shortages in essential supplies and offers crucial necessities like food, medicine, and shelter. Kuwait was among the first to establish an air bridge to Sudan amidst the ongoing conflicts, while sending medical supplies and relief materials and setting up water and shelter projects, Al-Hasawi pointed out. Additionally, KRCS has launched a fundraising campaign titled "Help Sudan" to further support those in dire conditions.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Sudan Fahad Al-Thafeeri announced Tuesday the completion of the necessary preparations for a Kuwaiti airlift to provide humanitarian and medical aid to the victims of landslides and war in Sudan. The first stage of the airlift will start by sending a plane filled with around 40 tons of medical and humanitarian aid, as the first plane will arrive on Wednesday, followed by additional flights on the 15th, 18th, and 20th of August, said Ambassador Al-Thafeeri.

He pointed out that the aid included ambulances, tents, foods, pesticides, and medicine, as part of a campaign launched by the Kuwait Society for Relief along with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, as well as many other Kuwaiti charities. This humanitarian initiative comes in line with the directive of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to extend aid in Sudan to lessen the effects of wars and floods, he added. He explained that these efforts are part of the airlift that initially began with the outbreak of war in Sudan and included 18 planes



Anwar Al-Hasawi



Kuwaiti Ambassador to Sudan Fahad Al-Thafeeri



and two ships, one of which carried life-saving medicine for cancer patients.

Kuwaiti charitable organizations and societies have launched dozens of humanitarian campaigns to alleviate the suffering of the war-traumatized people of Sudan, he stated. The Ambassador praised the extensive efforts that official and local bodies in Kuwait have contributed in hastening the airlift launch, as well as the cooperation and facilities provided by Sudanese authorities to accomplish this endeavor despite the difficult circumstances that millions face in Sudan. — KUNA



Officials distribute food items and medicines.



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Death toll mounting from South Asia's monsoon

Murder case filed against former Bangladesh PM

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KURSK: A Russian drone attacks Ukrainian armored vehicles in Kursk Region in this image taken from a handout footage released by the Russian Defense Ministry on August 12, 2024. — AFP photos



SUMY: A Ukrainian military vehicle drives from the direction of the border with Russia carrying blindfolded men in Russian military uniforms on August 13, 2024.

Russia strikes back at Ukraine

Counterattack has 'halted' the 'uncontrolled ride of the enemy', Russian commander says

MOSCOW: Russian forces on Tuesday struck back at Ukrainian troops with missiles, drones and airstrikes in actions that one senior commander said had halted Ukraine's advance after the biggest attack on sovereign Russian territory since the war began. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers smashed through the Kursk border a week ago in a surprise attack that Russian President Vladimir Putin said was aimed at improving Kyiv's negotiating position ahead of possible talks and slowing the advance of Russian forces along the front.

The Ukrainian forces carved out a slice of Russian territory, prompting Moscow to evacuate almost 200,000 people while it rushed in reserves. Russian war bloggers reported intense battles across the Kursk front as the Ukrainians tried to expand their control, though they said Russia was bringing in soldiers and heavy weaponry and had repelled many Ukrainian attacks.

Russia's defense ministry published images of Sukhoi Su-34 bombers striking at what it said were Ukrainian troops in the Kursk border region and said it had repelled attacks at villages about 26-28 km (16-17 miles) from the border. Russian forces had destroyed a total of 35 Ukrainian tanks, 31 armored personnel carriers, 18 infantry fighting vehicles, and 179 other armored vehicles during in the week-long battle, it said. "The uncontrolled ride of the enemy has already been halted," said Major General Aпти Alaudinov, the

commander of the Chechen Akhmat special forces unit. "The enemy is already aware that the blitzkrieg that it planned did not work out."

It was not clear which side was in control of the Russian town of Sudzha, through which Russia delivers gas from Western Siberia through Ukraine and on to Slovakia and other European Union countries. Gazprom said Tuesday it was still pumping gas to Ukraine through Sudzha.

Kursk's acting governor, Alexei Smirnov, said on Monday that Ukraine controlled 28 settlements in the region, and the incursion was about 12 km deep and 40 km wide. Ukraine claimed it controlled 1,000 square km (386 square miles) of Russian, more than double what the Russian figures indicate.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Western leaders said they would help Ukraine defeat Russian troops on the battlefield and drive them out. Ukraine recaptured large swathes of territory in 2022. But its counteroffensive in 2023 failed to pierce heavily dug-in Russian lines, and Russian forces have been advancing this year deeper into Ukrainian territory. Russia controls just under one fifth of territory internationally recognized as Ukraine.

Putin pledge

At his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, Putin told officials that Russia would force out the Ukrainian troops, saying Russian forces were speeding up their advance along other parts of the

front. Still, the foreign occupation of Russian land was an embarrassment for the army and for Putin. The Ukrainian incursion is the most serious into Russia since the June 1941 invasion by Nazi Germany, which turned on the 1943 Battle of Kursk.

President Volodymyr Zelensky told Ukrainians in his nightly address that the operation in Russia was a matter of Ukrainian security and the Kursk region had been used by Russia to launch many strikes against Ukraine. But by dedicating forces to Kursk, Ukraine may leave other parts of the front exposed just as Russia has been advancing. Russia which has a far larger army, could try to encircle Ukrainian forces.

Ukraine's Western backers, which have been keen to avoid an escalation of the war into a direct confrontation between Russia and the US-led NATO, said they had no prior warning of the Ukrainian offensive. Putin said the West was using Ukraine to fight a proxy war with Russia and the border incursion was an attempt to undermine Russian domestic stability.

Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) said Zelensky was taking crazy steps that risked an escalation far beyond Ukraine's borders. In Kursk, 121,000 people had already left or have been evacuated and another 59,000 were in the process of being evacuated, local officials said. In Russia's Belgorod region, which borders Kursk, 11,000 civilians were also evacuated, the region's governor said. — AFP

US lifts restrictions on Saudi weapons as it eyes resolving Gaza

WASHINGTON: The United States confirmed Monday it would resume sales of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia, as concerns give way to US hopes for it to play a role in resolving the conflict in Gaza. More than three years after imposing limits on human rights grounds over Saudi strikes in Yemen, the State Department said it would return to weapons sales "in regular order, with appropriate congressional notification and consultation." "Saudi Arabia has remained a close strategic partner of the United States, and we look forward to enhancing that partnership," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters.

US President Joe Biden took office in 2021 pledging a new approach to Saudi Arabia that emphasized human rights, and immediately announced that the administration would only send "defensive" weaponry to the longtime US arms customer.

Geopolitical considerations have, however, changed markedly since then. The United Nations, with US support, brokered a truce in Yemen in early 2022 that has largely held. Since the truce, "there has not been a single Saudi airstrike into Yemen and cross-border fire from Yemen into Saudi Arabia has largely stopped," Patel said. "The Saudis since that time have met their end of the deal, and we are prepared to meet ours," Patel said.

Saudi role in Gaza war

It is now the United States, Britain and recently the Zionist entity that have been striking Houthi targets in Yemen, with Saudi Arabia content to watch from the sidelines. The Houthis have been firing missiles at commercial ships in the vital Red Sea in professed solidarity with Palestinians, who have been in the crosshairs of the Zionist entity since the October 7 attack by Hamas.

In a bid to find a long-term solution, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has repeatedly traveled to Saudi Arabia to discuss a package of US incentives if the kingdom recognizes the Zionist entity. Saudi Arabia has sought US security guarantees, a continued flow of weapons and potentially a civilian nuclear deal if it normalizes with the entity.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made normalization with Arab states a top goal and no prize would be as big as Saudi Arabia, guardian of Islam's two holiest sites. But Saudi Arabia says it cannot act without progress on a Palestinian state, an idea pushed by the Biden administration as it seeks a diplomatic way out of the Gaza conflict, but bitterly opposed by Netanyahu and his far-right allies.

Before October 7, Gulf Arab states had been moving closer to the Zionist entity, in large part out of shared hostility to Iran. Saudi Arabia cooperated with the United States, along with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, in repelling an Iranian missile and drone barrage against the entity in April in response to a Zionist strike on an Iranian diplomatic building in Syria. The United States is again hoping for support from Arab partners as Iran threatens another reprisal against the Zionist entity over the killing in Tehran of Hamas' political leader, Ismail Haniyeh. — AFP

Baby sole survivor of Zionist strike that killed 10 people

KHAN YUNIS: A Zionist strike killed 10 members of a Gaza family in the territory's southern district of Khan Yunis Tuesday, leaving only one survivor — a three-month-old girl, a medic told AFP. "Ten members of the Abu Haya family were killed in a Zionist strike on Abassan in east Khan Yunis," the medic from Nasser Hospital told AFP on condition of anonymity. "There is only one survivor from the family, a baby girl named Rim. She is just three months old," he said, identifying the 10 other members of the family — two parents and their eight children.

The girl, wrapped in a black cloth, stirred strong emotion in the courtyard of Nasser Hospital, a place now known for grieving families searching for dead or wounded loved ones. "This little girl was pulled out of the rubble. Her whole family is dead. Who will take care of her now?" asked Ibrahim Barbakh, a resident of Khan Yunis, as he held the baby. Rescue workers, witnesses and medical sources reported further Zionist air strikes and shelling in several parts of the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, some of them deadly.

In the occupied West Bank, Zionist forces shot a man dead on Tuesday during a raid to demolish the apartments of two detained Palestinian suspects. The Zionist military said in a statement to AFP that the man was shot after Zionist forces opened fire in response to Palestinians throwing rocks at them during the demolition.

The Zionist troops had stormed Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, to demolish the apartments of



KHAN YUNIS: Palestinian toddler Rim Abu Hayya, the sole survivor from her family after they were killed by Zionist bombardment is carried by her aunt Ayat in a tent shelter west of Khan Yunis on August 13, 2024. — AFP

two Palestinians who are in custody on suspicion of carrying out an attack in the city earlier this year. "Suddenly, they arrived and surrounded the neighborhood and then entered the house," Ahmed Al-Barghouthi, brother of one of the detainees, told AFP. "They told us that the house was going to be destroyed with explosives and ordered us to leave even though I'm ill and we have two elderly people in our family."

The Zionist military identified the two detained

suspects whose apartments were targeted for demolition as Khaled al-Kharouf and Aysar Barghouthi. It said the two men had killed Lara Tannous and Amer Mansour in a "terror attack adjacent to the town of Silwad" on January 7. The Zionist entity routinely demolishes the homes of Palestinians accused of carrying out attacks, arguing that such measures act as a deterrent, while critics say they amount to collective punishment. — AFP

Earthquake rattles Syria, also felt in Jordan, Lebanon

DAMASCUS: A 4.8 magnitude earthquake struck the city of Hama in western Syria late on Monday, with residents across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon feeling the impact and tremors lasting into Tuesday morning. Syria's health ministry said on Tuesday said around 65 people sustained minor to moderate injuries as they fled in pan-

ic following the earthquake. In Salamiya, a town approximately 30 km (18 miles) east of Hama city, residents rushed out into the dark streets out of fear, said Nasser Duyub, a state employee living there. "My son was sleeping, I don't know how I grabbed him and got out of the house," Duyub told Reuters. Salamiya's national hospital treated around 67 cases of shock, the health ministry added.

Residents said they saw a balcony collapse and ambulances treating people who had fainted. SANA news agency, citing Souhad Zaidan, the head of Salamiya's city council, reported minor damage such as cracked walls.

The Syrian civil defense operating in the

northern opposition-held areas of the war-torn country said they had deployed to several areas but had not received any reports of damage. Syria's state news agency SANA said it had registered the earthquake's epicenter in east Hama. The German Research Centre for Geosciences gave its magnitude as 4.8, at a depth of 10 km (6 miles).

Syria's National Earthquake Center said monitoring stations recorded 13 tremors east of Hama city until Tuesday morning. Jordan's state news agency reported a 3.9 magnitude aftershock less than an hour after the initial quake. Residents across Lebanon felt the quake.

Both Lebanon and Syria have been hit by Zion-

ist air strikes over the last 10 months as regional hostilities play out in parallel with the Gaza war, and several residents said they initially thought the quake was an air strike.

In Syria, some said they had flashbacks to February 2023, when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake killed more than 50,000 people — mostly in Turkey but with thousands also perishing in northern Syria. That earthquake caused widespread destruction in both countries. "It was the same sound, as if it was coming out of the earth," said Umm Hamzah, a resident of the Syrian capital Damascus. "I got dizzy just like last time, but the scare was worse because I knew what happened in the previous quake." — Reuters

International

Murder case filed against former Bangladesh PM

Hasina with 2 officials, 4 top police officers accused over death of grocery store owner

DHAKA: A court in Bangladesh opened a murder investigation into ousted ex-premier Sheikh Hasina and six top figures in her administration Tuesday over the police killing of a man during civil unrest last month. Hasina, 76, fled by helicopter to neighboring India a week ago, where she remains, as protesters flooded Dhaka's streets in a dramatic end to her iron-fisted tenure. More than 450 people were killed during the weeks of unrest leading up to her toppling. "A case has been filed against Sheikh Hasina and six more," said Mamun Mia, a lawyer who brought the case on behalf of a private citizen. He added that the Dhaka Metropolitan Court had ordered police to accept "the murder case against the accused persons", the first step in a criminal investigation under Bangladeshi law. Mia's filing with the court also named Hasina's former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Obaidul Quader, the general secretary of Hasina's Awami League party.

It also names four top police officers appointed by Hasina's government who have since vacated their posts. The case accuses the seven of responsibility for the death of a grocery store owner who was shot dead on July 19 by police violently suppressing protests. The Daily Star newspaper reported that the case was brought on behalf of Amir Hamza Shatil, a resident of the neighborhood where the shooting happened and a "well-wisher" of the victim.

'We don't deny this'

Hasina's government was accused of widespread human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial killing of thousands of her political opponents. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus returned from Europe three days after Hasina's ouster to head a temporary administration facing the monumental challenge of steering democratic reforms.

The 84-year-old won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his pioneering work in microfinance, and is credited with helping millions of Bangladeshis out of grinding poverty. He took office as "chief adviser" to a caretaker administration — all fellow civilians bar



DHAKA: Students sit near a vandalized mural of Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, during a protest demanding accountability and trial against Hasina on August 12, 2024. — AFP

home minister Sakhawat Hossain, a retired brigadier general — and has said he wants to hold elections "within a few months".

Hossain said on Monday that the government had no intention of banning Hasina's Awami League, which played a pivotal role in the country's independence movement. "The party has made many contributions to Bangladesh — we don't deny this," he told reporters on Monday. "When the election comes, (they should) contest the elections." AFP has contacted the caretaker administration for comment.

'Temporary crisis'

The new administration has stressed it wants to put Bangladesh on a different path. Its foreign minister

Touhid Hossain told a briefing of more than 60 foreign diplomats late Monday it was "very serious about human rights", and vowed not to "allow any violence or damages to occur", he said. "All those committing such crimes will be investigated," Hossain added.

The unrest and political change have also shaken Bangladesh's critical garment industry, but he assured diplomats that foreign investments would be protected. Bangladesh's 3,500 garment factories account for around 85 percent of its \$55 billion in annual exports, supplying many of the world's top brands as the world's second biggest exporter of clothing by value after China. "This is a temporary crisis," Hossain added. "Everything will come back in the right way, as competent people are in charge." — AFP

Ilhan Omar latest US 'Squad' member to face primary challenge

WASHINGTON: Firebrand Democratic US Representative Ilhan Omar faces a challenge from within her own party on Tuesday, after two fellow members of the liberal group nicknamed "The Squad" lost party primaries earlier this year.

The Minnesota lawmaker, one of four progressive women whose 2018 election created the group, faces a primary rematch with former Minneapolis city councilor Don Samuels, who came close to beating Omar in a 2022 primary. The winner in the heavily Democratic district is expected to easily win the November 5 election, when control of Congress will be up for grabs as Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican Donald Trump seek the presidency.

Fellow Squad members Representatives Jamaal Bowman of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri lost their party primaries over the past few months, facing opponents who had won substantial support from the pro-Zionist entity fundraising group AIPAC.

Bowman, Bush and Omar had all expressed opposition to President Joe Biden's support for the Zionist entity in its war in Gaza, but AIPAC as of mid-July had given just \$25 to Samuels' campaign, according to



MINNEAPOLIS: Ilhan Omar is seen in this file photo after her election to the US House of Representatives in 2018. — AFP

data collected by Open Secrets. Bowman and Bush's losses will whittle away the Squad's ranks from its peak of nine members.

They also reflect a party that has backed away from some of its furthest-left causes, like calls for providing government-backed healthcare for all Americans or talk of defunding police, which came to the fore during the 2020 Democratic presidential primary before Biden secured the nomination.

The absence of a significant 2024 Democratic primary before Biden ended his candidacy last month, passing the torch to Harris, meant that further-left

candidates such as independent Senator Bernie Sanders did not drive the debate. "I understood going into this election cycle that the progressive movement was going to be burdened because of the absence of somebody carrying the banner on the center stage of American politics," said Alan Minsky, executive director of Progressive Democrats of America.

Omar and some fellow Squad members voted against some Biden priorities including the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill signed into law in 2021. Omar objected to that because it did not move in tandem with a bill to expand social programs, including childcare, as had been promised. Unlike the hardline Republican House Freedom Caucus, whose roughly three dozen members have repeatedly blocked their own party's priorities, members of the Squad have generally voted in step with fellow Democrats on legislation.

Omar, who arrived in the United States as a refugee from Somalia, describes her politics as "visionary, bold and loud" and says she has delivered millions of dollars in federal funds for community development in her district. She argues she has paid close attention to her district's large immigrant population — including Somalis — in part by probing whether large banks discriminate against Muslim Americans.

She has faced criticism for antisemitic remarks, with House Republicans in 2023 voting to remove her from the Foreign Affairs Committee over a 2019 social media post suggesting that the Zionist entity's supporters were motivated by money rather than principle. Omar has apologized for that post. — Reuters

Iran rejects calls to 'stand down'...

Continued from Page 1

carrier strike group and a guided missile submarine to the region in support of the Zionist entity.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani criticized the Western call for restraint. "The declaration by France, Germany and Britain, which raised no objection to the international crimes of the Zionist regime, brazenly asks Iran to take no deterrent action against a regime which has violated its sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said in a statement.

The United States and its European allies also called for a ceasefire between the Zionist entity and Hamas in Gaza, with ceasefire talks to resume on Thursday. The Zionist military offensive in Gaza has killed at least 39,929 people, according to a toll from the territory's health ministry, mostly women and children.

Far-right parties in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition strongly oppose any ceasefire in Gaza, a point rammed home by firebrand National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir on a visit to Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound that was swiftly condemned by its custodian Jordan.

Defying longstanding rules that allow Jews and other non-Muslims to visit the compound but not to pray there, Ben Gvir led hundreds of Zionists in singing Jewish hymns and performing Talmudic rituals, images posted on social media networks showed. In a video filmed inside the compound, Ben Gvir renewed his opposition to any let-up in the Gaza war. "We must win and not go to the talks in Doha or Cairo," the minister said, referring to the truce talks planned for Thursday.

Minister Ben Gvir, instead of maintaining the status quo at the mosque is supervising the Judaization operation and trying to change the situation inside Al-Aqsa Mosque," an official from the Waqf, the Jordanian body that is custodian of the site, said on condition of anonymity. Zionist police also "imposed restrictions" on Muslim worshippers trying to enter the mosque, he said.

Jordan's foreign ministry condemned the "storming" of the mosque, calling it a "flagrant violation of interna-

tional law". "The continual violations of the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its sanctities require a clear and firm international position that condemns these violations," ministry spokesperson Su-fyan Al-Qudah said in a statement. Netanyahu's office said Ben Gvir's visit "deviated from the status quo". It said the Zionist entity's policy on the so-called Temple Mount remained unchanged. Ben Gvir's provocations were condemned by the US, EU and the UN.

Hamas has urged mediators to implement a truce plan earlier presented by US President Joe Biden instead of holding more talks. Analyst Esfandyar Bat-manghelidj said Iran was considering how to retaliate against the Zionist entity without derailing the ceasefire talks. "The renewed push for a ceasefire offers Iran a way out of this escalatory cycle," Batmanghelidj, CEO of the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation think-tank, told AFP. "Iranian officials still feel obliged to hit back at (the Zionist entity), but they must do so in a way that doesn't derail the prospects for a ceasefire summit."

Despite more than 10 months of fighting in Gaza, Hamas has still on occasion been able to fire rockets into the Zionist entity. On Tuesday the militants said they had fired two rockets at Tel Aviv in their first attack on the city in months. The Zionist army claimed a rocket from Gaza fell into the sea, while another was identified but "did not cross into (Zionist) territory".

Pressure for a ceasefire in Gaza has grown since emergency services in the Hamas-run territory said a Zionist air strike on Saturday killed 93 people at a school housing displaced Palestinians. On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin met Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Moscow and told him he was "concerned" about civilian deaths in Gaza. Putin called for a ceasefire and the "creation of a fully-fledged Palestinian state", according to images shown on Russian state television.

"Everyone is well aware that Russia today, unfortunately, must defend its interests and defend its people with arms in hand. But what is happening in the Middle East, what is happening in Palestine, of course, does not go unnoticed on our part," Putin said. "And of course, we are watching with great pain and anxiety the humanitarian catastrophe that has unfolded in Palestine," he added. Abbas told Putin: "We feel that Russia is one of the dearest friends of the Palestinian people." — Agencies

Lisping Trump chats with Musk...

Continued from Page 1

The young men who view Musk as a hero are a prized target for Trump, whose following tends to skew older. More than a million users listened in live to the conversation on X.

Trump insulted Harris several times, referring to her as "third rate", "incompetent" and "a radical left lunatic". But then he praised her looks. "She looks like the most beautiful actress ever to live," Trump said about a picture of Harris on the cover of Time magazine. "It was a drawing, and actually, she looked very much like a great first lady, Melania," he added, referring to his wife Melania Trump.

He also expressed anger that Harris had been swapped in for Biden on the Democratic ticket. "She hasn't done an interview since this whole scam started," Trump said, claiming falsely that Biden dropping off the ticket was a "coup". In a statement after the interview, a Harris campaign spokesperson, Joseph Costello, said: "Trump's entire campaign is in service of people like Elon Musk and himself — self-obsessed rich guys who will sell out the middle class and who cannot run a livestream in the year 2024."

Musk, who has said he previously voted Democrat, has thrown his weight — and his wealth — behind Trump since a gunman tried to assassinate the Republican at a rally last month. A longstanding critic of electric vehicles, Trump has shifted gears since Musk's endorsement. On Monday, he described the electric cars made by Tesla as "incredible". Musk embraces Trump and scorns subsidies. But Tesla still lobbies for US benefits.

The apparent technical difficulties come after Musk fired swathes of staff at the platform, and also served as an uncomfortable reminder that the Tesla boss had once backed Trump's rival Ron DeSantis, whose campaign launch on the platform was also beset by problems. When things finally got underway, Musk said the "massive attack il-

Venezuela prepares NGO crackdown; UN voices concern

CARACAS: The UN voiced concern Tuesday over what it said was a climate of fear in Venezuela, as the country's parliament considered laws that critics say will be used to crack down on NGOs and political opponents of strongman leader Nicolas Maduro. Maduro was declared by authorities to have won reelection for a third presidential term last month in a vote whose contested results have pushed the country into political crisis. Dozens have been killed and thousands arrested amid demonstrations.

United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said he was troubled by the use of counterterrorism legislation to enforce arbitrary detentions. "Criminal law must never be used to limit unduly the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association," Turk said in a statement. His spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said human rights and democracy were impossible to protect in "a climate of fear."

The parliament was set Tuesday to consider a new law increasing regulations on non-governmental organizations, specifically around registration and financial disclosures — backed by fines of up to \$10,000. The move comes after Maduro ally and president of the National Assembly, Jorge Rodriguez, called NGOs a "facade for the financing of terrorist actions." Other priorities on the parliament's radar include further regulating social media and strengthening hate crime laws — often used to target political opponents. Maduro earlier banned the social media site X for 10 days following the election, after CEO Elon Musk said the president had engaged in "major election fraud."

'Iron fist'

The National Assembly's moves come after Maduro called Monday for the state to use an "iron fist" after protests over his reelection claim, which has been broadly rejected across the Americas and Europe. As the official protest death toll rose to 25, Maduro urged "severe justice" for violence he blames on the opposition, which insists its candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia won the July 28 vote by a landslide.

The National Electoral Council (CNE) declared Maduro the victor within hours of polls closing, giving him 52 percent of ballots cast. It did not provide a detailed breakdown of the ballots. The opposition says its own tally of polling-station-level results showed Gonzalez Urrutia, a 74-year-old retired diplomat, had won more than two-thirds of votes.

Both Gonzalez Urrutia and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who was barred from running by Maduro-friendly state institutions, are in hiding. The UN human rights office said that according to official statements, more than 2,400 people have been arrested since July 29. "I call for the immediate release of everyone who has been arbitrarily detained, and for fair trial guarantees for all detainees," said Turk. "The disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officials and the attacks on demonstrators by armed individuals supporting the government, some resulting in deaths, must not be repeated." — AFP

illustrates there's a lot of opposition to people just hearing what President Trump has to say."

Trump was banned from Twitter after a mob of his supporters stormed the US Capitol in Jan 2021, but Musk reinstated him when he took the platform over and renamed it. The South African-born billionaire has emerged as a major voice in US politics, but is accused of turning X into a megaphone for rightwing conspiracy theories. He is one of the Democrats' fiercest critics, leveraging his 194 million-strong following on X to assail liberal efforts to boost diversity and inclusion — what he calls the "woke mind virus" — and the White House's handling of the southern border.

"We have people streaming over," Musk told Trump, likening the border to the "zombie apocalypse" depicted in the film "World War Z". "It's just not possible for the United States to absorb, you know, everyone from Earth," said Musk, identifying himself as a "legal immigrant".

In his "chat" with Musk, Trump returned often to a favorite theme — boasting about his relationship with autocrats like Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping, and insisted America would be safer under his stewardship. "One of the things we're going to do is we're going to build an Iron Dome," he said, referring to the Zionist entity's missile defense system. "We're going to have the best Iron Dome in the world... because it just takes one maniac, to you know, start something."

Musk reiterated his strong support for Trump, saying the ex-president "was the path to prosperity and Kamala is the opposite". At one point he also appeared to be touting for a job under a future Trump administration, suggesting he would like to serve on a cost-cutting committee. "I think it would be great to just have a government efficiency commission that takes a look at these things and just ensures that taxpayer money... is spent in a good way," he said. "I'd be happy to help out on such a commission." Trump appeared solid on the job application. "You're the greatest cutter," he told the man who slashed swathes of staff months after taking over Twitter. — Agencies

International

Death toll mounting from South Asia's monsoon

At least 250 people died in flooding, landslides in India since June

NEW DELHI: Torrential storms lashing South Asia have killed hundreds of people since June, official data showed Tuesday, with flooding and landslides causing widespread devastation during the treacherous monsoon season. Weather-related disasters are common during the monsoon season from June to September, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

The deaths include at least 250 in India, 171 in Nepal and 178 in Pakistan, according to official data in each country. In India, just months after the country baked in its longest-ever heatwave, according to government weather experts, ferocious rainstorms have triggered widespread flooding and landslides.

The crushing heatwave in May and June saw temperatures in New Delhi match the capital's previous record high: 49.2C (120.5F) clocked in 2022. Now the heat has been replaced by rains. India's weather department this week warned of "heavy rainfall" over much of the south and north-eastern states.

On Tuesday, rescue teams searched for two missing people after nine drowned when a surge of water smashed through the Una district of Himachal Pradesh state. Witnesses saw a car being swept away like a toy by the swollen muddy river. "Several people tried to stop the car ... as the current was increasing but the car sped past and soon the car was swept away by the strong current," Rajendra Kumar said.

Floods in deserts

Scores of people have died in India this month alone, while 200 people died in the southern state of Kerala last month when landslides hit villages and tea plantations. In Nepal, 171 people have died since monsoon rains began in mid-June, including 109 people in landslides. Other deaths have been caused by floods and lightning, according to the disaster authority.

Searches continue in central Nepal's Chitwan district for two buses swept over concrete crash barriers in a raging river on July 12, killing around 50 people. Ninety-two children are among the 178 deaths across Pakistan since the rains arrived in July, with the collapse of homes the biggest killer, according to the National Disaster Management Authority.

In the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mountain villages have been warned of the risk of glacial lake flooding this week as temperatures and humidity climb. Monsoon rains across the region from June to September offer respite from the summer heat and are crucial to replenishing water supplies. They are also vital for agriculture, and therefore the livelihoods of millions of farmers and food security for South Asia's nearly two billion people.

India is the world's third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases but has committed to achieve a net zero emissions economy by 2070 — two decades after most of the industrialized West. For



KOKRAJHAR: Students and villagers stand outside a partially collapsed government school following severe soil erosion after an increase in the water level of the Sermanga river during monsoon season in the New Bongaigaon village of Kokrajhar district in India's Assam state on August 10, 2024. — AFP

now, it is overwhelmingly reliant on coal for power generation. Pakistan, meanwhile, contributes less than one percent to global greenhouse gases yet is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate

change. In 2022, catastrophic flooding plunged a third of the country underwater, killing over 1,700 people, displacing 33 million and destroying thousands of homes. — AFP

Greece battles deadly wildfire for third day

ATHENS: Greek emergency services battled a massive wildfire threatening Athens for a third day Tuesday after finding the first victim and thousands of people were kept away from their homes by the flames. The body of a Moldovan woman was found in a burned factory and at least 66 people have been treated for injuries since the fire broke out Sunday, authorities said. Five firefighters were hurt.

Fueled by strong winds, the wildfire raced across parched landscape northeast of the capital, destroying dozens of houses, cars and businesses in the 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) of land it has devastated. The Greek government appealed for assistance from other European nations. France, Italy, Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia and Turkey were sending hundreds of firefighters along with helicopters, fire engines and water tankers, authorities said. The fire has badly hit the suburbs of Nea Penteli, Palaia Penteli, Patima Halandriou and Vrilissia.

The body of a Moldovan in her 60s



DIONE, Greece: A local gets into his car in front of the flames to evacuate during a wildfire in Dione on August 12, 2024. — AFP

was found in a factory in the suburb of Halandri. A bouquet of white flowers was laid in tribute in the mess of steel and burned chairs and tables. Halandri mayor Simos Roussos told ERT state television that he had seen nearly a dozen homes destroyed by fire in his town. Numerous businesses, as well as used car and coal yards and paint warehouses were also affected, he said. "The fire travelled 50 kilometers and changed direction 10 times," Roussos said.

In nearby Penteli, a helicopter waterbombed huge balls of flame coming from a warehouse containing wood and what is believed to be propane tanks. Locals fled loud explosions, which sent items flying. The labor ministry banned outdoor working in areas hit by the fires because so many burned factories contained toxic chemicals.

With much of the capital covered by acrid smoke for two straight days, scientists reported an alarming rise in haz-

ardous airborne particles, particularly from Sunday night to Monday night. "Never in a million years did I think a fire would come here," 65-year-old Sakis Morfis told AFP outside his gutted home in Vrilissia. "We're without clothes, money, everything was burned inside," he said.

Hundreds of firefighters, backed by around 200 fire engines and 12 water-bombing aircraft battled the blaze that started in Varnavas, some 35 kilometers (22 miles) from Athens. Costas Tsigkas, head of the association of Greek firefighter officers, told ERT the army of firefighters had made progress during the night. "We are at a better level across the front," Tsigkas said. "But conditions again will not be easy. There will be winds from midday onwards" and "every hour that passes will be more difficult". Greece's National Observatory, itself threatened by the wildfire, said temperatures of up to 38 degrees Celsius (100 Fahrenheit) are expected on Tuesday, with winds of up to 39 kilometers (24 miles) per hour.

Greece's conservative government came under attack from the press over the fire. "Enough is enough," thundered the front page of Greece's top-selling centrist daily Ta Nea. The liberal Kathimerini said the "out of control" inferno "had left huge destruction (and) unanswered questions". — AFP

UK vows to 'prioritize' mental health after damning report

LONDON: The UK government on Tuesday pledged to prioritize mental health as a report into a fatal stabbing rampage by a psychotic patient identified a litany of errors by medical authorities. Nineteen 19-year-old students Grace O'Malley-Kumar and Barnaby Webber and school caretaker Ian Coates died in the attacks in the central English city of Nottingham last June.

Health Minister Wes Streeting said it was time to put a greater focus on mental health, amid growing public concern about treatment waiting times and big increases in demand. "It's time we prioritize mental health so we will be updating the Mental Health Act to bring care into the 21st century to ensure that care is appropriate, proportionate and compassionate — while keeping the public safe," he wrote in The Sun daily.

Victims' relatives said the report revealed "a catalogue of continual failures" lasting years in the handling of paranoid schizophrenic Valdo Calocane who carried out the killings. "It's really hard to actually pinpoint one particular point, because the failings are so systemic and they're so gross," said Emma Webber whose son Barnaby died. And she warned that what happened in Nottingham was "not a one-off tragedy". "There are more Valdo Calocanes out in our community," she said.

According to the report, repeated medical assessments of Calocane underplayed the serious risk he posed to others. Key details were "minimized or omitted" such as his refusal to take his medication, violent behavior and persistent symptoms of psychosis.

"Poor decision-making, omissions and errors of judgments contributed to a situation where a patient with very serious mental health issues did not receive the support and follow-up he needed," said Chris Dziki of the Care Quality Commission which produced the report. Sanjoy Kumar, the father of Grace O'Malley-Kumar, said doctors had to take greater responsibility for releasing "dangerous" patients.

Public safety

"It's not about depriving people of their liberty. It's about holding clinicians responsible who put people like that out on our streets," said Kumar, a practicing doctor. "We have lost the absolute love of our life, our lovely, beautiful and brave daughter, Gracie, and at the end of the day what we want to see is that the public are safe," he said. "I think the nation is crying out for safety from these crimes," he added.

Calocane was given an indefinite hospital order in January after admitting manslaughter due to diminished responsibility. Prosecutors accepted his not guilty pleas to murder after multiple medical experts concluded he had paranoid schizophrenia.

Streeting, a member of the UK's new Labour government, said the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) had accepted the recommendations about improvements to the care of patients with serious mental illness. Measures already in place include £2.3 billion (\$2.9 billion) a year increase in funding "to transform services". "Action is already underway to address the serious failures," he said in a statement, adding that he wanted to "assure myself and the country" that the errors seen in Nottingham "are not being repeated elsewhere".

There has been growing alarm in the UK at the state of mental health provision over recent years as the NHS struggles with increased demand, a post-Covid backlog and staffing and funding issues. The NHS says some 5.3 million children and young people were in contact with mental health services in 2023/24, up 8.1 percent on the previous year and over 25 percent on 2021/22. — AFP



The Museum of Memories is seen near Line of Control (LOC) - the border between India and Pakistan, at the Hunderman village in Kargil district. — AFP photos



Indian security force personnel return from a security post near Line of Control.

Families split by India-Pakistan rivalry lose hope

HUNDERMAN, India: The ancient trade route over the Himalayan passes of Hunderman once brought communities together, but the rugged peaks are now used as fortifications by nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan. Indian apricot farmer Ghulam Ahmad, 66, separated from his parents as a teenager in the chaos of war that saw control of his village swap from Pakistan to India, dreams of seeing his mother's grave.

If the crossing was open, it would be a day's trek of 50 kilometers (30 miles) to Pakistani territory. But to visit the site now requires a roundtrip of some 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles), visa permission that is hard to obtain, and expenses he cannot afford. "What can we do?" said Ahmad. "Many here have died without meeting, only in hope of meeting."

India and Pakistan have only one tightly restricted border point where people can cross, in Punjab state far to the south, but few do so. The rivals, who both celebrate their 77th independence day this week, have fought three major wars and countless border conflicts since they were partitioned out of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.

They remain bitterly at odds over control of the restive territory of Kashmir, divided between the two



HUNDERMAN, India: Ghulam Ahmad, an Indian apricot farmer sits beside a portrait of his father who died in Pakistan, as he speaks during an interview with AFP.

countries and claimed in full by both. "If someone reopens this border many would go there," he said. "And many from there would come here to meet relatives". Ahmad's village in the Kargil area lies beside a raging glacial meltwater tributary of the Indus river, at the fortified line of control dividing Kashmir between the countries. Imposing snow-capped peaks shadow the village dotted with rival army posts.

'Crying'

Kargil was also the site of the last major clash between New Delhi and Islamabad in 1999. Ali, 49, who uses only one name, is a tour guide in the summer months when curious tourists come to visit, and

otherwise leads donkeys carrying supplies to Indian military mountain outposts. He has never met his uncle's family across the border. "My mother's brother and their entire family are on the other side," Ali said, saying his mother "keeps crying about her separation from them". He recalled the terrifying 10-week conflict in 1999, in which at least 1,000 people were killed. "It was a really tough period," Ali said, describing how villagers would shelter in mountain caves. "The men only came out at night to water the fields and take care of the animals."

'Disconnected'

After a quarter of a century of relative peace, the narrow valley is far less isolated. India's military has made a giant push to bolster strategic infrastructure, such as roads and telecommunication lines. Families can now connect online, swapping messages after decades of silence — or even, for the first time. "There was nothing here in 1999," said Kargil veteran Major General Lakhwinder Singh. "Now small townships are coming up, new hotels."

But Mohammad Baqir, 51, said while he had now reconnected with relatives in Pakistan, his desire to meet in person and pray at a mosque together was just a dream. "I've seen our soldiers fortify defenses and have no hope of a thaw," Baqir said. "There's always fear that something may happen". Ahmad, the apricot farmer, said he showed his late father's photograph to his teenage grandson, but he was not interested. The young generations were "entirely disconnected", he said. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2024

IEA trims oil demand outlook

Global oil demand growth slows in Q2 as China offsets gains

PARIS: Global oil demand growth slowed in the second quarter of the year, primarily due to softer construction and industrial activity in China, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday. "Demand is set to rise by less than 1 mbd (million barrels per day) in both 2024 and 2025," said the IEA in its monthly oil report. That growth rate is far slower than last year's 2.1 mbd increase and slower than pre-pandemic expansion.

The IEA expects global consumption to come in at 103.06 mbd in 2024, up from 102.09 mbd last year and 100.6 mbd in 2019. Europe will be the only continent to see a drop in overall demand, with the Americas rising only marginally.

Demand will continue to expand apace in the Asia-Pacific region, including in China, according to the IEA. Yet the IEA noted Chinese oil demand fell in June for the third consecutive month, primarily due to weaker demand for gasoil (diesel) and naphtha, products used by the construction and manufacturing industries.

The IEA noted that the rising number of trucks running on natural gas or batteries was also eroding demand for diesel. "Chinese oil demand growth has gone into reverse due to a slowdown in construction and manufacturing, rapidly accelerating deployment of vehicles powered by alternative fuels and comparison to a stronger post-reopening baseline," said the Paris-based IEA, which advises oil-consuming nations on energy policy.

It noted that sales of electric cars have also been

strong, citing data from the China Passenger Car Association showing that they accounted for more than 50 percent of sales in July, and are up by third for the first half of the year.

The report from the IEA, which advises industrialized countries, is the second this week to flag that a sluggish economy is likely to curb demand in China, the world's biggest oil importer and second biggest oil consumer. "Weak growth in China, following the post-COVID surge of 2023, now significantly drags on global gains," the Paris-based energy watchdog said in its report. While the impact of China's post-pandemic economic bounce has faded, the IEA expects strong demand in Western economies, notably the United States, where one third of global gasoline is consumed.

The US summer driving season is expected to be the strongest since the pandemic, the IEA said, adding supply cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (OPEC+) had tightened the physical market. "For now, supply is struggling to keep pace with peak summer demand, tipping the market into a deficit," the IEA said. World oil demand will rise by 950,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2025, the IEA said, down 30,000 bpd from the previous forecast. It left this year's growth forecast unchanged at 970,000 bpd.

Outside the developed countries of the OECD, demand in the second quarter of this year was the slowest since the pandemic year of 2020, the IEA said. China's share of this demand growth is ex-



DUBAI: This picture taken on December 10, 2023 shows the OPEC pavilion at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai. The IEA said in its report on Tuesday that continues supply cuts by the OPEC+ had tightened the physical market. — AFP

pected to fall to about a third in 2024, compared to just over two thirds in 2023.

The IEA said the fall in China was most marked in gasoil and naphtha, reflecting less construction and manufacturing, and implying "a pause in the relentless expansion of the country's petrochemical sec-

tor". OPEC on Monday cut its 2024 demand forecast for the first time since July 2023, also citing China. Even after its downward revision, the group of oil producing nations said world oil demand would rise by 2.11 million bpd this year, compared with the IEA's 970,000 bpd. — Agencies

People leave New Zealand amid rising economic crisis

WELLINGTON: People are leaving New Zealand in record numbers as unemployment rises, interest rates remain high and economic growth is anemic, government statistics show. Data released by Statistics New Zealand on Tuesday showed that 131,200 people departed New Zealand in the year ended June 2024, provisionally the highest on record for an annual period. Around a third of these were headed to Australia. While net migration, the number of those arriving minus those leaving, remains at high levels, economists also expect this to wane as the number of foreign nationals wanting to move to New Zealand falls due to the softer economy.

The data showed of those departing 80,174 were citizens, which was almost double the numbers seen leaving prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Merrily Allen is currently planning her move with her partner and 14-year-old daughter in early 2025 to Hobart on the Australian island state of Tasmania "There is a lot of opportunity over there. They're always, always looking for people in my profession," said Allen, who works in dental administration. "I've got a lot of friends that have gone (to Australia) ... purely because of better work opportunities, better living. Australia just seems to have it together."

During the pandemic, encouraged by the then government's handling of the outbreak, New Zealanders living overseas returned home in historically



AUCKLAND, New Zealand: Boats are moored in waters in front of the Auckland city skyline, New Zealand. People are leaving New Zealand in record numbers as unemployment rises, interest rates remain high and economic growth is anemic, government statistics show. — AFP

high numbers. But the love affair with the country of 5.3 million, is over for some. Economists say New Zealanders frustrated by the cost of living, high interest rates and fewer job opportunities, are looking to Australia, the UK and elsewhere.

New Zealand's economy is struggling after the central bank hiked cash rates 521 basis points in its most aggressive tightening since the official cash rate was introduced in 1999. The economy annual growth of 0.2 percent in the first quarter, unemploy-

ment rose to 4.7 percent in the second quarter and inflation remains high at 3.3 percent. Furthermore, Australia has been recruiting and offering relocation packages in areas such as nursing, policing and teaching where they have skill shortages attracting New Zealanders, who do not need visas to work there. At the same time, the New Zealand government has undertaken a significant downsizing of the country's public service leaving many skilled workers looking for jobs. — Reuters

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Cheaper services curb US producer price gains in July

WASHINGTON: US producer prices increased less than expected in July as an energy-driven rebound in the cost of goods was tempered by cheaper services, indicating that inflation continued to moderate in support of an interest rate cut next month. The fairly benign report from the Labor Department on Tuesday also showed favorable readings for most of the components that go into the calculation of the inflation measures tracked by the Federal Reserve for monetary policy.

"Producer price increases cooled this month which is good news for the Fed's inflation fight, but there is no PPI deflation, so Fed officials do not

have to rush to judgment and bring rate cuts forward because the economy is headed downhill," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWD BOND.

The producer price index for final demand edged up 0.1 percent last month after rising by an unrevised 0.2 percent in June, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the PPI gaining 0.2 percent. In the 12 months through July, the PPI increased 2.2 percent after climbing 2.7 percent in June.

Goods prices rebounded 0.6 percent, the largest gain in five months, after falling for two straight months. A 1.9 percent increase in energy prices accounted for nearly 60 percent of the rise in goods prices. Wholesale gasoline prices increased 2.8 percent. There were also increases in the prices of diesel and jet fuel. Wholesale food prices shot up 0.6 percent after nudging up 0.1 percent in June. Meats, fresh fruits and melons cost more relative to the prior month. Excluding the volatile food and en-

ergy components, goods prices gained 0.2 percent after being unchanged in June.

Services prices fell 0.2 percent, the largest decline since March 2023, after rising 0.4 percent in June. That reflected a 1.3 percent drop in trade services, which measure changes in margins received by wholesalers and retailers. Margins for machinery and vehicle wholesaling fell 4.1 percent. There were also decreases in margins for food and alcohol retailing as well as automobiles, automotive fuels and lubricants retailing, and desktop and portable device application software publishing. But the cost of transportation and warehousing services rose 0.4 percent.

Airline fares fell 0.2 percent after rising 0.4 percent in June. Healthcare and medical insurance costs ticked up 0.1 percent following a 0.2 percent gain in the prior month. The cost of physician services fell 0.2 percent, while hospital inpatient care rose 0.2 percent after climbing 0.4 percent in June. Hotel and motel room prices dropped 0.4 percent after declining 0.5 percent in June. Portfolio management fees increased 2.3 percent, a gain that is likely to be reversed following a recent stock market sell off.

Portfolio management fees, healthcare, hotel and motel accommodation and airline fares are among components that go into the calculation of the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price indexes, the inflation measures tracked by the Fed for its 2 percent target. "We modestly lowered our tracking of core PCE inflation from 0.20 percent to 0.18 percent, with a final forecast more dependent on CPI data released tomorrow," said Veronica Clark, an economist at Citigroup.

Slowing inflation and a cooling labor market have led financial markets to anticipate that the Fed will start its easing cycle in September. With the US central bank now increasingly concerned about labor market weakness, after the unemployment rate surged to near a three-year high of 4.3 percent in July, a rate cut of 50 basis points cannot be ruled out. The Fed has maintained its benchmark overnight interest rate in the current 5.25 percent-5.50 percent range for a year, having raised it by 525 basis points in 2022 and 2023. Excluding food, energy and trade, prices rose 0.3 percent after edging up 0.1 percent in June. The core PPI increased 3.3 percent year-on-year after rising 3.2 percent in June. — Reuters

Markets rise as US wholesale inflation slows

LONDON: Global stocks mostly rose on Tuesday as attention turned to economic data and its impact on interest rates. The week's main focus is expected to be US consumer inflation figures on Wednesday, but investors got reassuring wholesale price data on Tuesday.

The producer price index (PPI) rose by 0.1 percent in July, down slightly from a 0.2 rise in June, the US Labor Department said in a statement. This was slightly cooler than the median forecast of economists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal.

Core PPI that excludes volatile food and energy prices was flat.

On an annual basis, PPI came in at 2.2 percent, down sharply from a revised 2.7 percent rise a month earlier. "The key takeaway from the report is the disinflation trend in total and core PPI, as that is moving in a necessary direction to drive a rate cut by the Fed," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. While the mood on trading floors has calmed since last week's volatility, investors remained cagey before US consumer price figures that could influence the Federal Reserve's monetary policy decision-making. Observers warned that the inflation readings could cause big market moves in either direction, with a weaker-than-expected print adding to worries about the world's biggest economy, while a strong reading could dent rate-cut bets.

"One of the major risks is the timing and magnitude of the Fed's rate cuts," said ACY Securities' Luca Santos. "If the Fed delays easing monetary policy, the US economy could risk entering a deeper slowdown, leading to a potential recession."

"Conversely, if the Fed cuts rates too aggressively, it might reignite inflationary pressures or create financial market instability. Balancing these risks will be crucial for maintaining economic stability," Santos added. Tokyo surged in Asian trading, with traders catching up with Monday's gains elsewhere after a long holiday weekend in Japan. London gave up early gains won after data showed Britain's unemployment rate had unexpectedly dropped in the second quarter and wage growth slowed to the lowest level in nearly two years.

But it picked up after the US wholesale inflation data, as did Frankfurt. German investor confidence worsened more than expected in August, a survey showed Tuesday, as a hoped-for recovery in Europe's largest but struggling economy remains out of reach. The ZEW institute's closely-watched economic expectations index fell to 19.2 points, a steep drop of 22.6 points from a month earlier.

Shares in Starbucks jumped 19 percent at the start of trading after the coffee shop chain announced that Chipotle chief executive Brian Niccol would take over as chairman and CEO next month. The leadership shifts come as Starbucks pushes to turn around its business, while contending with broad-based sales declines in its most recent financial results. Chipotle shares slumped 9.5 percent.

Crude futures dropped but remained well up over the week owing also to an escalation of tensions in the Middle East. The White House warned that a "significant set of attacks" by Iran and its proxies against the Zionist entity was possible as soon as this week after top leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas were assassinated in late July. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: People shop in the produce section of a grocery store in Los Angeles. US producer prices increased less than expected in July as an energy-driven rebound in the cost of goods was tempered by cheaper services. — AFP

Business

Reliance, Disney to create \$8.5bn India entertainment powerhouse

Antitrust scrutiny rising, firms offer to sell some TV channels

NEW DELHI: Reliance and Walt Disney have offered to sell some channels to win faster antitrust approval for their \$8.5 billion India media assets merger, but are resisting changes to cricket broadcast rights they own, two sources familiar with the matter said. Antitrust experts have warned that the Reliance-Disney merger, announced in February, could face intense scrutiny as it will create India's biggest entertainment player which will compete with Sony, Zee Entertainment, Netflix and Amazon with a combined 120 TV channels and two streaming services.

The merged company, which will be majority owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani's Reliance, will also have lucrative rights worth billions of dollars for the broadcast of cricket, raising pricing power fears and its grip over advertisers. After the Competition Commission of India (CCI) privately asked Reliance and Disney around 100 questions related to the merger, the companies have told the watchdog they are willing to sell some TV channels - fewer than 10 - to assuage concerns of market power and win an early approval, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The sources said some of the concessions being offered relate to regional Indian language channels where the two companies may have a dominant market share. Zee and Sony planned to create a \$10 billion TV behemoth in India and in 2022 offered concessions by selling three TV channels. That helped them win CCI approval, but the merger eventually collapsed. CCI's notification approving that deal, which contained details of the competitive landscape,

showed that in local language Marathi, Disney and Reliance channels back then had a combined market share of between 65 percent and 75 percent. In Bengali language entertainment channels, the two had as much as a 50 percent market share. Disney declined to comment. Reliance and the CCI did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

Cricket is another point of contention in the merger process. The sport has a fanatical following in India and matches are sought after by advertisers. Reliance-Disney will own digital and TV cricket rights for top cricket leagues, including for the world's most valuable cricket tournament, the Indian Premier League (IPL). Jefferies said the Disney-Reliance entity will have a 40 percent share of the advertising market in TV and streaming segments.

K K Sharma, a former head of mergers at CCI, has told Reuters previously: "With Disney and Reliance together, hardly anything of cricket will be left ... Here, it is not merely dominance but almost an absolute control over cricket." The CCI is studying the market power of the companies in cricket rights and has not raised any concerns so far, but the companies have argued with the CCI that the rights will expire in 2027 and 2028 and can't be sold right now, the sources said.

Further, the companies have raised concerns that any sub-licensing of cricket rights to another party would also require prior approvals from the Indian cricket board, which could prolong the approval process, the sources said. "The companies are arguing that nothing can be done on cricket rights," one of the sources said. — Reuters



NEW DELHI: India's richest man and oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani (right) attends the India Mobile Congress 2018 in New Delhi in this file photo. — AFP

South Africa's unemployment reaches new highs

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's jobless rate rose to a near record in the second quarter of 2024, continuing a trend that has seen the number of unemployed people grow by more than 60 percent in ten years, official data showed Tuesday. The unemployment rate hit 33.5 percent between April and June, up by 0.6 percentage point from the previous quarter, national statistics agency StatsSA said.

That is close to the record 35.3 percent reached in 2021 during the coronavirus pandemic. About 8.4 million people were out of work, up from 5.2 million in 2014, it said. Including people who have given up looking for work, the jobless rate was a staggering 42.6 percent, up from 41.9 percent in the first quarter, StatsSA added.

The number of people working in the formal sector was down but informal sector employment was up by 100,000 or 3.3 percent over the same period last year, it added. The new figures were the first to be released since elections in May brought in a new coalition government that has put boosting the country's sluggish economy top of the agenda. Unemployment was a key political issue in the vote that saw the long-ruling African National Congress lose its absolute majority in parliament for the first time in three decades. The difficulty to find jobs has in the past fuelled protests as well as anti-foreigner sentiment.

Young people in particular lament the lack of prospects in what is usually regarded as Africa's most industrialized economy. — AFP

Climate goals face setback amid carbon offset risks

LONDON: Stalled efforts to expand companies' use of carbon credits to offset greenhouse-gas emissions are raising the prospect that some will back-track or abandon targets to shrink their carbon footprint. Since 2015, when governments agreed in Paris to try to keep the world from warming more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), more than half of the world's largest 2,000 publicly listed companies have announced targets to cut their emissions to zero on a net basis by 2050.

But environmental advocates are expressing concerns that companies are falling behind on those targets. Companies are in turn complaining that clean technologies are not being rolled out on time and that government policies are not doing enough to support the transition away from fossil fuels.

Proponents of carbon offsets argue they can help companies meet their targets when efforts to slash their emissions fall short. Companies buy the offsets, which are generated by projects that absorb carbon or reduce emissions, such as reforestation and switches to cleaner fuels for domestic cookstoves. The Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi), however, dealt a blow late last month to efforts to expand the use of offsets. The non-profit, which audits companies' emissions targets, said its research found that carbon offsets are largely ineffective in reducing emissions because their cli-

mate benefits cannot always be verified. It delayed a final decision to 2025 on whether to allow companies to use offsets to meet emissions targets.

This represented a U-turn for the SBTi, whose board of trustees had said in April it wanted to allow companies greater use of offsets in target-setting. It currently allows companies to use offsets only after their targets have been met by directly reducing their emissions. Nearly 6,000 companies use the SBTi to validate emission targets. More than 2,000 companies have committed to getting their targets validated going forward.

The SBTi is the largest independent, third-party validator of corporate net-zero plans and considered by many to be the gold standard given its focus on ensuring any strategy aligns with climate science. Some companies are likely considering paring back their net-zero ambitions if they are not allowed to use carbon offsets more widely, said Tommy Ricketts, CEO of carbon-ratings agency BeZero Carbon.

"There are a lot of companies out there going, 'we can't deliver against our targets. We have two options. We look for another way of doing it or we quietly leave the building,'" Ricketts said. He declined to name specific companies. An SBTi survey of companies published this year suggested cutting emissions from a company's supply chain was the biggest barrier to setting a net-zero plan.

An SBTi spokesperson declined to



The new plant of Swiss start-up Climeworks is pictured in Hellisheidi, Iceland on May 8, 2024. — AFP

comment on the impact of not allowing carbon offsets toward meeting targets and said its review of them was ongoing. "The current framework will remain unchanged until the revision process is fully complete next year," the spokesperson said.

John Lang, who tracks net-zero goals for research group the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit said that, as a result of the SBTi's stance on carbon offsets, he expected more companies will pare back their near-term emission targets. They may, however, focus more on realistic actions to cut emissions, he said. "Recalibrating targets doesn't necessarily mean regressing on ambition."

Thomas Day, an analyst at non-profit climate research group NewClimate Institute, said companies that are scaling back their efforts are often just abandoning unsubstantiated "lofty-sounding ambitions". Offsets can come in particu-

larly handy when it comes to companies' supply-chain emissions, referred to as Scope 3. They make up the largest part of a company's carbon footprint and are hard to slash, because companies often do not have control or influence over vendors and customers. Broader use of carbon offsets could expand the market to \$100 billion a year by 2030 from \$723 million last year, according to carbon-offset broker, project developer and consultant South Pole.

South Pole CEO Daniel Klier said the lack of near-term clarity on validation could lead to carbon offset volumes stagnating. "The fact (SBTi officials) say we may get some clarity in 2025 is a major problem, because that means there's probably a year without investment in nature and carbon removals. Nobody will do anything until they have guidelines," Klier said. — Reuters

Starbucks names Chipotle boss Brian Niccol as new CEO

NEW YORK: Starbucks said Tuesday that Brian Niccol, chief executive at Chipotle, would be the coffee chain's new CEO — just over a year after current boss Laxman Narasimhan took over the role. Narasimhan steps down as chief executive and as a member of the Starbucks board "with immediate effect," said the company in a statement. Starbucks' shares surged around 21 percent in early trading, while Chipotle Mexican Grill shares fell by over 12 percent.

The leadership shifts come as Starbucks pushes to turn around its business, while contending with broad-based sales declines in its most recent financial results. The company also saw a bruising April earnings report, sparking a difficult response on Wall Street and causing Narasimhan to promise a reset. Starbucks previously cited weakening consumer sentiment and tough market conditions in China as factors in its troubles.

The company has also been contending with pressure from activist fund Elliott Investment Management, which took a stake in the chain and had been seeking ways to boost the share price.

"The replacement of Laxman Narasimhan as Starbucks CEO is the result of growing dissatisfaction, particularly from activist investors, over the way the chain has been run," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData in a statement. "While some of the slowdown can be attributed to a more sluggish



DUBLIN, US: Chipotle CEO Brian Niccol walks across the 14th hole during the Pro Am event prior to the Memorial Tournament presented by Workday at Muirfield Village Golf Club on June 5, 2024 in Dublin, Ohio. — AFP

consumer cutting back, much is also the result of a worsening store experience and a lack of innovation in areas like food," he added.

Investors could be hoping for improvements in day-to-day operations by bringing Niccol on board.

"Brian is a culture carrier who brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of driving innovation and growth," said Starbucks board chair Melody Hobson in a statement as the company announced the leadership changes. Niccol has served as Chipotle's CEO since 2018.

In naming him Starbucks' new CEO, the company noted that his work at Chipotle had "driven significant growth and value creation," citing revenue that has nearly doubled and higher profit.

Narasimhan, a veteran of PepsiCo and other consumer brands, had taken over the top spot in 2023 after a period working with longtime Starbucks CEO and interim boss Howard Schultz. — AFP

generators supplying electricity "exclusively to a neighboring country". Currently only one plant in India - Adani Power's 1,600 megawatt (MW) Godda plant in eastern Jharkhand state - is under contract to export 100 percent of its power to a neighboring country.

The memo says "the government of India may permit connection of such generating station to the Indian grid to facilitate sale of power within India in case of sustained non-scheduling of full or part capacity". The sale of power to the local grid might also be allowed if there is a delay in payments, it said. The move, which comes nearly a week after longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled Bangladesh after deadly protests, could also benefit future projects where all output is locked into export contracts. — Reuters

UK wages growth tumbles; German investor morale falls

LONDON/FRANKFURT: Britain's unemployment rate has unexpectedly dropped to 4.2 percent and wage growth has slowed to the lowest level in nearly two years, official data showed Tuesday. The unemployment rate for the second quarter compared with 4.4 percent in the three months to the end of May, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

Analyst consensus had been for a small rise in the rate. The ONS added that wages growth, excluding bonuses, slowed to 5.4 percent from 5.8 percent over the same reporting period. That was the lowest level since August 2022. "The number of job vacancies continues to decline, although the total number remains above pre-pandemic levels," added ONS director of economic statistics Liz McKeown. A busy week for British economic data sees the release Wednesday of inflation numbers, ahead of second-quarter growth figures Thursday.

Together, the data could provide clues regarding the pace of future interest-rate cuts from the Bank of England. "The further easing in wage growth will be welcomed by the Bank of England as a sign that labor market conditions are continuing to cool," noted Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at research group Capital Economics. "This lends some support to our forecast that the Bank of England will press ahead with two more 25 basis-point interest rate cuts later this year."



LONDON: Pedestrians walk in the winter sunshine down Oxford Street in central London. Britain's unemployment rate has unexpectedly dropped to 4.2 percent and wage growth has slowed to the lowest level in nearly two years, official data showed Tuesday. — AFP

Adani plant may stop selling power to Bangladesh

SINGAPORE: An Adani Power-owned coal-fired power plant under contract to sell all its output to Bangladesh can now supply the domestic market as the government has amended its power export rules. An internal federal power ministry memo, dated Aug 12 and seen by Reuters, amends 2018 guidelines govern-

Business

Overseas investors turn bearish on Japan equities after brutal sell-off

Sudden yen volatility, BoJ rate rises spook global investors

HONG KONG: Global investors are turning bearish on once-favored Japanese stocks following last week's turbulence as they reassess economic prospects and the viability of yen-funded trades. Using cheap yen to buy stocks on the Nikkei was a hot trade until this month. The Nikkei index had doubled since the start of 2023, and a tumbling yen had boosted returns for investors and companies.

That trade is being turned on its head by sudden volatility in the Japanese yen. Bank of Japan (BoJ) rate rises, doubts around Japan Inc's earnings and worries the US economy is stalling.

The CSOP Nikkei 225 Daily Inverse Exchange-traded fund - the only ETF outside Japan that allows bearish bets against the Nikkei index - saw a surge in its trading volume during the week ended Aug 9. Average daily turnover on the Hong Kong-listed product reached nearly HK\$20 million (\$2.57 million), a 20-fold increase from previous week's roughly HK\$1 million per day and the highest since its launch in May this year.

Investors are also exiting direct exposure to Japan. Global hedge funds dumped Japanese equities at the fastest pace in more than five years during the Aug 2 to Aug 8 week, Goldman Sachs said, and even some long-term investors have started cutting exposure. The BoJ's quantitative tightening and a strong yen will be headwinds for Japanese stocks, said Ben Bennett, head of investment strategy for Asia at LGIM, a London-based asset management giant.

The firm's multi-asset funds had turned un-

derweight Japanese equities before last week, he said, adding they maintained that weighting after the volatile week.

Japanese stocks had their worst one-day sell-off since 1987 last Monday. Fears of a US recession and a surprise rate hike in Japan triggered a massive unwinding of billions of dollars of a popular yen carry trade that was financing the purchase of risk assets, including Japanese equities. While the actual size of the unwinding remains uncertain, some analysts warn it has room to go, given expectations of yen appreciation and a spike in the CBOE Volatility Index. The yen has surged from around 162 per dollar in mid-July to roughly 142 per dollar last Monday, its strongest level in seven months. "One of the drivers of upside in Japanese equities is going to phase out," said Carlos Casanova, senior economist for Asia at Swiss asset manager UBP, referring to yen carry trades.

"Now we need to see an improvement in fundamentals, meaning that you need to see upward revisions in earnings. And that's not going to happen unless we see a recovery in the domestic economy," he said. UBP has recently exited some positions in Japanese equities and now holds a neutral view. Zuhair Khan, Tokyo-based senior portfolio manager at UBP, said it was getting tougher to trade the Japanese market as the US interest rate cut path and the yen had both become harder to predict. Markets, meanwhile, are waiting for data due this week on Japanese second-quarter economic growth and US inflation.



TOKYO: A man is reflected on the window of a brokerage displaying a digital board with the Japanese yen rate versus the US dollar, along a street in Tokyo on August 13, 2024. — AFP

"No one wants to act rashly now," said Steven Leung, a Hong Kong-based executive director at UOB-Kay Hian. "Investors need to wait for

important figures this week to draw a more informed conclusion about whether the sell-off in Japanese stocks is over." — Reuters

News in Brief

airBaltic orders 10 Airbus A220s

PARIS: Latvian airline airBaltic, the largest client in Europe for the Airbus A220-300, has ordered another 10 of the jets, the manufacturer said Tuesday. The order, which has a catalogue value of almost \$1 billion, brings to 90 the number of airBaltic's firm commands for the A220-300. "Over the years, this aircraft type has proven its operational capabilities and value — it has been the backbone of our operations and has played an integral role in the international success story of airBaltic," airline chief executive Martin Gauss said in a communique. The Latvian carrier was the first client for the plane in 2016 and its fleet has been entirely made up of A220s since 2020. — AFP

Russian ruble weakens 8.5%

MOSCOW: The Russian ruble continued to weaken on Tuesday for the sixth consecutive trading session, following Ukraine's unexpected attack a week ago on Russia's Kursk region. By 0800 GMT, the ruble was 1.6 percent weaker on the day at 92.50 to the dollar, according to LSEG data. It has lost 8.5 percent since the start of the attack on Aug 6. Trading in major currencies shifted to the over-the-counter (OTC) market, obscuring pricing data, after Western sanctions on the Moscow Exchange and its clearing agent, the National Clearing Centre, were introduced on June 12. — Reuters

Escondida mine workers plan strike

SANTIAGO: Workers at BHP's Escondida copper mine in Chile will go on strike starting on Tuesday after failing to reach an agreement with the company, according to a statement from the union. The statement said there weren't any "substantive" advances during five-day government mediated talks and that the strike would start at 8 am (1200 GMT) on Tuesday. "We're convinced we made every responsible effort to reach an agreement, but that wasn't possible," the statement said, adding that all members should follow instructions to begin a strike. BHP did not immediately respond to a request for comment. — Reuters

Samsung main Korea union to strike

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics' biggest workers' union in South Korea said on Tuesday it would begin a four-day strike from Thursday to pressure the company over higher wages and bonuses after talks with management fell through in July. Lee Hyun-kuk, vice president of the National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), said in a live YouTube broadcast: "This strike is strategically designed to damage the company." He said the union, whose 36,500 members make up about 30 percent of Samsung Electronics' South Korean workforce, expects the company would not have enough backup office workers to support production lines during the planned strike, as many workers would be away for a national holiday on Thursday. — Reuters

China new loans tumble 15-year low in July

BEIJING: China's bank lending tumbled more than expected in July, hitting the lowest in nearly 15 years, dragged down by tepid credit demand and seasonal factors and raising expectations that the central bank may dole out more easing steps. Chinese banks extended 260 billion yuan (\$36.28 billion) in new yuan loans in July, down nearly 88 percent from the previous month and also missing analysts' forecasts, according to data released by the People's Bank of China on Tuesday.

Analysts polled by Reuters had predicted new yuan loans would come in at 450 billion yuan last month, noting that July is traditionally a weak period for credit expansion. After the data, some analysts said they expected the PBOC to cut interest rates further, but it may have to tread cautiously for fear of fuelling capital flight and hurting the yuan currency.

"July's credit data is indeed very weak," said Zhou Shilei, director of the global financial market department at UOB (China). "The effect of previous interest rate cuts is not significant, and there are expectations for further rate cuts." Last month's new yuan loans dipped from June's 2.13 trillion yuan and compared with 345.9 billion yuan a year earlier.

Banks extended 13.53 trillion yuan in new yuan loans in the first seven months of this year, the PBOC said. The central bank did not provide a single month breakdown for July but Reuters calculated the figure based on the bank's January-July data, compared with January-June.

Household loans, mostly mortgages, contracted 210 billion yuan in July, compared with a rise of 570.9 billion yuan in June, according to Reuters calculations based on the PBOC data. Corporate loans dropped to 130 billion yuan from 1.63 trillion yuan in June. The PBOC's survey of bankers published last week suggested loan demand weakened significantly in the second quarter, with the overall loan demand index falling to 55.1 percent from 71.5 percent in the previous quarter. Central bank chief Pan Gongsheng has said a slowdown in China's credit expansion is

Singapore upgrades 2024 economic growth forecast

SINGAPORE: Singapore on Tuesday upgraded its economic growth forecast for this year after beating expectations in the second quarter and on optimism that the manufacturing sector will gradually recover.

The trade ministry said it sees the export-driven economy growing 2.0-3.0 percent this year, compared with a previous projection of 1.0-3.0 percent. It grew 1.1 percent last year and 3.8 percent in 2022.

The city-state's economic performance is often seen as a barometer of the global environment because of its reliance on international trade. It grew 2.9 percent on-year in April-June, trade ministry data showed Tuesday, better than



EMPLOYEES work on a machine part production line at a printing and packaging factory in Qingzhou, in east-China's Shandong province on August 9, 2024. — AFP

natural due to factors such as economic shifts and less lending to the property sector and local government financing vehicles.

China's economic growth missed forecasts in the second quarter, while July economic indicators also offered little cheer as export growth slowed and consumer inflation got a boost only due to weather disruptions to food supplies.

The PBOC pledged to guide credit to grow reasonably and steadily lower companies' financing and household credit costs, the bank said in its second-quarter monetary policy implementation report published last week. At a meeting earlier this month to discuss policies for the second half of 2024, the PBOC said it would step up financial support to the broader economy and efforts would be directed more at consumers to spur consumption. To bolster growth, the PBOC unexpectedly conducted a medium-term lending facility operation on July 25 and cut the interest rate, while five of China's major state-owned banks on the same day cut deposit rates to

cushion a hit to their already record low margins.

"With private credit demand still lackluster, the PBOC's recent rate cuts aren't significant enough to drive much of a recovery," Capital Economics said in a note. "We're only expecting a further 20bps of cuts to the loan prime rate this year, which won't be sufficient to drive a sustained resurgence in credit demand." Outstanding yuan loan growth slowed to 8.7 percent from a year earlier, compared with 8.8 percent in June. Analysts had expected an 8.8 percent gain. There were signs of steadying in some key money gauges.

Last month, broad M2 money supply rose 6.3 percent versus a year earlier, beating the 6.1 percent forecast in a Reuters poll and a record low of 6.2 percent in June. Annual growth of outstanding total social financing, a broad measure of credit and liquidity in the economy, sped up to 8.2 percent from 8.1 percent in June. In July, total social financing fell to 770 billion yuan, compared with forecasts of 1.1 trillion yuan, and 3.3 trillion yuan in June. — Reuters

the 2.7 percent estimated and following the 3.0 percent expansion seen in the previous three months. Among key export markets, the ministry said demand from the United States was seen easing gradually on slowing consumption, while China's economy is forecast to "expand at a slightly slower pace" in the second half.

However, growth in the eurozone was forecast to improve, while key Southeast Asian economies are tipped to pick up slightly. "On balance, Singapore's external demand outlook is expected to be resilient for the rest of the year," the trade ministry said.

It also noted possible headwinds including the potential "intensification of geopolitical and trade conflicts" and tighter financial conditions that could "trigger market volatility or latent vulnerabilities in banking and financial systems". Manufacturing, a key economic pillar, contracted 1.0 percent on-year in the second quarter, hit by weak output in pharmaceuticals. However, that was narrower than the 1.7 percent shrinkage in the first quarter. — AFP



A GENERAL VIEW shows high-rise office buildings in the Raffles Place financial business district in Singapore on August 13, 2024. — AFP

US officials to visit China this week for economic meetings

WASHINGTON: Senior American officials are due to visit China this week, the US government said Monday, seeking to keep ties between the world's two biggest economies steady despite simmering trade tensions.

The trip to Shanghai will be for talks under a financial working group (FWG) formed last

year, with both sides due to discuss financial stability, issues relating to cross-border data, as well as the fight against fentanyl. The working group's meetings will take place on Thursday and Friday, with the US delegation being led by Brent Neiman, Treasury's deputy under-secretary for international finance.

Treasury officials will be joined by representatives from the Federal Reserve and Securities and Exchange Commission. The financial working group is co-led by People's Bank of China deputy governor Xuan Changneng. "We intend for this FWG meeting to include conversations on financial stability, issues related to cross-border data, lending, and payments, private sector

efforts to advance transition finance, and concrete steps we can take to improve communication in the event of financial stress," Neiman said.

He added that the gathering of US and Chinese economic officials builds on President Joe Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's "guidance to establish durable lines of communication as we responsibly manage our relationship" with Beijing. Officials are also expected to discuss possible revisions of China's anti-money laundering law, according to the Treasury. The talks will mark the fifth meeting of the financial working group, and the second round in China.

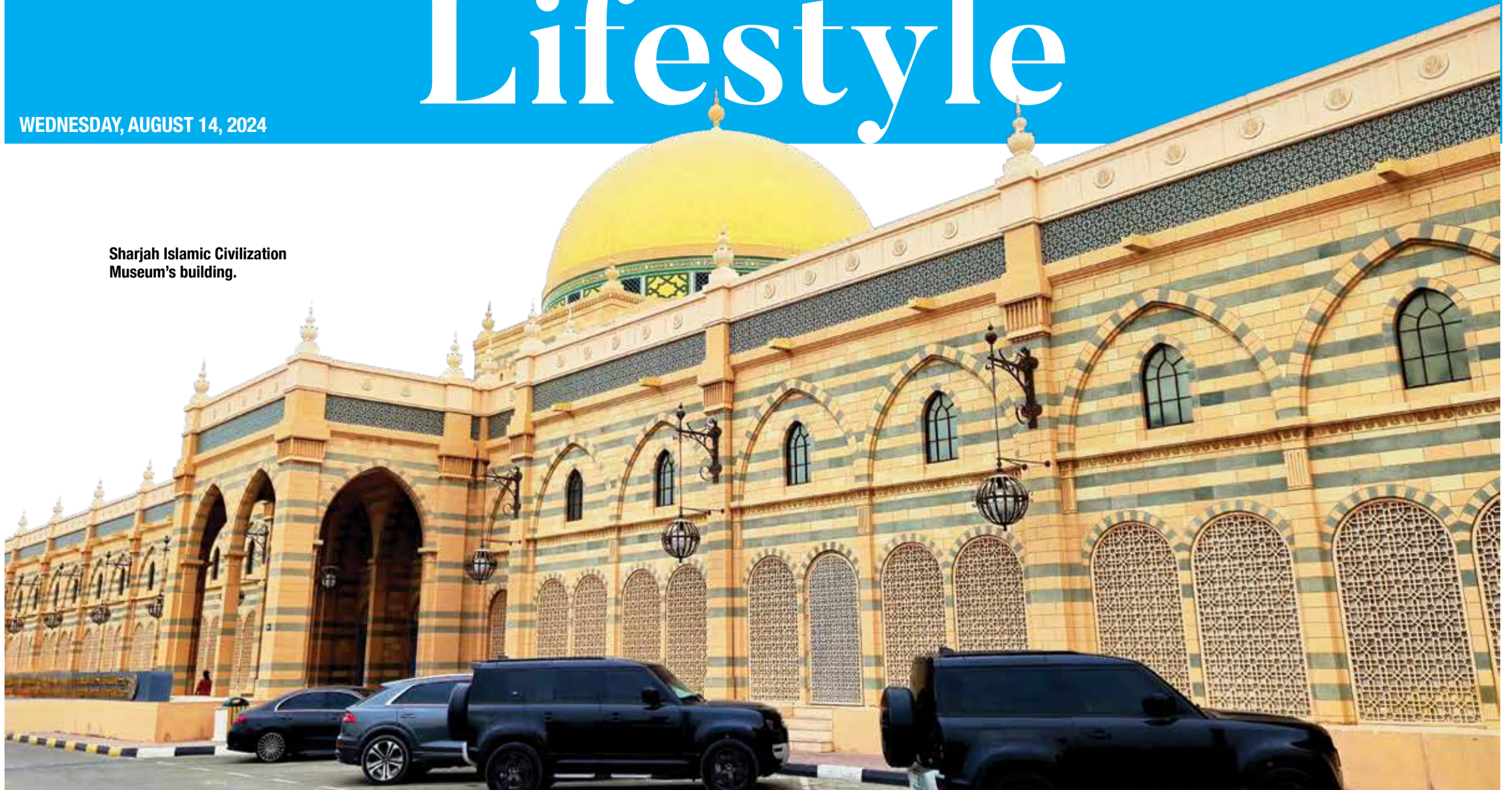
The group was launched in 2023 together with

an economic working group, reporting directly to Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng. The Shanghai trip this week comes after Yellen's high-level talks in Beijing and Guangzhou in April, where she warned strongly of the risks of Chinese industrial overcapacity — an issue Chinese officials have pushed back on.

The Biden administration has also been seeking to prevent precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl from being brought into the United States. It has previously highlighted wins from its diplomacy with China, including what officials said was the first crackdown in years by Beijing on producers of these precursor chemicals to the drug behind a US addiction epidemic. — AFP

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2024



Sharjah Islamic Civilization Museum's building.

SHARJAH MUSEUM

Showcasing Islamic cultural masterpieces



Manuscript containing parts 11 to 14 of the Holy Quran.

The Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, situated on the Corniche just north of central Sharjah, is a remarkable facility showcasing Arab and Muslim cultural achievements. The museum is dedicated to preserving and promoting Islamic arts and crafts, including textiles, jewelry, astrolabes, manuscripts, ceramics, and coins. Established in 1996, the museum embodies the vision of Sheikh Dr. Sultan Al-Qasbi, a member of the UAE's Supreme Council and ruler of Sharjah, to highlight Islamic and Arab cultural heritage and serve as a global destination for visitors eager to explore this rich history. — KUNA



Sharjah Islamic Civilization Museum.



Traditional Ottoman costume from the thirteenth century.



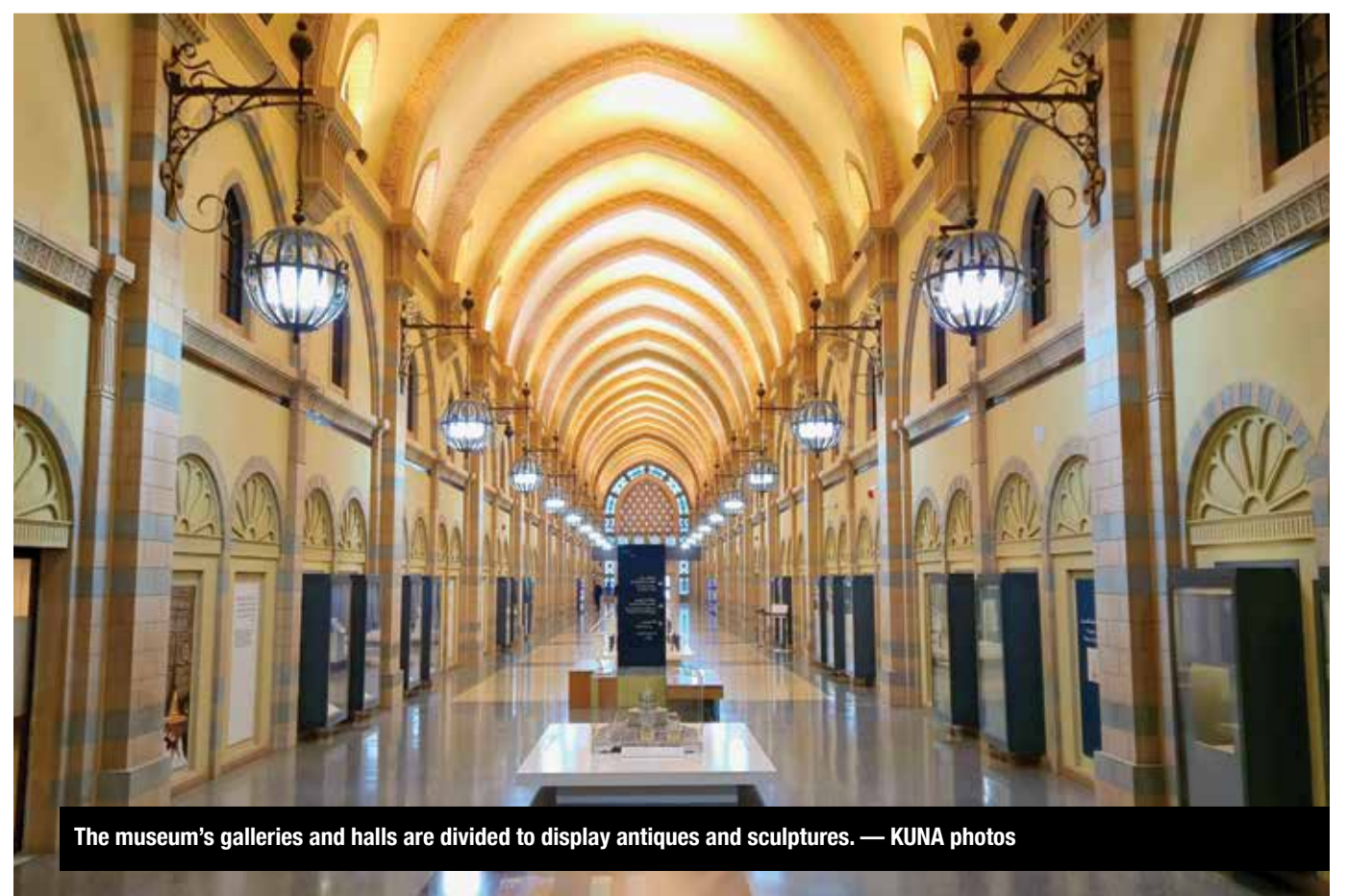
Nineteenth-century warrior gear.



Dome of the Sharjah Islamic Civilization Museum.



The cover of Allah's house (Kiswa) is made of black silk and embroidered with gold threads.



The museum's galleries and halls are divided to display antiques and sculptures. — KUNA photos

Lifestyle



An employee holds a larvae of Hercules beetle (*Dynastes hercules*) at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja.



A beetle (*Dynastes neptunus*) walks on a wood at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja, Boyaca Department. — AFP photos



In Colombia, hungry beetle larvae combat trash buildup



View of larvae of Hercules beetle (*Dynastes hercules*) eating organic waste at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja.

In the far-flung Colombian highlands, beetles are the secret weapon in an innovative project to combat the ever-growing problem of trash buildup. Here, larvae of the enormous rhinoceros beetle eat through piles of organic garbage that would otherwise end up in polluting landfills. But that's not all. The larvae poop is gathered and sold as fertilizer, and when the beetles reach adulthood, they are sold as pets to clients as far afield as Japan. "The beetles have the answer" to rubbish disposal, said environmental and health engineer German Viasus, who runs the project in Colombia's central Boyaca region.

The concept is simple, cheap and, Viasus believes, an example that would be easy to replicate elsewhere in the world. Each week, his facility in the city of Tunja receives about 15 tons of waste generated by some 40,000 inhabitants of neighboring municipalities. It is piled up as food for the voracious larvae, which can grow to the length of a human hand. Other larvae are held in tanks where they consume leachate — a fluid produced by organic waste decomposition that can be damaging to ecosystems.

'Cutting edge'

Official Colombian estimates are that the South American country produces some 32,000 tons of garbage every day — more than 2,600 school



A beetle (*Dynastes neptunus*) (right) and a Hercules beetle (*Dynastes hercules*) fight on a wood at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja.



Venezuelan Carmelo Campos poses during an interview with AFP in Tunja.



View of a sticker warning that 'kmushicoins' are accepted at a hardware store in Tunja.

buses — about half of it organic. Worldwide, some 11.2 billion tons of trash are generated each year, according to the UN. With the landfill in Tunja fast approaching its end date, Viasus' larvae offer an alternative solution to a major headache. The engineer stumbled on the idea by chance when in 2000, after a similar project using earthworms had failed, he found scarab beetle larvae feasting on the contents of a garbage bag.

The ones he has today are all descendants of those first foundlings. The larvae live for about four months

before starting their metamorphosis and acquiring their characteristic hard shells. The beetles have a lifespan ranging from a few months to about three years. At this point, Viasus sells them to clients in countries including Germany, Canada, France, the United States and Japan — where they are a popular pet. Some find homes in Colombia, where many see them as good luck charms. To avoid the fees associated with payments in yen, euros and dollars, Viasus teamed up with crypto wiz Carmelo Campos to develop a digital currency called Kmushicoins after the

Japanese name for a horned beetle. Today in Tunja, but also cities such as Bogota and Medellin, a handful of businesses accept the currency as payment. "The world is so polluted, we are suffocating with this junk," electronics vendor Jefferson Bastidas told AFP in Tunja, saying he joined the initiative to aid the environment and place his business at the "cutting edge of technology." — AFP



Employees collect organic waste at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja, Boyaca Department.



CEO of Tierra Viva Escarabajos German Viasus poses for a picture with beetles at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja, Boyaca Department.



Employees fertilize crops with organic beetle compost at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja.



Indian YouTuber arrested after peacock curry video

An Indian would-be social media star has been arrested and detained after outrage by his video of cooking and eating the country's protected national bird, a peacock, police said. Police said that Kodam Pranay Kumar was detained Monday and sent to jail after "other videos in his mobile phone confirmed" that the bird he'd cooked for his curry dish video was indeed a peacock. The colorful birds are protected under stringent wildlife laws.

"He is now in jail on 14 days remand under the Wildlife Protection Act and now the court would decide whether he'd remain inside or get a bail," Akhil Mahajan, police superintendent in southern state of Telangana told AFP. Investigators are also trying to ascertain how and where Kumar managed to get a peacock for the video, which has since been removed from his channel. The video showed him cooking peacock curry, "a stunt al-

legedly pulled to attract more views," The Times of India reported.

"However, the response was far from what he might have anticipated," it added. "Social media users condemned the video, accusing Kumar of promoting illegal wildlife consumption and disrespecting a national symbol". The Indian peacock, identified with its vibrant blue color and a regal wingspan among males, holds a special symbolic importance in India. The throne of the country's Mu-

ghal ruling dynasty was also called the Peacock Throne because it featured bejeweled peacocks, once present in huge numbers across parts of northern Indian plains. Rapid urbanization and habitat loss in the last few decades have significantly reduced their numbers in the wild, with stringent punishment and fines under the wildlife laws now protecting them from hunting or harm. — AFP



An artwork by street artist Banksy, the eighth released in eight days, depicts a rhino climbing a car, on a wall in Charlton, London.



People look at an artwork by street artist Banksy, the ninth released in nine days, depicting a gorilla releasing animals.

BANKSY FREES THE ANIMALS AT LONDON ZOO IN MURAL SERIES FINALE

Street artist Banksy on Tuesday claimed the ninth - and perhaps final - mural of his animal-themed art trail across London, with a painting on the shutters of the capital's zoo showing a gorilla freeing a sea lion and birds. The series began with a mountain goat on Monday and was followed by eight other artworks, including three monkeys hanging from a railway bridge, the silhouette of a wolf on a satellite dish and two pelicans above a fish and chip shop. The zoo painting shows a gorilla prising open a metal shutter to release birds and a sea lion. Banksy has posted pictures of all his murals on his Instagram account.

The BBC, citing Banksy's team, said

the gorilla artwork was the final piece of the series. The artist's team did not immediately reply to a Reuters request for comment. London Zoo staff were thrilled to find the latest mural had been painted on their doorstep and many passers-by have been popping over to admire it and take pictures, said zoo media manager Rebecca Blanchard.

"This is bringing so many smiles to people's faces this morning," Blanchard said as she stood in front of the mural. She said the zoo still had to decide what to do with it but they were "definitely keeping it and preserving it". Blanchard said the artwork might be the "grand finale" of what she described as an "incredible series

celebrating animals". Theories have swirled on social media about the meaning of the works by an artist who has highlighted themes such as war and climate change in his previous work. Some speculated they could be related to the riots and racist attacks that have swept the country in the past week; others linked them to the idea that humanity is seeding its own downfall. — Reuters

An artwork by street artist Banksy, the ninth released in nine days, depicts a gorilla releasing animals, on the front of a shutter outside London zoo. - AFP photos



Visitors walk past a graffiti on a tree saying 'Killer Hasina' in Bangla language inside the Dhaka University.



A student paints a wall with revolutionary slogans to cover old murals.

Whitewashing the past: Students give Bangladesh a makeover

One are the slogans of last week, demanding the "killer dictator" quit: if you ask Bangladesh's youth whether they're hopeful about the future, the writing literally is on the wall. Students who led the weeks of protests that toppled autocratic premier Sheikh Hasina are back on the streets to give the capital Dhaka a makeover. They are whitewashing walls to clear politically charged graffiti accusing her of murder and demanding her resignation at the height of this month's unrest.

In their place, they are daubing elaborate and colorful murals hinting at widespread faith among Bangladeshis of a better tomorrow. "We want to reform our Bangladesh," Abir Hossain, 21, said as he and half a dozen classmates decorating a kerbside wall with the image of a bird flying out of its cage. "We're feeling proud," he told AFP. "The bird is now free. We're independent now." Students in paint-smearing shirts chatted and laughed with friends as they renovated the visual landscape of Shabagh, a leafy central neighborhood that hosts the elite Dhaka University.

Colorful murals exhorted the public to "destroy the iron doors of prison" and celebrated Bangladesh's "rebirth". "When the protests started, there were a lot of negative things written here," Fiyaz Hossain, 21, told AFP. "We are erasing them... so people younger than us don't say them," he added. "We're writing other things that they can say in the future."

'Shoot me in the chest' Graffiti denouncing "Killer Hasina" proliferated on walls around Dhaka



Fruit vendors sit next to a wall mural as they wait for customers inside the Dhaka University in Dhaka. — AFP photos

as the protests against her 15-rule intensified, and it is disappearing just as quickly. "We want to deliver a message to the public that we have liberated this country from a dictator, and now we have to work together," Nafisa Sara, 19, told AFP during a quick break from the paintbrush. "The people will see that if the students and all of us work together, we can build the country," she added.

But the impromptu public works project also shows that rancor towards the former leader remains widespread. More than 450 people were killed in the unrest that ended last week when Hasina abruptly resigned

and fled to India. One of the murals depicts Abu Sayeed, a student shot dead in the northern city of Rangpur, the first student slain in a police crackdown on protests. Footage of Sayeed's last moments has been shown repeatedly on Bangladeshi television since Hasina's departure breathed new life into a repressed media landscape.

The painting shows an image that has now been etched onto the national consciousness: the 25-year-old stretching his arms out wide in a defiant confrontation with riot police. It is captioned with his reported last words: "Shoot me in the chest". A Dhaka court on Tuesday ruled that a criminal investigation for



A student paints a wall with revolutionary motifs to cover old murals.

murder could proceed against Hasina, two of her senior lieutenants and four police officers for separate police killing during the unrest.

The caretaker government that took office after her departure has yet to comment on whether it supports the case, or whether Hasina should return from exile to face some form of justice. Student groups have in recent days held rallies to demand just that. "She must be brought back to the country," said Mohiuddin Rony, 25, "and she must face trial". — AFP



College students paint a wall to cover murals that praised the ousted premier Sheikh Hasina and her government.



A pedestrian walks past a wall mural inside the Dhaka University.

Sports

China's Olympic divers inspire next generation at Beijing pool

China completed a clean sweep of all eight Olympic diving gold medals in Paris

BEIJING: The splash of young athletes hitting the water and the cries of encouragement from coaches echo through a Beijing swimming pool, where the next generation of Chinese diving champions is being trained. China completed a clean sweep of all eight Olympic diving gold medals in Paris on Saturday — a historic first.

And their success is inspiring others back home. At Muxiyuan sports centre, home to Beijing's top diving school, around a dozen young divers jumped, twisted, and plunged into the water from boards ranging from a few centimetres to 10 metres high.

Children as young as seven stood, unnerfed, at the edge of a platform nearly two stories above the water, taking a breath and then leaping into the air. With legs stretched, toes pointed, and arms extended, they barely made a ripple in the pool.

Among the dozen or so children was 12-year-old Zhang Jiarui, who began diving three years ago after seeing Chinese diver Cao Yuan win gold at the Tokyo Games. "I was a bit naughty when I was a child, so my parents sent me to practice gymnastics," she told AFP.

"When I saw the Chinese diving team walk up to the top of the Olympic podium on television, I fell in love with diving and decided to give it a shot." While most school children are on summer holidays, Zhang and her peers train more than seven hours a day.

Many have already been plucked from less prestigious diving schools around the country, and the best among them will go on to compete under the Chinese flag. "If you rest too long, it can affect your training," she explained. During the academic year, "we have classes in the morning and training in the afternoon", she explained. "We have to study harder to keep up."

'Innate qualities'

Chinese divers have won 22 of the last 24 Olympic

gold medals and China has been the most successful diving nation at every Games since 1984. Coach Cao Ke is responsible for a group of divers aged eight to 10, from which he tries to identify future medal winners.

"We primarily look for innate qualities such as strength, explosiveness, and spatial awareness, as well as their feeling for the water," he said. "We also consider their attitude towards training and their competitiveness in simulated competitions."

As the trainees practiced their pikes and somersaults, coach Cao Ke observed from the pool's edge. "You're leaning back a little too much," he gently told one girl practicing a backwards dive. The young athletes then moved into a gymnasium with diving boards, crash mats, and trampolines, as Cao used ropes and harnesses to suspend them in diving poses and adjust their form.

Not all of them have what it takes — Cao said he will eventually identify those with the potential to become elite athletes and cut those that don't make the grade from the programme. "Diving requires meticulous attention to detail. It takes time to refine each movement to perfection," he explained. "There's no secret weapon of Chinese diving. It's because of really everyone's hard work."

'Train hard'

China's diving domination is built on a ruthlessly efficient talent pipeline. "In China, they start professional drills from five or six years old," Ma Jin, the Chinese head coach of Mexico's national diving team, told AFP.

"Abroad, they are only playing (at that age), and don't have very specialized early training." Quan Hongchan, who won two golds in Paris to go with one in Tokyo when she was just 14, began diving aged seven, supposedly after a coach spotted her playing in a school playground.



BEIJING: Photo shows young divers training at Muxiyuan sport school in Beijing. The splash of young athletes hitting the water and the cries of encouragement from coaches echo through a Beijing swimming pool, where the next generation of Chinese diving champions is being trained. — AFP

Cao Yuan — who won the men's 10-metre platform final in Paris — started diving when he was just five. Chinese diving has an "incomparable" advantage in "research, nutrition, physio, training, facilities, and equipment," Ma said.

Muxiyuan, for instance, employs specialized chefs to prepare meals for the young athletes. The school's yoghurt is made exclusively for the students and un-

available to the public, another coach told AFP.

Hongping Li, a former Olympic diver for China, said the fact that most of the country's "coaches were top divers themselves of national or Olympic calibre," gave them another advantage. Zhang told AFP she would "train hard" so she could join her compatriots on the Olympic stage. "I want to bring glory to the country." — AFP



IN THE AIR, UNDEFINED: Taiwan's Military News Agency (MNA) on August 13, 2024 shows two US-made F-16V jet fighters of the Taiwanese air force escorting an EVA airline plane carrying Taiwanese medal-winning athletes. — AFP

Taiwan sends up fighter jets as welcome brigade

TAIPEI: Taiwan dispatched three F-16 fighter jets to accompany its Olympic athletes on the final hours of their flight home from the Paris Games on Tuesday. Competing under the name Chinese Taipei, Taiwanese athletes brought home seven medals — two golds and five bronzes — the second-best result for the island in an Olympic Games.

Most notably, boxer Lin Yu-ting clinched gold in the women's boxing final match on Sunday, an emotional win that comes as she and Algerian boxer Imane Khelif have been ensnared in a major row over their gender eligibility. But both the Taiwanese government and public have thrown their support behind Lin, turning out in large crowds for organized watch parties in her hometown of New Taipei City.

To welcome the athletes flying home Tuesday on a chartered plane by home carrier EVA, President Lai Ching-te "ordered that three F-16 fighter jets be sent to escort the flight home", the Presidential Office said.

According to footage released by the defence ministry, the jets coasted alongside the green-tailed commercial plane, occasionally releasing celebratory flares into the morning sky. The athletes also got a hero's welcome on land, with fans swarming Lin at the airport for autographs and selfies. The other Olympians donned flower crowns and giant leis.

Lin — who has been dubbed "Taiwan's daughter" by both local media and President Lai — said it was "pretty cool". "It feels like I suddenly got the spotlight overnight. I feel honored to have this title, but also feel the responsibility that comes along with it," she told reporters at the airport.

"I hope to be a good role model." She added that to stay focused on her performance — instead of the gender controversy roiling outside the ring — she had turned off social media. Lin and Khelif were thrown out of last year's world championships — which was run by the Russian-led International Boxing Association — but they were cleared by the International Olympic Committee to compete in Paris.

IBA's Kremlin-linked president claimed in a chaotic press conference that the two women had undergone "genetic testing that show that these are men". The IOC leapt to the defence of both boxers, with president Thomas Bach saying they were born and raised as women, and have passports saying that. Neither is known to identify as transgender. But the furor continues to flare online, in part due to initial posts from US presidential candidate Donald Trump and Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling.

Besides Lin, Taiwan's other gold medal went to Lee Yang and Wang Chi-lin, a badminton duo who defended their men's doubles champion title from the Tokyo Games in a hard-fought battle against China's team. — AFP

Western media hail Olympics, Russia says Games 'shameful'

PARIS: The Paris Olympics won mostly rave reviews from western media after they closed on Sunday, while media in Russia, whose team were excluded because of its war in Ukraine, sniffed at France's success. Los Angeles Times sports columnist Bill Plaschke wondered whether "Tinseltown was up to the task of rivaling Paris when it hosts the next Summer Olympics in 2028."

"We have to somehow take greatness and make it even greater," he wrote, calling the Games in France "a blockbuster Parisian party that was two weeks of pure Hollywood". "How on earth can the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics surpass what the world just witnessed in a two-week burst of picturesque rejoicing from the Champ de Mars to the Palace of Versailles?"

The New York Times was generous in its praise of the sporting extravaganza, saying it lifted France from its gloom brought on by political crisis.

"Many are reluctant to let go of its magic: of the adrenaline-fuelled excitement, of the party free of political debate, of the sense of time deliciously suspended, like the glowing Olympic cauldron that has hovered wistfully over the city every night."

Rugby union: S Africa to face Australia

PERTH: South Africa coach Rassie Erasmus named the Springbok team on Tuesday to face Australia in Perth in their second Rugby Championship match at the weekend.

South Africa team (15-1):

Aphelele Fassi; Cheslin Kolbe, Jesse Kriel, Lukhanyo Am, Makazole Mapimpi; Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu, Morné van den Berg; Elrigh Louw, Pieter-Steph du Toit, Marco van Staden, Ruan Nortje, Salmaan Moerat (capt), Thomas du Toit, Johan Grobbelaar, Jan-Hendrik Wessels Replacements: Malcolm Marx, Ox Nche, Vincent Koch, Eben Etzebeth, Kwagga Smith, Grant Williams, Manie Libbok, Handre Pollard.

Meanwhile, All Blacks lock Sam Darry said Tuesday they are "excited" about the chance to redeem themselves after their shock defeat to Argentina, as New Zealand prepare to face the Pumas again. Following their 38-30 loss in Wellington, the All Blacks play Argentina once more in The Rugby Championship this Saturday at Auckland's Eden Park, where New Zealand have not lost a Test for 30 years.

They were outplayed in Wellington last Saturday, but Darry says the New Zealand team is relishing the chance to show an improved display. "We have got to own our mistakes," he told reporters in Auckland.

Chinese fans, media bask in Olympic success

BEIJING: China celebrated one of its best Olympic performances on Tuesday, while state media attempted to score political points from the golden haul won by its athletes at the Paris Games. Team China racked up 40 gold medals in Paris, level with the United States, in their best performance at an overseas Olympics. However, it trailed its geopolitical rival in the overall medal count.

Some fans declared China the true winners, if

'Love letter'

The Guardian of Britain hailed the Games' message which it said was "the importance of protecting the spirit of the games in an uncertain world riven by conflict".

But Jim White, writing in The Telegraph, said that Paris "could not match the spirit and warmth of London 2012".

The Italian media was unanimous in its praise, with Corriere della Sera saying Paris had "overcome its fears" despite a prologue marked by "rain, pollution of the Seine and sabotage".

La Repubblica highlighted the "Diversity Olympics". Spain's El Mundo added: "The Paris of the Olympics was the most dedicated Paris we'd seen in a very long time."

Germany's Die Welt praised the security ensured by the French, saying Paris showed how the Games can be organized "safely in a metropolis in a free and democratic country".

Poland's Rzeczpospolita called the Paris Games "a love letter" while Gazeta Wyborcza noted that nearly all the competitions "took place in front of full stands".

In Portugal, the editor of daily Correio da Manhã, Carlos Rodrigues, called the Games "a magnificent success". "In sporting terms too, Paris was a success, even if it didn't dazzle or create a world star capable of rivaling the likes of Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps."

But others including Frank Renout, writing for Dutch daily newspaper Het Parool, warned that the magic would not last. "Soon everything will return to normal, which in the case of the French means dark and confrontational," he

wrote. "If 'happiness' were an Olympic sport, France would never have won a medal."

'Endless scandals'

In Russia, however, some newspapers found fault. "The Paris Games weren't flawless," said Moskovsky Komsomolets, a pro-Kremlin mass circulation newspaper, stressing it remained unclear who sabotaged France's high-speed rail network before the opening ceremony.

The newspaper argued that spectators will remember "an endless series of scandals" and not the athletes' sporting feats or records. Komsomolskaya Pravda, a pro-Kremlin tabloid, said the competitions in Paris were "the most shameful Olympic Games in history". "The Paris 2024 organizers managed to offend hundreds of millions of people with an opening ceremony and a parody of the Last Supper. And then the Olympics became increasingly embroiled in problems, scandals and even crime."

One of its subheads read: "Vomiting athletes, champions with male chromosomes in women's boxing and worms in food." In Algeria, an editorial in government daily El Moudjahid praised Algerian boxing champion Imane Khelif, who was at the centre of a gender eligibility row at the Paris Games.

"Imane's victory is also a victory for the oppressed and the excluded, but above all it is a victory for the law, which for too long has been trampled by the logic of the powerful, who are greedy for domination and adept at double-standard policies." — AFP



BRISBANE: South Africa's Kwagga Smith (R) is tackled by Australia's James Slipper (L) during the Rugby Championship match between Australia and South Africa at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane. — AFP

"It's on everyone. Everyone has got to have a bit of a look in the mirror — at their prep, how they turned up for the game and how we can be better."

"We are really excited about the opportunity at Eden Park against a quality Argentina side. It's a

great Test to see what we are made of." The 24-year-old made his debut against Fiji in San Diego last month. He claimed his first international try in Wellington against Argentina, only to then taste his first defeat in the famous black shirt. — AFP

'Malicious provocations'

A hashtag related to China's historic medal count had gained 920 million views by Tuesday. State news agency Xinhua posted an article on Monday that lauded China's athletes for "spreading friendship and making friends".

But it also praised them for resisting "malicious provocations", a reference to the doping controversy that engulfed its swimmers before the Games. The swimming team instead "used its strength to 'slap down' the foreign media's continuous slander".

"When faced with malice, they dare to fight back; when presented with kindness, Chinese athletes will reciprocate," Xinhua said. The New York Times reported in April that 23 swimmers tested positive for a banned substance before the Tokyo Games, with US authorities accusing the global anti-doping agency of a cover-up. — AFP

Sports

Man City's off-field issues give rivals hope in Premier League title race

Arsenal look the best-placed challengers to take City's crown

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's grip on the Premier League title has reached an unprecedented four years but off-field doubts surround the English champions ahead of the new season. Pep Guardiola turned City into the dominant force in English football with six Premier League titles in the past seven seasons.

Guardiola, though, is entering the final year of his contract and the City boss has offered no guarantees that he plans to extend his stay at the Etihad Stadium to a decade. "Nine years today in the same club is an eternity," Guardiola said during pre-season. "I want to be sure it's the right decision. Not just for me, for the club, for the players."

Another cloud hangs over City's title defence, with the long-awaited hearing into 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of financial rules expected to take place before the end of the year. City have vehemently denied any wrongdoing over the allegations, some of which date back to 2009.

However, if they are found guilty, they could face severe sanctions. Everton and Nottingham Forest received points deductions last season for breaches of profit and sustainability rules (PSR), with Leicester set to face similar consequences this season.

The need to meet those regulations and a summer of both European Championship and Copa America action have been blamed for an unusually slow start to the transfer window from Premier League clubs.



LONDON: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (L) and Manchester City's Portuguese defender #03 Ruben Dias react ahead of the English FA Community Shield football match between Manchester City and Manchester United at Wembley Stadium, in London on August 10, 2024. - AFP

City have only added Brazilian winger Savinho and appear weaker for the impending sale of Julian Alvarez to Atletico Madrid.

Arsenal the coming force?

Arsenal look the best-placed challengers to take City's crown after finishing second in each of the past two seasons. The 89 points amassed by Mikel Arteta's men last season is only surpassed in the

Gunners' history by the unbeaten "Invincibles", who won Arsenal's last Premier League title in 2003/04.

Italian defender Riccardo Calafiori is Arsenal's only major close-season signing to date, strengthening what was the best defence in the league last season. But the Gunners are the coming force in the English game.

Arteta's squad was the third youngest in the league last season and features a host of stars such as William Saliba, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli yet to hit their peak years. "I see Arsenal playing at the same level as last season," Guardiola said. "They are on fire. Every year it looks like they are more and more difficult."

Liverpool ran City and Arsenal close for the majority of last season before a dip in form cost them a glorious finish to Jurgen Klopp's reign. Arne Slot has been given the daunting task of replacing the charismatic Klopp, who won the Premier League and Champions League during his time at Liverpool.

The former Feyenoord boss needs a fast start to ensure there is no hangover from Klopp's departure and resounding friendly victories over Arsenal, Manchester United and Sevilla were a step in the right direction. "We both like the fans to come into the stadium and see a team that plays with a lot of energy, that plays good football," said Slot on the similarities between his and Klopp's style. Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag survived an internal re-

view into his position after their worst-ever Premier League finish of eighth.

Ten Hag held onto his job largely thanks to a shock FA Cup final win against Manchester City last season. The Dutch boss has been backed by United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe, with the signings of Leny Yoro—who will miss the first three months of the season due to injury—and Joshua Zirkzee expected to be followed by a swoop for Bayern Munich defenders Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui.

But United face stiff competition to try and get back into the Champions League. Chelsea are also under new management after Enzo Maresca replaced Mauricio Pochettino, who departed Stamford Bridge after only one season.

However, Maresca inherits a chaotic situation with more than 50 players on Chelsea's books after another free-spending window snapping up young talent from around the globe. Newcastle and Tottenham will expect to improve after missing out on the top four last season, while Aston Villa have strengthened ahead of their first Champions League campaign since 1982-83.

At the other end of the table, Ipswich, Leicester and Southampton are hoping to avoid the fate of the three promoted sides last season who all failed to beat the drop. Ipswich are back in the top-flight for the first time in 22 years and face a baptism of fire at home to Liverpool on the opening weekend. - AFP



PARIS: Gold medallist Algeria's Imane Khelif poses on the podium during the medal ceremony for the women's 66kg final boxing category during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. - AFP

Hero's welcome for gender-row boxer Khelif in Algiers

ALGIERS: Olympic boxing champion Imane Khelif said she had won for her country's women as Algeria's Paris Games medallists received a hero's welcome at Algiers airport on Monday. Khelif, who was the centre of a gender controversy at the Olympics on her way to the women's 66kg title, teenage gymnastics gold medallist Kaylia Nemour and men's 800m bronze medallist Djamel Sedjati brandished their medals for the waiting fans.

The crowd cheered Khelif with chants of "Tahia Imane" (long live Imane). "The answer lay in the results of each match," she said. "I wanted to show the strength of performance and the presence of women in general, and Algerian women in particular."

The International Olympic Committee took over the boxing competition in Paris after losing patience with the International Boxing Association. The IBA, led by Umar Kremlev, a Kremlin-linked oligarch, retaliated during the Games by saying it had disqualified Khelif and Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting from its world championships last year because its tests showed "these are men". The IBA had allowed both boxers to compete in Tokyo three years ago.

Khelif, 25, addressed what she called a "relentless campaign" on Monday. She said she wanted "to thank the Algerian people who supported me in this ordeal and gave me strength". "Algerian women are an example and a model for the whole world," the boxer said. "Thanks to God, we have restored Algeria's honour and flown the Algerian flag in Paris, which is the most important thing." - AFP

Cubans celebrate return of Olympic champ Mijain Lopez

HAVANA: Thousands of Cubans on Monday night welcomed home the island's Paris 2024 team led by five-time Olympic gold wrestling champion Mijain Lopez.

A bus carrying the team drove through the streets of the capital Havana to the La Piragua plaza on the Malecon waterfront esplanade, where people were waiting at midnight to greet them. Upon arrival, Lopez, 41, took to the stage with his two sons and other members of the sports delegation to greet the crowd attending a salsa concert in their honour.

"We are happy to arrive here ... happy with the welcome, it has been incredible since we got off the plane," said the Greco-Roman wrestling legend, who had retired after the 2021 Tokyo Games before returning to the sport to achieve his landmark triumph.

Three-and-a-half hours earlier, President Miguel Diaz-Canel received them on the runway of Jose Marti International Airport, where he arrived hand

in hand with Lopez's mother Leonor Nunez, who hugged her son excitedly when he descended from the plane.

The Olympic delegation was led by Lopez, who made Olympic history in Paris with a fifth consecutive individual gold medal in the same event, and boxer Erislandy Alvarez, champion in the 63.5 kg division. Cuban state television had for days been broadcasting a message from Lopez in Paris inviting his compatriots to join the party on the Malecon.

"We are here celebrating the triumph of the Olympic medalists," said Brayan Alvarez Adalberto, director of the Alvarez y su Son orchestra, as the concert featuring three popular salsa orchestras got underway.

People came out to cheer their champions in some areas of the capital, but in others there were few in attendance as public transportation is usually sporadic at night due to gasoline shortages and numerous broken buses, according to the authorities.

Cuba, which is facing its worst economic crisis with soaring inflation, blackouts and shortages of food and medicine, was represented in Paris by a delegation of 61 athletes in 16 sports. The island, which did not achieve its goal of placing in the top 20 at the Games, won nine medals in Paris, two gold, one silver and six bronze. - AFP



LONDON: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (L) jokes with Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola as they hold the trophy after winning the English FA Community Shield football match between Manchester City and Manchester United at Wembley Stadium, in London on August 10, 2024. - AFP

Haaland nominated for PFA Player of the Year award

LONDON: Manchester City striker Erling Haaland is in the hunt to win a second successive PFA Player of the Year award after being nominated alongside team-mates Phil Foden and Rodri. Haaland enjoyed another prolific campaign with 38 goals in all competitions as City lifted an unprecedented fourth consecutive Premier League title. The Norway star won the PFA award after City's treble-winning campaign in 2022-23. Rodri was a key figure in City's midfield during their latest Premier League triumph and also helped Spain win Euro 2024.

England playmaker Foden scored 27 goals last season for Pep Guardiola's men. Chelsea forward Cole Palmer, Arsenal midfielder Martin Odegaard and Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins have also been shortlisted for the prize.

The women's award will go to either a Chelsea player or a City player. Chelsea's Niamh Charles, Erin Cuthbert and Lauren James are shortlisted along with Yui Hasegawa, Lauren Hemp and Khadija Shaw. The winners will be announced at the PFA Awards ceremony in Manchester on August 20. - AFP



HAVANA: Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel (2nd R) poses with Paris 2024 Olympic Games Cuban athletes upon their arrival at Havana's Jose Marti airport on August 12, 2024. - AFP

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Olympic flag arrival kicks off 2028 'pressure' for Los Angeles

'We have the flag now, It's on us and we got a lot of work to do Los Angeles'



LOS ANGELES: US springboard diver Delaney Schnell (2nd L) waves the Olympic flag next to Los Angeles mayor Karen Bass (L), US skateboarder Tate Carew (C), LA28 chairman Casey Wasserman (2nd R) and US volleyball player Micah Maria (R) after their plane landed during an event celebrating the arrival of the Olympic flag at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in Los Angeles. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Olympic flag arrived under bright skies Monday in Los Angeles, where officials now have four short years to organize a Games capable of rivaling the widely praised Paris edition in a notoriously traffic-clogged metropolis.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass landed in a plane emblazoned with palm trees and the logo "LA 2028," and crossed the tarmac holding the five-ringed banner, accompanied by several US athletes. "We feel the pressure to make sure that our city and our region is prepared and ready," she told reporters.

"We have the flag now. It's on us. We got a lot of work to do Los Angeles," Bass added. A timely reminder of potential unique challenges came moments before her plane landed, as a 4.6-magnitude earthquake shook Los Angeles.

"Making sure that we are prepared for events like an earthquake" will be key to infrastructure plans, she said. "But also now we have climate events that

we never thought about impacting our region, that we have to be prepared for as well."

Still, the biggest challenge will inevitably be transport. In Paris for the closing ceremony last weekend, Bass outlined plans for Los Angeles to deliver a "no-car Games." In a city addicted to private vehicles, where gigantic freeways criss-cross the urban sprawl and traffic jams are a daily inevitability, that pledge is ambitious.

"I'm skeptical we'll actually achieve that, but I know we're going to try," said James Moore, an industrial and systems engineering professor at University of Southern California.

'Out of town'

Los Angeles does have a subway network, but at just five-and-a-half lines and relatively infrequent service, it is tiny for the region's 10 million residents. Authorities plan to bring in 3,000 buses, borrowed from

all over the country, and to create dedicated road lanes for them. Public transport will receive priority over private cars, which will not be banned. Not all Olympic sites are expected to have parking. The last time Los Angeles hosted the Olympics, in 1984, many residents left the city, averting a traffic nightmare.

"If we see residents following the same strategy in 2028 and basically getting out of town for a few days, that may free up enough road space that we're able to move everybody with buses," said Moore. The city's giant main airport, infamous for its accessibility issues, will — at least — finally be connected to the metro train network.

An automated shuttle, long in the works, is due to open by 2026, when Los Angeles will host the opening match of the soccer World Cup.

Hollywood, homelessness

Los Angeles is counting heavily on its reputation

as the world's movies and entertainment capital. In a "handover" segment of the Paris closing ceremony, Tom Cruise parachuted with the Olympic flag into Los Angeles near the famous Hollywood sign, which he then redecorated with the Olympic logo.

Los Angeles is also a US sporting powerhouse, with numerous major teams and state-of-the-art stadiums. "What's not in our DNA? We're creative, we're storytellers. We've got sport, we've got diversity. It's LA," Reynold Hoover, CEO of the 2028 organizing committee, told AFP.

But beneath the Hollywood glitz, Los Angeles has an enormous homelessness crisis. Some 75,000 people lack housing, in a city where real estate is eye-wateringly expensive. Since arriving at City Hall, Bass has made this long standing issue a priority. A vast shelter program has recently shown signs of progress. The total number of homeless people fell slightly in 2024, for the first time in six years. — AFP

Pegula wins second WTA Canada title

TORONTO: Jessica Pegula defeated Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 in an all-American final on Monday to win the WTA Toronto Masters, becoming the event's first back-to-back champion since 2000.

Sixth-ranked Pegula captured her sixth career WTA title and second of the year after Berlin in June to become the first consecutive winner in Canada since Martina Hingis in 1999-2000.

"Crazy. I can't believe it. I wanted it so bad," a tearful Pegula said. "Getting emotional thinking about it. I'm so happy to take the title here. It's awesome. I'm just flooded with emotions."

"It has been an up-and-down year but these are happy tears. I'm so happy."

Pegula said she was happy to have won the Canadian crown in both of the event's alternating home cities, Montreal and Toronto, which is near her own hometown of Buffalo, New York.

Her grandparents, one from Toronto and the other from Montreal, were in the audience. "One in each city so that's one for each of you," Pegula said.

Pegula improved to 3-0 in her career rivalry with Anisimova, taking her second victory of the year after April at Charleston. Pegula broke Anisimova to begin the match and again to claim the first set after 27 minutes when Anisimova double faulted.

In the second set, Anisimova smacked a forehand winner to break Pegula for a 2-1 lead and Pegula double faulted away a break to give Anisimova a 5-2 edge on the way to a third set.

'Just super excited'

After dropping her first set of the week, Pegula broke for a 2-0 lead on an Anisimova double fault and took a 4-0 edge when Anisimova netted a forehand to surrender another break.

Anisimova, who won only three points in the first four games of the final set, sent a forehand long to drop the match on Pegula's serve after 87 minutes.

"I know everyone's talking about my record and all this stuff, but it's nice to be able to get through the week and to back it up," Pegula said. "Just super excited, I mean, an honor, really."

At 132nd in the world, Anisimova became the lowest-ranked finalist at the Canadian tournament in 40 years. Anisimova dispatched four top-20 rivals this week to reach her fourth career WTA final, but could not claim a third title after Bogota in 2019 and Melbourne in 2022. — AFP



TORONTO: Jessica Pegula of the United States celebrates victory over Amanda Anisimova of the United States in the women's singles final on the final day of the National Bank Open, part of the Hologic WTA Tour at Sobey's Stadium. — AFP

Kuwait female athletes: Tale of persistence at Paris '24 Olympics

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti participation in the Paris 2024 Olympics highlighted the promising potential of Kuwaiti women's sports on the international stage. This historic involvement showcased the progress of Kuwaiti female athletes, signaling a future of accumulating experience and determination that could lead to significant achievements in regional and global arenas. Kuwait was represented by four female athletes in the 33rd Olympics held from July 26 to August 11, 2024, competing in athletics, rowing, sailing, and swimming under the slogan "Our Will is Strong."

Each athlete demonstrated perseverance and determination in a competitive field. Following their participation, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) had a sit down on Tuesday with the four proud women representatives for each to give her experience throughout their thrilling campaigns in the Olympics. Amina Shah, a first-time Olympic participant, said that she gained valuable experience and is committed to continuous training for future international events.

In the women's individual (ILCA 6) race, she achieved her best result by finishing 30th out of 43 competitors, marking the top ranking among Arab participants. Amal Al-Roumi, on the other hand, pointed that she began her career in 2017 as she expressed pride in being the first Kuwaiti woman to compete in the 800-meter race at the



Olympics. She has plans to train for upcoming championships, including the 2024 Asian Games in Thailand and the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh in 2025.

Lara Dashti expressed passion about the sport since early childhood, when she started her journey at the age of 10. Her dedication led her to a fifth-place finish in the women's 100-meter breaststroke. Lara qualified for her second Olympic appearance after Tokyo 2021, and she aspires for participating in future competitions like the Asian Championships and the World Aquatics Championships.

Suad Al-Faqan, a professor in the Biological Sciences Department at Kuwait University (KU), and is the first Kuwaiti woman to compete in rowing, said that she started her journey in 2020 and has been supported by her students and faculty at KU. Her commitment garnered significant media attention and resulted in a personal record at the Olympics. The Kuwaiti delegation, including female athletes Lara Dashti, Amina Shah, Amal Al-Roumi and Suad Al-Faqan, alongside their male counterparts attended the Paris 2024 Olympics closing ceremony on Sunday. — KUNA