

BLUEPRINT

GAM announces invitation for 'Amman Smart City Project' Tender

2

RELIEF

100 aid trucks enter Gaza — JHCO

3

REGULATIONS

Digital bank Revolut secures UK banking licence

7

MARATHON

Jordan joins the World at 2024 Paris Olympic Games

8

Friday-Saturday, July 26-27, 2024 | Muharram 20-21, 1445 Hijri



Royal Decree dissolves House of Representatives

AMMAN — A Royal Decree has been issued, dissolving the House of Representatives as of 25 July 2024.

WEATHER

Morocco heatwave kills more than 20 people in 24 hours — ministry

RABAT (AFP) — A heatwave in Morocco has killed at least 21 people in a 24-hour period in the central city of Beni Mellal, the health ministry announced on Thursday. The meteorology department said soaring temperatures affected much of the North African country from Monday to Wednesday, reaching 48°C in some areas. In Beni Mellal, "the majority of deaths involved people suffering from chronic illnesses and the elderly, with high temperatures contributing to the deterioration of their health conditions," the regional health directorate said in a statement. Morocco has suffered

DEVELOPMENT

Crown Prince meets group of young people in Zarqa

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein met with a group of young people in Zarqa Governorate on Thursday and discussed a number of local issues related to education, training and development. During the meeting, held at the King Abdullah Cultural Centre in Zarqa, the Crown Prince stressed the importance of expanding vocational education and technical training, which contribute to creating non-traditional job opportunities for young people, according to a Royal Court statement. The Crown Prince expressed pride in the nation's youth, noting the importance of their role in leading Jordan's future, the statement said. Crown Prince Hussein called on young Jordanians to benefit from public and private institutions that support youth. Turning to the threat



Photo courtesy of Royal Court

HRH Crown Prince Hussein meets on Thursday with a group of young people in Zarqa Governorate, where he discusses a number of local issues related to education, training, and development

of drugs, the Crown Prince stressed the need for concerted efforts to combat this scourge and raise awareness of its dangers and effects on the social fabric. On the sidelines of the meeting, the Crown Prince toured a fine art exhibition at the centre, and viewed the artworks of a number of the centre's trainees, according to the statement.

Russian, Chinese bombers stage joint patrol near Alaska

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian and Chinese jets staged a joint patrol over far eastern Russia and the Bering Sea near Alaska but Moscow and Beijing stressed it was not aimed at any "third party". Wednesday's flights, with nuclear-capable bombers, came days after Moscow said the United States sent its own strategic bombers close to Russian airspace. Russia said its "Tu-95MS strategic missile carriers and the Chinese air force's Xian H-6 strategic bombers carried out an aerial patrol over the Chukchi and Bering Seas and the north Pacific Ocean". The joint US-Canadian North American Aerospace Defense Command earlier said American and Canadian warplanes had intercepted two Russian and two Chinese bombers in international airspace near Alaska on Wednesday. It said the bombers "remained in international airspace" and were "not seen as a threat".

Moscow said the patrol observed international law and did not breach foreign airspace, adding that "at certain stages of the route, the aviation group was accompanied by fighter jets of foreign countries".

Continued on page 5



AFP photo

US President Joe Biden pauses as he concludes his address to the nation about his decision to not seek reelection, in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC, on Wednesday

Biden says time to pass torch to 'younger voices'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — US President Joe Biden told Americans Wednesday he quit the 2024 election to unite the country, saying in a historic Oval Office speech that it was time to pass the torch to "younger voices". "I revere this office. But I love my country more," the 81-year-old said in an elegiac prime-time address to the nation urging his divided country to embrace democracy and shun hatred. "The defense of democracy, which is at stake, is more important

than any title," Biden said. "I have decided the best way forward is to pass the torch to a new generation. That is the best way to unite our nation." In his first televised address since his stunning decision, Biden also hailed his Vice President Kamala Harris, 59, who is set to be the new Democratic presidential nominee. "She's experienced. She's tough. She's capable," Biden said in just the fourth address of his presidency from behind the Resolute Desk — and

likely his last. Biden bowed out of the race later than any other president in US history, giving in to weeks of pressure from Democrats after a disastrous debate performance against Donald Trump raised concerns about his age. Speaking in a hushed voice after a COVID infection, Biden used the powerfully symbolic setting to insist on his achievements — while admitting it was time to move on.

Continued on page 5

AGGRESSION

Israel strikes Gaza as military recovers five captive bodies

GAZA STRIP, Palestinian Territories (AFP) — Israeli strikes hit Gaza on Thursday, killing and injuring people according to Palestinian medical sources, as the military said it had recovered the bodies of five Israelis taken to Gaza by Hamas fighters after they were killed on October 7. A group supporting Israeli hostages still held in the Palestinian territory welcomed the rescue but alleged "sabotage" of efforts to free others. The accusation from the Hostages and Missing Families Forum came with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a visit to Washington. Netanyahu — whose critics accuse him of prolonging the fighting — is on Thursday to meet US President Joe Biden, who has been pushing a truce and hostage-release deal. In a speech to the US Congress on Wednesday, Netanyahu downplayed Palestinian civilian casualties during the more than nine months of war between Israeli forces and Hamas. At least 39,175 Palestinians have been killed



AFP photo

Palestinian children receive treatment at the Nasser hospital, where the injured and dead arrive following the Israeli military targeting of the southeastern district of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on July 25, 2024

in Israel's military campaign in Gaza since the war began, according to the health ministry of the Hamas-run territory, which does not give details of civilian and fighter deaths. The latest toll includes 30 deaths over the previous 24 hours. Palestinian medical services on Thursday said their teams had trans-

ported four dead and 12 wounded after a strike on a house in the Gaza City area in the north of the territory. 'Crisis of trust' An AFP correspondent reported air strikes and machine gun fire from tanks in Gaza City. To the south, witnesses said there was shelling in the Khan Yunis

city and Rafah areas, as well as air strikes in Al-Qarara, near Khan Yunis. Israel's military said the five bodies recovered from Gaza, including those of two soldiers and two reservists, had been returned to Israel following a rescue operation on Wednesday in Khan Yunis.

Continued on page 5

CRITICISM

Palestinians slam IOC 'double standards' over Israel at Paris Olympics

PARIS (AFP) — The head of the Palestine Olympic Committee criticised "double standards" from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Thursday over its decision to allow Israel to compete at the Paris Games. Palestinian Olympic head Jibril Rajoub demanded a boycott in a letter to the IOC earlier

this week which was rejected by the head of the international Olympics body, Thomas Bach. "This confirms that there are international institutions that insist on applying double standards and not adhering to the Olympic Charter, laws and regulations, or morals," Rajoub said as he arrived at Paris's Charles

de Gaulle airport with the Palestinian sporting delegation. Around a hundred people were there to welcome the athletes with dates and shouts of "Free, Free Palestine!" "The Israelis or the Israeli Olympic Committee have lost the moral, sports, humanitarian and legal right to participate," Rajoub added,

saying Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza amounted to "crimes of genocide, ethnic cleansing". Palestinian militants from Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, resulting in the deaths of about 1,170 people, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel's retaliatory

military campaign to destroy Hamas has killed 39,175 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. Around 400 Palestinian athletes have been killed, while others have been unable to train or travel because of Israeli bombing or restrictions, the Palestine Olympic

Committee says. Russia has been banned from the Paris Olympics by the IOC for violating the Olympic charter when it annexed Ukrainian sporting organisations after the Kremlin's 2022 invasion. The IOC has in the past denied that Israel is in violation of the Olympic charter and stressed the relation-

ship between Israeli and Palestinian Olympic Committees. "We have two National Olympic Committees, that is the difference with the world of politics, and in this respect both have been living in peaceful co-existence," IOC chief Thomas Bach said in Paris on Tuesday.

Continued on page 5



Abdallat calls for joint efforts to achieve common goals in building a better future for Jordan

GAM announces invitation for ‘Amman Smart City Project’ Tender

AMMAN — As per royal directives to provide the best services for Amman city and its residents, The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) announces an invitation for “Amman Smart City Project” Tender, Design- Build-Operate- Transfer, according to a statement for The Jordan Times.

The Project is part of a broader national drive to modernise Amman, enhance its urban service delivery, aid in smart transition and guide future investments. The Project is expected to aid the city in leveraging urban

data through technology to make better, more informed decisions.

This ambitious undertaking unfolds in four distinct packages of projects...

GAM vision is to promote and activate the creation of a smart city platform that leverages

the latest technologies and innovations to address challenges and provide efficient, reliable, and sustainable services to our residents, visitors and businesses.

The first phase, aiming at fostering collaboration with the private sector and integrating advanced technology into project implementation. This ambitious undertaking unfolds in four distinct packages of projects, with the inaugural phase focusing on four pivotal subprojects under the smart mobility theme, the statement said.

Jordan lowers candidacy age to boost youth political participation

AMMAN (JT) — The recent amendments to the political parties and election laws to lower the age of candidacy are strategic steps to increase youth participation in political life, according to the Director of the Prime Ministry’s Human Rights Department, Khalil Abdallat.

During the launching ceremony of the “Active Jordanian Youth for Improving Human Rights and the Electoral Process in Jordan” project, organised on Thursday by Hayat Centre for Civil Society Development (Rased) and Plan International in cooperation with the Prime Ministry, Abdallat said that these changes demonstrate the leadership’s commitment to providing young people with opportunities to participate in decision-making and shaping the future.

He also highlighted the “key” role of His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Crown Prince Hussein in strengthening Jordan’s human rights framework, with a particular focus on empowering youth and increasing their participation in various sectors.



Abdallat calls for joint efforts to achieve common goals in building a better future for Jordan

The political and economic reform initiatives and public sector development demonstrate a forward-looking royal vision for building a state based on the rule of law and democratic principles.

He also noted the Crown Prince’s influential role in promoting youth engagement in

public life, particularly through their efforts in the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

He also outlined the role of the Human Rights Department in leading efforts to accept youth-related recommendations from both treaty and non-

contract mechanisms.

Several youth-related recommendations were accepted during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Jordan’s human rights record, reflecting the Kingdom’s commitment to inclusive and sustainable development, he noted.

Abdallat called for

joint efforts to achieve common goals in building a better future for Jordan.

The sessions covered the concept of human rights, their sources and distinctions, international human rights mechanisms, the UPR, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Iqlaa promotes business linkages for micro and small businesses

AMMAN (JT) — Within the scope of USAID Informal Livelihood Advancement Activity (Iqlaa), The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham-Jordan), in collaboration with the lead implementer Mercy Corps, held a two-day business matchmaking and linkages event at Jordan International Exhibition Centre in Mecca Mall, in Amman, Jordan.

The event brought together around 60 home-based businesses (HBBs) and micro and small enterprises (MSEs) from several governorates with leading larger enterprises, including traders, manufacturers, and service providers from various sectors across the kingdom, fostering a dynamic environment for business collaboration.

The matchmaking and linkages event allowed HBBs and MSEs to showcase their diverse products and services through dedicated exhibition spaces. Larger enterprises



The matchmaking and linkages event allow HBBs and MSEs to showcase their diverse products and services through dedicated exhibition spaces

visiting the exhibitors engaged in fruitful discussions with participating MSEs.

“Maybe more than any other time, micro and small businesses in Jordan are struggling to make ends meet in a highly competitive market and a relatively lower demand than supply. Since it started in May 2022, the USAID-funded Iqlaa programme has focused on supporting home-

based, micro and small enterprises to grow and become more resilient. One of the main objectives of the programme, which is improving MSEs’ access to business opportunities, is being reflected in this two-day event,” said Ayat Tawil, economic specialist at USAID.

The two-day event witnessed increased interest from all participants, resulting in potential business deals

and an evident growing appetite for local sourcing. Prior to the event, AmCham trained participating MSEs to be equipped and ready to seize this opportunity and potentially secure business deals with the visiting larger enterprises.

USAID Informal Livelihoods Advancement Activity (Iqlaa) is a five-year programme funded by USAID, which started in 2022 and

aims to support Jordan’s HBBs and MSEs to grow, transform, and become resilient to future challenges. Iqlaa’s approach explores new ways of doing business and improving access to finance, markets, and services. The programme focuses on four sectors: agriculture, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, and services, with a particular focus on technology development and implementation.

AmCham-Jordan is a leading Jordanian business association established in 1999 under the Jordanian Association Law, with over 250 members companies and professionals with the mission to contribute towards economic development through the promotion of Jordan and US trade and investment relations, business development, policy & advocacy, human resources development and business community outreach.

IRC, National Council launch initiative to enhance access to quality nurseries

AMMAN (JT) — The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) held on Thursday a ceremony to launch the Accreditation Quality Management System (AQMS) for nurseries in Jordan, according to a statement for The Jordan Times.

This presents a pioneering step which will ultimately improve the quality of services for children in Jordan’s nurseries. This collaboration was made possible as part of the Ahlan Simsim initiative, launched in 2018 by the IRC and Sesame Workshop to support young children across the MENA region to learn, grow and thrive.

The AQMS aims to enhance the quality of services provided to children across all types of nurseries, whether institutional, private, or home-based. It measures nursery standards against seven metrics and 320 indicators. These criteria include the nurseries’ buildings and facilities, how well

the nurseries are managed, the quality of the learning environment, the skills of the caregivers and the programmes and activities offered to the children, the statement said.

The certificates remain valid for three years, and are subjected to continuous review by the NCFA and the Health Care Accreditation Council. During the ceremony, three nurseries from governmental, private, and medical institutions were awarded certificates based on the AQMS grading scheme.

The awarded nurseries were Istiklal Hospital, Zaha Centre, and the Energy and Minerals Regulatory Commission.

Rania Subeih, Zaha Cultural Centre CEO, said, “This platinum-level certification is a testament to our commitment to providing the highest quality care and educational environment for our children. The rehabilitation of the nursery site, and involving parents and stakeholders in programme implementation were some of

the efforts exerted to improve services that lead us to acquire this certification.”

In this regard, NCFA Secretary-General Mohamed Miqdadi said, “The nursery quality assurance system was prepared based on standards and controls that allow the evaluation, monitoring and development of the level of services provided in nurseries and achieving quality in programmes and activities for early childhood. This system, prepared by the NCFA in cooperation with the International Rescue Committee, is the first nursery quality system issued in Jordan, and came as a complement to the national achievements in the childhood sector, in order to achieve the best interest of children by improving the services provided to them.”

This new step towards improving the quality standards of nurseries in Jordan is aligned with national broader efforts to ensure children in the Kingdom have access to early quality education.

Unprecedented Neolithic discoveries at Wadi Faynan by British archeologists

By Saeb Rawashdeh

AMMAN — Two British archaeologists, Steve Mithen and Bill Finlayson studied the early Neolithic site of Wadi Faynan, situated some 250 kilometres south of Amman.

Some structures in Wadi Faynan were used as workshops, others for storage or grinding of foods and pigments. Structure 075 is of an unprecedented form in the Neolithic archaeological record. While the function role of this structure remains unclear, it provides further evidence that changes in social organisation—notably the appearance of communal activity, collective labour and ideology manifest in art and architecture—preceded that of economic change within the Neo-

lithic transition process, Mithen outlined.

“Moreover, contrary to recent proposals that the Neolithic ‘originated’ in a so-called ‘Golden Triangle’ of Upper Mesopotamia, this new discovery at WF16 indicates that socially-driven Neolithisation was widespread within south-west Asia at the very start of the Holocene,” Finlayson said, adding that the initial stages of the Neolithic transition in south-west Asia are denoted as the PPNA cultural phase (9,750–8,550 BC).

The PPNA settlements show significant similarities to those of the Epipalaeolithic in terms of having sub-circular structures and no traces of domesticated plants and animals. The PPNA is followed by the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB)

cultural phase (8,750–6,300 BC) when rectangular, two-storey buildings and domesticated sheep, goat and cereals are gradually developed and adopted.

WF16 is located on two adjacent knolls in Wadi Faynan, at the base of the escarpment leading to the Jordanian plateau. It is around 500 metres from the PPNB settlement of Ghuwayr and 2 kilometres from the Pottery Neolithic site of Tell Wadi Faynan, Mithen noted, adding that the site was shown to have stratification more than 2 metres deep, good preservation and a rich cultural inventory.

“Several sub-circular stone and walled structures containing domestic debris, grinding stones and human burials were exposed, and stone and bone artefacts

with incised designs were recovered, along with anthropomorphic figurines and a diverse range of stone and shell beads,” Finlayson said.

Architecture indicative of communal activity and sometimes of a monumental nature is not unknown from the PPNA—a tower and wall were found in Jericho in 1950’s by Kathleen Kenyon.

The floor of the WF16 structure in Wadi Faynan covers more than six times that of the so-called “monumental” buildings at Jerf Ahmar (Syria) dated to 9,650–8,610 BC, Mithen underlined, adding that similarities with the Jerf Ahmar buildings are found in the intentional deposition of animal skulls and decorated benches, the latter having been previously cited as a uniquely Upper Mesopotamian PPNA



A large amphitheater-like structure was constructed at WF16, most likely for communal activity, perhaps singing, dancing and ritual

phenomenon.

“Although the ubiquity of naturalistic animal motifs at Jerf Ahmar and Gobekli Tepe is not

replicated at WF16, animal imagery is present. This is rare, however, the dominant symbols being primarily abstract

and anthropomorphic in nature,” Finlayson underlined, adding that the function of Structure 075 at WF16 remains

unclear.

Whatever it had been used for, its size and form suggest communal activity for its construction, use and repair, Mithen said, noting, “The two cup-hole mortars set within the floor suggest the collective grinding of plants or some other material; the deposition of broken stone bowls and goat/ibex bones suggests feasting, while its scale, decoration and tiered benches imply ritual or at least performance activities.”

Structure 075 and its associated buildings demonstrate that new forms of social organisation, manifest in architecture and settlement design, occurred in a significantly wider region than Upper Mesopotamia at the start of the transition to the Neolithic, Finlayson concluded.

RELIEF



Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation says that one hundred trucks carrying humanitarian aid have entered Gaza over the past week

100 aid trucks enter Gaza — JHCO

AMMAN (JT) — One hundred trucks carrying humanitarian aid have entered Gaza over the past week, providing essential supplies, including food parcels, blankets, tents, flour, mattresses and clothes.

This operation was organised by the Jordanian Armed Forces-the Arab Army and the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO), in partnership with the World Food Programme, and supported by various organisations, the Jor-

dan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The JHCO continues to receive cash donations...

JHCO Secretary-General Hussein Shibli stressed on Thursday the urgent need for increased efforts and resources to ensure that aid reaches those

in need in the war-torn Strip.

To date, a total of 2,735 trucks and 53 aircraft carrying aid have entered Gaza through Al Arish airport, according to JHCO.

The JHCO continues to receive cash donations through its bank account at Bank Al Etihad, account number JO32 UBSI 1030 0000 4010 1659 9151 06 or through e-wallets or CliQ at JHCOGAZA, as well as via "eFA-WATEERcom" and through their website www.jhco.org.jo

Safadi, Qatari counterpart discuss war on Gaza, strategic ties

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani held comprehensive talks on Thursday to strengthen strategic relations between their countries, with efforts to end the Israeli aggression on Gaza and various regional issues at the centre of the discussions.

Both top officials stressed the urgent need to stop the ongoing Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, calling for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, and underlined the importance of providing adequate aid throughout the war-torn Strip.

During their meeting, which comes within the framework of continuous consultation and coordination between Jordan and Qatar, Safadi and Sheikh Mohammed discussed joint efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including the delivery of aid through Jordanian channels.

Safadi expressed Jordan's support for efforts by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States to broker an exchange deal that would lead to a permanent ceasefire.

They also stressed the need for an effective international response to stop Israel's illegal actions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which undermines the two-state solution and the possibility of achieving a just and comprehensive peace.



Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Saleh Kharabsheh announces on Sunday that the Iraqi Council of Ministers has approved an extension of the memorandum of understanding for the supply of crude oil to Jordan

The discussions also covered initiatives to reduce regional tensions and reaffirmed their support for Lebanon's security and stability, stressing the importance of compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

Safadi appreciated Qatar's support and care for the approximately 80,000 Jordanian citizens working and living in the Gulf country.

Reaffirming their commitment to enhancing cooperation in various

fields, Safadi and Sheikh Mohammed stressed their commitment to continued consultation, coordination, and cooperation to serve their nations' interests and address broader Arab and Islamic issues.

Prince Hassan stresses importance of understanding climate change

AMMAN (JT) — Under the patronage of HRH Prince Hassan, chairman of the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST), the closing ceremony for the first batch of the Blue Peace Initiative's Youth Fellowship in the Middle East was held on Wednesday.

The event, hosted by the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management, highlighted the "significant" achievements of the programme, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

In a speech delivered on his behalf by HCST Secretary-General Mashhour Rifai, Prince Hassan stressed the importance of understanding and classifying disasters to grasp the impacts of climate change.

He noted that while some disasters are natural, such as earthquakes, floods, and volcanoes, others, like fam-



In a speech delivered on his behalf by HCST Secretary-General Mashhour Rifai, Prince Hassan stresses the importance of understanding and classifying disasters to grasp the impacts of climate change

ines and epidemics, can be predicted, while intentional disasters such as wars and industrial and nuclear incidents also pose significant threats.

Prince Hassan warned of the impact of climate change and

disasters on displacement and migration worldwide, reiterating the need to protect vulnerable and marginalised groups in conflict-affected countries, and empower them to face climate change challenges, displacement

and migration.

The prince highlighted the global and collective responsibility to develop humanitarian solutions to crises, stressing the importance of upholding human dignity and the right to life.

He called for regional cooperation to develop the "Great Rift Valley", which extends from the south-eastern Mediterranean Sea through the Dead Sea and the Red Sea to East Africa.

Chair of the administrative committee of the Blue Peace Initiative in the Middle East Maysoun Zoubi highlighted the critical role of youth in the new phase of the initiative, referring to the youth's contribution to promoting dialogue and developing innovative solutions for sustainable water management.

Caroline Tissot, deputy head of mission and regional head of cooperation at the Swiss embassy, praised the collaborative efforts of regional stakeholders, noting that the active participation of youth will ensure the lasting impact of these efforts, and promote effective dialogue and cooperation for a sustainable future.

REDUCTION

Oil bill decreases by 16% in first 5 months of 2024

AMMAN (JT) — Kingdom's oil bill went down by 16 per cent in the first five months of 2024, compared with the same period in 2023, the Department of Statistics (DoS) said on Thursday.

According to the DoS's monthly report on Jordan's foreign

trade, cited by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, the value of the oil bill in the January-May period of 2024 decreased to JD1.143 million in the first five months of 2024, compared with JD1.361 million in the same period of last year.

The reduction in the oil bill amounted to

approximately JD218 million compared with the previous year, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Mineral fuels and other mineral oils topped the list of Jordan's oil imports at JD356 million, followed by crude oil at JD333 million.

EXPORTS

Kingdoms trade balance deficit decreases by 2.5%

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's trade balance deficit decreased by 2.5 per cent in the first five months of 2024, reaching JD3.865 billion compared with JD3.966 billion for the same period last year.

The total value of exports fell by 1.5 per cent to JD3.628 billion, down from JD3.683 billion in the corresponding period. National exports specifically saw a 4.1 per cent decline, amounting to JD3.276 billion, compared with JD3.415 billion, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

According to the Department of Statistics' monthly report issued on Thursday, the value of imports also declined by 2 per cent, reaching JD7.493 billion, down from JD7.649 billion. Re-exports, however, increased by 31.3 per cent to JD352 million, up from JD268 million.

The coverage ratio of total exports to im-



Jordan's trade balance deficit decreases by 2.5 per cent in the first five months of 2024, reaching JD 3.865 billion compared with JD3.966 billion for the same period last year

ports remained steady at 48 per cent, the same as in the previous year.

In May alone, the total value of exports reached JD880 million, with national exports at JD788 million and reexports at JD92 million. Imports for the month amounted to JD1.675 billion, resulting in a trade balance deficit of JD795 million.

The report noted an 8.6 per cent increase in total exports in May

compared with the same month in 2023, with national exports rising by 7.5 per cent and reexports by 19.5 per cent. Imports, on the other hand, decreased by 8.8 per cent, leading to a 22.5 per cent reduction in the trade balance deficit.

The coverage ratio of total exports to imports in May improved to 53 per cent, up from 44 per cent in May 2023, marking a 9 percentage point increase.

COOPERATION

Investment minister, Greek ambassador discuss investment opportunities

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Investment Khoulood Saqqaf and Greek Ambassador to Jordan Irene Riga on Thursday discussed strategies to increase investment between the two countries.

During the meeting, Saqqaf highlighted the investment opportunities available to Greek companies in Jordan and highlighted the Kingdom's favourable investment climate, which includes competitive regulations, a high-

ly skilled workforce and numerous free trade agreements that have given Jordanian products access to a market of more than 1.5 billion consumers.

According to a Ministry of Investment's statement, Saqqaf also highlighted the benefits of Jordan's investment environment law and the investment opportunities listed on the "Invest in Jordan" platform.

She reiterated the

ministry's support to Greek companies by addressing challenges and providing ongoing assistance to ensure successful investments.

Acknowledging the strong economic and trade ties between Greece and Jordan, the diplomat suggested that organising visits for Greek business leaders to Jordan would be beneficial in understanding local investment incentives and project development opportunities.



Minister of Investment Khoulood Saqqaf and Greek Ambassador to Jordan Irene Riga on Thursday discuss strategies to increase investment between the two countries

Consumer confidence in Kingdom's economy rises in Q2 2024

By Maria Weldali

AMMAN — IPSOS Jordanian Consumer Sentiment Index (JCSI) for Q2 2024 showed a 1.3-point increase in consumer confidence in the Kingdom's

economy compared with the first quarter of the year.

IPSOS is one of the largest market research companies operating in 90 markets with more than 20000.

According to IPSOS website, JCSI is a quarterly national survey that assesses consumers' attitudes toward the current and future state of the local economy, personal financial situations, sav-

ings, and confidence in making large investments.

The recent rise in the index is attributed to an increase in citizens' confidence in both the future state of Jordan's economy and its current outlook,

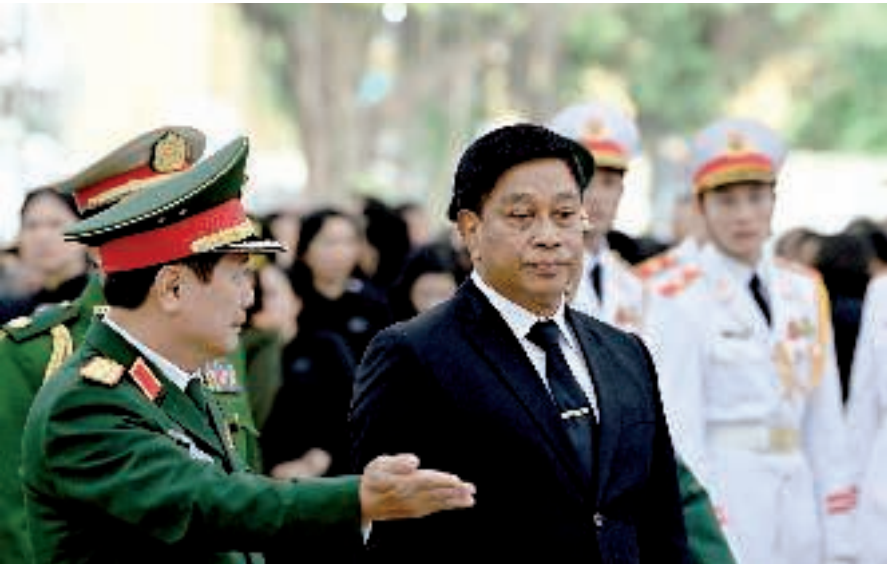
IPSOS added.

The survey also noted that "high living costs and inflation remain a top concern for Jordanians, with unemployment topping the list as the most pressing issue this quarter".

Economist Waseem said that the labour market's stability and improving investment opportunities are helping to stimulate the economy, even amid regional challenges. "Jordanians are somewhat

optimistic. Despite shifts in purchasing power and spending patterns, they believe the government is on the right path toward economic development and recovery," Hussein said.

Economist Zain Ziad highlighted the importance of understanding critical economic challenges to realise the goals set out in Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision.



Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister Tin Aung San (centre) pays his respects for the late general secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong at the national funeral house during the first day of a two-day-national mourning in Hanoi on Thursday

Myanmar junta, ethnic armed group claim control of military regional HQ

YANGON (AFP) — Myanmar's junta and an ethnic minority armed group both claimed on Thursday they were in control of a town and regional military command in northern Shan state following days of clashes.

Fighting has rocked the town of Lashio, home to the military's north-eastern command, since July 3 when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed an offensive against junta troops.

Local media run by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) reported the group "fully captured the headquarters of the Northeast Military command in Lashio" on Thursday morning and also captured Lashio town, home to around 150,000 people.

MNDAA spokesman Li Jiawen said the group's fighters had captured Lashio, without giving further details.

But junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told reporters the claim was "not true".

"The insurgents infiltrated the outskirts of Lashio so [the security forces] have been following and clearing them," he said, without giving details.

The north-eastern command is located in the north of Lashio.

A video uploaded to social media with a caption saying it was shot in Lashio on Thursday morning showed deserted streets with no soldiers in sight.

AFP reporters geolocated the video to a site in the town around 2 kilometres from the command.

Northern Shan state has been rocked by fighting since late last month when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed an offensive against the military along the highway to China's Yunnan province.

The clashes have shredded a Beijing-brokered truce that in January halted a campaign by the alliance of the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the MNDAA.

The military has carried out several air strikes around the town during the fighting, according to residents.

Dozens of civilians have been killed or wounded in the recent fighting, according to the junta and local rescue groups.

Neither the junta nor the ethnic alliance have released figures on their own casualties.

Indonesia's foreign minister on Thursday slammed the junta's unwillingness to engage with a regional peace plan to resolve the conflict, speaking after meeting her Singaporean counterpart on the sidelines of an Association of Southeast Asian Nations foreign ministers meeting in Laos.

Both Singapore and Indonesia have been critical of the junta's power grab, which has divided the 10-member ASEAN bloc.

Russia, China FMs to meet as ASEAN talks get under way in Laos

VIENTIANE (AFP) — The foreign ministers of Russia and China will meet on the sidelines of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers talks in Laos on Thursday, according to a schedule seen by AFP.

The three-day meeting of the 10-member ASEAN bloc started in the capital Vientiane on Thursday, with tensions in the South China Sea and the conflict in Myanmar high on the agenda.

Sergei Lavrov will meet Wang Yi at 6 pm local time (11:00 GMT) for a 40-minute "ministerial meeting", according to the schedule.

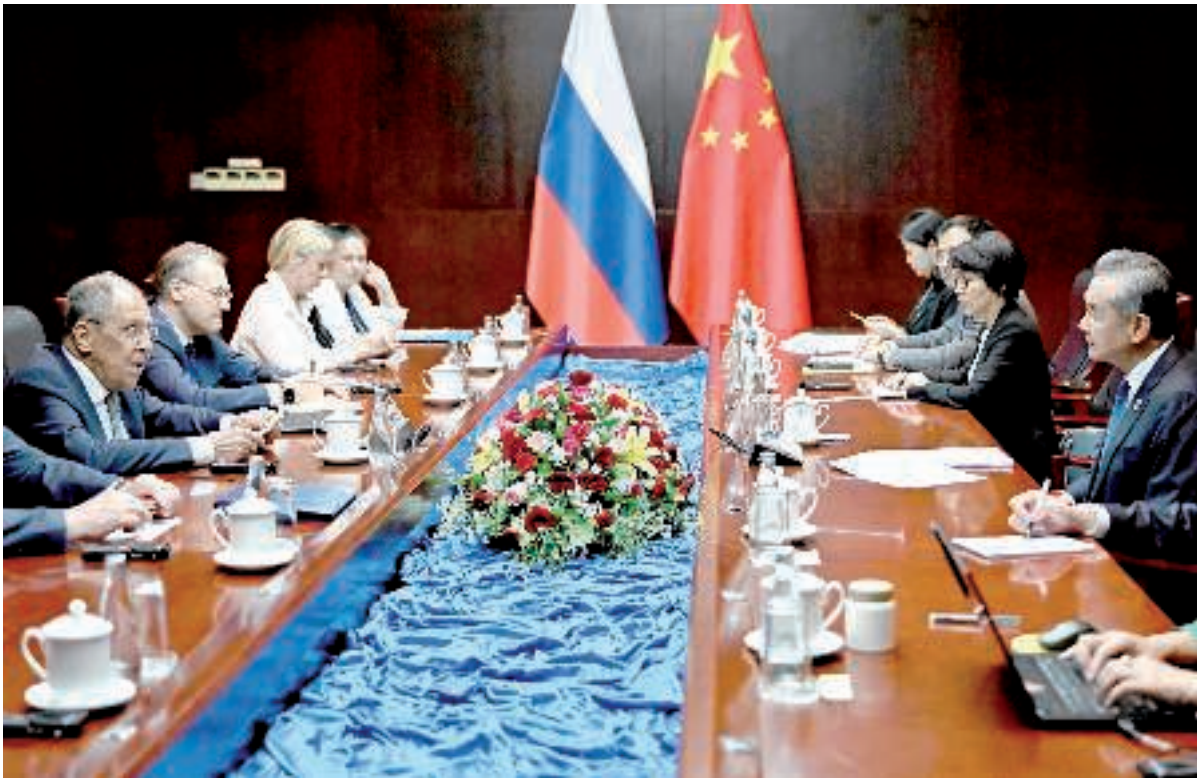
Both men have already arrived in Vientiane, AFP journalists said, to attend the ASEAN talks as observers along with foreign ministers from the United Kingdom and Canada.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar arrived in Vientiane on Thursday and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is also expected to attend.

ASEAN ministers were thrashing out a common position on the civil war raging in member state Myanmar on Thursday, a Southeast Asian diplomat at the talks said.

"Myanmar is not resolved yet but we're almost there," the source said, requesting anonymity in order to speak to the media.

A draft ASEAN communique seen by AFP said ministers "strongly condemned" the continued violence unleashed by the military's coup in



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov hold a ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the 57th Association of southeast Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Related Meetings in Vientiane on Thursday

2021 that has plunged the country into turmoil.

The junta is struggling to crush armed opposition to its coup and has been barred from high-level ASEAN meetings over its crackdown on dissent.

It had previously refused to send "non-political representatives" to attend high-level ASEAN meetings but two senior bureaucrats are representing Myanmar at the talks in Vientiane.

The military's readiness to reengage diplomatically was a sign of its "weakened position", the diplomatic source told AFP.

An ethnic minority armed group claimed on Thursday its fighters had captured a town and a military regional command in northern Shan state, although the junta said it was still in control.

Indonesia's foreign minister slammed on Thursday the Myanmar junta's unwillingness to engage with a regional peace plan to resolve the crisis sparked by its coup.

Retno Marsudi made the remarks after meeting her Singaporean counterpart on the sidelines of the Vientiane meeting.

Weeks after it seized power, the junta agreed to a five-point peace plan with ASEAN that it has since ignored as it wages a crackdown on dissent and battles armed opposition to its rule.

"We shared the same view on the lack of commitment of Myanmar military junta to implement the 5PC [five point consensus]," Marsudi wrote on social media platform X.

Flashpoint reefs

A series of clashes between Philippine and Chinese vessels at flashpoint reefs in the South China Sea in recent months is also on the ASEAN agenda, the diplomatic source said.

Beijing claims the waterway, through which trillions of dollars of trade passes annually, almost in its entirety despite an international court ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

A Filipino sailor lost a thumb in a June 17 confrontation when Chinese coast guard members wielding knives, sticks and an axe foiled a Philippine Navy attempt to resupply its troops on a remote outpost.

The source said the Philippines was trying to insert a mention of injuries to its people in the joint communique, expected later Thursday.

Blinken is also expected to "discuss the importance of adherence to international law in the South China Sea" when he arrives in Laos, according to the US State Department.

UNREST

Nigeria's army, security agency warn against Kenya-style protests

ABUJA (AFP) — Nigeria's armed forces and DSS security agency on Thursday warned against Kenya-style violence in protests planned for next week over soaring costs of living, saying the military would stop any attempts to create "anarchy".

While Kenya has been rocked by deadly protests that forced the government to repeal new taxes, Nigeria has seen little unrest over economic reforms that have already forced a 40 per cent spike in food inflation.

#EndBadGovernanceinNigeria has been trending on X alongside #RevolutionNow, with calls for Nigerians to take to the streets from August 1 for demonstrations. But it is unclear who is behind the protest demands.

It is also unclear whether the online protest calls will inspire people to turn up at a time when many Nigerians are just trying to get by, wary of losing work and cautious over past crackdowns.

Nigerians are struggling with the worst cost-of-living crisis in years after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ended a costly fuel subsidy and liberalised the naira currency in reforms needed to revive the economy of Africa's most populous nation.

The protest calls have been met by a torrent of warnings from officials, security forces and governors urging youth to stay



'Citizens... do not have the right to mobilise for anarchy and unleash terror,' said defence spokesman Edward Buba

away. Some have even accused the organisers of treason and trying to destabilise the country.

"While citizens have the right to peaceful protest, they do not have the right to mobilise for anarchy and unleash terror," defence spokesman Maj. Gen. Edward Buba told reporters.

"It is easy to see that the contemporary context of the planned protest is to shadow the happenings in Kenya, which I must say is violent," he added.

Army 'will not stand by'

The armed forces had detected some "elements bent on hijacking" the planned protests with the aim of making it violent, he said.

"The level of violence being envisaged can only be described as a state of anarchy. The armed forces on its part will not stand by and allow anarchy to befall our nation."

"The plotters desire to use the intended violent outcome to smear the federal and sub-national governments; make them unpopular and pit them against the masses," it said in a rare statement.

Tinubu, who has repeatedly called for patience for the reforms to work, on Wednesday urged protesters to hold off to allow the government to respond to "all their pleas", information Minister Mohammed Idris said.

He too suggested that some groups were mobilising protests to unleash violence and replicate recent Kenyan protests.

"We must ensure that these protests do not snowball into violence or disorder"

The Department of State Services or DSS, which handles domestic threats, also warned against violence, saying "sinister" elements wanted to abuse the protests and had political motives.

MIGRATIONS



Members of Panama's National Border Service (Senafront) stand guard at the Asti point in the jungle province of Darien, Acandí municipality, on the Colombia-Panama border on July 16

Number of migrants who drowned in Panama rises to 16

PANAMA CITY (AFP) — The number of migrants who drowned in a flooded river in northern Panama has risen to 16, President Jose Raul Mulino said on Thursday.

On Wednesday, border police reported 10 bodies had been found in the remote riverside community of Carreto, without specifying the nationalities of the victims.

The small village lies on the Caribbean Sea and is part of the Guna Yala autonomous Indigenous territory.

Border police did not specify whether the migrants had crossed into Panama through the Darien jungle or by boat.

The bodies of the drowned migrants were quickly buried by locals, who authorities said were hoping to hide their complicity with smugglers.

"Burying bodies without reporting it to the authorities is a crime that must be investigated," Mulino said.

The president said the deaths pointed to the risks migrants faced when they left a controlled route the country has put in place.

"It is not that the controlled route is the panacea... but at least it is monitored, it is better protected"

Mulino vowed during his election campaign to deport migrants and shut down the Darien route taken by hundreds of thousands.

Washington this month pledged \$6 million in funding for migrant repatriations from the Central American nation in the hope of reducing irregular crossings at its own southern border.

The start of "expulsions" of migrants on charter and commercial flights was "imminent", regional US Homeland Security official Marlen Pineiro said on Tuesday.

In recent weeks the Panamanian government has closed sev-

DISASTER

UN says Ethiopia landslide death toll could reach 500

KENCHO SHACHA GOZDI (AFP) — The death toll from landslides in a remote region of southern Ethiopia has risen to 257, the United Nations said on Thursday and the number could soar up to 500.

Rescuers pressed on with the grim search for bodies and survivors in Kencho Shacha Gozdi, with crowds of distraught people digging through mud, often using just their bare hands and shovels.

Solomon Tsoma told AFP that 13 of his family had died, including his uncle's seven children his brother's infants. "We have recovered 12 bodies but haven't been able to find my sister's body," he said.

The UN humanitarian agency, OCHA gave the new toll of 257 dead, citing local authorities. "The death toll is expected to rise to up to 500 people," it added.

OCHA said more than 15,000 people need to be evacuated because of the risk of further landslides, including at least 1,320 children under the age of five and 5,293 pregnant women or new mothers.

Aid has begun arriving in the isolated area, including four trucks of supplies from the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, it said.

The landslide is the deadliest on record in Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation which is often



Residents and volunteers leave for the night after digging in the mud in search for survivors and bodies at the scene of a landslide in Gofa on Wednesday

battered by climate-related disasters.

Bodies wrapped in shrouds

Officials said most of the victims were buried when they rushed to help after the first landslide, which followed heavy rains Sunday in the area roughly 480 kilometres from the capital Addis Ababa.

Resident Getachew Geza said he and his son rushed to help after hearing two hous-

es had been buried. "When we got there ...a massive mudslide overwhelmed everyone, including my son.

In one graphic scene shown on social media by the local authority, dozens of men surrounded a pit where human limbs were exposed in the mud.

Other villagers carried bodies on makeshift stretchers while in a nearby tent women wailed as they sat near a row of bodies wrapped in shrouds being prepared for

burial.

OCHA said 12 people who sustained injuries had been taken to a local hospital, while at least 125 are displaced. The number of missing is not known.

Guterres 'deeply saddened'

UN chief Antonio Guterres sent his condolences over the disaster, with his spokesman Stephane Dujarric saying he was "deeply saddened".

"UN agencies are dis-

patching food, nutrition, health and other critical supplies to help people affected by the landslides," Dujarric said.

Senait Solomon, head of communications for the South Ethiopia regional government, told AFP on Wednesday that the landslide site was sloped and "prone to disasters", adding that conservation work to protect the area, including tree planting, had been under way at the time of the landslides.

More than 21 million people or about 18 per cent of the population rely on humanitarian aid in Ethiopia as a result of conflict, flooding, drought and other natural disasters.

OCHA said this week that that a similar landslide in May in the same area killed more than 50 people.

Seasonal rains in South Ethiopia state between April and early May had caused flooding, mass displacement and damage to livelihoods and infrastructure, it had said in May.

In 2017, at least 113 people died when a mountain of garbage collapsed in a dump in the outskirts of Addis Ababa.

The deadliest landslide in Africa was in Sierra Leone's capital in Freetown in August 2017, when 1,141 people perished.

Mudslides in the Mount Elgon region of eastern Uganda killed more than 350 people in February 2010.



The Oak Fire burns through trees near Jerseydale, California

Thousands flee fast-spreading wildfire in northern California

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — Firefighters were battling a fast-moving wildfire in the US state of California on Thursday, authorities said, with more than 3,500 people forced to flee their homes.

The Park Fire broke out on Wednesday evening, on the last day of a heatwave affecting the region.

More than 1,150 personnel were deployed to fight the blaze, which was only 3 per cent contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire).

As of 12:00 pm local time (19:00 GMT) on Thursday, the fire had enveloped 290 square kilometres, according to CalFire.

More than 3,500 people had evacuated the area, Governor Gavin Newsom said.

The town of Chico, under threat from the fire, is located just 20 kilometres west of Paradise, a town that was destroyed by a massive

wildfire in 2018, resulting in the deaths of 85 people.

The cause of the Park Fire remains under investigation, according to CalFire.

Wildfires were also burning in western Canada, where part of the tourist town of Jasper has been destroyed

On Thursday, the National Weather Service issued a "red flag" weather warning for "critical fire weather conditions" in the area,

including wind gusts and low humidity.

The western United States has experienced several heat waves since the beginning of June, and dozens of fires are currently burning in the region.

Oregon, California's northern neighbour, is battling a megafire that is the largest in the country, having ravaged more than 268,000 acres of forest and prompting evacuations in a rural region.

The raging flames have created vast columns of smoke, affecting air quality as far away as neighbouring Idaho.

Wildfires were also burning in western Canada, where part of the tourist town of Jasper has been destroyed.

Western North America has increasingly been affected by extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change.

In mid-July, Newsom warned of a fire season that was "shaping up to be very active".

Morocco heatwave kills more than 20 people in 24 hours — ministry

Continued from page 1

The rising temperatures and prolonged drought, which has lowered reservoir levels, are a threat to the vital agricultural sector.

Water evaporation reached 1.5 million cubic metres per day, Water Minister Nizar Baraka said at the end of June.

Morocco's record temperature — 50.4°C — was set in August last year in

Agadir, in the south of the country.

Scientists have linked climate change to more prolonged, stronger and more frequent extreme weather, including heatwaves.

Palestinians slam IOC 'double standards' over Israel at Paris Olympics

Continued from page 1

He added: "We are not in the political business, we are there to accomplish our mission to get the athletes together."

As he arrived on Thursday, Yazan Al Bawwab, a Palestinian swimmer, said he wanted to raise awareness about the Palestinian cause and the suffering in Gaza.

"As an athlete... it's not about the medals. It's about reaching the most people, about the Palestinian cause," he said. "If a medal gets me more awareness, that's what I care about.

"Sports is a tool for peace also, it's a way to spread my message to the world about Palestinians and that we're suffering."

Israel's 88-strong del-

egation arrived in Paris earlier this week and the men's football team played their first game on Wednesday evening, drawing 1-1 with Mali.

The Israeli national anthem was whistled at the Parc des Princes stadium and Palestinian flags were waved by a handful of spectators, leading to angry exchanges between them and Israeli fans.

Israel strikes Gaza as military recovers five captive bodies

Continued from page 1

After the military warned it would "forcefully operate" in the area, the Gaza health ministry on Monday said an Israeli operation had killed 70 people and wounded more than 200.

The five Israelis recovered had previously been announced as having died, and the military as well as the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said militants had killed them on October 7.

The Forum has regularly protested in Israel for a deal to get the remaining captives home.

On Thursday it demanded an urgent meeting with Israel's team for negotiating a ceasefire and hostage-

release deal, saying a "crisis of trust" had emerged.

"It has now become apparent that the information provided to the hostages' families did not accurately reflect the situation's reality," the group said in a statement.

"This foot-dragging is a deliberate sabotage of the chance to bring our loved ones back. It effectively undermines the negotiations and indicates a serious moral failure."

Anti-government protesters who have also regularly demonstrated, sometimes by the tens of thousands, have accused Netanyahu of dragging out the war. So have some analysts.

Far-right members of Netanyahu's ruling co-

alition oppose a truce, which would involve Palestinian prisoners being freed in exchange for the hostages.

After Netanyahu's speech to Congress, Hamas issued a statement saying the Israeli premier "thwarted all efforts aimed at ending the war and concluding a deal to release the prisoners", despite Egyptian and Qatari mediation.

Delegation delayed

A senior US administration official said negotiations for a Gaza deal were in the last stretch and Biden would try to close some "final gaps" with Netanyahu.

But a source with knowledge of the talks said separately that the arrival of an Israeli del-

egation in Doha for talks on Israeli demands for a deal had been postponed from Thursday to next week.

Far-right members of Netanyahu's ruling coalition oppose a truce...

Biden says time to pass torch to 'younger voices'

Continued from page 1

He said there was a "time and a place for new voices, fresh voices — yes, younger voices. And that time and place is now".

'Never wavered'

In a poignant sign of support for Biden after the toughest decision of his political life, most of his family sat watching him in the Oval Office as he spoke.

They included his wife Jill and daughter Ashley — who held hands near the end of his remarks — Biden's troubled son Hunter and a number of

Biden's grandchildren.

Jill Biden later posted a letter on X thanking "those who never wavered" — an apparent backhanded dig at the Democrats who called on Biden to quit — and said it was "time to put that trust in Kamala".

Biden's withdrawal has upended Trump's campaign, which had previously focused on the president's age and mental acuity. Now it is Trump, 78, who is the oldest candidate in US history.

Trump, who had initially called for unity after surviving an assassination attempt on July 13, was in no mood for magnanimity after Biden's

speech.

"Crooked Joe Biden's Oval Office speech was barely understandable, and sooo bad!" Trump said on social media.

Republicans have called for Biden to step down altogether, saying that if he is not fit to stand for reelection then he is not fit to serve as president.

Biden however insisted that he was no lame duck and that he would continue to work on the economy and key foreign policy issues for the rest of his time in office.

"Over the next six months I will be focused on doing my job as president," he said.

'Lunatic'

One key goal is a peace deal in the Middle East — a legacy-defining dream that many US presidents before Biden have chased.

Biden, who has been increasingly critical over Israel's military campaign in Gaza, meets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House on Thursday.

But in a sign of how quickly things are changing, Netanyahu will sit down separately that day with Harris as well, as well as meeting Trump in Florida on Friday.

The US election campaign meanwhile is mov-

ing ahead at full speed without Biden.

In his first rally since Harris secured enough delegates to become the de facto Democratic nominee, Trump hit out at Harris as his "new victim."

"She is a radical left lunatic who will destroy our country," he said, accusing Harris of hiding Biden's "mental unfitness." Earlier, the White House denied there was any "cover up" over Biden's condition.

Harris was also on the campaign trail Wednesday, telling a Black college sorority in Indianapolis that "I am fighting for our nation's future."

Russian, Chinese bombers stage joint patrol near Alaska

Continued from page 1

The patrol was part of "a plan of military cooperation for 2024 and not directed against third countries", Moscow said.

China's defence ministry also said that the patrol was "not aimed at a third party" and "has nothing to do with the current international and regional situation".

Russia's defence ministry posted images of planes taking off and landing as well as footage from the air.

The TU-95MS planes were developed in the Soviet era to carry long-range cruise missiles and are part of Russia's nuclear triad. The Xian H-6 planes are also nuclear-capable.

China and Russia have drawn closer amid Moscow's offensive on Ukraine and the two countries hold joint military exercises regularly.

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited China in May on his first trip abroad after reelection and met Chinese counterpart

Xi Jinping again this month at a regional summit in Kazakhstan.

Russia said Sunday that it scrambled fighter jets to prevent two US strategic bomber planes from crossing its border over the Barents Sea in the Arctic.

The US military routinely carries out flights over international waters, operations that it says are conducted in neutral airspace, but Moscow has responded more aggressively in recent months.

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Renewables overproduction turns electricity prices negative

By Nathalie Alonso and Catherine Hours
Agence France-Presse

PARIS — With the proliferation of solar panels and wind turbines an unusual phenomenon is becoming more and more frequent: Wholesale electricity prices turn negative.

While that may brighten the mood of consumers whose power bills have surged in recent years, it could undermine the further development of renewables, a key element in the fight against global warming.

The increasingly frequent phenomenon is "extremely problematic" for the wind and solar sector, said Mattias Vandenbulcke, strategy director of the renewables industry group France Renouvelables.

"It allows some to have harmful, even dangerous rhetoric which says 'renewables are useless'," Vandenbulcke said.

In southern Australia, wholesale electricity prices have been negative some 20 per cent of the time since last year, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The share of negatively priced hours in southern California was above 20 per cent in the first half of the year, more than triple from the same period in 2023, the IEA said.

In the first six months of the year in France, there were negative prices around five percent of the time, beating the record set last year, according to the electricity grid operator RTE.

In Switzerland the price tumbled as far as -400 euros (-\$436) per megawatt hour on July 14. The lowest prices are usually recorded around midday during the summer when solar production is at its peak.

'A warning signal'

The trend has been accelerating for the past three years as demand in Europe has unexpectedly dropped since the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Prices turn negative on the spot wholesale electricity market when production is strong while demand is weak.

Around a fifth of the total is traded on this market, where electricity is bought for the following day.

Negative prices help reduce the bills of consumers, said Rebecca Aron, head of electricity markets at French renewables firm Valorem, but the impact is delayed and difficult to discern among the other factors that send prices higher and lower.

Large, industrial consumers that can shift production to times when prices are negative and buy on wholesale markets can reap the biggest rewards.

Negative prices are "a warning signal that there is way too much production on the electrical grid", said energy analyst Nicolas Goldberg at Colombus Consulting.

Electricity grids need to be kept constantly in balance. Too much can lead to the electricity to increase in frequency beyond norms for some equipment. Too little can lead to some or all customers losing power.

There are currently few options to stock surplus electricity production so producers have to reduce output.

Many renewable producers stop their output when prices are set to turn negative. It takes one minute to stop output at a solar park, two to three minutes for a wind turbine.

But not all stop their production.

Tripling renewables

"Renewable energy can be controlled, but depending on production contracts, there might not necessarily be an incentive to stop," said Mathieu Pierzo at French grid operator RTE, which has the responsibility for balancing the electricity load.

Some producers are paid a fixed price under their contract or are compensated by the state if prices fall below a certain level.

Fossil fuel and nuclear power plants can adjust their production to some extent, but halting and restarting output is costly.

In the future, solar and wind will also have to "participate more in balancing the electricity system", Pierzo said.

Solar and wind production is set to rise further as nations agreed at the COP28 climate conference last year to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 as part of efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels.

"Rising frequency of negative prices sends an urgent signal that greater flexibility of supply and demand is needed," the Paris-based IEA warned last week.

"The appropriate regulatory frameworks and market designs will be important to allow for an uptake in flexibility solutions such as demand response and storage," it said.

Harris now has just weeks to emerge from Biden’s shadow

By Frankie Taggart
Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON — Kamala Harris may already be the Democrats' presumptive White House nominee, but she now faces a race to forge a distinct identity after years playing second fiddle to President Joe Biden.

Biden's decision to endorse his vice president after exiting the race, and the flood of party support that followed, all but guarantee Harris will lead Democrats in their fight to prevent Donald Trump's comeback November 5.

But the unprecedented switch of candidate this close to election day leaves Harris little time to emerge from Biden's shadow, or to preempt Republican attempts to brand her as a stereotypical liberal lightweight.

In a first informal campaign speech on Monday, she gave a preview of the next four months as she contrasted Trump's criminal conviction and anti-abortion stance with her record as a prosecutor and campaigner for women's rights.

"In those roles I took on perpetrators of all kinds," she said in her speech from campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware.

"Predators who abused women, fraudsters who ripped off consumers, cheaters who broke the rules for their own gain," she enumerated, before adding: "I know Donald Trump's type."

Harris faces few obstacles to securing the nomination on August 7 in an online vote of delegates nearly two weeks before the formal Democratic national convention in Chicago.

And she comes backed by the apparatus of the old Biden campaign and floods of donations.

But to introduce herself to voters nationwide, she'll need all the help she can get.

Unknown quantity

Harris's last run at the presidency in 2020 ended in failure as she struggled to connect her personal story to policy positions. She got the consolation of a place on Biden's ticket, but the vice presidency is a notoriously unrewarding job in US politics.

Her approval ratings in office have been almost as bad as Biden's, although allies hope they will improve once she pitches herself.

Her candidacy is set to be historic by any measure: The first Black woman and the first South Asian woman ever nominated

for the presidency by Democrats or Republicans.

But while Harris's positions on a whole host of issues are well known in Washington, she remains something of an unknown quantity to the wider public.

She will be able to claim credit for popular Biden accomplishments, such as unprecedented government investment in infrastructure. However, she will also have to answer for the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan and initially high COVID in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic.

Trump's intense focus on illegal immigration may inflict real damage on Harris, who early on in the Biden presidency was given the unenviable task of working with Latin American governments to address the root causes of a record surge in migration over the US-Mexican border.

Harris will be on stronger ground when it comes to another hot button election issue: Abortion.

She became the face of the White House's efforts to target what she called "Trump abortion bans" in more than 21 states after the Supreme Court overturned federal protections for abortion access.

Referendum on Trump

On foreign policy, she toes Biden's pro-Ukraine line but has been tougher on Israel, delivering the administration's harshest language on the plight of Palestinians in the Gaza conflict. She was the first senior Biden official to call for a cease-fire.

Another top issue that Harris will boost, differentiating herself from fossil-fuel-champion Trump, is climate change.

She has a record as a California prosecutor of going after oil companies to curb pollution and has been to the left of Biden on environmental issues.

And she initially advocated for an end to fracking, although these days she is closer to Biden, who favors the technology.

Seasoned political strategist Rick Wilson, a prominent "Never Trump" former Republican, said Harris should avoid being too granular about policy with so little time left.

"I mean the kind of campaign where she says things like, 'Refer to my 687-page plan on climate or healthcare or whatever,'" he told the Talking Feds podcast on Monday.

"This race is a referendum about Donald Trump, top-to-bottom, stem-to-stern. It was about Joe Biden. Now it is entirely about Donald Trump."

In fuel-guzzling Saudi Arabia, electric cars pique interest

By Haitham El/Tabei
Agence France-Presse

RIYADH — For Hamed al-Rafidain, a Saudi human resources worker, an electric vehicle (EV) offers welcome savings, especially since his other car is a fuel-guzzling four-wheeler favoured by motorists in the desert kingdom.

The 39-year-old is part of a small but growing EV consumer base in Saudi Arabia, which hopes to become a hub for the technology as it seeks to diversify its economy away from oil.

Although the EV market in the world's largest oil exporter remains small compared with the United States and China, it tripled last year to nearly 800 cars, according to Saudi business news outlet Al Iqtisadiyah.

"What drove me to buy an electric vehicle was financial considerations," said Rafidain, who spends up to 2,000 riyals (\$530) a month on fuel for his off-road vehicle.

"Maintenance costs are also lower compared to a conventional vehicle, with no oil changes and no brake-pad replacements," he added, pointing to the engine-free storage space under the hood of his new car.

Chinese EV giant BYD is expected to dominate the Saudi market. Its global rival Tesla of the United States has no dealerships in the Gulf kingdom.

With eight million residents, Riyadh experiences traffic jams that contribute to high pollution levels.

Rafidain said he chose an EV because of environmental concerns, noting electric vehicles "help reduce global warming in cities".

For a little over \$53,300, he bought a BYD that he mostly uses for short trips within the capital.

EV challenges

A lack of charging infrastructure and Saudi Arabia's vast size mean that many view their EVs as suitable for shorter trips, rather than replacements for conventional vehicles.

Using an EV for travel outside the city was a "gamble, especially since the infrastructure is still underdeveloped", Rafidain said, noting the range of current batteries is only about 400 kilometres.

While BYD and Lucid install charging stations directly at customers' homes, the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Company is working to place them elsewhere,

aiming for 5,000 across the country by 2030.

EV prices remain high in Saudi Arabia, where fuel costs are lower than in most countries, with a litre of petrol costing \$0.62.

A vehicle from Lucid, which opened a factory in Jeddah last year after a billion-dollar Saudi investment, costs \$92,000, but the arrival of BYD is expected to make EVs more affordable.

Industry expert Hossam Iraqi said EVs are less popular among Saudis owing to their size and performance in extreme heat.

"Most current electric vehicle production is small to medium-sized, which does not suit the needs of large Saudi families," he said, adding the Gulf region's extreme heat has an impact on battery efficiency.

Saudi surge

Salesman Hassan Mohammed expects strong EV sales this year, as demand grows at home and abroad.

"More than one car brand has opened its doors in the kingdom and now offers after-sales service, which has encouraged consumers," he said at an exhibition in northern Riyadh, where Saudis test-drove cars.

Al Iqtisadiyah reported in April that Saudi Arabia imported only 779 EVs in 2023, up from 210 the previous year, citing official Saudi statistics.

The country is also ramping up domestic production.

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, PIF, now controls 60 per cent of Lucid and has secured a deal with South Korea's Hyundai to establish a plant in the kingdom for both EVs and petrol-powered cars.

Additionally, Saudi EV brand CEER, launched in 2022, plans to start production in 2025.

Earlier this year, Saudi Industry Minister Bandar Al Kharif said the country was aiming to produce 300,000 EVs annually, without giving a timeline.

Riyadh, targeting carbon neutrality by 2050, was also in talks with battery producers, he said.

For now, some still prefer hybrid vehicles, which use both batteries and petrol to go longer distances.

"The balance between electricity and gasoline is economical and convenient," said Omar Al Shami, a 43-year-old Egyptian pharmacist, as he charged the car he bought for his wife.

"Things may change in the future," he said.

No paving stone unturned in Dutch garden greening contest

Agence France-Presse

AMSTERDAM — Renske's garden at her home in The Hague, once paved over, has been transformed beyond recognition into a lush oasis in the barely three months since she joined a competition to make Dutch cities greener.

The Netherlands' Tegelwippen, or "tile-flipping" contest, encourages residents to help cities adapt to climate change by ripping out heat-absorbing concrete paving stones and plant trees in their gardens instead.

Just three of those stones remain as a reminder of what Renske's garden looked like before she swapped a concrete jungle for one dotted with flowers, aromatic plants and shrubs.

Plants and greenery are "better for everything" than the ubiquitous concrete blocks that cover much of the ground in built-up areas, said Renske, a 36-year-old law professor, who asked not to use her family name for privacy.

"It's less hot and the sound of the city doesn't bounce off the tiles," she told AFP at her home near The Hague's city centre.

Old concrete paving stones are found all over the densely populated The Netherlands, a quarter of which lies beneath sea level and is particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Swapping the stones out to plant green gardens "really helps to combat urban warming", said Eva Braaksma, who works at the agency that thought up the "tile-flipping" contest.

"Paving stones get very hot in the sun, and tiles do not absorb rainwater, so replacing them with plants cools the garden," she said.

Besides, "greenery makes you happier".

"Together we are making The Netherlands a little greener," Braaksma said at an "action day" organised by the Amsterdam municipality in a suburb of the Dutch capital.

Around her, an army of volunteers was busy removing paving stones from the gardens of around 10 people who felt unable to rip them up themselves.

10 million stones

Almost two million paving stones have been "flipped" so far this year, according to a counter on the competition website, and around 10 million since the contest started.

It was dreamed up by the Frank Lee creative agency during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to inject a bit of fun into greening The Netherlands' cities.

"We got the idea for a competition because we saw there were many tiled gardens in Dutch cities," Braaksma said.

"We thought it would be fun to make a competition out of it to encourage people to get involved," she added.

People taking part tell the competition how many paving stones they have removed from their gardens by uploading a picture to the website.

A collection is then organised so that they can be recycled, Braaksma said.

Having won several environmental awards, the Dutch competition is already catching on in neighbouring Belgium, with growing interest in Germany, Austria and France.

'A necessity'

In Amsterdam, 68-year-old Maida Paesch was watching a group of volunteers remove the concrete stones from the garden of the home she has lived in for the past 15 years.

In that time, rainwater would collect in a garden corner where it would stagnate because the paving prevented it from draining away.

"I hope this water will now be absorbed by the earth," the retired grandmother said, adding that she was already imagining her grandchildren playing in the garden and watering her plants.

Her neighbourhood in northern Amsterdam is particularly susceptible to being water-logged, said Daniel Goedbloed, a water management specialist appointed by the Amsterdam municipality.

"When it rains really hard, fully tiled places prevent the rain from being absorbed by the ground, flooding streets and gardens, while the ground itself dries out, even in rainy weather," he told AFP.

Back in The Hague, Renske said her "concrete neighbourhood" was an "urban heat island on the map".

She thinks all urban dwellers should trade their tiles for trees.

"It's a bit daunting at first, to dig up your garden completely," she said.

"But if we all do it, it can impact on how the city warms, and it's a necessity."

PETROL



Egypt announced a new sharp increase in fuel prices as it slashed government subsidies

Egypt raises fuel prices as part of IMF-backed reforms

Country to increase petrol prices by 15%

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt announced on Thursday a 15-per cent increase in petrol prices, part of a reform package requested by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to proceed with a \$5 billion loan to the cash-strapped government.

The Egyptian petroleum ministry said the price hike would come into effect on Friday.

The announcement comes ahead of an IMF meeting on Monday to review the April payout package, unlocking \$820 million in funds after Cairo received another such tranche of the loan in late June.

Egypt is suffering its worst ever economic crisis, with ballooning foreign debt driving up

inflation and resulting in several consecutive devaluations of the local currency against the dollar.

Egypt is suffering its worst ever economic crisis

Inflation peaked at nearly 40 per cent last year, before winding down to 27.5 per cent in June.

The IMF has demanded wide-ranging reforms, most notably

adopting a liberal exchange regime as well as limiting government spending and incentivising private investment.

Alongside the economic crisis, Egypt has also been caught in regional tensions, with bloody wars raging in neighbouring Gaza and Sudan.

Attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on shipping around the Red Sea have also hit revenues from Egypt's Suez Canal, recording a 23.4-per cent drop in the 2023-2024 fiscal year compared to the previous one.

The key waterway, which connects Asia to Europe, normally carries about 12 per cent of global maritime trade.

CENTRAL BANK

China makes surprise cut to key lending rate

Bank of China cut rate for its MLF to 2.3% from 2.5%

BEIJING (AFP) — China's central bank on Thursday unexpectedly cut a medium-term interest rate by the most in more than four years, marking the latest move by authorities to boost economic growth.

The world's second-largest economy has encountered severe headwinds in recent years, as a heavily indebted property sector, sluggish consumption and high youth unemployment weigh on confidence.

Beijing has introduced a host of measures in recent months in a bid to get it humming again, but a full rebound has so far proven elusive.

In a surprise move on Thursday morning, the People's Bank of China slashed the rate for its medium-term lending facility (MLF) — the interest for one-year loans to financial institutions — to 2.3 per cent, from 2.5 per cent.

The central bank typically makes MLF announcements on a pre-determined day in the middle of the month.

The last time the rate was cut was in August but the latest is the biggest since April 2020.

It comes after the PBoC cut two benchmark interest rates on Monday, as expected.

The country's economy has failed to fully recover from the impact of tough anti-pandemic measures, which were lifted in late 2022.

Chinese authorities



Buildings are seen late evening after rain in Beijing on Wednesday

ties have set an official growth target for this year of around five per cent.

But that is considered ambitious by many economists and it expanded just 4.7 per cent on-year in the second quarter, data showed last week.

Those figures came as Communist Party leaders,

including President Xi Jinping, gathered for a meeting in Beijing, where they issued repeated calls to "eliminate risks" in the economy and boost domestic consumption.

However, they have so far offered few concrete measures to revive growth.

Markets track tech-led plunge on Wall St, yen extends gains

HONG KONG (AFP) — Heavy selloffs in tech stocks hammered equity markets on Thursday, tracking a plunge on Wall Street as disappointing earnings caused traders to panic that a long-running rally in the sector may have been overdone.

Tokyo's Nikkei led the retreat in equities, diving more than three per cent, with a stronger yen adding to the downward pressure on exporters.

Global stocks have pushed ever higher this year — with New York's three main indexes hitting multiple records — with tech titans such as Alphabet and chip makers such as Nvidia and TSMC boosted by an explosion of interest in all things linked to artificial intelligence.

The rallies have been helped by blockbuster profits and upbeat outlooks, causing investors to pile more cash in owing to a fear of missing out.

However, with valuations pushing to dizzying heights, analysts have been warning about retreat, and Tuesday's earnings from Tesla and Google-parent Alphabet provided a selling opportunity.

Tesla said profits fell 45 per cent in the second quarter owing to price cuts and aggressive AI investment

and, while Alphabet exceeded forecasts, results from YouTube were less upbeat.

The two firms are part of the "Magnificent Seven" tech kings who have been key to the driving gains in markets this year. Tesla shed 12.3 per cent and Alphabet gave up 5 per cent.

All three main indexes on Wall Street tumbled, with the Nasdaq shedding more than 3 per cent and the S&P 500 down more than 2 per cent in its worst day since December 2022.

"Investors are now facing the pressing question: How long will it take for these massive investments by hyperscalers to start delivering over-the-top results?" said analyst Stephen Innes.

"Patience is becoming the new flag-bearer for recent tech stockholders as they wait for these tech bets to pay off," he said in his Dark Side Of The Boom newsletter.

Asia followed suit, with tech firms among the big losers — Seoul's SK Hynix dived nearly 9 per cent despite strong earnings, while Samsung lost two per cent.

Tokyo-listed Sony was off more than five per cent and Soft-Bank 9.4 per cent, and in Hong Kong Tencent gave up three per cent

with Meituan 5.7 per cent lower.

Hong Kong and Shanghai fell despite a surprise cut in a key rate by the Chinese central bank.

Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington, Mumbai, Bangkok, Manila and Jakarta were also well in the red. Taipei was closed for a second day owing to a typhoon.

The yen extended a rally against the dollar...

London, Paris and Frankfurt were sharply lower in the morning.

The Nikkei in Tokyo tumbled 3.3 per cent, with carmaker Nissan shedding seven per cent after issuing a profit warning.

Hideyuki Suzuki, senior analyst at SBI Securities, told AFP that "falls in the US tech sector — especially a plunge in Tesla shares, and disappointing Alphabet earnings — as well as a stronger yen weighed on the market".

The boom in electric vehicle sales is slowing, and "excessive ex-

pectations for AI and other technologies are being corrected", he said.

However, he added that "it's not that economic fundamentals are worsening, so shares may rebound after" Japanese and US central bank meetings.

"The yen is higher on speculation that the Bank of Japan may hike interest rates" at its meeting next week but views are divided, Suzuki said.

The yen extended a rally against the dollar that has been underway in recent weeks, having hit a nearly four-decade low near 162 at the start of this month.

The Japanese unit strengthened to as much as 152.10 per dollar at one point.

"The market is now firmly pricing in a rate cut by the Fed in September," said Moody's Analytics' Stefan Angrick told AFP.

"Inflation and growth in the US have cooled. At the same time, market participants still expect the Bank of Japan to hike rates, if not at the upcoming meeting next week, then in September or October.

"We expect the yen to appreciate as the rate gap between Japan and the US narrows and speculation against the Japanese currency fades."

REGULATIONS

Digital bank Revolut secures UK banking licence

LONDON (AFP) — British fintech company Revolut said on Thursday it had obtained a long-awaited UK banking licence —but must wait to lend money and take deposits as it remains in a restrictive phase.

The licence granted by regulators linked to the Bank of England will allow Revolut to eventually compete better with established UK lenders, such as HSBC and Barclays.

It is seen also as a gateway to gaining bank licences around the world.

'We are incredibly proud to reach this important milestone ...'

Revolut has already secured such authorisation in the European Union.

In the UK, the Prudential Regulation Authority has granted the fintech entry into the "mobilisation" stage, Revolut said Thursday.

This was a "UK banking licence with restrictions", it added, noting the move would give it time to build operations for eventual customer rollout.

Revolut, which has waited more than three years for the licence amid regulatory caution, has over 9 million

UK customers, around one-fifth of its global total.

"We are incredibly proud to reach this important milestone in the journey of the company and we will ensure we deliver on making Revolut the bank of choice for UK customers," Chief Executive Nik Storonsky said in a statement.

The group last year earned pre-tax profits of \$545 million on revenues of more than \$2.2 billion.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD 5.1 million spread over 4.5 million shares that traded through 3,000 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.44 per cent, closing at 2416.14 points.

Out of 92 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 35 companies rose while the share price of another 25 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Arab Pesticides and Veterinary Drugs Mfg. Co. by 7.42 per cent, Jordan Kuwait Bank by 6.79 per cent, Jordan Express Tourist Transport by 5.73 per cent, Tuhama for Financial Investments by 4.88 per cent, and Jordan French Insurance by 4.84 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Al Dawliyah for Hotels and Malls by 4.88 per cent, Arab Company for Investment Projects by 4.67 per cent, National Portfolio Securities by 4.41 per cent, Ready Mix Concrete and Construction Supplies by 4.20 per cent, and Al-Quds Ready Mix by 4.07 per cent.



OLYMPICS

Murray withdraws from tennis singles but will play doubles

PARIS (AFP) — Andy Murray has withdrawn from the tennis singles at the Paris Olympics but will still take part in the doubles, the two-time gold medallist said on Thursday. The British former world number one, who will retire at the end of his fifth Games, has still not fully recovered from back surgery he had last month. He believes the men's doubles, where he is playing with Dan Evans, offers his best chance of another medal. "I've taken the decision to withdraw from the singles to concentrate on the doubles with Dan," said the 37-year-old. "Our practice has been great and we're playing well together. Really looking forward to getting started and representing GB one more time." Murray won gold in singles at London 2012 and in Rio four years later, as well as silver in mixed doubles with Laura Robson in 2012. His withdrawal means his final singles match was his brief second-round appearance at Queen's Club against Jordan Thompson last month before he was forced to pull out because of a spinal cyst.

Biles nails signature vault in Olympic gymnastics training

PARIS (AFP) — US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles got her first taste of Bercy Arena on Thursday, opening podium training on balance beam ahead of the start of the Olympic women's competition at the weekend. Biles is strongly tipped to add to her cache of four Olympic golds at the Paris Games after a tumultuous Tokyo campaign, when she withdrew from most of her events as she battled the dangerous and disorientating "twisties". After a near two-year absence, Biles has reestablished herself at the top of a sport she redefined with a unique combination of athleticism and artistry. Meticulous attention to her mental health has the 27-year-old heading into her third Olympics on her own terms. "Nobody's forcing me to do it," Biles said after earning her Paris berth. "I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself — just to remind myself that I can still do it." Biles nailed a spectacular Yurchenko double pike vault, sticking like glue on the landing. It is a skill so difficult that no other woman has attempted it in competition. She and her US teammates were all business as they got a feel for the competition arena, opening on balance beam, where Biles delivered some solid tumbling elements.

Jordan joins the World at 2024 Paris Olympic Games

By Aline Bannayan

AMMAN — The 2024 Olympic Games officially opened in Paris, France on Friday with over 10,000 athletes from 200 nations taking part, marking the 12th time for Jordan at the Olympics.

The 2024 Summer Olympics will run up to August 11 with Paris as the main host city, and events held at 16 other cities spread across France. It will be the second time in history that the opening of the Olympic Games will be held outside a stadium, with the parade of nations planned as a boat parade along the River Seine with the route featuring the cultural elements and views of Paris landmarks

The Games will feature 329 events in 32 sports, with four optional sports that were proposed by the Paris Organising Committee: Breakdancing will make its Olympic debut, while skateboarding, sport climbing, and surfing will return from 2020.

As with many athletes who settle for symbolic participation at the Games, Jordan's contingent includes a combination of athletes qualifying through competitions, while non-qualifying athletes take part based on the "quota" or wild card system which aims at making sure countries



Photo courtesy of New York Tech

Muath Khawaldeh, a Jordanian marathon runner at the Olympics in Paris, prepares for the event in the US running venues

from all corners of the globe are present.

The Kingdom will compete in 6 sports with a total of 9 qualifying athletes out of the 12 member team: A record 4 qualifiers in Taekwondo (Olympian silver medalist Saleh Sharabati, Juliana Al Sadeq, Rama Abul Rub, Zaid Mustafa), 3 in boxing (Hussein and Ziyad Ishaish, Obada Al Kasbeh), gymnast Ahmad Abu Saoud, table tennis player Zaid Abu Yamen, as well as three wild card participants swimmer Amr Wirr and Karen Bilbeisi, and marathon runner Muath Khawaldeh.

Since first participating at the 1980 Olympics, Jordan earned a spot on the medals table of the world's biggest sporting competition only at the past two Olympics Games.

The 2016 Rio Games went down in Jordanian sporting history when then 20-year old Ahmad Abu Ghaush, the youngest competitor in taekwondo's 68 kilogramme weight class also became the first taekwondo athlete in the Arab world to win gold and Jordan's first ever Olympic medal. He was 2012 World Junior Champion, 2012

Asian Junior Champion and 2016 Asian Olympic qualifying gold medalist.

Following Rio, the Tokyo 2020 Games, which was postponed by the COVID19 Pandemic to 2021, saw Jordan win a silver and bronze medal with a record 10 of the 14 Jordanian athletes qualifying through competition. Saleh Sharabati became a new national hero winning a silver in taekwondo following in the footsteps of teammate Abu Ghaush. A second medal was secured by Abdul Rahman Masatfeh who clinched a bronze as Karate made

its Olympic debut.

Earlier, there were three bronze medals at the 1988 Seoul Games by Samer Kamal and Ihsan Abu Sheikha, and at the 1992 Barcelona Games by Ammar Fahed. However, taekwondo was still considered an "exhibition sport" at the time.

Until 2000, table tennis was the only game whose athletes qualified through competition, through players Jacqueline Duqum (Seoul 1988), Nadia Rashad (Barcelona 1992) and Tatiana Najjar (Sydney 2000). Taekwondo and boxing followed soon after.

In 2004, Zeina Sha'ban (table tennis), Ibrahim Bisharat (equestrian), Nadine Dawani and Ibrahim Aqil (taekwondo) qualified to the Athens Olympics.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Dawani, Bisharat and Sha'ban again qualified. In 2012, Jordan had Mohammad Abu Libbeh, Dawani and Raya Hatahet qualifying (taekwondo), Bisharat (equestrian) and Ihab Al Matbouli (boxing). In 2016, it was Abu Ghaush (taekwondo) and Hussein Ishaish (boxing). In 2020, the 10 qualifiers included veteran Bisharat, competing at his fourth Olympics; five boxers (Ziyad and Hussein Ishaish, Ali Hindawi, Mohammad Wadi and Obada Al Kasbeh); Saleh Sharabati and Juliana Sadeq (taekwondo), Younes Salman (judo); Abdul Rahman Masatfeh (karate).

On the Olympic scene, Jordan's national anthem was played for the first time when the late Maha Barghouti won a gold medal in wheelchair table tennis at the Sydney Paralympics in 2000. At the 2020 Paralympic Games, Jordan added four more golds: 3 by Omar Karadeh, Abdul Karim Khattab and Jamil Shibli (power lifting), and Ahmad Hindi (athletics).

Since 1984, Jordan has won a total of 17 medals at the Paralympics (5 gold, 6 silver and 6 bronze).

New Japan film camera aimed at 'nostalgic' young fans

By Natsuko Fukue
Agence France-Presse

TOKYO — Keita Suzuki leads a group of young analogue photography fans around a coastal city in Japan, stopping to snap pastel hydrangea blooms with bulky vintage film cameras.

The participants later share their lush retro-looking snaps online — a trend a top Japanese camera brand wants to capture with its first new film model in two decades.

Instead of pressing a smartphone button, more and more young people "want to experience the original act of taking a photograph: Winding the film up, looking through the viewfinder and releasing the shutter", Suzuki told AFP.

Another "beauty" of film photography is that with limited physical film, you must think carefully about which memories to "lock in" to each photograph, he said.

Suzuki advertises his tours on social media and has seen a growing interest from teens and 20-somethings loading 35mm film and taking it to be developed for the first time.

Yuriko Yamada was one of around 20 people who joined a recent gathering in Kamakura near Tokyo.

"Digital photos are clear and clean, but film ones have faint, soft colours, which I prefer," the 34-year-old said.

"It takes time to see the final product, but I really enjoy the process," she added. "It feels nostalgic."

Japan's biggest camera brands stopped mak-



AFP photo

This photo taken on June 29 shows Yuriko Yamada (right), a participant of a film photography tour in Kamakura, skimming through her prints with her friend at a camera shop in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture

ing analogue film models in the 2000s as digital ones became dominant.

Despite the surge in popularity, many of those on the photo tour said they still find it difficult to repair their old cameras because the parts are no longer being produced.

'Many hurdles'

To meet rising demand from new film fans, the \$500 Pentax 17 — the brand's first analogue model in 21 years — was launched in Europe and the United States in June, and Japan this month.

The camera has a classic black appearance but takes half-frame photos, meaning a 24-exposure film yields 48 shots, which are

ing old models for a new generation of analogue enthusiasts.

Portrait-orientated like phone photos. It has been so popular in Japan that pre-orders sold out, according to manufacturer Ricoh Imaging Company.

Product planner and designer Takeo Suzuki, nicknamed TKO — a revered figure among photography fans — said Ricoh had been "surprised" by the "huge" global response.

Plans to release a new analogue camera were hatched around 2020, but weren't easy to realise.

"This was a completely new project, so it was like groping in the dark," Suzuki said.

"There were so many hurdles, but we received a lot of support from many people."

Pentax engineers used

archive drawings of past cameras, some on paper, to try and make manual winders and other analogue technology.

But they struggled, so the company asked retired colleagues to come back to help.

"They taught us tips and tricks that were not on the blueprints, but were really recipes in the engineer's head," Suzuki said.

By doing so, they "revived the old technology little by little."

'Spark conversations'

Instant and disposable film cameras made by Ricoh's rival Fujifilm have also become popular as the trend for sharing old-fashioned photos on social media grows.

Back then, "young people found it difficult to enter" as mostly older male customers would be having "intimidating, technical conversations" with staff, he said.

But now Ishikawa actively courts them with fun items such as stickers to decorate photos and leather camera straps, as well as a custom developing service — speaking to customers beforehand about the style they want.

"Young people see film photography shared on social media, and they want to try it themselves," he said.

Yamada, the photo tour participant, says she feels "more and more into film photography".

"It's inconvenient, but I feel it's something new."

Renowned British conductor steps down after assault claims

LONDON (AFP) — British conductor John Eliot Gardiner on Wednesday said he was stepping down from the choir and orchestra he has led for six decades after claims he hit a performer.

The acclaimed conductor, 81, withdrew last August from the BBC Proms — Britain's foremost classical musical festival — after the incident in which he is said to have struck a member of the Monteverdi Choir.

"After a long period of deep consideration and reflection, I have decided to step down as leader and artistic director of the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra," he said in the statement.

Gardiner added that he had done a "great deal of soul searching" over the past year and had "apologised repeatedly and unreservedly" for his loss of control.

Gardiner is a veteran of the Proms and conducted during King Charles III's coronation in May 2023.

It is alleged he hit bass singer William Thomas after he went the wrong way off stage last August after a performance at the Berlioz festival at the composer's birthplace near Grenoble in south-eastern France.

Gardiner founded the Monteverdi Choir in 1964.

He described it as the "proudest and most inspiring project of my life" but added that he thought it was best that he and the orchestra parted company.

After the incident Gardiner withdrew from engagements and said he

was seeking specialist help.

Gardiner said the choir and orchestra had been the "proudest and most inspiring project of my life" and that he had reached his decision "with a heavy heart after six decades of remarkable collaborative achievement".

In 2010, the conductor addressed his reputation as a hard taskmaster.

"I can be impatient, I get stroppy, I haven't always been compassionate," he told The Financial Times.

But he said stories of "a dictatorial style that has bordered on rudeness" were overblown. "Someone needs to be in charge", he said.

'I can be impatient, I get stroppy, I haven't always been compassionate'

His string of awards include a knighthood and honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music. He has also won two Grammys for opera and choral music.

The board of the choir and orchestra paid tribute to Gardiner for his "extraordinary musical influence over the past 60 years".

It said he had taken "full responsibility for the incident".