

MASSIVE SABOTAGE French train services still disrupted

AFP, Paris

Traffic on three major French high speed train lines remained disrupted yesterday, a day after saboteurs paralysed much of the rail network ahead of the Olympic Games opening ceremony in Paris.

Seven out of 10 trains ran yesterday on the three key routes with delays averaging one to two hours, the state railroad SNCF said.

Kathleen Cuvellier, speaking in the northern city of Lille, said her journey to Avignon in the south was going to be "hell" now.

Cuvellier, travelling with her two year-old son, said she now had to take a slower train to Paris to take another one for Avignon, adding: "The travel time was four hours and now it's going to be seven".

Cecile Bonnefond, whose train from Lille to the western city of Nantes was cancelled, added: "One doesn't have any choice".

Concern grows as Venezuela blocks polls observers

AFP, Caracas

Concerns grew Friday over the fairness of Venezuela's presidential elections as Caracas was accused of blocking international observers from arriving for today's vote, including a delegation of ex presidents.

In the latest blow to an already fraught election run-up, Panama said authorities had prevented a flight carrying former Latin American leaders -- all critics of President Nicolas Maduro -- from leaving its international airport.

Colombian officials reported being denied entry at Caracas airport, as did conservative Spanish MPs and Chilean senators.

Socialist Maduro, 61, will seek reelection today to a third six-year term amid accusations of opposition harassment by an authoritarian regime.

His government agreed with the opposition last year to hold free and fair elections in 2024, with international observers present -- winning a temporary easing of sanctions from the United States.

But he since reneged on some of the conditions, and loyalist institutions barred opposition leader Maria Corina Machado from running against him.

SOUTHEASTERN SERBIA 30 Afghan, Nepali migrants hurt as van overturns

AFP, Belgrade

Thirty Afghan and Nepali migrants were injured when a van transporting them overturned in southeastern Serbia, the RTS state-run television reported yesterday.

Three migrants remained in a hospital while the others received medical care and were placed at a reception centre run by the country's commissariat for refugees, RTS said.

The migrants are men from Nepal and Afghanistan, the broadcaster reported citing the commissariat.

The accident occurred on Friday on a highway near the town Bela Palanka when the van, transporting nearly 50 migrants, slipped off the road.

Serbia lies along the so-called Balkans route used by migrants heading towards the European Union.

In 2023, nearly 100,000 migrants used the route, according to the bloc's border surveillance agency Frontex.

Migrants take perilous journey every year to reach Europe.

A boat with at least 45 refugees has capsized off the coast of Yemen's Taiz on Wednesday night, and there are only four survivors, the UN refugee agency in Yemen said on Thursday.

The boat capsized because of strong winds and overloading, the agency added. It said it was working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist the survivors and provide protection.

No further details were provided about the rest of the refugees. In June, at least 49 migrants died and 140 went missing after their vessel, which departed from Somalia carrying 260 migrants, capsized in the Yemeni coast.



Palestinians inspect the damage following an Israeli strike on the Khadija school housing displaced people in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

INTENSE FIGHTING IN KHAN YOUNIS More than 180,000 Gaza civilians displaced: UN

AFP, Khan Younis

More than 180,000 Palestinians have fled fierce fighting around the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis in four days, the United Nations said Friday, after an Israeli operation to extract captives' bodies from the area.

Recent "intensified hostilities" in the Khan Younis area, more than nine months into the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip, have fuelled "new waves of internal displacement across Gaza", said the UN humanitarian agency, OCHA.

It said "about 182,000 people" have been displaced from central



that its forces had "eliminated approximately 100 terrorists" in the city this week.

Israel's military chief, Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi said the captives' bodies were pulled from underground tunnels and walls in a "hidden place".

Troops "were near those fallen bodies in the past, we did not know how to reach them" until this week, Halevi said in a statement.

Witnesses and rescuers said heavy battles continued around eastern Khan Younis on Friday. The Nasser Hospital said 26 bodies were brought to the medical site.

According to UN figures, the vast majority of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once by the fighting.

In a separate development, an Israeli military commander said Friday that troops in the country's north were preparing

for a "decisive offensive" against Lebanon's Hezbollah after months of deadly cross border exchanges.

Israeli forces have traded near-daily fire with Hamas ally Hezbollah.

Major General Ori Gordin, Israel's commanding officer in the north, told troops that "we have already eliminated more than 500 terrorists in Lebanon, the great majority of them from Hezbollah", an army statement said.

According to an AFP tally, more than nine months of violence have killed at least 523 people in Lebanon.

Most of them, 342 people, have been confirmed to be Hezbollah militants but the tally also includes 104 civilians. Gordin did not mention civilian casualties.

In northern Israel, at least 18 Israeli soldiers and 13 civilians have been killed, according to the military.

S AFRICA SCHOOL

Video shows 'auction' of black pupils

AFP, Cape Town

A Cape Town school is investigating allegations of racist bullying after a video emerged that appears to show pupils pretending to auction off their black classmates, the education department said Friday.

The video shared on WhatsApp and leaked to the media shows at least two male black pupils behind a gate in a fenced-off area as several mixed-race "coloured" students appear to be shouting bids for them.

The video, entitled "Slavery at school is crazy", was "deeply disturbing and hurtful", Western Cape Education Department spokesperson Bronagh Hammond said.

The school has opened a disciplinary investigation into allegations of racist bullying, she said.

News24 cited a parent as saying that a group of boys had tried to force their son into a cage but he escaped.

"They were picking up black boys and putting them in the cage," the unidentified woman was quoted as saying.

Although a minority nationally, mixed-race South Africans who identify themselves as "coloured" mostly live in Western Cape province, of which Cape Town is the capital.

'It'll be fixed!'

Trump tells supporters they won't have to vote in the future

REUTERS, Washington

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump told Christians on Friday that if they vote for him this November, "in four years, you don't have to vote again. We'll have it fixed so good, you're not gonna have to vote."

It was not clear what the former president meant by his remarks, in an election campaign where his Democratic opponents accuse him of being a threat to democracy, and after his attempt to overturn his 2020 defeat to President Joe Biden, an effort that led to the deadly insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to a request for clarification of his comments. Trump was speaking at an event organized by the conservative group Turning Point Action in West Palm Beach, Florida. Trump said: "Christians, get out and vote, just this time. You won't have to do it anymore. Four more years, you know what, it will be fixed, it will be fine, you won't have to vote anymore, my beautiful Christians."

He added: "I love you Christians. I'm a Christian. I love you, get out, you gotta get out and vote. In four years, you don't have to vote again, we'll have it fixed so good you're not going to have to vote," Trump said. In an interview with Fox News in December, Trump said that if he won the November 5 election he would be a dictator, but only on "day one", to close the southern border with Mexico and expand oil drilling.

SOUTH AFRICAN DROUGHT

Worst yet to come in once-in-a-century: WFP

AFP, Johannesburg

A record drought that has devastated crops across southern Africa, causing millions of people to go hungry and pushing five countries to declare a national disaster, is entering its worst stage, the UN warned.

The UN's World Food Programme said it expected the number of people struggling to put enough food on the table to increase as the lean season, the period between harvests when food is scarcest, gets underway. "The worst period comes now," WFP's acting regional director for southern Africa, Lola Castro, told AFP in an interview. "People haven't been able to pick anything and the problem is the next harvest is only in April 2025."

The small kingdom of Lesotho became two weeks ago the latest country to declare a state of national disaster over the El Nino-induced dry spell, after Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Other countries, like Angola and Mozambique, might follow soon or signal a gap between the food they have and the food they need, said Castro. According to some estimates, the drought is the worst to hit the region in 100 years, she said.

At least 27 million people have been affected in a region where many rely on agriculture to survive, Castro said, speaking from Johannesburg on Friday. The drought has wiped out 70 percent of the harvest in Zambia and 80 percent in Zimbabwe, severely reducing supply and pushing up food prices, she said. "When you go now to rural productive areas of Southern Africa, what you see is a devastated scenario," she said.



A bulldozer is used to put out flames off Highway 32 near Forest Ranch, California, US on Friday night. A huge, fast-moving and rapidly growing wildfire in northern California has forced more than 4,000 people to evacuate as firefighters battle gusty winds and perilously dry conditions, authorities said.

US defends law forcing sale of TikTok app

AFP, San Francisco

TikTok's collection of user data makes it a national security threat, the US Justice Department said Friday in response to a civil suit by the Chinese-owned firm aimed at preventing the forced sale of the app.

TikTok's suit in a Washington federal court argues that a law, which forces the video platform to be sold next year or face a US ban, violates First Amendment rights of free speech.

"Given TikTok's broad reach within the United States, the capacity for China to use TikTok's features to achieve its overarching objective to undermine American interests creates a national-security threat of immense depth and scale," the Justice Department wrote in its filing.