



5 World Health Organization declares Africa free of polio



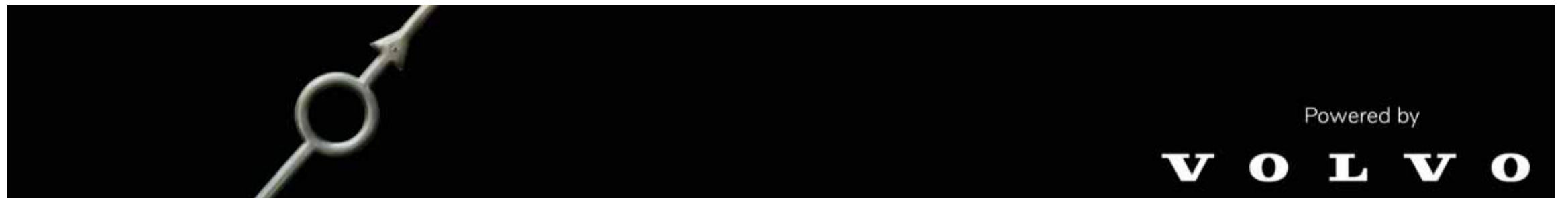
8 NBK-Bahrain reports profit of BD 60.89 million in H1 2020



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16 Flustered Williams crashes out, Djokovic reaches quarterfinals



Interior minister comfortably defeats no-confidence vote

MPs file two grillings against premier • Hayef to grill Saleh again



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh holds a document during a session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh yesterday comfortably defeated a no-confidence motion filed by 10 MPs last week following a grilling in which he was accused of benefiting from his post and violating the law. Minutes after the vote, MPs Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei filed two separate grillings against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah over alleged violations and mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis.

MP Mohammad Hayef, one of those who voted against the interior minister, said he will file a fresh grilling against the minister today. Thirty-five lawmakers renewed their confidence in the minister while 13 MPs voted in support of the motion, which would have unseated the minister had it won the support of 25 MPs.

HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to Saleh for winning confidence of the Assembly. He commended Saleh's answers to the grilling he faced on Aug 18 and the consequent confidence of the parliament during yesterday's session.

The grilling of the minister was marred by the leaks of two sensitive videos allegedly showing top officials plotting to tap social media accounts of a number of Kuwaiti citizens. Saleh told the house ahead of the vote that he had taken a decision to send into retirement the chief of the state security

agency, but added that he withdrew the decision yesterday and asked the government's legal department to determine its legality.

The secret service chief and seven officers had already been suspended pending further investigation and the entire case was sent to the public prosecution for investigation. The minister also said he had sent to the public prosecution a ministry official for allegedly destroying archive files of the ministry. MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, who had grilled Saleh, charged members of what he called the "deep state" of threatening the security and future of the country and urged action against them. MP Safa Al-Hashem, defending the minister, criticized Muwaizri's grilling as lacking evidence, saying he only focused on personal accusations.

In his grilling, MP Kandari charged that the prime minister failed to manage the coronavirus crisis regarding issuing appropriate policies and decisions to control the negative impacts of the pandemic. He said the premier failed to check mismanagement in the signing of contracts worth KD 1.1 billion between March and the end of June. He also accused the premier of failure to take decisions to control the influx of expatriates into the country during the pandemic and also failed to draw appropriate policies to rectify the imbalance of the population structure that is in favor of expats.

Kandari also accused the prime minister of failing to manage public finances, whose resources

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News in brief

MoE approves remote learning

KUWAIT: Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi on Tuesday approved a decision to implement remote learning across all educational stages in the coming semester. The decision applies to all public, private and religious schools, according to a press release from the ministry. The decision is subject to revision in November in light of public health conditions, the statement added.

Sheep exports to Kuwait allowed

CAPE TOWN: A South African court ruled on Tuesday that Kuwaiti livestock exporter Al Mawashi could ship thousands of sheep to the Middle East, dealing a blow to animal welfare activists seeking to ban such exports on concerns that extreme heat could kill the animals en route. The court ruled that Al Mawashi could transport up to 56,000 sheep on a vessel out of South Africa's East London port "to destinations in the Middle East". — Reuters

Bahrain backs two-state solution

MANAMA: Bahrain said yesterday it was committed to the creation of a Palestinian state in talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, implicitly rejecting his push for Arab countries to swiftly normalize ties with Israel. "The king stressed the importance of intensifying efforts to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict according to the two-state solution... to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital," the official Bahrain News Agency reported. — AFP

Longer wait for US visas

WASHINGTON: US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the US agency in charge of processing immigration applications, said on Tuesday that it had avoided a planned furlough of 70 percent of its staff but warned that it still faced financial hardship that could result in some applicants experiencing longer wait times. USCIS is dependent on fees from new immigration applications. — AFP

Top clubs circle as Messi calls time at Barca

BARCELONA: Six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi has told Barcelona he wants to leave in a "bombshell" fax that is expected to spark a legal battle over a buy-out clause worth hundreds of millions of dollars and a fight from top European clubs eager to sign up the Argentinian. Signaling the end of an era at Barcelona, where Messi is the record scorer and has won four Champions League titles, the disgruntled Argentine wants to terminate his contract "unilaterally" by triggering a release clause, a source told AFP.

As neighbors build dams, Iraqis watch twin rivers dry up

DIWANIYAH, Iraq: With its neighbors activating new dams, Iraq's historic twin rivers could run dry - unless new infrastructure projects and tense talks with

Record COVID cases, but few deaths in Qatar

DOHA: Qatar has the world's highest per-capita coronavirus infection rate but one of the lowest death rates, due to extensive testing, a young population and lavish healthcare spending. With 40,702 cases per million since the pandemic began, Qatar is well ahead of next-placed Bahrain, which has seen nearly 29,000 cases per million, and San Marino at just over 21,000. Here is an explanation of why Qatar, home to 2.75 million people, has reported so many positive cases and how it has tackled the public

health emergency.

Qatar's health authorities are adamant that their high per-capita infection rate is down to one factor above all: Testing. Almost 600,000 people have been tested for the novel coronavirus, over a fifth of the population. "Because of our low threshold for testing, we have identified many more asymptomatic and mild cases of the virus than other countries," the chair of the National Strategic Group on COVID-19 Abdullatif Al-Khal told AFP.

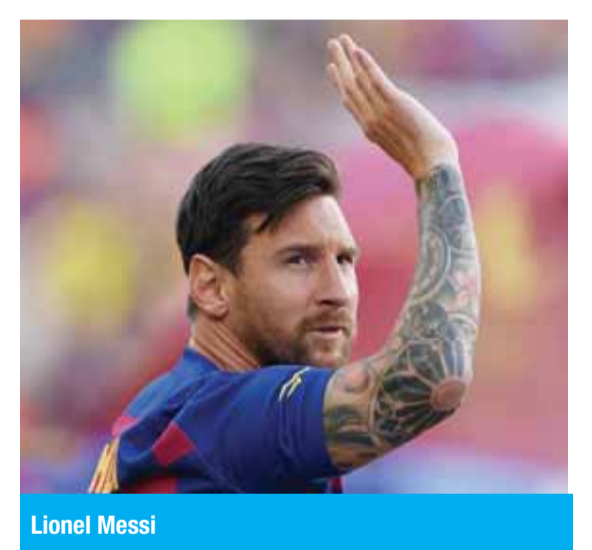
But beyond that, Qatar has faced local outbreaks that spread fast because of its reliance on foreign laborers living in cramped, unsanitary conditions, as it transforms the country ahead of the 2022 World Cup. Antoine Flahault, co-director of the

Manchester City, Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Milan are among the clubs to have been linked to Messi, who is among the greatest players in history and has wages to match, with a reported weekly salary of nearly one million euros. ESPN reported that Messi spoke last week with Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola about a possible move. Barcelona have yet to react officially but are understood to believe Messi's release clause expired in June, and that he remains under contract until the end of the 2021 season.

Relations have plummeted this year and speculation swirled about Messi's departure after this month's humiliating 8-2 Champions League quarter-final defeat to Bayern Munich, which left Barca without a trophy for the first time since 2007. The 33-year-old's demand, faxed by his lawyers, prompted protests against Barcelona's under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu. — AFP (See Page 15)

Turkey and Iran bear fruit. Nowhere is the effect on the country more palpable than in Basra, Iraq's only coastal province. Here, the Tigris and Euphrates - on which millions of Iraqis rely to farm - meet at the Shatt al-Arab waterway before spilling into the Gulf.

But with flows already heavily weakened, seawater is pushing back into the freshwater rivers, strangling wildlife and human settlements that have survived on these banks for millennia. Iraq's water woes aren't new. But with increasing regional desertification and population growth, Turkey and Iran are keener than ever to keep precious water resources for themselves.



Lionel Messi

Their new dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, and the tributaries that feed them, have reduced water flows into Iraq by half, said Baghdad's Water Minister Mehdi Al-Hamdani. But he remains hopeful, with plans in the works to improve access across the country and guarantee drinking water to all, even in a worst-case scenario.

Hamdani, who headed Iraq's dams directorate before becoming minister, said there were plans to build a large reservoir in Makhoul, north of Baghdad. But new dams alone won't save Iraq's waterways, experts warn. — AFP (See Page 8)



DOHA: In this photo taken on May 7, 2020, a health worker collects a swab sample from a man at a drive-thru testing service for COVID-19. — AFP

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Local

Kuwaiti professor urges oil investment in Africa markets

'Political differences bigger threat on prices than COVID-19'

KUWAIT: Economics Professor at Kuwait University from the College of Business Administration Dr Anwar Al-Shriaan called on Kuwait to invest in oil within promising emerging markets such as Africa, by establishing refineries and petrochemical factories, in order to maximize the state's income. Dr Shriaan warned of completely relying on the sale of crude oil, which is exposed to severe price shocks, the most recent of which was this year since the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in demand. This was discussed during a seminar organized by the Ministry of Oil (MoO) Tuesday, through the Zoom application, concerning the pandemic's impact on oil prices in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where the management in the oil sector must turn to the idea of the private sector, aiming to achieve profitability and not achieve revenues only, indicating that the oil sector in Kuwait is treated as a private sector, but in reality it is treated as a public sector.

The vital question is when the aviation and tourism sector in the world will revive, since this industry is linked to many things, and its future depends on the necessity of a vaccine against COVID-19, Shriaan explained. After many major countries resorted to opening their economies recently, they found that shops and restaurants have become empty and this matter will lead to a decrease in demand for a period of six months, he mentioned. The biggest danger facing oil prices currently is not the virus crisis, but rather the fluctuations in oil prices associated with political differences between the major producing countries, which are pushing prices to drop sharply. Additionally after the Organization of Petroleum

Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreement and countries outside it, they found out that prices are slowly rising, he noted. He underscored that the oil markets have become fragile in dealing with global economic shocks, and in the event that any major country resorts to raising production, prices will return to low levels, stressing that Kuwait must deal with the worst scenarios for oil prices, as it is expected that prices revolve around \$50 per barrel (pb) if there is no political shock that affects prices.

“Reprice oil in budget to \$40 pb”

Repricing oil

Shriaan called for the necessity of repricing the barrel of oil in Kuwait's budget for the current 2020/2021 fiscal year to \$40 pb, anticipating a decline in oil prices during the upheaval years, and the state should tend to borrow due to its low cost to the state compared to liquidating assets in the General Reserve Fund. In response to a question about the successful economic model in which the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries can be managed in light of the calls to restructure the oil sector and merge the sector companies, Shriaan said that he is against the idea of transferring previous experiences to Kuwait, given the nature and privacy of Kuwait in managing the oil sector. In this regard, he underlined the need to manage the oil sector in a commercial way that aims to achieve profit, but with a governmental mentality, and the main criterion becomes achieving the highest profit and benefit to the state, thus work is done to prevent inflation in the corporate governance structure and reduce random employment. “Subsequently, cost reduction will be achieved significantly,” he said.



VIENNA: In this file photo taken on September 22, 2017, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) logo is pictured at OPEC's headquarters in Vienna. — AFP

On the future of the petrochemical industry in Kuwait, Shriaan mentioned that the value of oil is declining as a source of energy although many studies confirmed that this industry is a successful economic alternative and that Kuwait should focus completely on all the newly developed industrial sectors, indicating that this industry must be expanded, where it has a huge market worldwide. Kuwait should establish projects for refineries and petrochemicals abroad, not only at home, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, Public Relations Director at the Ministry of Oil (MoO) Sheikha Tamader Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said that MoO's virtual seminar on the impact of the virus on oil and fuel prices in the Arabian Gulf states is the first of its kind

using digital communication platforms and will implement a number of lectures. She stated that the importance of the symposium comes in response to the conditions that the world is going through due to the virus and the negative repercussions that affected oil prices as a result of the decrease in the quantities of demand, as a result of health measures imposed by many countries of the world to contain COVID-19, such as closures and restrictions on the movement of citizens, as well as travel and almost a complete halt in economic activity. She commended the efforts by Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf states within OPEC and its allies from abroad in this fragile stage of oil price stability and market equilibrium. — KUNA

EU trade chief committed to boosting ties with GCC

BRUSSELS: The European Union's Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan expressed his strong desire to strengthen trade and political relations between the 27-member European bloc and the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). “I am a very strong believer in improving the EU and Gulf relationships and my track-record shows I have backed my convictions with actions including my time as an EU Commission for agriculture,” Hogan told a webinar on Tuesday. “I think we can do a lot more together.”

Hogan, an Irish politician, welcomed the large number of people who listened to the webinar, saying it shows that there

is a lot of interest from the Gulf region and EU for a “stronger and closer relationship between our two regions.” The webinar, titled “Trends and Opportunities in EU-GCC Trade Relations,” was organized by the Brussels-based think tank Bussola Institute. Hogan noted that the EU-GCC partnership goes back to more than 30 years with the signing of the cooperation agreement in the 1988. “The relationship between the EU and GCC have been gaining significantly economic as well as political cooperation,” stressed Hogan.

Our trade, he noted, flows have gone strongly over the last 30 years and partic-

ularly in the last decade have doubled. The Gulf region is the eighth trading partner of the EU, he said and called for the resumption of the stalled EU-GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiations. “We should get round the table and resume our negotiations. We are working towards that objective at the moment,” he said. The EU trade chief said that two-way trade in goods between the two sides amounted to 121 billion euro (\$142 billion) in 2019. That does not include services and foreign direct investments. “From the point of view of the trade commissioner of the EU I am very committed to strengthening the trade relations we have and advancing them further,” he stressed and urged for closer cooperation between the two regional blocs to overcome the difficulties and challenges due to the current coronavirus pandemic.

He noted that the majority of GCC

countries have refrained from imposing unnecessary trade restrictions to deal with the coronavirus impact. He pointed out that the EU and the GCC have set up a region to region economic dialogue in 2018 to boost trade and economic relations. The EU supports the GCC diversification strategies, he said, and called for more workshops and seminars to strengthen the trade and economic relations between the two regional groups. The EU is also supporting GCC economic integration within itself, he said noting that this is a complex and challenging process but is vital. “We are there if any guidance and help is needed for this process,” he said. “I hope that in the coming months we can conclude a free trade agreement between us and we are anxious to do that.” The six-member GCC includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. — KUNA



EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan

Record COVID cases, but few...

Continued from Page 1

Swiss School of Public Health, told AFP that other countries with large populations of migrant workers, including Singapore and other Gulf nations, faced similar spikes in cases. “Singapore had a surge in cases last April which initiated in dormitories of migrant workers with poor levels of sanitation (and) health insurance,” he said.

Qatari capital Doha's outlying Industrial Area, the scene of the country's first surge of reported cases, was sealed by security forces and flooded with public health teams to contain the outbreak. Officials say strict new rules were brought in to improve hygiene in migrant workers' quarters.

Unlike some Gulf countries which have opted for dragnet testing, Doha has zeroed in on groups more vulnerable to infection, including migrant laborers and Qataris returning from overseas. More than one in five residents have now been tested, and at the height of the pandemic, more than one in four of those tests were positive, according to a laboratory source. Luxembourg leads the world testing rankings with 755 per 1,000 people since the pandemic began; Qatar ranks ninth globally with 203.

Gas-rich Qatar's heavy investment in its health system in recent years, coupled with its unusually young population of migrant workers, helped keep its fatality rate among the lowest in the world, authorities and experts say. Just 194 people have died - only 0.17 percent of those infected, accord-

ing to official statistics.

Qatar's death rate of 67 deaths per million population is the second lowest in the Gulf Cooperation Council bloc, behind only the UAE at 37 per million. By contrast, the US has reported 523 deaths per million. “The reason being they probably have (one of) the best health systems - they are well-equipped and they were well prepared,” Abdinasir Abubakar, from the World Health Organization's regional office, told AFP.

Qatar's critical care infrastructure also proved resilient, in contrast to some countries where the death rate has been much higher. The Gulf state's intensive care units reached only 76 percent capacity at the peak of the outbreak, the health ministry said. “A strong history of health sector investment (ensured) everybody who needed hospital care was able to receive it free of charge,” Khal said.

As of Aug 20, Qatar's “R” rate, the number of people each infected person goes on to infect, had dropped to “well below 1 and remains stable,” said Khal. The country has posted new daily infection rates hovering in the 200-range in the past week - but those are far lower than the 2,355 cases reported on May 30. “Qatar has partially lifted some restrictions and we could expect some resurgence,” said the WHO's Abubakar. “But we expect they will maintain some measures and intensify testing and tracing, and management of cases.”

Social distancing rules are enforced in workplaces and public areas, masks are required in shops and when outdoors for reasons other than exercise. Wary of another wave of infections, authorities have taken extraordinary measures, even including the public naming of Qataris breaching self-quarantine - something unprecedented in the traditional society. — AFP

accused the premier of violating article 39 of the constitution, which bans the state from eavesdropping on citizens without prior permission from the judiciary.

In his grilling, MP Subaei accused the premier of failing to safeguard oil resources that generate most of public revenues and also for violating the law by revoking citizenship of Kuwaitis for political reasons. The National Assembly is due to meet next Tuesday to debate two grillings against Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi.

Two shot dead in protest-hit US city of Kenosha

KENOSHA, United States: Two people were shot dead on Tuesday night in the US city of Kenosha as groups clashed during protests over the police shooting of a black man. Violence broke out as hundreds of protesters marched for a third night in the Wisconsin city after Jacob Blake was seen in video footage being shot several times at point-blank range by a white police officer. Blake was trying to get into his car, with his three children inside, when he was shot on Sunday.

The most recent police shooting of an African American has sparked renewed outrage and protests in US cities, including New York and Minneapolis, as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. The Kenosha police department said local officers, along with assisting agencies, responded to reports of shots being fired and multiple gunshot victims shortly before midnight.

“The shooting resulted in two fatalities and a third gunshot victim was transported to a hospital with serious, but non-life threatening injuries,” the department said in a tweet, adding the investigation was “active and ongoing”. Earlier, footage was posted online showing people running through the streets of Kenosha as gunshots rang out, while other videos showed wounded men lying on the ground. The police statement said: “Investigators are aware of the social media videos being circulated regarding this incident.”

The majority of protests have passed off peacefully, though some demonstrators also burned cars and buildings on Sunday and Monday nights in Kenosha. Expecting another night of demonstrations, authorities installed a temporary iron fence in front of the county courthouse, a scene of confrontations between police and protesters the last two nights, but few police were seen in the city's streets.

As scuffles with demonstrators kicked off, law enforcement moved armored vehicles in front of the courthouse and fired rubber bullets at protesters who shot fireworks. An AFP reporter saw several civilians carrying weapons on Tuesday night, with at least one small group of mainly white, heavily armed men was in the city vowing to protect property.



KENOSHA: Demonstrators sit in the street in front of law enforcement officers on Tuesday. — AFP

One video, verified by AFP and taken by photographer Alex Lourie, showed a man sitting on the ground bleeding heavily from a gunshot wound to his arm as law enforcement vehicles approached him with officers shouting “Back it up” to onlookers. The injured man was helped to his feet by the officers. Another showed footage of a man, who appeared to be carrying a rifle, falling to the ground before several gunshots could be heard as people fled from the scene telling one another to take cover.

Earlier Blake's mother Julia Jackson called for calm and urged peace ahead of a national protest planned for Washington this weekend. She said the damage caused on previous nights in Kenosha “doesn't reflect my son or my family,” and issued a powerful call for unity and denunciation of racism in America. “Clearly you can see by now that I have beautiful brown skin. But take a look at your hand. And whatever shade it is, it is beautiful as well,” she said.

Jackson's lawyer, civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, said it would take a “miracle” for her son to walk again after one of the policeman's bullets shattered Blake's spine, and others damaged his stomach, colon, liver and arm. While Blake's mother said she was praying for the police, his father, Jacob Sr, accused law enforcement - who remain quiet about the incident - of “senseless attempted murder”.

“They shot my son seven times, like he didn't matter,” Blake said, struggling to hold back tears. “But my son matters. He's a human being.” Jacob Blake's sister Letetra Widman added: “I don't want your pity. I want change.” Blake, 29, was shot after trying to break up a domestic dispute, according to Crump. — AFP

Interior minister comfortably...

Continued from Page 1

have been depleted, charging that his government resorted to impose charges and taxes on citizens to raise non-oil revenues. The lawmaker

Local

Expatriate workers over 60 without degrees can stay till year's end

'Born in Kuwait' exempted from govt to private visa transfer ban

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower has decided to limit the renewal of work permits of expats aged 60 and above till the end of this year, except for those who hold university degrees. In this regard, informed sources told Al-Rai that Manpower Authority Director Ahmad Al-Moussa issued a decision limiting the renewal of work permits for expats aged 60 and above who only hold high school certificates or lesser qualifications till the end of this year. The directive also allowed only a one-year renewal for expats aged 59 and 60 until Jan 1, 2021 in order to give those included in the decision to prepare to depart by the end of 2020, a date after which all 60-plus expats in Kuwait will only be of holders of university degrees.

In the meantime, the manpower authority

allowed residents born in Kuwait to transfer their residency visas from the government to the private



Part of measures to curb demographic imbalance

sector, so the number of exempt categories that can transfer from the public to the private sector is

now four, Al-Qabas reported. The authority had issued a decision on Sunday banning the transfer of government workers to the private sector, which exempts Kuwaiti women's husbands and children, wives of Kuwaitis, Palestinians with travel documents and those in specialized technical professions in the health field who are transferring to licensed facilities to provide medical services, such as doctors, nurses and others in the medical field.

Under the decision, transferring employees from the private sector to the government should comply with procedures followed by the manpower authority and the Civil Service Commission. The authority also said only certain categories of expats are allowed to transfer dependent visas to work in the private sector, including husbands and children of Kuwaiti women, those born in Kuwait,

Palestinians with travel documents and those having at least a diploma after the secondary stage from Kuwaiti educational establishments.

Meanwhile, statistics revealed that 272,000 non-Kuwaitis were born in Kuwait between 2009 and 2019. Statistics of the marketplace showed 20,072 new residency permits were issued during 2019, with only 1,186 to women, while 2018 saw 20,000 work permits issued. Meanwhile, entry of domestic helpers was the highest during the past two years at 52,006, 62 percent of whom were females. This decision is part of a series of measures the government has taken or is expected to take to address the country's demographic imbalance issue, as Kuwait's citizens-to-expatriates ratio currently stands at approximately 30 to 70 percent.

Plan to open 200 new schools within five years

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi said Tuesday the ministry has a plan during the next five years to open nearly 200 new schools, as it also requires a second supervisor for each educational stage, especially with the huge administrative burdens. In a press statement, Harbi said he addressed the Civil Service Commission regarding a proposal to establish a second supervisory position for each stage (kindergarten - primary - intermediate - secondary) in the educational areas. He stressed the importance of having two supervisors for each educational stage in the same district at the present time, for several reasons, he added. The second supervisor would be addressing the technical obstacles that prevent the advancement of the work in the educational zone. The functional tasks of each supervisor will be to follow up and supervise the work of school principals and their assistants, write annual reports, prepare the educational budget for teachers and supervisory positions, implement transfer and assignment requests, submit the necessary reports on the results of the work and suggest appropriate recommendations for the development of educational work and identify the needs of schools, Harbi said.—KUNA

Kuwait registers 698 new COVID-19 cases, 2 deaths

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 698 additional COVID-19 cases over the past 24 hours, increasing the total number of infections to 82,271, while two new deaths were added to a death toll of 521. Speaking to the press, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the confirmed cases included patients who contracted the virus due to contact with infected people while others remained under examination to determine the source. The cases were found in the following health zones: 208 were in Al-Ahmadi, 154 in Al-Farwaniyah, 126 in Al-Jahra, 107 in Hawally and 103 in Al-Asimah (Capital). Additionally, there were 7,844 active cases, while 92 others remain in intensive care units, Dr Sanad elaborated. There are 4,364 swab tests conducted over the past 24 hours to reach a total of 599,413, he revealed. Earlier yesterday, the ministry confirmed 504 fresh recovery cases, raising the total to 73,906 recoveries so far.—KUNA



Kuwait lifts ban on Malaysia, Pakistan poultry imports

KUWAIT: Kuwait lifted a ban on imports of birds' meat and eggs from Malaysia. The decision came upon a recommendation presented by the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition yesterday. Adel Al-Suwait, the secretary of the supreme committee for food safety at the authority, said in a statement to the press that the commission made the recommendation at a meeting to lift the ban on the importation of all fresh and frozen birds' meat, eggs and poultry products from the Kingdom of Malaysia after it was proclaimed clear of the bird flu disease. Suwait added that the commission also advised for lifting the ban on imports of poultry from Pakistan which was also declared clear of the same disease. Moreover, a decision was taken to prohibit imports of poultry products, except for those thermally treated at 70 degrees temperature, from Victoria, Australia, where the bird flu disease has spread. A similar measure was also taken for such imports from South Carolina, the US, for the same reason.—KUNA

Sheep 'stolen' in ranch ownership dispute

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti accused unidentified people working for a ruling family member of stealing sheep from his ranch. Al-Rai daily reported yesterday.

Case papers indicate that the citizen filed a complaint at Qashaniya police station, saying that he had purchased a ranch from a ruling family member for KD 100,000 and gave a KD 10,000 in down payment pending completing the deal and transferring the ranch's ownership to him.

The citizen added that he accordingly moved 100 of his sheep into the ranch, but the ownership transfer process was delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak as well as new government regulations concerning transferring ranch ownership. He added that the 'sheikh' demanded payment of the balance,

but he refused until he got the ranch's deed. The citizen said three days prior to filing his police report, three unidentified people showed up at the ranch, kicked out the guards and took his sheep. He directly accused people working for the sheikh of being behind what happened. A case was filed and further investigations showed that the stolen sheep were kept in a house owned by the sheikh. A force was dispatched to the scene, where three laborers fled on spotting the police, who removed the sheep. Further investigations are still in progress.

In my view

The fight is still on



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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CCOVID-19 - do you remember this word? I honestly hope so, because indications are that in many countries, the virus is still holding strong and is still fighting with vengeance. Countries that are close to us here in Kuwait are experiencing relatively scary numbers again, and it seems most, if not all, of the cases are due to negligence and not following the simplest and easiest procedures to avoid being infected or transmitting the disease.

Yes, complacency also seems to be a factor as people are taking it easy after governments started opening up their countries, because it is not easy or wise to continue locking down countries for so long, as this is bad in many aspects, including the impact on the economy. Authorities started easing measures after people had enough time to understand and get used to the measures to avoid contraction of the virus, such as social distancing, wearing a face mask in closed quarters, making sure hands are washed or sanitized before touching the face and so on.

Please, as restrictions are being lifted, you should continue following health safety measures without having an authority enforce them. We should not have a curfew to keep people away from each other, as they know that six feet is the closest one can get to another person. We do not need a police officer to waste his time telling us that your gathering for a certain event in a hall or a house is not right. We do not need a healthcare provider to tell us to wear a mask while we are at a mall or a store, and so on. These steps should be taken automatically after six or seven months of COVID-19 among us.

Again, please do not let your guard down, keep up the fight and do not be complacent. Persevere until the full war is completely won!

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Foreign minister hosts students union members

Sheikh Ahmad meets engineers society chief



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with members of the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) - Egypt Branch. —KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Kuwait Society of Engineers Faisal Al-Atel.

Kuwait Food Bank launches campaign for 4,700+ people

KUWAIT: Kuwait Food Bank (KFB) launched yesterday a food project for more than 4,700 people from needy and families affected by the novel coronavirus pandemic. In a press statement, Deputy Manager of KFB Meshaal Al-Ansari said that the bank continues distributing food baskets as part of the humanitarian role for meeting all needs of those families in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting all government efforts in this regard at the present time.

Ansari added distribution locations were changing according to the locations of the needy families in order to ensure smooth deliveries. He referred to all various projects done by the KFB, such as delivery of meals, food baskets, sanitizing materials and other necessary items. Ansari praised volunteers' efforts in spite of the hot weather, as he also commended the Kuwaiti society on helping the needy people. He noted that the food bank's projects are being implemented according to an organized plan in coordination with the different government and private sector bodies.

In this regard, he called on the private sector and philanthropists to donate, help and provide the various needs of these needy families throughout the county. Ansari stated that KFB facilitated payments of donations, Zakat and alms, that meet all health requirements set by the health authorities. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received on Tuesday Ahmad Saud Al-Shemmari, the head of the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) - Egypt Branch, and members of the union's management. The minister, during the

meeting, has re-stated that the ministry eyes as significant the NUKS' role abroad for educating Kuwaiti students about necessary precautions against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). He also urged his guests to coordinate with the Kuwaiti diplomatic missions and abide by health directions to cope with this

health disaster. Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad received Chairman of the Kuwait Society of Engineers Faisal Al-Atel. The minister, during the meeting, renewed the praise for the society for its support for state efforts in coping with repercussions of the COVID-19 outbreak. —KUNA

Ten Kuwait-funded water wells go operational in Yemen

ADEN: Secretary of Yemen's of Hudaydah Governorate Walid Al-Qadimi inaugurated on Tuesday 10 solar-powered water wells in the western governorate overlooking the Red Sea. The project was funded by Kuwait's Al-Rahma International fundraising agency and carried out by Altwasul for Human Development. The wells provide nearly 15,000 families in 10 villages with drinkable water, according to a statement from Altwasul. On behalf of the Yemeni government and people, Qadimi expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti leaders and people for their humanitarian contributions. "The assistances provided by the Kuwaiti bothers meet the needs of Yemeni people and contribute to stability in the country," he told reporters during the launching of the project. Meanwhile, Mohammad Behider, director of Hudaydah water and sewage organization, said the Kuwaiti generous assistances remarkably alleviated the suffering of the residents in the governorate. He added that the organization covered nearly 60 percent of the potable water needs of the residents of the



western coast of the governorate thanks to the contributions of Kuwait. Meanwhile, Sadeq Al-Saeedi, director of Altwasul office in Hudaydah, said the wells,

being powered by renewable energy, are operated in cost-effective way which best suits the beneficiary community. —KUNA

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WHO provides Kurdistan with Kuwaiti-funded medical supplies

IRBIL: The World Health Organization (WHO) announced Tuesday that it provided Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), north Iraq, with medical supplies to help tackle COVID-19, with Kuwaiti funding in cooperation with US organizations. In a press statement, WHO said that it had delivered six ambulances to the KRG ministry of health to improve emergency and life-saving services for the Syrian refugees and their host communities in the governorate of Irbil. The statement added that the aid also included 22 tons of "health technologies" to support the efforts of the regional government in facing the pandemic. The KRG health ministry had



announced earlier Tuesday that the total COVID-19 infections stood at 25,929. —KUNA





Hong Kong opposition lawmakers arrested

China cosies up to EU as US tensions high



AT SEA: Photo shows ships of the Hellenic Navy taking part in a military exercise in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Greece said it launched military exercises on August 25 with France, Italy and Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, the focus of escalating tensions between Athens and Ankara. — AFP

Crisis brewing in the Mediterranean

Escalating tensions; Turkey at odds with Greece and EU

ANKARA: A crisis is brewing in the eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey is at odds with Greece and the European Union over maritime rights over gas reserves. As naval ships build up in the area, and Germany tells both countries to defuse their escalating row or risk sparking a "catastrophe", here is a snapshot of developments.

Turkey, Libya accord

Tensions set in when Ankara signs a controversial agreement in November 2019 with Libya's UN-recognized government, claiming extensive areas of the Mediterranean for Turkey. The search for energy resources in the area has long been a source of acrimony between Greece and Turkey, and Ankara's appetite has

been whetted by discoveries of large gas reserves. In January 2020 Egypt, Cyprus, Greece and France condemn the deal as well as a security agreement also signed last year by Ankara and the Tripoli-based government, as a violation of sovereignty. They also condemn Ankara's drilling in the waters of Cyprus, in defiance of warnings from the EU and Washington. Turkish troops occupy the northern third of the divided island, whose southern part is an EU member.

'Show of force'

On June 10, 2020 Ankara protests an inspection by the EU's naval mission of a cargo ship suspected of breaching the UN's embargo on deliveries of arms to Libya. Under the 2019 security accord with Libya, Ankara boosted its armed support for the government, which is fighting strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces for control of the north African country. On June 11 Turkish warships and fighter jets carry out large-scale manoeuvres in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkish state media describe them as a "show of force". On June 17, Paris criticizes as "extremely aggressive" the Turkish reaction to a French frigate on a NATO mission in the Mediterranean as it tries to check a cargo ship suspected of transporting arms to Libya.

Greece, Egypt accord

The mood sours further when Greece and Egypt sign an agreement on August 6 to set up an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey is incensed by the deal, branding it "null and void". The Greek parliament is expected to ratify the agreement.

Gas hunt

In July Ankara announces plans for energy exploration near the Greek island of Kastellorizo, which rests just two kilometers off the Turkish coast. Greece says it was deploying navy ships in the Aegean in "heightened readiness". On August 10 Ankara dispatches a research vessel, the Oruc Reis, accompanied by Turkish naval vessels off Kastellorizo. France sends in its own military assets in support of the Greek warships monitoring Turkey's work.

Collision

On August 12, a Turkish frigate collides with a Greek one in the eastern Mediterranean in hotly disputed circumstances. Commenting on the incident for the first time, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vows not to yield to "pirates" and push ahead with the Oruc Reis mission.

On the 21, he says that Ankara will step up its gas hunt with the deployment at the end of the year of the Kanuni drilling ship, which is undergoing maintenance.

Mediation

On August 25, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas shuttles between Athens and Ankara in a bid to put direct talks between the two rivals back on track. Speaking for the European Union, he calls for "de-escalation and a will for dialogue." Underscoring the difficulties facing Maas, Greece and Turkey stage rival simultaneous air and sea exercises just south of Crete.—AFP



AT SEA: Greek Hydra-class frigate Psara (F-454) of the Hellenic Navy and a military helicopter takes part in a military exercise in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. — AFP

Corruption: Another disease plagues Brazil's COVID fight

RIO DE JANEIRO: Ingrid dos Santos has no idea who's been receiving the paychecks from her job as a nurse at a COVID-19 field hospital in Rio de Janeiro, but she knows it isn't her. Dos Santos, 28, says she has not been paid since May for her contract at the shoddily built, never-opened tent hospital in the Rio suburb of Duque de Caxias. But the salary and severance pay she was supposed to receive, and then some, show up on her social security records—a telltale sign in Brazil that someone is stealing public money and trying to cover it up. Her case is emblematic of the massive amounts of government emergency funds to fight the pandemic that experts say are being stolen in the world's second-hardest-hit country, as the rush to respond to COVID-19 is sidetracked by an older, endemic disease: corruption.

Brazil has a long history of graft scandals. But even by Brazilian standards, the scope of the accusations is outrageous. Amazonas state allegedly purchased overpriced ventilators from a wine store. Rio de Janeiro's governor is facing impeachment over the seven field hospitals the state contracted, five of which never opened. Brasilia's health secretary was arrested Tuesday over suspected kickbacks on coronavirus test kits.

In all, at least 11 out of 27 states have corruption cases open. Even football superstar Neymar got dragged in. His name and personal data were used to register for the 600-real monthly stimulus payments the federal govern-

ment is paying poor Brazilians hit hard by lockdown measures. Dos Santos said more than 1,000 colleagues were in the same situation as her. "Where did the money go? Nobody knows," she told AFP. "All we know is that the people working on the front line are forgotten," said the now-unemployed mother-of-two. "A lot of us are suffering."

Big money, little oversight

Experts say the window for large-scale corruption opened as Brazil struggled early in the pandemic to contain the havoc wrought by COVID-19. As authorities rushed to buy suddenly scarce ventilators, intensive care beds, face masks and hand sanitizer, Congress passed a bill in April authorizing all levels of government to make emergency purchases without tenders or the usual red tape. Many countries hit hard by the virus took similar measures. But in Brazil, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's attacks on lockdowns and the "hysteria" caused by the virus largely left states and municipalities to fend for themselves as COVID-19 surged in the country of 212 million people, which is second only to the United States in infections and deaths, with more than 3.6 million and 116,000, respectively.

"Brazil has all these states and municipalities competing against each other to buy the same things," said Guilherme France, of watchdog group Transparency International's Brazil office. "It's much easier to monitor one big public entity's contracts than 5,000 entities". The total lack of coordination by the federal government definitely increased the risk of corruption." Of the 286.5 billion reals (around \$50 billion) in federal emergency spending on the pandemic so far, less than eight percent has gone directly to fight the disease, according to the Federal Accounts Court (TCU), the government auditor.—AFP

Africa 'declared polio free': WHO

LAGOS: The UN's World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday declared that Africa was now free of the virus that causes polio, a landmark in a decades-long campaign to eradicate the notorious disease around the world. "Today is a historic day for Africa," said Prof. Rose Gana Fomban Leke, whose commission certified that no cases had occurred on the continent for the past four years, the threshold for eradication of poliovirus. Poliovirus now joins smallpox in the list of viruses that have been wiped out in Africa, the WHO said. Since 1996, eradication efforts "have prevented



KANO: In this file photo, a Health worker administers a vaccine to a child during a vaccination campaign against polio at Hotoro-Kudu, Nassarawa district of Kano in northwest Nigeria. — AFP

up to 1.8 million children from crippling life-long paralysis and saved approximately 180,000 lives," the agency said.

Poliomyelitis—the medical term for polio—is an acutely infectious and contagious virus which attacks the spinal cord and causes irreversible paralysis in children. It was endemic around the world until a vaccine was found in the 1950s, though this remained out of reach for many poorer countries in Asia and Africa. In 1988, when the WHO, UNICEF and Rotary launched the worldwide campaign to eradicate the disease, there were 350,000 cases globally. In 1996, there were more than 70,000 cases in Africa alone.

Thanks to a global effort and financial backing—some \$19 billion over 30 years—only Afghanistan and Pakistan have recorded cases this year: 87 in total. Poliovirus is typically spread in the faeces of an infected person and is picked up through contaminated water or food. Vaccinating people to prevent them from becoming infected thus breaks the cycle of transmission and eventually eradicates the virus in the wild. The last case of polio in Africa was detected in 2016 in Nigeria, where vaccination efforts had been hampered by Boko Haram jihadists.

More than 20 workers involved in the campaign lost their lives. "This is a momentous milestone for Africa. Now future generations of African children can live free of wild polio," said Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's regional director for Africa. "This historic achievement was only possible thanks to the leadership and commitment of governments, communities, global polio eradication partners and philanthropists." Moeti said. "I pay special tribute to the frontline health workers and vaccinators, some of whom lost their lives, for this noble cause." — AFP

International

COVID-19 re-infections raise concerns about immunity

Mutating virus poses challenges for vaccine makers

AMSTERDAM: Two European patients are confirmed to have been re-infected with COVID-19, raising concerns about people's immunity to the coronavirus as the world struggles to tame the pandemic. The cases, in Belgium and the Netherlands, follow a report this week by researchers in Hong Kong about a man there who had contracted a different strain of the virus four and a half months after being declared recovered - the first such second infection to be documented. That has raised fears about the efficacy of potential vaccines against the virus, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people, though experts say there would need to be many more cases of re-infection for these to be justified.

Belgian virologist Marc Van Ranst said the Belgian case was a woman who had contracted COVID-19 for the first time in March and then again with a different coronavirus strain in June. Further cases of re-infection were likely to surface, he said. Van Ranst told Reuters TV the woman, in her 50s, had very few antibodies after the first infection, although they might have limited the sickness. Re-

infection cases were probably limited exceptions, he said, although it was too soon to tell and many were likely to surface in coming weeks.

He added that the new coronavirus appeared more stable than the influenza virus, but it was changing. "Viruses mutate and that means that a potential vaccine is not going to be a vaccine that will last forever, for 10 years, probably not even five years. Just as for flu, this will have to be redesigned quite regularly," he said. Van Ranst, who sits on some Belgian COVID-19 committees, said vaccine designers would not be surprised. "We would have loved the virus to be more stable than it is, but you can't force nature."



Belgian and Dutch patients infected after recoveries

Genetic testing

The National Institute for Public Health in the Netherlands said it had also observed a Dutch case of re-infection with a different strain of the virus. "It is clear there has been a first and a second infection with a substantial quantity of virus. Enough to be able to determine the genetic code of the virus, that



AMSTERDAM: Tourists walk in the center of Amsterdam as the Netherlands tightens up supervision of the measures to prevent further spread of the COVID-19. — AFP

is what showed they were indeed different," said Marion Koopmans, a leading virologist in the Netherlands and a member of the World Health Organization's scientific advisory group.

She added the elderly Dutch patient had a weakened immune system, which explained the patient's

situation. "People are worried and ask if re-infection is 'standard'. I don't think it is," she added. WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told a UN briefing in Geneva regarding the Hong Kong case that, while there were anecdotal reports of re-infections, it was important to have clear documentation. — Reuters

California: Heatwave, pandemic makes it hard to cool off

RANCHO CORDOVA: Before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down air-conditioned shopping malls and movie theaters, Debera Diaz and her adult son Joshua could have ducked inside to escape the 109 degree Fahrenheit heat that roasted their town near Sacramento last week. So the pair, who have been living in Debera's Honda Civic since her divorce and eviction a few months ago, were grateful to find a cooling center in city hall, complete with masks and a showing of the Meryl Streep movie "The Devil Wears Prada." "You can't even go to the library," said Diaz, 58. "It was really bad."

The coronavirus pandemic presents vexing challenges for officials trying to protect residents from extreme weather conditions. Many places people usually go are closed, and public cooling centers like the one in Rancho Cordova can only accept half the normal number of people because of physical distancing requirements. Staying with relatives or friends is also difficult because of health concerns. At the same time, however, officials worry that fears of catching the virus will keep some vulnerable people from seeking shelter from extreme heat, or even seeking out evacuation centers

when wildfire threatens.

Protecting residents from extreme conditions is an issue that increasingly confronts cities and counties across the United States, as storms, heat and wildfire force thousands to seek refuge. Many experts are even more concerned about how to shelter vulnerable residents from extreme cold should the pandemic still be raging in the winter.

"It's changed how we approach this as a city," Rancho Cordova Mayor David Sander said of the pandemic. In previous years, churches and non-profits opened their doors to people seeking shelter, but now many are either closed or unable to help, he said. The city's cooling center, set up in a large meeting room, can only accommodate 10 people before workers have to open an adjoining room, Sander said. That is half or less than its usual capacity.

The city is not taking the temperatures of everyone who comes in but asks anyone with a self-reported fever to stay away. Among those most likely to suffer from extreme weather are people without homes like the Diazes, and the elderly on fixed incomes who might not have air conditioning or, if they do, may feel that they can't afford to use it, said Mary Jo Flynn-



CALIFORNIA: A view of a home that was destroyed by the LNU Lightning Complex fire in Napa, California. The LNU Lightning Complex fire is spread over 5 counties and has burned over 350,000 acres. The massive wildfire has destroyed at least 870 structures and is twenty two percent contained. — AFP

Nevins, the emergency operations coordinator for Sacramento County.

Public agencies opened eight cooling centers in the county during last week's heatwave, each able to accommodate between 10 and 40 people, she said. With more than 5,500 people homeless in Sacramento County last year, and around 225,000 elderly, space for residents to shelter from harsh weather can quickly run short, Flynn-Nevins said.

Statewide, cooling centers were opened in 24 of California's 58 counties, according to the California Department of Emergency Services. The administration of Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom did not

respond to requests for comment about the challenges of offering respite from the heat during the pandemic. But the state has encouraged residents to limit their use of electricity to avoid overtaxing the power grid and prompting blackouts.

When the temperature neared 100 Fahrenheit in the Sherman Oaks section of Los Angeles, Magdalay Arriola went to the East Valley Adult Center, where she sat with a water bottle and portable lunch cooler, reading a book. About 10 people, 6 feet apart and wearing masks, sat in the air-conditioned room. Employees in protective suits cleaned tables and chairs with disinfectant. — Reuters

In northeast Syria town, families say Turkey cut water

HASAKEH: Outside her home in northeast Syria, Sheikha Majid said her life had become an endless quest for fresh water, three weeks into the latest supply cut by Turkish forces. "I spend the whole time running after water trucks," the 43-year-old grandmother said, amid an ongoing outage-one of many in recent months-in Hasakeh, a city run by a semi-autonomous Kurdish administration.

As coronavirus spreads across northeastern Syria, residents in Hasakeh have been caught up in spats between Turkish forces to the north and Syria's Kurds, viewed by Ankara as "terrorists". In October last year, Turkish forces and their Syrian proxies occupied a 120-kilometre stretch of land inside the Syrian border, including the Alouk power station that supplies drinking water to Hasakeh. Kurdish officials say Turkey is now using the water station to pressure the local authorities into giving them more electricity in areas Ankara seized from them.

While Turkey claims the station has merely been under maintenance, aid organizations have warned against using water as a political or military tool to the detriment of civilians. Majid said the latest supply cut had made it difficult to ensure basic hygiene for her seven children and two grandchildren. "Most of the time we bathe in salty water" from wells instead, she said, adding that she used the brackish liquid for washing clothes too. In the city's narrow streets, women and children clutched empty jerrycans, waiting to fill them up from water deliveries, some from aid groups. On a rooftop, a young girl held a gushing green pipe over a water tank, funneling water from a truck below.

'Weapon against civilians'

"This time it's really dragged on," elderly resident Muhammad Khatar told AFP on Saturday, referring to the latest supply cut. "All we want is to eat and



HASAKEH: Residents fill up water from cisterns provided by humanitarian organizations during a water outage in Syria's northeastern city of Hasakeh. — AFP

drink, and do our job. We have nothing to do with politics." The Kurds say there have been eight interruptions to the supply of water from the station near the town of Ras al-Ain since last autumn.

The Turks "occupied our land and now they're cutting off our water," 45-year-old Saleh Fattah said. The issue has sparked increasing concern at a time when confirmed coronavirus infections have risen to 362 cases including 25 deaths in Syria's Kurdish-held northeast, according to data provided by the semi-autonomous administration. Dozens of those cases are in Hasakeh. In March, the United Nations warned one of the earlier water supply interruptions from Alouk was putting 460,000 people at risk in the Hasakeh area, as the pandemic spread worldwide.

Kurdish forces spearheaded the US-backed battle against the Islamic State group in Syria, but Ankara says they are linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. Turkey's defense ministry claimed on August 6 the Alouk water facility was under maintenance but that Hasakeh was still receiving water. The Kurds say the water has been cut off, and the hashtag "Thirst is strangling Hasakeh" has been trending online. Damascus on Monday accused Ankara of using water as a "weapon against Syrian civilians". — AFP

South Korean students forced online as global virus crisis deepens

SEOUL: Millions of South Korean students were ordered back to online classes Tuesday and Mexico launched a nationwide televised schooling program, highlighting the deepening crisis for children as the coronavirus pandemic drags into a ninth month. The school closures were part of new measures in many parts of the world to halt the disease that has killed more than 813,000 people and infected over 23 million, according to an AFP tally.

The latest high-profile case was sprint legend Usain Bolt, who was in quarantine Monday after undergoing a test for the virus that Jamaican media reported had come back positive. The retired 100 and 200 meters world-record holder said on Twitter that he was "trying to be responsible" by going into isolation, but he did not confirm the result. He is one of a growing number of sports personalities to have fallen victim as the virus touches all corners of society.

In the education sector, the United Nations estimates at least 60 percent of the global student population has been impacted by school closures across more than 140 countries. All schools and kindergartens in the greater Seoul region were told on Tuesday to return to online learning as authorities battled multiple coronavirus clusters. Another 280 infections were reported on Tuesday, taking South Korea's total to almost 18,000. "The alarming emergence of mass infections since August is turning up as infections of our students and staff members," Education Minister Yoo Eun-hae told reporters.

In Mexico, around 30 million children began a new school year on Monday with lessons via television in a nationwide experiment in distance learning. The government has teamed up with four private television stations to broadcast classes across the Latin American country, which has recorded more than 60,000 deaths from the virus. Face-to-face lessons have already been suspended since March. — AFP

News in brief

Rising rape cases in Liberia

MONROVIA: Thousands of Liberians dressed in black protested on Tuesday, accusing the government of President George Weah of failing to tackle rising incidents of rape. "We have registered more than 600 cases of rape between June and August," Margaret Taylor, head of the Women Empowerment Network, told AFP at the protests in the capital Monrovia. Under banners reading "No means no", the protesters, many accompanied by their children, marched on parliament. They presented a petition entitled "Enough is enough", calling for greater judicial funding to punish offenders, and more health funding to help victims. Decades of poverty and conflict have allowed sexual violence to go largely unchecked in the west African nation. A UN report in 2016 recorded 803 rape cases the previous year in the country of 4.5 million, and found that only two percent of sexual violence cases led to a conviction. — AFP

Gunmen kidnap students

KANO: Gunmen have kidnapped seven students along with their female teacher from a secondary school in northern Nigeria's Kaduna state, killing a vigilante and vandalizing a church, residents said Tuesday. The attackers on 20 motorcycles stormed Damba-Kasaya village Monday morning, shooting indiscriminately, they said. "The gunmen arrived around 8:00 am and went into the Prince Academy where they took away the seven students and their teacher who was coaching them for their upcoming senior class exams," resident Silas Adamu said. The gunmen raided deserted homes, stealing money and personal effects while the residents fled into cornfields, said another resident Iliya Bawa who confirmed the abduction. "We don't know where they took the hostages, they have not made any contact. We hope they don't harm them," he said. — AFP

'UFO' in Congo jungle?

GOMA: An unidentified flying object parachuted into dense Congo jungle to the confusion of local authorities, who detained two people for questioning until a subsidiary of Google parent company Alphabet confirmed the device was an internet balloon. Images shared on social media showed people inspecting a large silver-colored contraption fitted with solar panels and wires, which had landed in the tropical forest of Bas-Uele province in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo, trailing a large deflated balloon. Locals alerted the security services after the object fell to earth around 1 p.m. local time on Monday, Bas-Uele Governor Valentin Senga told Reuters after visiting the site around 10 km (6 miles) south of the provincial capital Buta. "I'm not able to say exactly what kind of device I observed," he said by phone on Tuesday. — Reuters

Facebook vows legal action

BANGKOK: Facebook said it would file a legal challenge against a Thai government order to take down a group where pro-democracy activists held discussions about the monarchy, a taboo subject in the country. A growing tide of youth-led protests has swept Thailand in recent weeks-buoyed by anger against what many regard as an illegitimate, military-aligned government and an overly powerful royal family. The private Facebook group, called "Royalist Marketplace", was created in April and had more than a million members before it was taken down on Monday. A Facebook spokesperson told AFP the network had been "compelled" by the government to remove the group. "Requests like this are severe, contravene international human rights law, and have a chilling effect on people's ability to express themselves," the platform said. — AFP

International

Israel keeps up Gaza strikes; Qatar joins mediation bid

Israel hits Hezbollah posts; 4 Gazans killed in bomb-handling mishap

GAZA: Israeli warplanes struck a Hamas target in Gaza overnight, the military said yesterday, even as a Qatari envoy joined efforts to broker an end to the almost three-week flare-up. Israel has bombed the Hamas-ruled enclave almost daily since August 6, in response to the launch of airborne incendiary devices and, less frequently, rockets across the border.

The fire bombs, crude devices fitted to balloons, inflated condoms or plastic bags, have triggered a rash of blazes in southern Israel that have caused significant damage to crops. "During the day, explosive and arson balloons were launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel," the Israeli military said. "In response ... fighter jets and (other) aircraft struck an underground infrastructure belonging to the Hamas terror organization in the southern Gaza Strip."

The fire balloons are widely seen as an attempt by Hamas to improve the terms of an informal truce under which Israel committed to ease its 13-year-old blockade in return for calm on the border. But so far Israel's response has been to tighten the blockade. It has banned Gaza fishermen from going to sea and closed its goods crossing with the territory, prompting the closure of Gaza's sole power plant for want of fuel.

An Egyptian delegation has been shuttling between the two sides to try to broker a renewal of the truce, and on Tuesday evening Qatar's Gaza envoy Mohammed El-Emadi entered the territory to join the mediation effort. The latest agreed ceasefire, which has already been renewed several times, has been bolstered by millions of dollars in financial aid from the gas-rich Gulf state. Sources close to the envoy said he was delivering a new tranche of 30 million dollars for disbursement to needy families in the

impoverished enclave.

Sources close to Hamas say it also wants other measures to ease living conditions in the territory where unemployment exceeds 50 percent. They include the extension of an industrial zone in the east of Gaza, the construction of a new power line, and an increase in the number of Israeli work permits issued to Gazans once anti-coronavirus restrictions have been lifted. On Monday, the Hamas authorities announced a 48-hour lockdown across the territory



Tension running high on the border

after four cases of the virus were confirmed in a Gaza Strip refugee camp.

Bomb-handling mishap

Meanwhile, four members of Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad were killed in Gaza overnight by the accidental explosion of a bomb they were handling, witnesses and security sources said Tuesday. A statement from the Islamist group, Gaza's second strongest after the ruling Hamas movement, said that "four martyrs" died while "per-

forming their duty", their usual term for what Israel calls a "work accident".

It said that those killed in the "accidental" blast included Iyad Jamas al-Jadi, 42, a commander linked to missile manufacturing units. According to witnesses and Palestinian security sources, the militants were preparing an improvised bomb which went off prematurely. Since August 6, Palestinians have been attacking Israel almost daily with incendiary devices attached to balloons.

The balloons have so far caused more than 400 fires in scrub, nature reserves and farmland, according to a tally of daily reports by Israeli fire services. Israel has responded with almost nightly air strikes. In addition, it has banned Gaza fishermen from going to sea and closed its goods crossing with the territory, prompting the closure of Gaza's sole power plant for want of fuel. The cross-border exchanges have caused some injuries but no deaths on either side, according to the Palestinian and Israeli authorities. — Agencies



GAZA: Members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group take part in funeral of comrades in Gaza City. Four members of Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad were killed in Gaza by the accidental explosion of a bomb they were handling. — AFP

Two Hong Kong opposition MPs arrested over protests

HONG KONG: Two prominent Hong Kong opposition lawmakers were among more than a dozen people arrested yesterday in a police operation focused on last year's huge protests, part of a widening crackdown against the city's democracy camp. Lam Cheuk-ting and Ted Hui were detained after early-morning raids on their homes, according to their political party and the police. Opposition figures decried the arrests, which add to a mounting toll of prosecutions targeting Beijing's critics in the restless financial hub.

"This is out-and-out political persecution," James To, a veteran lawyer and member of the Democratic Party, told reporters after the arrests. A police source told AFP that 16 people - including Lam and Hui - were arrested during yesterday's operation, which focused on protests in July last year. Both are minority pro-democracy lawmakers in the city's partially elected legislature and vocal critics of both Beijing and the Hong Kong government. A post on Lam's Facebook page said he was arrested "on suspicion of participating in rioting on July 21" last year.

That day, Lam and dozens of pro-democracy protesters were beaten by a gang of government supporters, some with "triad" organized crime links, in the town of Yuen Long. Police were late to arrive on the scene and were also filmed allowing some of the armed attackers to leave - scenes that sent already swirling distrust of the force skyrocketing and helped fuel further months of protests. Lam was

No reconciliation

Hui's office released video footage of his arrest where officers said they were charging him with attempted obstruction of justice, access to a computer with criminal or dishonest intent and criminal damage. He was later led from his house in handcuffs. The party said his charges also stemmed from a protest on July 6 last year. Police said a press conference would be held later in the day. Beginning in early June 2019, Hong Kong was hit by seven straight months of huge and often violent pro-democracy protests in which more than 9,000 people were arrested.

The popular unrest upended the city's reputation for stability and sparked a crackdown by China that has gathered pace this year. In late June, Beijing imposed a sweeping new security law, tightening Communist Party control over the semi-autonomous city and ending the legal firewall between the two territories. Certain political views such as advocating independence or greater autonomy for Hong Kong became illegal overnight and arrests have followed.

In response to the law, many Western nations ended extradition agreements with Hong Kong. The United States has placed sanctions on some Chinese and Hong Kong officials and declared the business hub no longer sufficiently autonomous from the authoritarian mainland. The democracy protests died down at the start of 2020 thanks to mass arrests and anti-coronavirus restrictions. City leader Carrie Lam began the year vowing to heal divisions.

But police have since arrested dozens of prominent pro-democracy figures on a slew of charges



HONG KONG: In this file photo, pro-democracy lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting stands up and protests shortly before Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam (not pictured) leaves the chamber for the second time while trying to present her annual policy address at the Legislative Council (Legco). — AFP

related to the rallies, with the courts now filled with hearings and trials. Authorities have denied allegations the investigations are politically motivated. Wu Chi-wai, chairman of the Democratic Party, said the latest arrests would do little to heal divisions. "The government is wielding the legal system and the police force to suppress dissenting voices within society and create a chilling effect instead of trying to reconcile confrontation and polarization," he said. — AFP

China cosies up to EU amid tensions

ROME: China's foreign minister on Tuesday kicked off a tour of a Europe still reeling from coronavirus, as he seeks to shore up economic and diplomatic relations in light of tensions with the US. Donald Trump's administration has stepped up anti-China rhetoric in the run-up to the US presidential election on November 3, despite ongoing trade talks.

On his first European stop in Rome, Wang Yi shied away from naming Washington explicitly, but lamented "provocation and damage from external forces" hitting the EU - a second favorite punching-bag of Trump's. "A united, stable and prosperous Europe is important for the whole of the world," Wang added.

Italy was the first G7 country to sign on to China's ambitious "Belt and Road" trade and infrastructure investment plan, and Wang on Tuesday inked two new trade deals with Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio. Rome was criticized for last year breaking ranks with other European countries over the investment scheme. Allies have worried that China's "Silk Road" will destabilize smaller countries by overloading them with debt, boost China's power, and allow key



ROME: Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio welcomes his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the Villa Madama, in Rome. Wang Yi, on a tour of Europe, will also visit the Netherlands, Norway, France and Germany. — AFP

technologies and trade secrets to slip into Beijing's hands.

But Italian leaders now hope boosted export opportunities for the country's main industries - from agricultural products to machinery - can help haul it out of a devastating economic crisis brought about by an over two-month lockdown. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Rome in March 2019, signing billions of euros in trade deals. Di Maio said the latest agreements covered natural gas from Snam, Europe's biggest pipelines operator, and the export of "Made in Italy" food products to China, as well as "important partnerships in the energy and transport sector".

Human rights and Hong Kong

But there are clear pitfalls for Wang's stated aim to "consolidate relations" between China and Europe as the top diplomat

travels on to the Netherlands, France, Germany and Norway. Just as the trade deals were being signed, visiting Hong Kong activist Nathan Law urged Italy to condemn China for human rights abuses.

Law met with an Italian foreign affairs delegation and told reporters Di Maio should "address Hong Kong's problems and the human rights violations by China". Italy should "severely condemn" Beijing's human rights record, added Law, who recently fled Hong Kong to London after Beijing imposed a controversial security law on the territory in June. Law called for a "strong alliance" against Beijing, including "sanctioning" Chinese officials responsible for human rights violations against China's Uighur population in the north-western Xinjiang province, and in Hong Kong. — AFP

NZ mosque gunman waives his right to speak at sentencing

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand (NZ) mosque gunman Brenton Tarrant waived his right to speak at his sentencing hearing in Christchurch yesterday, in a dramatic twist after the court heard more than 90 horrific victim statements. Tarrant, who sacked his lawyers last month, had admitted 51 charges of murder, 40 of attempted murder and one of terrorism over the attacks at the Al Noor and Linwood mosques in Christchurch on March 15 last year.

Defendants in New Zealand have the right to address the court and there had been speculation Tarrant would use his sentencing to promote his extremist views, leading to strict restrictions on media reporting the case. But when judge Cameron Mander asked if he wanted to speak-after sitting through three days of anguished and angry testimonies from more than 90 survivors and bereaved families in which he was frequently called "a loser" and "a coward"-Tarrant declined. A court-appointed lawyer will make a brief statement on his behalf before Mander delivers his sentence on Thursday.

The Australian white supremacist, 29, is expected to become the first person in New Zealand imprisoned for life without prospect of parole. Shortly before waiving his right to speak, Tarrant was face-to-face with Abdul Aziz, who was hailed a hero when he chased the gunman from the Linwood mosque. "I saw the fear in his eyes when he was running for his life," Aziz told the court. "You know the face, the one who chased you out," he told Tarrant who sat a few meters away, maintaining the same passive demeanor he had shown throughout the three days of harrowing testimony. When Tarrant opened fire through a window at the mosque, the 49-year-old Aziz grabbed a credit-card payment machine and ran outside, passing the bodies of an elderly couple, until he saw "this coward, gutless person" and threw the machine at him. — AFP

News in brief

Qaeda blows up Yemen clinic

DUBAI: Al-Qaeda blew up a medical centre in war-torn Yemen on Tuesday, 10 days after executing a dentist it accused of guiding US drone strikes against its militants. The clinic in the Soma district of Al-Baida province was where the dentist worked before his execution, a local official said. The jihadists shot Motthar al-Yousoufi, then crucified his body and left it outside the health centre on August 15. On Tuesday, they blew up the clinic. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is active in Yemen, is considered by the United States as the radical group's most dangerous branch. Washington has carried out a drone campaign against its leaders for the past two decades. But the Sunni extremist group has thrived in the chaos of civil war between Yemen's Saudi-backed government and Shiite rebels who control the capital Sanaa. — AFP

Bombers were 'militants' widows'

MANILA: Two female suicide attackers who carried out a double bombing in the southern Philippines were the widows of militants who had worked for the Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf group, the army chief said yesterday. Fourteen people were killed and 75 wounded, including members of the government-backed security forces and civilians, when the pair blew themselves up in a coordinated attack on Jolo island in Muslim-majority Sulu province on Monday. No group has claimed responsibility for the country's deadliest attack this year, but the military had pointed to Abu Sayyaf as the likely culprits. Army chief Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana identified the female bombers as Nanah and Inda Nay. In a text message to reporters, Sobejana said Nanah was the wife of Norman Lasuca, who is considered the Philippines' first homegrown suicide bomber. Lasuca and another attacker blew themselves up outside a military camp on Jolo in June 2019, killing several soldiers and civilians. — AFP

Flash floods kill at least 30

KABUL: At least 30 people have been killed and hundreds of houses destroyed as flash floods caused by torrential rains lashed a city north of the Afghan capital Kabul, officials said yesterday. Many children were among the dead in the city of Charikar, which was hit by heavy rains overnight, the ministry of disaster management said in a statement. About 20 people were also injured and more than 300 houses destroyed. A local government hospital in the province of Parwan said it had received the bodies of 17 people killed in the floods. A relief operation was under way to help those affected. Torrential downpours and flash floods kill scores of people annually in Afghanistan. Many poorly built homes, mostly in rural areas, are at risk of collapse during the rains in the impoverished country. — AFP



CHARIKAR: People go around a market area after a flash-flood in Charikar, Parwan province. — AFP

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 2020

Business

NBK-Bahrain reports a net profit of BHD 60.89 million in 1H 2020

Net profit grew 1.6% Y/Y, total assets increased 4.6% Y/Y

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Bahrain ("NBK - Bahrain") reported a net profit of BHD 60.89 million (KD 49.793 million) for 1H 2020, compared to BHD 59.95 million (KD 48.283 million) for the same period in 2019, recording an increase of 1.6 percent year-on-year. As of end of June 2020, NBK-Bahrain's total assets grew by 4.6 percent y-o-y, to reach BHD 7.135 billion, compared with BHD 6.824 billion for the same period in 2019, while total shareholders' equity recorded BHD 692.426 million.

Commenting on the Bank's 1H 2020 results, NBK Group CEO, Isam Al-Sager said: "NBK - Bahrain managed to post good profits for the 1st half of 2020, despite the unprecedented challenges facing the operating environment and the uncertainty following coronavirus pandemic outbreak, combined with the sharp fall collapse in oil prices, in addition to global interest rates cuts, which added more pressure on net interest margins."

Al-Sager pointed out that NBK Group's strategic investments over the last years in the main areas supporting growth and performance of international operations had a major impact on boosting the group's profits and minimizing risk.

This once again demonstrates the success of the diversification policy adopted by the group for a long time, especially in Bahrain, given the promising growth prospects and positive outlook of this market." Al-Sager added that NBK-Bahrain continues to consolidate its position year after year in the Bahraini market, which is one of the key growing markets for NBK Group, especially considering that the bank's profits are operating profits.

On his part, General Manager of NBK - Bahrain, Ali Fardan said: "The bank has achieved good results for the 1st half of the year despite the challenges facing the banking sector, thanks to the continued reliance of NBK Group's clear strategy and sound vision on focusing on core banking activities."

Fardan affirmed that the bank took upon itself to support its customers during these exceptional circumstances, by deferring their loan and credit card installment payments, as part of the bank's commitment to its national duties. Fardan stated that the bank activated business continuity plans during the crisis to ensure helping our customers make it through the prevailing difficult circumstances, and also worked closely with the Central

- **Al-Sager:** NBK - Bahrain continues to post good profits despite the challenges posed by coronavirus pandemic
- **Fardan:** We provided support to our customers during these exceptional circumstances as part of our national duties

Bank of Bahrain to support the stimulus package that aimed at mitigating the fallout of coronavirus crisis on the local economy.

Additionally, he indicated out that the bank continues to enhance its activity in the Kingdom of Bahrain to provide top-notch banking and financial services to both its individual and institutional customers.

Fardan commended the efforts of the Central Bank of Bahrain, in particular, and government authorities, in general, which supported the performance of the bank and the banking sector in Bahrain at large. He also stressed that the support



Isam Al-Sager

Ali Fardan

provided by NBK Group to the bank in Bahrain, through its wide regional and international branch network, has clearly contributed to promote the bank's activities in the Bahraini market, capitalizing on its high credit ratings, extensive relationship network, and leading reputation as the best bank in the Middle East and one of the Safest Banks all over the world.

As neighbors build dams, Iraqis watch twin rivers dry up

DIWANIYAH, Iraq: With its neighbors activating new dams, Iraq's historic twin rivers could run dry unless new infrastructure projects and tense talks with Turkey and Iran bear fruit. Nowhere is the effect on the country more palpable than in Basra, Iraq's only coastal province. Here, the Tigris and Euphrates-on which millions of Iraqis rely to farm-meet at the Shatt Al-Arab waterway before spilling into the Gulf.

But with flows already heavily weakened, seawater is pushing back into the freshwater rivers, strangling wildlife and human settlements that have survived on these banks for millennia. "Salinity has gone up in recent years and it's killing the farmlands," said Abu Shaker, a 70-year-old who has spent decades growing Iraq's famed date palms. Now, with such little fresh water, Abu Shaker and fellow farmers have left their ancient palms withering on cracked and salty earth, moving north in search of potable water. "Before, we could sell our dates in the Gulf and as far as the United States," he said.

'Total interruption'

"Now, you can see with your own eyes. This whole river died." Iraq's water woes aren't new. But with increasing regional desertification and population growth, Turkey and Iran are keener than ever to keep precious water resources for themselves. Their new dams on the Tigris and Euphrates, and the tributaries that feed them, have reduced water flows into Iraq by half, said Baghdad's Water Minister Mehdi Al-Hamdani. But he remains hopeful, with plans in the works to improve access across the country and guarantee drinking water to all, even in a worst-case scenario.

Hamdani, who headed Iraq's dams directorate before becoming minister, said there were plans to build a large reservoir in Makhoul, north of Baghdad. "It would allow us to store more water, generate electricity and protect Baghdad in case of floods," he said. It would be one of the biggest infrastructure projects in Iraq since 2003, when a US-led force toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and unleashed years of conflict. Since then, government plans to rehabilitate dilapidated power grids, water networks and roads have been regularly derailed by warfare, most recently the years-long fight against the Islamic State group, which Iraq declared defeated in late 2017.

A health crisis sparked by a shortage of safe drinking water hospitalized some 100,000 people in Basra in 2018. This year, an unprecedented fiscal crunch caused by low oil prices forced the government to suspend infrastructure investments. But new dams alone won't save Iraq's waterways, experts warn. Sustainable access, they say, will only be secured through water-sharing deals with Ankara and Tehran. Talks with Turkey, which have focused on the enormous Ilisu dam on the Tigris, were suspended for two years but resumed in May, when Iraq's new cabinet came into power. Hamdani vowed that an ongoing air and ground assault by Ankara on Kurdish militants in northern Iraq would not derail the "positive" talks, which included a deal to regulate filling the Ilisu.

Iran to the east has also activated dams, causing flows to the Dukan and Darbandikhan reservoirs in Iraqi Kurdistan to drop "from 45 cubic meters per second to seven cubic meters per second," according to the ministry. In some parts, flows are at a meager "two cubic meters per second-that is to say, an almost total interruption." Hamdani was again optimistic, however, saying comprehensive negotiations with Tehran were proceeding smoothly.

Troubled waters ahead

But as a receiving country, Iraq has little leverage, lamented Mohammed Al-Chalehyawi, who leads a farming cooperative in the southern agricultural heart-

land of Diwaniyah. "Turkey can launch a water war at any moment, whenever it suits it," Chalehyawi said. The droughts that wrecked Iraq's harvests between 2016 and 2018 were a taste of what may come, he said, warning that within five years, the Tigris and Euphrates could dry up, killing wildlife and limiting potable water. "Iraq only has one solution: using economic pressure against Turkey," said Chalehyawi, suggesting Baghdad could restrict the import of Turkish goods and services. Others have suggested trading crude for water, like under the 1990s United Nations-led program that allowed an Iraq under crippling sanctions to trade barrels for food and medicine. But Iraq, OPEC's second-largest producer, needs to act fast. Already the world is using less crude, and Iraq's nearly 40 million people need 71 billion cubic meters of water yearly, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. By 2035, when Turkey and Iran's dams are set to be completed, Iraq is set to receive just 51 billion cubic meters. And the population of the "land between the two rivers" will have swelled to more than 50 million, for whom the life-giving waters could be just a distant memory. —AFP

evaluate a user's risk of infection based on their location and their medical and travel history. Many of India's state apps were launched even as the central government brought out its own coronavirus contact-tracing app Aarogya Setu, or "Health Bridge", in early April, which has been downloaded by more than 152 million people, according to the National Informatics Centre. "While Aarogya Setu has faced significant scrutiny, not much is known about how the state apps work," said Devdutta Mukhopadhyay, a lawyer with New Delhi-based digital rights group Internet Freedom Foundation. "Many of them do not have a specific privacy policy and there is no transparency about how these apps collect, process, store or share personal data."

The National Informatics Centre, the organization within the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology that has been collaborating with many state governments on the development of their apps, did not respond to repeated requests for comment. However, officials in the states of Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that their apps had privacy policies in place and the data collected was secure.

Pandemic and privacy

In late February, Ravi Bhagat and his team were asked to develop an app that would work as an administrative and awareness tool to fight the pandemic. "We had a deadline of less than a week to come up with something," said Bhagat, CEO of the Punjab government's e-governance cell. "We studied the South Korea and China models, looked at our requirements, and had it up and running," he added, noting that the app has been downloaded by more than 5 million people.

Down south in Tamil Nadu state, Azhagu Pandia Raja modified a game he had been creating into a coronavirus tracking app for the government within a week of being assigned the job in March.

"It was a challenge for us because it was an emergency and a question of people's health," said Raja, a



An Iraqi farmer checks on his crops in Iraq's southern part of al-Faw, 90 kilometres south of Basra near the Shatt al-Arab and the Gulf on August 17, 2020. —AFP

research fellow with the Chennai city government. In this race to get the technology up and running, personal data concerns were overlooked, say privacy rights advocates.

A report released in April by the non-profit Software Freedom Law Center has warned about the "excessive collection and processing, and unauthorized sharing of personal data, unbridled surveillance and tracing of people" by state apps. Looking at the apps' policy documents, the researchers at the New Delhi-based organization found that many did not have terms of service accessible to users, limiting the governments' liability in case of "misuse of the data collected". Personal data rules under India's information technology act mandate that all such apps have comprehensive privacy policies, said Prasanth Sugathan, the charity's legal director. "Privacy policies have to be very specific in apps like these, but many circumvented the law by being vague to just tick the box," he said in emailed comments.

"There are no consent clauses for contact tracing, storage of data (or) the role of private players involved - how can the data be deleted or rectified? These apps are like black holes." —Reuters



Aarogya Setu app, which has been downloaded by 100 million Indians, was initially available only on Google's Android and on Apple devices. — Reuters

'Black holes': India's virus apps raise privacy fears

CHENNAI: Harinder Kaur was not surprised when people slammed their doors in her face as she walked into neighborhoods in the northern state of Punjab armed with a smartphone and a long list of health and travel-related questions. The 28-year-old health worker had been told to go door-to-door in villages in Patiala district and help populate the state's COVID-19 tracing app with "thousands of details" people were unwilling to share, from their digestive health to their mobile numbers.

"People were just hostile," said Kaur, who is one of more than 1 million Accredited Social Health Activists, or ASHA workers, on the frontlines of India's battle to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"We didn't want to download the app, but our concerns were ignored," Kaur said in a phone interview.

"There is so much information the app wants from every individual, including pictures. Many are just scared to give it now and threaten us if we persist." Considered key tools in stemming the pandemic, the rollout of Punjab's Corona Virus Alert (COVA) app and the dozens of tracing apps being used by different Indian states has been mired in concerns over privacy issues.

According to a new report released this month by Tandem Research, an independent research collective, there are at least 85 tech tools being used to support the public health response in India.

At least half of them are mobile apps, say digital rights campaigners. Health workers and lawyers say they are worried about the lack of privacy policies in the apps, as well as the use of open-source software and unclear terms on issues like data retention and sharing.

The apps use Bluetooth and GPS on smartphones to

Apple defeats bid to return 'Fortnite' to App Store

SAN FRANCISCO: A US court has rejected a bid by the makers of Fortnite to reinstate the video game sensation immediately to the App Store, saying its eviction by Apple was a "self-inflicted wound."

The ruling against Epic Games was the opening salvo in a battle over whether Apple's tight control over the App Store, and its 30 percent cut of revenue, counts as monopolistic behavior.

"We thank the court for recognizing that Epic's problem is entirely self-inflicted and is in their power to resolve," Apple told AFP following the ruling in California late Monday.

"We look forward to making our case to the court in September." District Court Judge Yvonne Gonzalez-Rogers's ruling gave Epic a partial victory however by ordering Apple not to limit Epic's ability to provide Unreal Engine, key graphics technology, for other apps. The judge acknowledged that Fortnite has passionate fans and people are turning to games as the pandemic keeps them home, but she added that companies must nevertheless abide by contractual agreements or work out conflicts in court.

Apple pulled Fortnite from its online mobile apps marketplace on August 13 after Epic released an update that dodges revenue sharing with the iPhone maker. Apple does not allow users of its popular devices to download apps from anywhere but its App Store. The Silicon Valley-based tech giant told Epic it would cut off access to tools needed to tailor software for devices powered by the iPhone maker's operating systems. —AFP

China's crash diet begs question: Is it facing a food crisis?

SHANGHAI: A national campaign to curb mounting food waste in China is feeding speculation that the supply outlook is worse than the government admits and fuelling warnings food could become another front in the worsening US-China rivalry. President Xi Jinping started the "Operation Empty Plate" drive in mid-August to address what he called "shocking and distressing" waste, prompting a nationwide push to comply reminiscent of the Mao era.

The aggressive campaign has spooked many on social media, who are asking whether it indicates deeper problems. China is among the world's biggest food producers and consumers, with nearly 1.4 billion mouths to feed. But heavy flooding this year in the Yangtze River basin-the source of most of China's rice-has destroyed huge swathes of farmland, while coronavirus lockdowns earlier this year upset supply chains.

These add to longer-term problems such as dwindling arable land and an exodus of people from rural farming regions to cities. China has increasingly filled the food gap with imports, but trade and political disputes have dramatically soured relations with three of its most important food suppliers-the United States, Canada and Australia. —AFP

Business

US consumer confidence at 6-year low; concerns about recovery rise

Households worry about labor markets and incomes

WASHINGTON: US consumer confidence dropped to a more than six-year low in August as households worried about the labor market and incomes, casting doubts on the sustainability of the economy's recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

The second straight monthly decrease in consumer confidence reported by the Conference Board on Tuesday overshadowed an acceleration in new single-family home sales to a more than 13-1/2-year high in July. The housing market continues to show strong immunity to the coronavirus crisis. The ebb in confidence followed the expiration of a \$600 weekly unemployment benefit supplement on July 31 and a flare-up in new coronavirus infections across the country, which forced some jurisdictions to shut down businesses again or pause reopenings. Though new cases have subsided, hot spots remain.

"Today's data are telling us that while some lucky workers are able to buy new homes, millions of others are unable to afford life's necessities and pay the rent especially after the federal government canceled those \$600 checks," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFJ in New York. "The consumer is the most worried they have been all year which pours cold water on the idea that the economic recovery is sustainable." The Conference Board said its consumer confidence index dropped to a reading of 84.8 this month, the lowest since May 2014, from 91.7 in July. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index edging up to a reading of 93 in August.

The survey's present situation measure, based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions, tumbled to a reading of 84.2 this month from 95.9 in July. The expectations index based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business and labor market conditions

dropped to 85.2 from a reading of 88.9 in July. The survey's so-called labor market differential, derived from data on respondents' views on whether jobs are plentiful or hard to get, deteriorated to a reading of -3.7 this month from 2.2 in July. That measure closely correlates to the unemployment rate in the Labor Department's employment report.

It has dropped from as high as 38.3 in August last year, and fits in with views that the labor market recovery is losing speed after nonfarm payrolls increased by 1.763 million jobs in July after a record jump of 4.791 million in June. The share of consumers expecting an increase in income fell to 12.7 percent this month from 14.8 percent in July and the proportion anticipating a drop increased to 16.6 percent from 15.8 percent last month. The weekly unemployment supplement has been cut to \$300. Economists estimate the reduced unemployment benefits will slash about \$50 billion from retail sales in August and restrain consumer spending, the main driver of the economy.

New home sales increase 13.9% in July



Housing shines

"We are clearly in the second phase of the recovery, driven by underlying fundamentals rather than purely the surge in activity as household reengaged," said James Knightley, chief international economist at ING in New York. "This reinforces our view that a V-shaped recovery will not happen, the US economy is unlikely to recover all of its lost output until mid-2022." The economy slipped into recession in February. Gross domestic product contracted in the second quarter at its steepest pace in at least 73 years. Stocks on Wall Street were mixed after a three-day rally. The dollar fell against a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices were down.

warn of massive job cuts due to reduced travel demand. "We must prepare for the possibility that our nation's leadership will not be able to find a way to further support aviation professionals and the service we provide, especially to smaller communities," American said in the statement.

Widespread cuts

The planned layoffs are in addition to the 12,500 employees who voluntarily left American, and another 11,000 who offered to take a leave of absence in October, the airline said. "In short, American's team will have at least 40,000 fewer people working October 1 than we had when we entered this pandemic," according to the memo. The company in July warned 25,000 workers they could be furloughed beginning October 1.

American said it planned to fly less than 50 percent of its fleet in the fourth quarter, while long-haul international service would be reduced to 25 percent of its 2019 level. The company last week eliminated service to 15 smaller destinations in the United States. Among other carriers, Southwest Airlines said in June nearly 16,900 employees representing 27 percent of the company's workforce had voluntarily left the company. United Airlines said last month it could lay off as many as 36,000 employees, which would represent close to 38 percent of its total headcount.

Delta Air Lines has warned of similar cuts and on Monday the Air Line Pilots Association said the carrier had informed it of plans to furlough 1,941 pilots on October 1.

process under British law to complete its privately solvent recapitalization. The carrier will now face a High Court hearing on September 2 to sanction the restructuring, saying it is confident of getting judges' blessing. Across the Atlantic, the plan must make it through a so-called "Chapter 15" hearing-in reference to the US bankruptcy law on September 3.

'Milestone'

"Achieving this milestone puts Virgin Atlantic in a position to rebuild its balance sheet, restore customer confidence and welcome passengers back to the skies as soon as they are ready to travel," the company said. Branson has previously warned that Virgin Atlantic would collapse unless it received financial aid from the UK government to help weather the crisis. However, with the state unwilling to help save the 36-year-old airline, Virgin scrambled around for a privately-funded package-which it has secured with the help of Delta Air Lines, which owns 49 percent of the carrier. The rescue

salary and bonus cuts across their workforces, remuneration consultants say. A poll in June of 75 financial firms by Pearl Meyer, a global remuneration consultant, showed 63 percent have neither made nor contemplated changes to bonus structures in the face of the pandemic, even though 70 percent expect COVID-19 to have a moderately or slightly negative impact on their businesses. Bonus plans also come despite a regulatory frown in Britain and elsewhere on bumper cash payouts in the early days of the pandemic, as banks were urged to conserve capital.

"These banks move broadly in lockstep, no one wants to cut anything first," said Simon Patterson, managing director at Pearl Meyer, which advises more than 1,000 companies on employee compensation struc-



Real estate signs advertise new homes for sale in multiple new developments in York County, South Carolina. —Reuters

In a separate report on Tuesday, the Commerce Department said new home sales rose 13.9 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 901,000 units last month, the highest level since December 2006. New home sales are counted at the signing of a contract, making them a leading housing market indicator. Economists had forecast new home sales, which account for about 13 percent of housing market sales, gaining 1.3 percent to a rate of 785,000-units. The housing market is being powered by record low interest rates and a migration to low-density residential areas as companies allow employees to work from home.

Data last week showed a record jump in sales of previously owned homes in July. Homebuilding and permits also soared last month, while confidence among homebuilders increased in August to the

highest level since December 1998. At least 28 million people are on unemployment benefits. Economists, however, say unemployment has disproportionately affected low-wage workers, who are typically renters. In July, new home sales increased in the Midwest, South and West. They fell in the Northeast. The median new house price increased 7.2 percent to \$330,600 in July from a year ago.

There were 299,000 new homes on the market, down from 304,000 in June. At July's sales pace it would take 4.0 months to clear the supply of houses on the market, down from 4.6 months in June.

"Given most people who can afford a new home are higher-paid workers who still have their jobs, we should expect this trend to continue," said Robert Frick, corporate economist at Navy Federal Credit Union in Vienna, Virginia. —Reuters

American Airlines to lay off 19,000 workers in October

NEW YORK: American Airlines warned Tuesday it will lay off around 19,000 workers on October 1 after federal aid expires unless lawmakers vote to give beleaguered US carriers more money.

American has been forced to slash flights and seen thousands of employees depart under voluntary programs as it faces a sharp downturn in travel demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

But in a securities filing the Texas-based carrier explained the job cuts are needed because flights have not recovered amid the coronavirus pandemic, and it will keep many planes grounded in the coming months. "Approximately 19,000 of our team members will be involuntarily furloughed or separated from the company on October 1," American said in a memo signed by Chief Executive Doug Parker and President Robert Isom and included in the filing.

However, the job losses could be curbed if Congress extends a program under the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act rescue package that helped airlines retain their staff through the end of September. But negotiations between Congress and the White House on a new spending package are deadlocked as the coronavirus continues to threaten the world's largest economy, and forcing major US carriers to

Creditors back £1.2bn rescue for Virgin Atlantic

LONDON: Virus-hit airline Virgin Atlantic, part-owned by British tycoon Richard Branson, said Tuesday that creditors had approved a £1.2-billion private recapitalization to help ensure its survival.

The rescue, worth \$1.6 billion or 1.3 billion euros, was launched last month following a dramatic jobs-slashing plan, as the coronavirus pandemic hit travel demand and grounded most passenger jets worldwide. Creditor approval was "a significant milestone in safeguarding its future," Virgin Atlantic said in a statement, highlighting "overwhelming support of all four creditor classes, including 99-percent support from trade creditors".

Virgin Atlantic is undergoing a court-sanctioned

Banks in bonus balancing act as economies shrink

LONDON: Major international banks may still pay out big bonuses to high flyers this year even as the pandemic saps the global economy, as fears of losing talent to rivals during a trading boom trump worries of a big compensation bill. While the likes of HSBC and Deutsche Bank are making redundancies to trim costs, other banks are taking a more relaxed approach to job,



In this file photo, a passenger walks past empty American Airlines check-in terminals at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia. American Airlines said it will lay off 19,000 workers on October 1. —AFP

Loans and grants to airlines included in the CARES Act, approved in the early weeks of the pandemic, allowed the carriers to continue to pay workers on the condition they not lay off any employees through the end of September. However, the virus has remained a threat to the United States much longer than anticipated, and key provisions such as aid to the unemployed and small businesses have expired in recent weeks. In their filing, American said both Republicans and Democrats support giving more money to airlines but that was hampered by their inability to pass a larger relief bill. —AFP



Virus-hit airline Virgin Atlantic, part-owned by British tycoon Richard Branson, said Tuesday that creditors had approved a £1.2-billion private recapitalization to help ensure its survival.

cash, including £200 million from Branson's Virgin Group, will be delivered over the next 18 months. The package will pave the way for Virgin Atlantic to rebuild its balance sheet and return to profitability from 2022, according to the carrier. —AFP

tures annually. Sources at two global banks said it was too early to speculate on bonus outcomes for specific units, though many traders will expect big payouts after a surge in revenue at market divisions propped up investment bank profits in the first half of the year.

Research from compensation consultant Johnson Associates this month suggested 2020 bonuses for fixed-income traders for instance could rise by more than 30 percent from last year. But that will need to be balanced against performances in other units, with low interest rates and an expected rise in defaults set to hit earnings in retail and corporate banking.

"Financial markets are cyclical but what we face is so unprecedented, no one truly knows whether next year is a feast or famine," Patterson said.

Finnair to cut 1,000 jobs as crisis end 'not in sight'

HELSINKI: Finnish national carrier Finnair announced plans Tuesday to cut 1,000 jobs, or 15 percent of its workforce, amid dire warnings about the economic impact of the coronavirus.

"A rapid turn for the better in the pandemic situation is unfortunately not in sight," chief executive Topi Manner said in a statement. "Our revenue has decreased considerably and that is why we simply must adjust our costs to our new size," Manner said. Scandinavian rival SAS posted a sharp loss in its third quarter profit meanwhile, as cost-cutting measures including around 4,800 job cuts failed to offset the huge drop in airline traffic. The 1,000 job cuts at Finnair will not apply to cabin and flight deck crew, the airline said, although flying staff will remain on furlough "until further notice". The vast majority of its 6,700 employees are currently on temporary layoffs.

Alongside job cuts, the carrier will make other structural changes and on Tuesday updated its savings target from 80 million euros (\$94 million) to 100 million euros. Finnair, which is majority owned by the Finnish state, cut 90 percent of its flights on April 1 and issued a profit warning as coronavirus restrictions pounded international travel. The company has been particularly hard hit by the drop in long-haul traffic, with flights between Helsinki and Asia a key part of the group's growth strategy. The carrier sold 500 million euros' worth of shares in June to boost liquidity.

Finland's government further tightened coronavirus travel restrictions last week, banning tourists from all but a handful of EU member states. In Stockholm, SAS said that its third quarter that runs from May through July, ended with a net loss of 2.37 billion kronor (228 million euros, \$270 million), more than reversing the profit of 1.2 billion kronor earned during the same period a year earlier.

"Despite our immediate measures to reduce costs to adapt to a new reality, the cost reduction of 67 percent did not offset the sharp decline in revenue" that was triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, a statement said. SAS revenues plunged by more than 80 percent to 2.5 billion kronor, and the number of passengers was down by 86 percent. The airline furloughed around 90 percent of its staff in mid-March, and said in April that around 40 percent of its positions, or 4,800 jobs, would be eliminated. —AFP

Extreme moderation

Britain's Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) banned bonus payments to top management and material risk takers at the UK's biggest deposit-taking banks when Europe's COVID-19 crisis escalated in March, meaning some top traders could miss out. Some senior managers at Barclays, Lloyds Banking Group and NatWest Group waived scheduled pay rises and took voluntary salary cuts. But the PRA has not made clear how long the ban will stay in place and some banks are already planning for future payouts, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) noted last month, though it urged them to align payouts with long-term business plans. The PRA said it will reassess firms' distribution plans beyond 2020 in the fourth quarter. —Reuters

Business

NBK Economic report

Kuwait's budget deficit widened in FY19/20 on lower oil prices

Lower subsidies drove the reduction in current spending

KUWAIT: Kuwait's fiscal position remained under pressure during FY19/20 due to low oil prices, leading to a continued draw down from the government's financial reserves. The deficit increased to KD 3.9 billion before the transfer of 10 percent of revenues to the Future Generation Fund (FGF), or 9.8 percent of 2019 GDP. This compares with a deficit of KD 1.3 billion, or 3.1 percent of GDP in the previous fiscal year. After the usual FGF transfers, the deficit would be KD 5.6 billion (14.1 percent of GDP), compared to KD 3.4 billion (7.9 percent of GDP) a year earlier. However parliament have recently approved the suspension of these transfers for last year and any future deficit years. The widening deficit was driven by lower oil prices, the fall in which accelerated sharply in March due to the global spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

plummeted 15.5 percent and 36.3 percent, respectively, while earnings from other goods & services fell by 41 percent to KD 69 million. In contrast, the United Nations Compensation Commission data showed a notable increase in Iraqi compensation transfers to KD 0.3 billion in FY19/20 from KD 0.1 billion in the previous fiscal year.

Meanwhile, the data also reveals that accrued debt due to the government, which includes unpaid utility bills, remains relatively high at 4.1 percent of GDP. Recouping these amounts would require stricter enforcement and an enhanced level of efficiency in the government collection system.

Spending reduction

In the context of a persistent budget deficit and calls to reduce wasteful public spending, the government trimmed its outlays by 3.2 percent to KD 21.1 billion last year. This represented 94 percent of the originally budgeted total. Current spending fell by 2.1 percent to KD 18.8 billion, mainly driven by a sharp 57 percent fall in (mostly) oil sector subsidies to KD 0.6 billion. Although the precise cause of this fall is not clear, we think it may be mostly due to a decline in arrears payments made to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, which were exceptionally large in FY18/19. Excluding this subsidy category, current spending would have risen 2 percent last year, still pointing to a degree of spending restraint.

Upward pressure on spending came from compensation of employees (around 40 percent of current spending), which increased by 5.6 percent, following an increase of 6.5 percent rise in FY18/19. In addition, purchases of goods & services increased by 6.4 percent on the back of an 11.0 percent increase in the purchases of fuel for electricity generation and water distillation plants to reach KD 1.5 billion, despite lower fuel prices. Finally, grants - mainly transfers to bodies as Kuwait University, the Public Authority of Manpower, and the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects - remained relatively stable at KD 5.3 billion.

Meanwhile, capital spending fell by KD 0.3 billion or 12 percent to KD 2.3 billion. This represented 70 percent of its budget allocations, which is the lowest ratio in six years and compares to 80 percent a year earlier. The decline in capital spending was consistent with weak project activity of recent years, due to prolonged bid negotiations and various technical difficulties. In addition, tight spending constraints aimed at curbing a growing deficit may have been a further contributing factor.

The government also presents spending data in an alternative way, which streamlines some of the above classifications. For example, some payments on wages fall outside of the compensation category mentioned above. Overall, the wage bill amounted to KD 12 billion or 57 percent of all spending and total subsidies (some of which are also classified outside the official 'subsidies' categories) a further 19 percent, adding up to around 76 percent of total spending. The broad classification of the spending categories is shown in chart 5 below.

Public finances, KD billion unless otherwise stated

| | FY | | | % y/y | | % of GDP | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| | FY17/18 | FY18/19 | FY19/20 | FY18/19 | FY19/20 | FY18/19 | FY19/20 |
| Revenues | 16.0 | 20.6 | 17.2 | 28.5 | -16.2 | 46.4 | 43.1 |
| Non-oil | 1.7 | 2.1 | 1.9 | 24.0 | -13.1 | 5.0 | 4.6 |
| Oil | 14.3 | 18.4 | 15.4 | 29.0 | -16.6 | 43.4 | 38.4 |
| Total Expenditures | 19.3 | 21.9 | 21.1 | 13.6 | -3.3 | 51.4 | 52.9 |
| Current Expenditures | 16.7 | 19.2 | 18.8 | 14.9 | -2.1 | 45.2 | 47.1 |
| Compensation of Employees | 6.7 | 7.2 | 7.6 | 6.5 | 5.6 | 16.9 | 19.0 |
| Goods & Services | 2.8 | 3.0 | 3.2 | 6.7 | 6.4 | 7.1 | 8.0 |
| Subsidies | 0.3 | 1.4 | 0.6 | ... | -56.6 | 3.4 | 1.5 |
| Grants | 4.7 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 12.0 | 0.2 | 12.3 | 13.1 |
| Social Subsidies | 1.1 | 1.0 | 1.0 | -7.9 | -2.2 | 2.3 | 2.4 |
| Miscellaneous & Transfers | 1.1 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 26.0 | -12.0 | 3.3 | 3.1 |
| Capital Expenditures | 2.5 | 2.6 | 2.3 | 5.0 | -12.6 | 6.2 | 5.8 |
| Budget Balance | -3.3 | -1.3 | -3.9 | ... | ... | -3.1 | -9.8 |
| RFFG transfers* | 1.6 | 2.1 | 1.7 | 28.5 | -16.2 | 4.8 | 4.3 |
| Budget Bal. after RFFG transfers* | -4.9 | -3.4 | -5.6 | ... | ... | -7.9 | -14.1 |

Deficits pressure reserves

Overall, the size of the deficit came in very close to our expectations and was the government's sixth consecutive post-transfers annual deficit following the drop in oil prices seen in 2014. While the government retains huge financial resources of more than \$500 billion in its main sovereign wealth funds, the persistent deficits of recent years have drained those available in the General Reserve Fund (GRF) used mainly for budget financing. This has become even more pressing since the expiration of the debt law in 2017, which left GRF reserves as the sole means of financing. According to the State Audit Bureau, the GRF had net assets of KD22.9 billion remaining in June 2019. Based upon reasonable assumptions, this may have declined to around KD18 billion at the end of FY19/20. The remaining liquid assets are likely to have been considerably lower.

The dwindling of GRF resources have continued in the first few months of this fiscal year, given the weakness of oil prices (which averaged just \$30/bbl in the first four months) and pressures on spending linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. For FY20/21 as a whole, the deficit could reach more than KD 10 billion, or 32 percent of GDP based upon an average KEC oil price of just below \$40/bbl and a cut in spending of 5 percent to KD 20 billion. This would deplete the majority of the remaining funds in the GRF. Indeed these pressures are already evident with the news that the government swapped KD 2.1 billion in GRF assets for more liquid FGF assets recently to keep financing its operations.

The government has proposed a range of potential measures aimed at trimming the deficit going forward. These include implementing both an excise duty and VAT (KD 0.8 billion), a 5 percent profit tax (KD 0.5 billion), a rise in utility fees (KD0.5 billion) and an increase in charges for other government services. The total

impact of these measures are estimated at KD 5.0 billion. However, most of these reforms require parliamentary approval and are unlikely to be implemented soon. We would therefore expect a mild impact on the current fiscal year. In the near term, efforts to address the budget deficit are likely to focus more on cuts in non-essential spending as well as freeing up financing options such as the recent GRF/FGF asset swap and the now-approved suspension of the 10 percent transfers to the FGF when the budget is in deficit.

However, the need for deep and wide-ranging fiscal reforms is becoming more and more urgent. The recent S&P downgrade to Kuwait's sovereign credit rating outlook to negative from stable is a warning sign reflecting the depletion of GRF resources and the absence of both a new debt law as well as reforms comparable to those seen in most other Gulf countries. Reforms should target rationalizing spending, promoting public private partnerships to reduce the cost of government projects, and mobilizing more non-oil revenues. Of course, for now, priority should be given to containing and eradicating the Covid-19 pandemic, which makes the passing of the debt law absolutely essential.

Kuwait could benefit from its good rating and low interest rate environment to borrow at competitive rates. But this does not mean that it will be "good debt" unless it is used for productive purposes (efficient physical and human capital investment) based on a clear and comprehensive medium-term reform plan. Such a plan should focus on addressing macroeconomic imbalances, chief among them is fiscal sustainability, and implementing structural reforms aimed at enhancing the role of the private sector in economic activity and creating jobs for the large number of nationals expected to enter the labor force.

- The fiscal deficit in FY19/20 stood at KD 3.9 billion or 9.8% of GDP due to lower oil prices, and could more than double in the current fiscal year.
- GRF resources used to finance the deficits are being depleted, underscoring the necessity of passing the debt law to deal with the short-term needs of combatting the Covid-19 pandemic and supporting the economy.
- At the same time, there is a need for a medium-term comprehensive reform plan aimed at addressing fiscal sustainability and enhancing the role of the private sector in economic activity.

Oil revenues drop

Oil revenues, which constituted 89 percent of total revenues, declined in FY19/20 on the back of a 10.3 percent fall in the price of Kuwait Export Crude (KEC). In addition, oil production fell by 1.1 percent as per the OPEC+ agreement to cut oil production. As a result, hydrocarbon revenues declined 16.6 percent, despite some support from rising gas receipts. Still, oil revenues came in at 111 percent above budget largely due to higher-than-expected oil prices of \$61.1/bbl versus \$55/bbl projected in the budget.

On the other hand, non-oil revenues fell by 13.1 percent following an increase of 24 percent in the previous year, due to a 7.7 percent decline in taxes and fees. Taxes on foreign corporations decreased 26.1 percent due to weak economic activity, which was also reflected in lower imports and customs proceeds (-3.6 percent) compared to FY18/19.

In addition, the proceeds of electricity and water (worth around 15 percent of total non-oil revenues)

Canon study reveals fast pace of change in print industry

DUBAI: The Canon ME Printing Industry Market Study 2020 has revealed that the print industry is at a turning point and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for print service providers to transform their objectives and operational model, and to look toward new avenues to diversify their offerings. Canon Middle East (CME) revealed the study's results during a webinar on Tuesday, August 25, 2020 hosted in partnership with ME Printer Magazine. The study recognizes the varied opinions between corporates and print service providers on the evolution of the industry, especially with regards to sustainable printing solutions, and aims to establish closer dialogue on the issue between both groups. It also gives an in-depth look into the opportunities, challenges and the latest market trends in the region during COVID-19, more specifically within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The industry-first study also supports print service providers looking to implement an informed and sustainable business strategy based on their customers' requirements in a post-COVID world.

Shadi Bakhour, B2B Business Unit Director, Canon Middle East, said: "With

the onset of the pandemic and the lockdown, we knew that there is going to be an impact on the print. There was already a change in motion with the natural progression brought forth by digital trends and new print sectors emerging, but we believe the change was accelerated by COVID-19 and put the industry on a path where transformation was now a necessity. Our objective is to support the print industry in the region, and conducting the Canon ME Printing Industry Market Study 2020 early on allows businesses and stakeholders in the sector to make solid strategic decisions and capitalize on the opportunities that are now available based on these new insights."

The study was conducted between June 2020 until the first week of July 2020 with print service providers as well as corporates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and the Levant.

Out of the countries surveyed, there was a consensus between industry stakeholders that business opportunities will become available predominantly in KSA and UAE as the top two growth markets as the region progresses with the recovery phase. The study also highlighted the

opposing opinions between print businesses and corporates regarding sustainability. While 53 percent of corporates are transitioning to sustainable printing solutions in the coming months, 40 percent of print businesses believe pricing is a major concern and have not yet invested in sustainable products to answer the rising demand.

With environmental regulations being adopted globally, and the pandemic increasing the pressure on governments and businesses to follow sustainable business practices, print service providers will eventually have to invest in sustainable technology if they are to remain competitive in the market. This insight presents an opportunity to narrow the gap between print businesses and their customers in the immediate future.

Some of the challenges indicated by print service providers include minimal financing options or unstable supply and demand trends. However, only 21 percent feel digitization is a major challenge, indicating the industry has already embraced this trend with the majority of print service providers agreeing that cloud-enabled digital workflow services were already adding value to their overall workflow. These insights on the decline of print volumes and the transition toward digital solutions are correlated by the significant number of print service providers (64 percent) indicating they plan to diversify their print business into new areas of printing - with 30 percent planning on investing in new digital machinery in the near future to achieve this objective and meet customers' demands for shorter print runs.

From a printing perspective, the study highlights that corporates see a decline regarding in-office printing, especially with the rise of working-from-home schemes, with 35 percent believing that the move towards digitization is inevitable. A majority, 69 percent, also agree that printing will still be used for major company or product announcements.

Burgan Bank offers through Qatar Airways prepaid card

KUWAIT: Ensuring all customers are met with banking solutions that serve their lifestyle needs, Burgan Bank now brings a limited time offer and other travel benefits through the Qatar Airways prepaid card. For those planning their adventures, customers and non-customers are encouraged to apply for the Burgan Bank Qatar Airways Prepaid card in order to enjoy free 4000 Welcome Bonus Q-miles, in addition to 3 Q-miles for every 1 KD spent locally, and 5 Q-miles for every 1 KD spent internationally. Q-miles are bonus miles earned to travel with Qatar Airways, a member of oneworld, an alliance of thirteen world-leading airlines committed to providing the highest level of service and connecting you to over 1,000 destinations around the world.

Cardholders are also entitled to a discount of up to 30 percent on 'Cleartrip', a free 'Schengen' approved medical insurance as well as special monthly offers from the largest electronics chain in Kuwait, 'Best Al-Yousifi'.

Saket Jajoo, Head of Cards at Burgan Bank said: "Burgan Bank is delighted to continue its long-standing partnership with the prominent regional and global airline, Qatar Airways. We seek to elevate our customer's quality of life by adapting to changing consumer needs and on-demand seasonal expectations. Qatar Airways prepaid card from Burgan Bank offers the highest Q-miles rewards program in Kuwait. Customers and non-customers can obtain the prepaid card through a swift, simple and secure process to experience the limitless privileges."

Welcome to the freewheeling world of crypto lending

LONDON: It sounds like a surefire bet. You lend money to a borrower who puts up collateral that exceeds the size of the loan, and then you earn interest of about 20 percent. What could possibly go wrong? That's the proposition presented by "DeFi", or decentralized finance, peer-to-peer cryptocurrency platforms that allow lenders and borrowers to transact without the traditional gatekeepers of loans: banks.

And it has exploded during the COVID-19 crisis. Loans on such platforms have risen more than seven-fold since March to \$3.7 billion, according to industry site DeFi Pulse, as investors hunt returns at a time when central

banks across the world have slashed interest rates to prop up economies battered by the pandemic.

Proponents say DeFi sites, which run on open-source code with algorithms that set rates in real-time based on supply and demand, represent the future of financial services, providing a cheaper, more efficient and accessible way for people and companies to access and offer credit.

But with the promise of high rewards comes high risk. Lawyers and analysts say such sites are vulnerable to coding bugs and hacks, and most are untested at scale and unregulated - the latter typical of much of a global cryptocurrency sector mistrustful of the financial establishment. Critics warn the technology could be the next overblown bubble of the crypto world, akin to initial coin offerings (ICOs), with inexperienced investors at particular risk. In 2017, billions of dollars poured into ICOs, where companies raised capital by issuing new virtual coins. Most projects failed to gain traction, and many investors lost their money. —Reuters



Classifieds

Thursday, August 27, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot with light to moderate freshening gradually north westerly wind with speed of 15 - 45 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot with light to moderate freshening over coastal areas north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 40 km/h.

| WEATHER WARNING | | | No Current Warnings | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| STATION | MAX. EXP. | MIN. REC. | SFC. CHART 26/08/2020 0000 UTC | | |
| KUWAIT CITY | 44 °C | 33 °C | | | |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 45 °C | 28 °C | | | |
| ABDALY | 45 °C | 27 °C | | | |
| BUBYAN | - °C | - °C | | | |
| JAHRA | 45 °C | 30 °C | | | |
| FAILAKA ISLAND | 44 °C | 30 °C | | | |
| SALMIYAH | 40 °C | 34 °C | | | |
| AHMADI | - °C | - °C | | | |
| NUWASIB | 43 °C | 30 °C | | | |
| WAFRA | 45 °C | 29 °C | | | |
| SALMY | 43 °C | 27 °C | | | |

| 4 DAYS FORECAST | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|--|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | Temperatures | | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
| | | | MAX. | MIN. | | |
| Thursday | 08/27 | Hot | 44 °C | 29 °C | NW-VRB | 08 - 32 km/h |
| Friday | 08/28 | Hot | 45 °C | 29 °C | NW-VRB | 10 - 35 km/h |
| Saturday | 08/29 | Hot | 46 °C | 29 °C | VRB-NW | 08 - 30 km/h |
| Sunday | 08/30 | Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas | 45 °C | 29 °C | VRB-SE | 08 - 35 km/h |

| PRAYER TIMES | | RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT | |
|--------------|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Fajr | 03:59 | MAX. Temp. | 45 °C |
| Sunrise | 05:22 | MIN. Temp. | 29 °C |
| Zuhr | 11:50 | MAX. RH | 32 % |
| Asr | 15:24 | MIN. RH | 08 % |
| Sunset | 18:17 | MAX. Wind | N 64 km/h |
| Isha | 19:38 | TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR. | 0 mm |

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP:0

EMERGENCY

112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSALHOTLINE 128

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Apply with detailed CV by whatsapp to:
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Level 1, for immediate hiring. The potential candidate should have transferable residence and ability to start work the soonest. With an attractive monthly salary, accommodation, transportation and food allowance will also be provided. All other terms and conditions are as per Kuwait Labor Law.

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| Hospitals | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |
| Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 |
| Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 |

| Clinics | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirqab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

Airlines

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Kuwait Airways | 171 |
| Jazeera Airways | 177 |
| Turkish Airlines | 1884918 |
| FlyDubai | 22414400 |
| Qatar Airways | 22423888 |
| KLM | 22425747 |
| Royal Jordanian | 22418064/5/6 |
| British Airways | 22425635 |
| Air France | 22430224 |
| Emirates | 22921555 |
| Air India | 22456700 |
| Air India EXPRESS | 22438185/4 |
| Sri Lanka Airlines | 22424444 |
| Egypt Air | 22421578 |
| Swiss Air | 22421516 |
| Saudia | 22426306 |
| Middle East Airlines | 22423073 |

Word Search

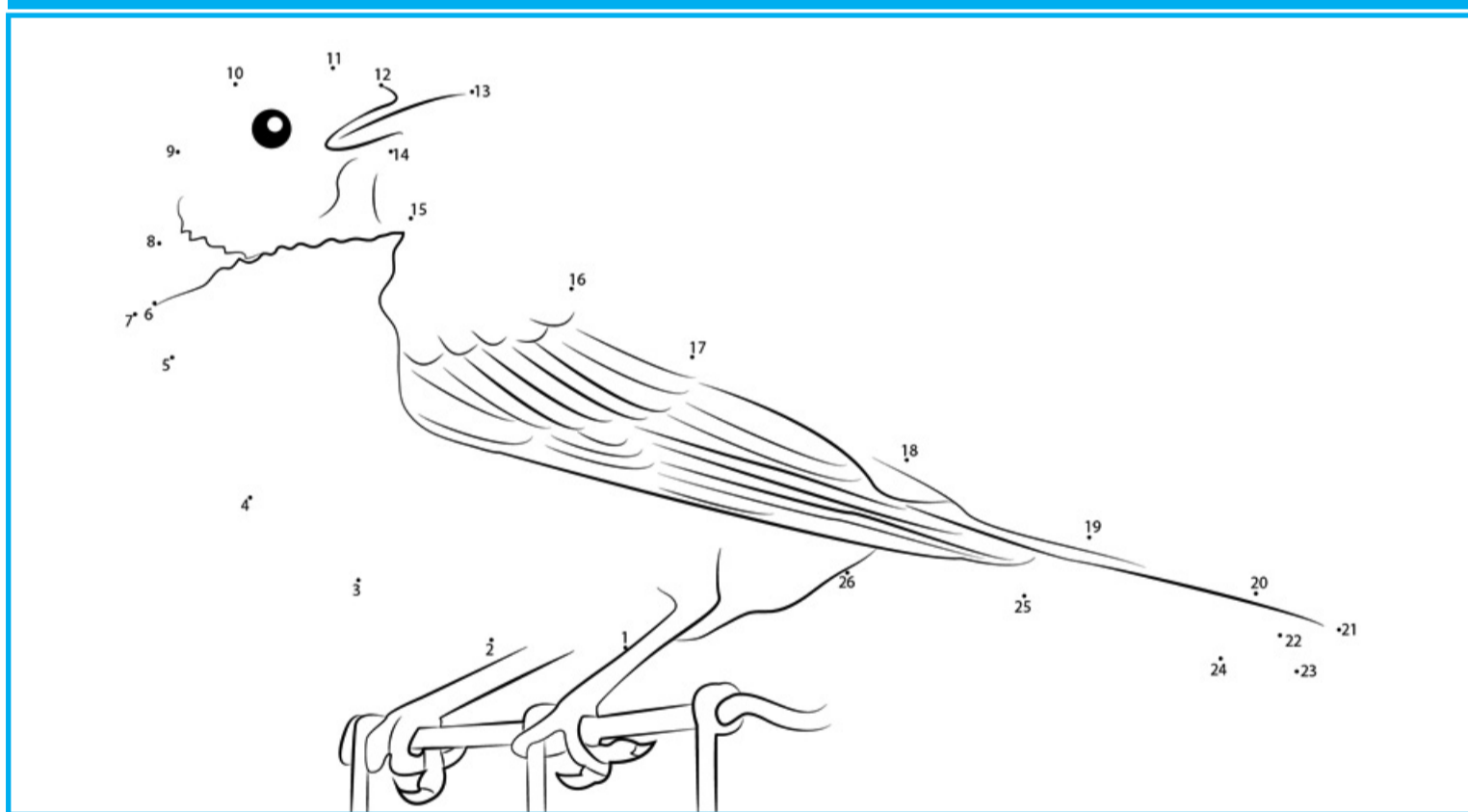
Light as a Feather

Find all of the hidden words and the letters that remain spell out a funny saying about our feathered friends.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T | H | E | N | E | K | A | R | T | L | Q | Y | B | E | I |
| R | D | E | I | B | I | S | E | L | M | A | U | M | I | N |
| N | R | E | T | L | N | R | V | Y | A | G | U | A | W | O |
| W | O | E | W | U | G | E | O | T | T | Z | H | E | I | O |
| W | B | I | O | E | F | E | D | O | R | M | T | N | K | L |
| O | I | P | R | J | I | C | A | N | A | R | Y | E | B | U |
| R | N | G | C | A | S | T | I | G | T | S | L | V | U | T |
| I | H | A | S | Y | H | E | P | E | L | I | C | A | N | Q |
| O | S | M | W | E | E | E | N | C | O | E | N | R | R | D |
| L | H | M | A | S | R | A | R | P | O | F | U | S | Y | K |
| E | A | E | L | C | C | T | U | O | C | A | L | D | E | S |
| L | W | O | L | U | A | F | H | R | N | L | U | S | K | T |
| A | K | T | O | G | F | W | A | E | U | C | O | T | R | O |
| S | T | T | W | I | H | N | E | G | K | O | C | H | U | R |
| E | E | S | N | E | E | N | I | U | G | N | E | P | T | K |

- | | | |
|----------|------------|---------|
| BLUE JAY | HERON | QUAIL |
| CANARY | IBIS | QUETZAL |
| CRANE | KINGFISHER | RAVEN |
| CROW | KIWI | ROBIN |
| DOVE | LARK | STORK |
| DUCK | LOON | SWALLOW |
| EAGLE | MACAW | SWAN |
| EGRET | MAGPIE | TERN |
| EMU | ORIOLE | TOUCAN |
| FALCON | OWL | TURKEY |
| GOOSE | PELICAN | WREN |
| GULL | PENGUIN | |
| HAWK | PUFFIN | |

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
 All things domestic are highlighted, Aries. It could be that you've finally called the plumber or set out to do those household repairs yourself. New people are likely to come into your life. In fact, they may try to fling an invitation for dinner, if possible. All you can expect today is the unexpected. Have some extra food on hand and see what happens.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
 You're likely aware of your writing abilities, Cancer, but you may not realize the extent of your talent. It would be worthwhile to devote more time to your craft. You can't improve much if writing time is interrupted by other obligations. Take some time to produce something of value. Why not give it a try, even if just for a week or so, to see what you can do?

Libra (September 23-October 22)
 Positive change rarely happens without effort. Keep this in mind as transformation occurs quickly. You may feel as though you're in the middle of a whirlpool and getting sucked deeper and deeper, unsure of where you'll ultimately end up. This is merely the "nose to the grindstone" phase. Trust that your efforts will ultimately be rewarded.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
 Friendship could turn into romance if you aren't careful, Capricorn. A platonic relationship could turn passionate, and no one would be more surprised than you. Think carefully about where you'd like this to go. While it can't go back to the way it was, you can stop it from progressing further if you're uncomfortable with the new dynamic. You can only make this decision once.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
 Keep your mind open to any and all possibilities today, Taurus. It's likely that you'll encounter someone who imparts valuable information. You may not realize right away just how important this information is, but it could have a dramatic impact on your life. Be prepared for anything. This is likely to be a most interesting day.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
 Tact isn't necessarily your strong suit, Leo. No one would accuse you of being overly sensitive to other people's emotions, but today you turn over a new leaf. This "new and improved" you tunes in to the thoughts and feelings of others and responds in thoughtful, caring ways. You may be surprised at how effective this gentler touch can be.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
 You have natural leadership abilities, and today would be an ideal day to make use of this talent. In the past you may have hesitated to step forward and implement your ideas. But recent successes have given you the necessary confidence to pursue your objectives. You'll likely find that the higher-ups support your efforts. Make the most of today's auspicious circumstances, Scorpio.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)
 Today you wake up feeling reinvigorated and renewed, Aquarius. You feel as though you can accomplish anything. And very likely, today you can. Anything you set your mind and attention to works out beautifully. Take care that you don't gloat too much, though. Just because you feel invincible doesn't necessarily mean that you are.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
 Your ship could come in today, Gemini. It will happen unexpectedly, and it may take you some time to adjust to this sudden financial windfall. This is a day of big changes, because you may also decide to use this money to completely alter your way of life. It could be that you make a move to another part of the country or decide to change professions. Trust your instincts, Gemini.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
 Even though you probably aren't getting on a plane today, Virgo, you would love to at some point in the future. Your wanderlust is back and you're bound for the wild blue yonder yet again, most likely to someplace exotic. Enjoy the time away, but do come back. It seems that sometimes your spirit of adventure dampens your enjoyment of the more mundane but more real daily life.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
 Today you feel in control and on top of the world. You can do anything, Sagittarius. This would be an auspicious time to begin a new project or creative endeavor. You can't help but succeed but take care not to get in your own way. Sometimes you can be your own worst enemy. Believe in yourself and move confidently in the direction of your dreams in order to make them come true.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
 People often see you as shy and reserved, Pisces, but of course you know that you're really very friendly once you relax. Today you find it unusually easy to interact with others. In fact, you feel downright gregarious as you chat and joke along with the best of them. This new, sociable you does wonders for your image. You've needed to loosen up for some time.

Lifestyle | Features

World's biggest rooftop greenhouse opens in Montreal

Building on a new hanging garden trend, a greenhouse atop a Montreal warehouse growing eggplants and tomatoes to meet demand for locally sourced foods has set a record as the largest in the world. It's not an obvious choice of location to cultivate organic vegetables-in the heart of Canada's second-largest city-but Lufa Farms yesterday inaugurates the facility that spans 160,000 square feet (15,000 square meters), or about the size of three football fields. "The company's mission is to grow food where people live and in a sustainable way," spokesman Thibault Sorret told AFP, as he showed off its first harvest of giant eggplants.

It is the fourth rooftop greenhouse the company has erected in the city. The first, built in 2011 at a cost of more than Can\$2 million (US\$1.5 million), broke new ground. Since then, competitors picked up and ran with the novel idea, including American Gotham Greens, which constructed eight greenhouses on roofs in New York, Chicago and Denver, and French Urban Nature, which is planning one in Paris in 2022. A local Montreal supermarket has also offered

since 2017 an assortment of vegetables grown on its roof, which was "greened" in order to cut greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change.

'Reinventing the food system'

Lebanese-born Mohamed Hage and his wife Lauren Rathmell, an American from neighboring Vermont, founded Lufa Farms in 2009 with the ambition of "reinventing the food system." At Lufa, about 100 varieties of vegetables and herbs are grown year-round in hydroponic containers lined with coconut coir and fed liquid nutrients, including lettuce, cucumbers, zucchini, bok choy, celery and sprouts. Bumblebees pollinate the plants, while wasps and ladybugs keep aphids in check, without the need for pesticides.

Enough vegetables are harvested each week to feed 20,000 families, with baskets tailored for each at a base price of Can\$30. The company's "online market" also sells goods produced by local partner farms including "bread, pasta, rice, etcetera," Sorret said. On the ground floor of the new greenhouse, a huge distribution center brings together nearly 2,000 grocery products for offer



Lufa Farms just opened what it says is the world's largest commercial rooftop greenhouse, seen in this aerial photo in Montreal.

to "Lufavores," including restaurants. Shopper Catherine Bonin tells AFP she loves the freshness of the produce but laments that some items are always out of stock. "I can never get peppers," she says.

Sales doubled during pandemic

"We are now able to feed almost two percent of Montreal with our greenhouses and our partner farms," said Sorret. "The advantage of being on a roof is that you recover a lot of energy from the bot-

tom of the building," allowing considerable savings in heating, an asset during the harsh Quebec winter, he explains. "We also put to use spaces that were until now completely unused," he said. Fully automated, the new greenhouse also has a water system that collects and reuses rainwater, resulting in savings of "up to 90 percent" compared to a traditional farm.

Lufa "more than doubled" its sales during the new coronavirus pandemic, a jump attributable "to contactless delivery from our online site," says Sorret. Profitable since 2016, the private company now employs 500 people, around 200 more than before the pandemic, according to him. It is currently working on the electrification of its fleet of delivery trucks and is in the process of exporting its model "to different cities around the world," starting with Canada and the United States, Sorret said. "What's a little crazy," he recalls, is that none of the founders "had grown a tomato in their life" before opening the business.— AFP



Antonio Banderas

SPANISH ACTOR ANTONIO BANDERAS 'CURED' OF CORONAVIRUS

Spanish actor Antonio Banderas said Tuesday that he was "cured" of the coronavirus, which he contracted several weeks ago. The actor known for his roles in films like "The Mask of Zorro" and "Philadelphia" said on Twitter he had kept to a "disciplined confinement" for 21 days since learning he was infected. He publicly announced he had tested positive on his 60th birthday on August 10. At the time, he said that he had been feeling "relatively well, just a bit more tired than usual". Banderas did not reveal where he had spent his three weeks in quarantine. He has previously suffered a heart attack at a home he owns in Britain.

Describing himself Tuesday as "cured", he added that "my thoughts go to those who weren't as fortunate as me, and to those who suffered more than I did. "I also wish strength to the ones who are in the middle of the fight," Banderas said. In January the actor received his first Oscar nomination for his role in Spanish director Pedro Almodovar's "Pain and Glory" in which he plays a film director in decline who reflects on his life.—AFP

BIGGIE'S CROWN, TUPAC'S LOVE LETTERS HEADED TO AUCTION

Teenage Tupac's love letters and fellow rapper Biggie's iconic crown will hit the auction block next month in Sotheby's first ever sale devoted to hip hop. The letters and crown will headline the September 15 sale that features more than 120 lots including clothing, jewelry, art and other ephemera of the genre born in the Bronx. The crown is the headgear that The Notorious B.I.G.-famous for hits including "Juicy," "Big Poppa" and "Hypnotize"-wore during his last recorded photoshoot in 1997, just three days before his shock murder in Los Angeles. The photographer Barron Claiborne, who took the now immortal image of the artist born Christopher Wallace, put the rap artifact up for sale where it's expected to go for \$200,000 to \$300,000.

It's quite a sum for a crown made of plastic that Sean "Diddy" Combs, at the time Biggie's label owner, at first worried would make the hip hop superstar look like the Burger King rather than the King of New York. "You're not so much selling the object as selling the story that's behind it," explained Cassandra Hatton, the senior specialist at Sotheby's behind the auction set to become an annual event. "It's something that we all recognize. All you have to say is 'Biggie's Crown,'" she told AFP. "Even my grandma-and I love Grandma, but she's not hip," laughed Hatton. "She knew what Biggie's crown was."

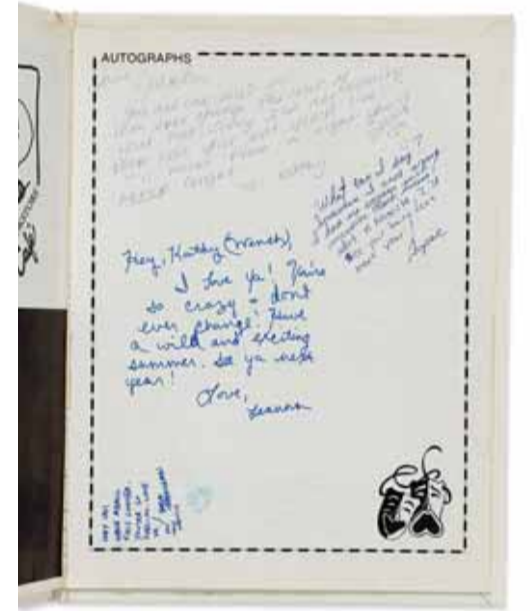
Tupac in love

The other cornerstone of the September auction is a collection of 22 signed love letters penned by Tupac Shakur to his girlfriend Kathy Loy when he was a teenager in Baltimore. Tupac-whose hits included "California,"



This undated handout image courtesy of Sotheby's shows Tupac Shakur's, High School Love Letters to Kathy Loy.— AFP photos

"Changes," "Dear Mama" and "All Eyez On Me"-was also gunned down, just months before Biggie. Both murders of two of hip hop's most influential stars remain unsolved. The 42 pages of intimate messages written in the deliberate yet shaky cursive of an adolescent paint a vulnerable portrait of the lyrical Tupac in love, both eager to profess his heart's desire and insecure that he could lose his high school sweetheart. "I love you now more than ever. So forgive me for carrying on. I love you beautiful. Still love me?" he writes in one letter signed "With All My Heart, Tupac Shakur." "Will you call me tonight at 11:40?"



This undated handout image courtesy of Sotheby's shows Kathy Loy's Yearbook Signed by Tupac Shakur.

Just to check to see if I'm okay," the nascent rapper wrote in a postscript. The letters are expected to sell for at least \$60,000 to \$80,000. The sale intends to trace the development of hip hop from its birth in the late 1970s through the "Golden Age" of the mid-1980s to mid-1990s to the present day. A portion of the proceeds will go to non-profit community organizations, including the music and DJ program Building Beats aimed at engaging underserved youth.

The charity aspect was important, Hatton said, because "the sale is about celebrating the history of hip hop and

how much of an impact it's had on culture." "We wanted to support organizations that themselves supported the preservation of the history of hip hop."

The auction is unique not only in that it's the first of its kind at a major international house, but also because the majority of the consigners are artists themselves or their estates, rather than collectors. "That's kind of a big conversation in the art world-do the artists get any benefit from the sale of their art," Hatton said. In this case, she said, "we can absolutely say yes."— AFP

Dogged by lockdown loneliness, Indians adopt man's best friend

When Lakshmi Sundar brought a malnourished stray puppy into her home in the Indian city of Chennai, she thought the brown-and-white bundle of energy would be a guest for just a few weeks. With the world marking International Dog Day yesterday, her household is one of a growing number across India to have adopted man's best friend to cope with the loneliness inflicted by the pandemic. "We bonded so well from day one, which is very rare... I don't bond that easily with anyone," Sundar, a 53-year-old who treats diabetes patients, told AFP of the pup her daughter named Meenakshi after a Hindu warrior goddess.

"She's a bundle of joy," said Sundar as she explained how no-one in the house wanted to give Meenakshi to another family. "And she has had a very calming effect on my daughter." India-which has more than three million coronavirus cases-imposed a months-long lockdown to try and halt its spread. As case numbers grew and more people were stuck at home, early fears about pets being potential carriers turned into a search for love and friendship from the four-legged creatures. "When the lockdown was opened partially, people were rushing and coming to take puppies," Dawn William of the Blue Cross of India animal-welfare group in Chennai told AFP. In the first half of August,

some 68 puppies were adopted from the group's shelter, he said.

"There are people and children who have time to spend with a pet. You know you have to care for it, you have to give him a bath, you have to play with him... so it keeps you going." India has an estimated 30 million stray dogs, and animal activists have long encouraged people to adopt mixed-breed street

dogs. But while a growing middle class is becoming open to having dogs as pets, many still prefer pedigrees, which are more of a status symbol. Shelter owners say, however, there has been a cultural shift-with younger people more willing to adopt mixed-breed strays.

'Unconditional love'

Animesh Katiyar, who owns the Fur



In this photograph taken on August 6, 2020, visitor Avni Naresh, 29, interacts with therapy dogs Cookie (left), Angel (center) and Bailey (right) at the Fur Ball Story dog cafe in Gurgaon, northern state of Haryana.— AFP photos

Ball Story dog cafe in Gurgaon near New Delhi, says there has been a jump in demand for his services from young professionals, many of whom are now working from home. The 27-year-old helps people find puppies to adopt, offers training for new owners and prepares pedigree and street pooches for animal-assisted therapy. "A pet just helps a lot because they're supposed to be providing unconditional love," Katiyar said, adding that the number of calls for his services has jumped from one per day to seven in recent months. One of Katiyar's regular customers is Avani Naresh, 29, an IT business owner who had a lifelong fear of dogs.

Eager to overcome his phobia, he sought Katiyar's help last year and slowly learnt to become comfortable around mutts. When the pandemic hit, the cafe shut and Naresh-unable to have a pet as he splits his time between Delhi and Gurgaon-realized he missed the animals he used to run away from. "A dog can be a big, big game-changer in terms of an emotional journey. A dog absorbs your entire stress. They understand... what you are going through," Naresh told AFP. "I think if I had a dog during the lockdown, I think my anxiety levels, my stress levels would have been to the minimum."— AFP



A trainer interacts with therapy dogs Angel (left) and Bailey (right) at the Fur Ball Story dog cafe in Gurgaon.



Tom Young, United Kingdom



Artist Anas Al-Amim, Kuwait



Ahmad Ghaddar, Lebanon



Artist Mohamad Sarkhoh, Kuwait



Artist Bader Kabazard, Kuwait

LOYAC hosts virtual art gallery for Beirut

In continuation of the 'Rise Up Beirut' campaign launched by LOYAC Lebanon, the LOYAC Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) is set to organize a virtual arts exhibition and dedicate the revenues to support the campaign. The virtual gallery takes place until September 5 on Instagram and Facebook, and will be supervised by artists Amira Bahbahani, Zainah Dabbous and Azza Al-Sharif.

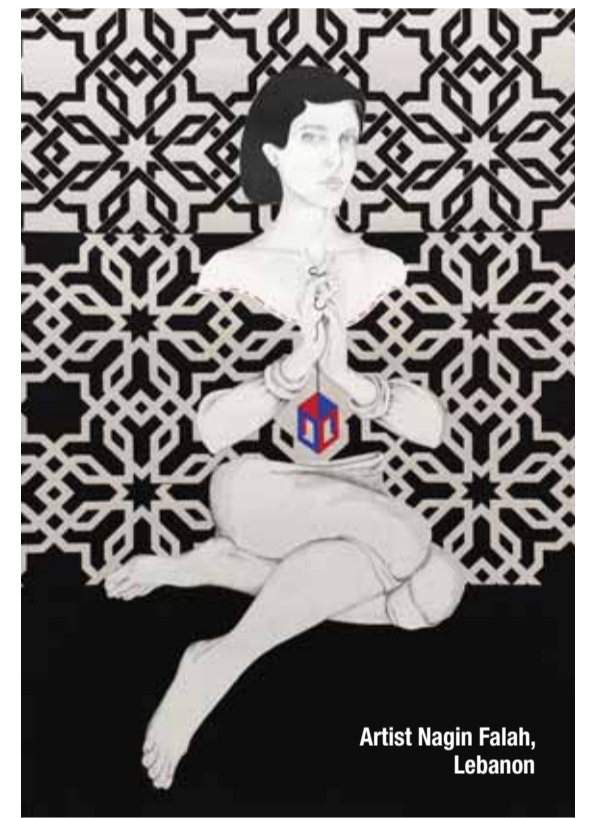
Speaking on the occasion, LAPA board member, artist Amira Bahbahani said that the exhibition would include paintings for artists from Kuwait, Lebanon and other Arab and foreign countries. She further explained that revenue will be dedicated to support LOYAC's campaign to repair houses damaged by the Beirut blast, and provide victims' basic needs.



A combo photo shows (right) artists Amira Bahbahani, Zainah Dabbous and Azza Al-Sharif (bottom left).



Photo shows the exhibition's poster and logo 'Rise Up Lebanon'.



Artist Nagin Falah, Lebanon



Artist Salim Mawad, Lebanon



Artist Omar Al-Qusai, Iraq/Austria



Ghada Al-Kindari, Kuwait

'ALL GIRLS, BUY IT!' IN CHINA, PERFECT DIARY GIVES COSMETICS WORLD A MAKEOVER WITH LIVE STREAMS, LOW PRICES

With chat groups, video streams and low prices for foundation, China's Perfect Diary has emerged from nowhere four years ago to become a cosmetics giant for the digital age, trailing only L'Oreal and LVMH in the world's no. 2 market for make-up. The Guangzhou-based beauty unicorn is now setting its sights on a Hong Kong initial public offering (IPO). Before that, it's driving into Southeast Asia, targeting more millennial social media users like Wen Shan, a 21-year-old student from Guangdong.

Wen has ditched Western brands like NARS and Revlon and devotes her annual budget of 3,000 yuan (\$434) to Perfect Diary cosmetics like eyeshadow palettes. Most cost less than 100 yuan and are made by the same contract manufacturers that supply Western brands. She converted to Perfect Diary after a roommate's tip. "The foreign brands have a large variety of foundations that often confuses me and I can't tell which one is best on me ... The Chinese brand knows what is good for local consumers."

Though still a global minnow compared with powerhouse L'Oreal, Perfect Diary now has 4% of the Chinese market for colour cosmetics, according to Euromonitor 2019 data. That ranks it joint third with Estee Lauder's MAC, beaten only by luxury giant LVMH's Christian Dior and three L'Oreal brands that stack

up to more than 20%. The research firm estimates the overall market more than doubled from 2015 to nearly \$8 billion in 2019 - and will mushroom to almost \$15 billion in 2024 as China's middle class expands. Perfect Diary's rise has been fuelled by blending low prices and social media platforms like Douyin - TikTok for China - and WeChat, collecting customer data it can use to design and roll out new products rapidly, helped by charismatic influencers with huge online followings like 'Lipstick King' Li Jiaqi.

Yelling his catchphrase "All girls, buy

it!", Li has given Perfect Diary products rave reviews in popular live streams on giant e-commerce retailer Alibaba's Taobao platform. Analysts said Perfect Diary's rise has been boosted by younger, 'Generation Z' consumers' willingness to embrace homegrown products. "Gen Z is growing up in a prosperous China," said Mei Xin, analyst at Huatai Securities. "Unlike the older generation, they don't believe the moon in the West is rounder than in China." A spokesperson for L'Oreal in China didn't immediately respond to a request for

comment on the growth of homegrown brands, but said L'Oreal typically welcomes healthy competition.

Eyes on Southeast Asia

Founded by entrepreneur Huang Jinfeng's Yatsen E-Commerce firm in 2017 as an online, China-focused operation, the company now also has more than 150 stores in China - with a target of 200 this year - as well as international aspirations. "Yatsen E-Commerce has always had a vision of creating a domestic beauty brand with true international influence," Huang told Reuters.

In recent months, it has opened its own online store for Southeast Asia countries including the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia. It also has an official store on Lazada, Alibaba's Southeast Asia arm. "We listen to users and we immediately carry out research on products they want," said Huang, citing the example of data gathered during the coronavirus pandemic that resulted in a new pressed face powder. "Consumers need to fix their makeup more often as the face mask takes off makeup," Huang said.

Perfect Diary currently uses contract manufacturers including Milan-headquartered Intercos? which has a factory in China that supplies L'Oreal and others. Since March it's been building its own plant in Guangdong, due on line by end-2021.

\$500m IPO, up to \$5bn valuation?

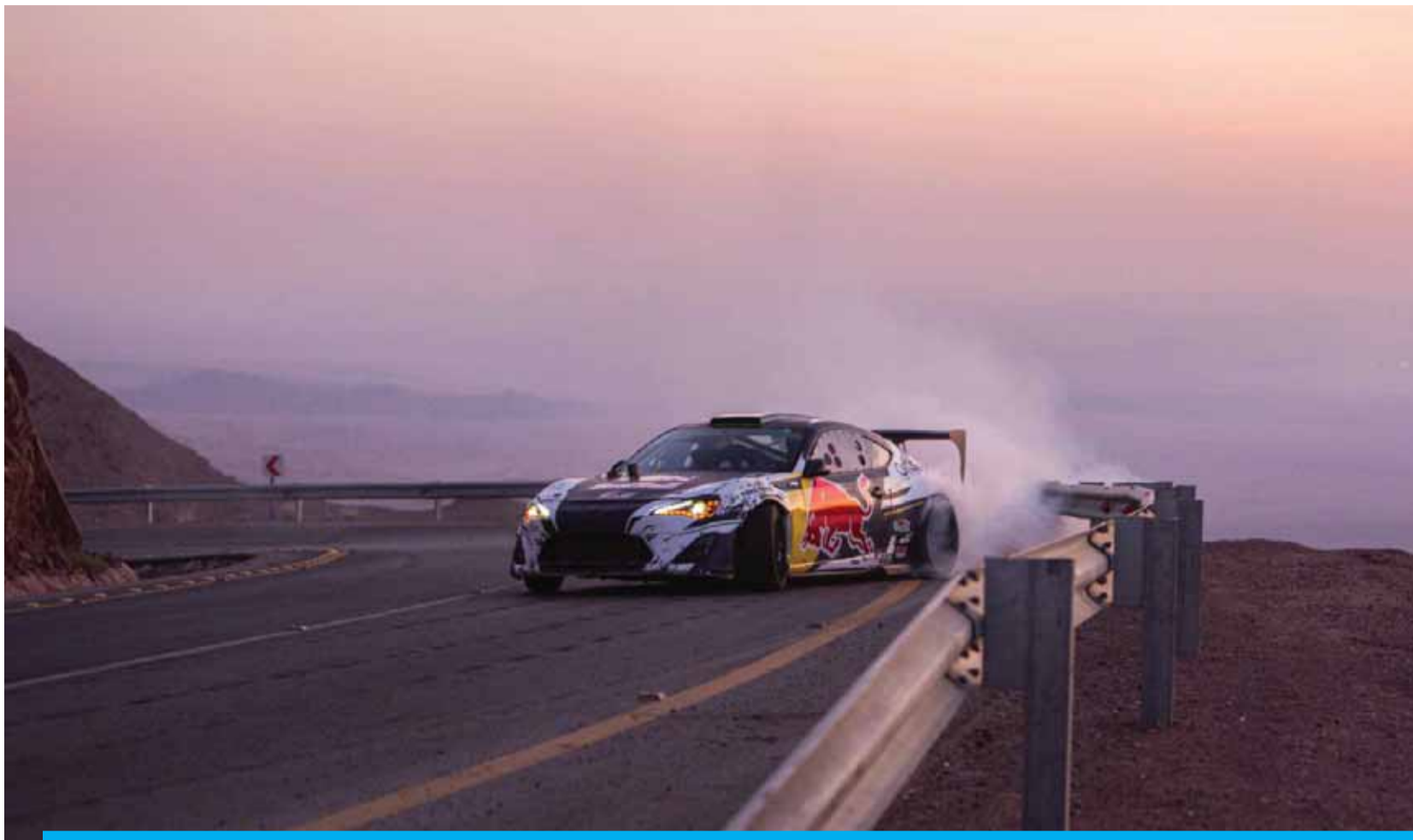
Perfect Diary doesn't disclose financial performance or liabilities, nor say whether it's profitable. Already backed by investors like Hillhouse Capital, Sequoia Capital, Tiger Global Management, Boyu Capital and Chinese Culture Group, Yatsen is currently raising a pre-IPO round that values it at around \$4 billion, according to two people with direct knowledge of the matter. It has also appointed Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley to lead a Hong Kong IPO that aims to raise up to \$500 million by the end of 2020, according to two separate sources.

One person said the IPO valuation could likely reach \$5 billion - big, yet dwarfed by L'Oreal's more-than-\$180 billion market value. The people declined to be named because the information was not public. Perfect Diary declined to comment on IPO plans. Meanwhile, student Wen continues to add lipsticks and foundations to her Perfect Diary make-up kit. "I don't care much about the originality of a brand," she said. "I didn't know Perfect Diary was a Chinese brand the first time I bought it. But now I know, I have a natural good feeling about using a domestic brand." — Reuters



Sports

Photo of the Day



Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Ahmad Daham perform at Wadi Rum, Jordan. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Mickelson eyes win on PGA Tour Champions debut

NEW YORK: Phil Mickelson is in the driving seat to win on his PGA Tour Champions debut after the American surged to a four-shot lead heading into the final round of the Charles Schwab Series, which he is using to prepare for next month's US Open.

Hall of Famer Mickelson has won 44 events on the regular PGA Tour, including five major championships, and qualified for the senior circuit having turned 50 in June.

Mickelson followed up his opening round of 61 with a 64 on Tuesday to go 17-under for the tournament in Ridgedale, Missouri, with Rod Pampling and Tim Petrovic trailing him going into the final round at Ozarks National.

Mickelson fired five birdies in seven holes on the front nine before a lone bogey immediately after the turn. But he recovered with three more birdies in the next four holes.

He is now in a position to break the PGA Tour Champions' 54-hole scoring record of 191, jointly held by David Frost, Bruce Fleisher, Loren Roberts, Bernhard Langer and Rocco Mediate.

"I hit some good shots, made some good birdies, but I want to work on a couple of things," Mickelson, who will also play in next month's PGA Tour Safeway Open, told reporters.

"I hit a couple of drives that I hung a little bit left that I want to work on."

"If I can drive it a little bit more aggressively, I think I can make a few more birdies and be hard to catch," added Mickelson, who has been eliminated from the PGA Tour's FedExCup playoffs. — Reuters

There will be fans at Tour de France, vows race boss Prudhomme

'Screening will be in place in 20-or-so climbs and passes'

PARIS: The coronavirus pandemic has forced the rescheduling of the Tour de France away from its traditional summer slot that sees millions of French and tourists alike swarming to watch cycling's greatest race.

But Tour director Christian Prudhomme has vowed that some fans will be accommodated when the delayed 2020 Grande Boucle gets under way in Nice on Saturday.

The COVID-19 pandemic has played havoc with sporting events and current French government law limits gatherings to 5,000.

That means a cataclysmic change for Tour organisers, with some climbs in previous years attracting hundreds of thousands of people along the roadsides. "Yes, the public will have access to the Tour de France," Prudhomme told AFP in an interview.

"But there will be screening areas at the start and finish areas to allow the current government maximum of 5,000 fans.

"Screening will also be in place in the 20-or-so climbs and passes," Prudhomme added, explaining that "in certain places, only people on foot, by bicycle or who come on public transport set up by the hosting towns or villages can go to the passes".

Health and safety protocols for riders and teams involve them being kept in a bubble and tested several times, with the smallest possible interaction between respective bubbles.

Two tonnes of handgel distributed over 60 points, mandatory wearing of facemasks at the start and finish areas and all zones run by organising company

ASO are also measures being taken.

Postponement a first health measure

Prudhomme said the fact the Tour had been pushed back two months was in itself the "first health measure".

"Moving from July to September naturally means fewer people," he said.

"People are at work, children have gone back to school, the tourists are no longer there.

"On the Tour routes, there are 20% foreigners in July, 50% in some passes. We already know that we will no longer have the British, the Australians, the Americans."

The so-called "caravan" of vehicles for organisers, teams, officials, journalists and sponsors is also down by 35-40%, according to Prudhomme.

He was quick to bat away questions over the ecological footprint the Tour leaves.

"There is a lot less plastic that will be handed out, something we've been working on for several years," Prudhomme said, adding that all organisers' cars this year are hybrids for the first time.

Turning to the actual racing, Prudhomme predicted that the riders would be more than fired up come the start on Saturday, with a daunting 3,470km-long course ahead of them that ends in Paris on September 20. "From what I could see when competition resumed, the riders are like they're starved to death," he said.

"They have a desire to compete, a thirst to compare themselves to others, the need to shine in a very



NICE: Tour de France director Christian Prudhomme (R) and Mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi give a press conference to present sanitary measures over the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic put in place for the start of the 107th edition of the Tour De France cycling race in the French Riviera city of Nice. — AFP

short but extraordinarily loaded season."

Previous winners Chris Froome and Geraint Thomas both missed out on selection for Team Ineos, but Prudhomme downplayed their absence, instead

highlighting the potential changes teams will have to make because of climatic differences from a July-run race. "There are plenty of sporting questions that I like," he said. — AFP

Canucks pull even with Golden Knights

WDMONTON: Bo Horvat scored two goals and Tyler Toffoli and Elias Pettersson each had a goal and two assists as the Vancouver Canucks bounced back to defeat the Vegas Golden Knights 5-2 in Game 2 of their Western Conference semifinal series on Tuesday night in Edmonton.

Jacob Markstrom, pulled in the third period of a 5-0 loss in Game 1 on Sunday, stopped 38 shots and also got plenty of help from his defense, which blocked a franchise-postseason-record 40 shots. Game 3 of the best-of-seven series is Thursday night.

Horvat, who had gone five games without recording a point, leapfrogged Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon and Dallas' Joe Pavelski into sole possession of the league lead for postseason goals with eight while also winning 21 of 26 faceoffs. Tanner Pearson had an empty-net goal and Alexander Edler added a pair of assists for the Canucks.

Alex Tuch and Max Pacioretty scored goals and Shea Theodore had two assists for Vegas, which lost for the first time in regulation in 12 games in franchise history (9-1-2) against the Canucks. Robin Lehner finished with 22 saves.

Vancouver took a 1-0 lead at the 1:29 mark of the first period when Toffoli, playing his first shift after missing

10 games with an injury, poked in a brilliant wraparound pass through the crease by Pettersson into a wide-open left side of the net.

It was Toffoli's 10th career playoff goal and first since Game 7 of the 2014 Western Conference finals as a member of the Los Angeles Kings.

Horvat made it 2-0 with a power-play goal, taking Toffoli's centering pass from behind the goal and then one-timing a shot from the slot past Lehner's glove side at 10:59 of the first.

Vegas cut the lead to 2-1 on Tuch's sixth goal of the playoffs at 6:34 of the second period. But Pettersson, who hit the crossbar a couple minutes earlier, answered with his fifth goal of the playoffs near the end of the second period, taking a pass from Edler in the slot and then deking Lehner to his glove side before wrapping a shot into the left side of the goal. Horvat, left alone on the right side of the net, scored his second goal of the game 18 seconds into the third period to make it 4-1. He took a backhand pass from Brock Boeser and then flipped a shot past Lehner's glove side.

Vegas pulled Lehner with 2:50 left after Edler picked up a cross-checking penalty, producing a six-on-four power play, and Pacioretty scored with 1:26 to play. Pearson sealed the win with an empty-net goal with 30 seconds left. — Reuters

Top-seeded Bucks looking to eliminate Magic

ORLANDO: The Milwaukee Bucks need one more victory to finish off the Orlando Magic.

After dropping the series opener, the Bucks look to close out the Eastern Conference first-round matchup with their fourth straight win today afternoon when they face the Magic at AdventHealth Arena near Orlando.

The eighth-seeded Magic delivered a wakeup call to the Bucks with a 122-110 victory in Game 1. But top-seeded Milwaukee has responded by winning the past three games by an average of 14.7 points.

Forward Khris Middleton has seen the difference and was highly pleased with a turnaround that includes Monday's 121-106 victory. "The difference between Game 1 and this game was we played hard no matter how they were playing," Middleton told reporters. "We know that is how it's going to be in the playoffs. Sometimes things aren't going to go our way and we're not going to make shots and we're going to make bad plays."

"But as long as we keep grinding it out, we're going to give ourselves a chance at the end of the day." Star forward Giannis Antetokounmpo and Middleton teamed up for big efforts in Game 4.

Antetokounmpo scored 31 points on 14-of-21 shooting and also recorded 15

rebounds and eight assists. Middleton added 21 points and 10 boards for his best effort of the series after averaging just 11 points and 6.3 rebounds over the first three games.

Orlando was able to hang around due to its long-range shooting — it finished 18 of 45 from 3-point range — before the Bucks outscored the Magic 37-25 in the decisive final quarter.

"We found our identity again, which is to play defense," Antetokounmpo said afterward. "No matter if we score the ball or not, we've got to keep defending." Big man Nikola Vucevic will look to keep the Magic in the series as his club attempts to avoid elimination. Vucevic registered 31 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists in Game 4 for his third 30-point outing of the series. He also made a personal playoff-best six 3-pointers.

But he was disappointed with the team's final-quarter performance when a victory to even the series was there for the taking. "To start the fourth we went through a dry spell offensively and we didn't execute well," Vucevic said afterward. "It's tough when you play well for three quarters. You have to be able to execute and make shots and we didn't."

Vucevic has an opportunity to become the first player in franchise history to record four 30-point performances in

a playoff series. But he will likely need some teammates to step up if there is to be a Game 6. Swingman Terrence Ross scored 19 points off the bench in Game 4 but was just 1 of 8 from 3-point range. Starting shooting guard Evan Fournier was just 4 of 14 from the field while contributing 12 points.

What would really help is the sight of standout power forward Aaron Gordon on the court.

Gordon strained his left hamstring against the Toronto Raptors on Aug. 5 and has missed the past eight games. Orlando coach Steve Clifford thought there was a chance Gordon would play in Game 4 but that didn't occur. Gordon is listed as questionable for Game 5. So now it will again be a wait-and-see scenario for the Magic. But Vucevic feels Gordon's presence or lack thereof doesn't affect the situation.

"It's win or go home for us," Vucevic said. "We just have to give it all and see what happens." Clifford expects nothing short of a supreme effort from his club. "Our guys have really good character," Clifford told reporters. "These games are the tough ones, down 3-1, but I'd be surprised if we didn't come out with a great approach and play good again." Meanwhile, the Bucks aren't about to coast until they have four wins in their coffers. "I have a ton of respect for Orlando and how they're playing and competing and executing and the talent they have," Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said. "This is playoff basketball. ... We have a lot of work still to do." — Reuters

Sports

Messi divorce: 'Bombshell' fax signals end of era, legal fight at Barcelona

Speculation swirled about Messi's departure after a humiliating 8-2 defeat to Bayern

MADRID: Six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi told Barcelona he wants to leave — on a free transfer — in a "bombshell" fax on Tuesday that is expected to trigger a legal battle over a buy-out clause worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Signalling the end of an era at Barcelona, where Messi is the record scorer and has won four Champions League titles, the disgruntled Argentine wants to terminate his contract "unilaterally" by triggering a release clause, a source told AFP.

Relations have plummeted this year and speculation swirled about Messi's departure after this month's humiliating 8-2 Champions League quarter-final defeat to Bayern Munich, which left Barca without a trophy for the first time since 2007.

The 33-year-old's demand sparked protests against Barcelona's under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu outside the Camp Nou where Messi, synonymous with the club's most successful period, is worshipped by fans.

"I don't see him anywhere else. I can't believe it," said Ruben Tejero, 28, one of about 100 fans at the stadium calling for Bartomeu to resign. "I prefer to think it's an ultimatum given to management for Bartomeu to go."

Manchester City, Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Milan are among those to have been linked to Messi, who is among the greatest players in history and has wages to match, with a reported weekly salary of nearly a million euros.

DRASTIC CHANGES

Barcelona have yet to react officially but are understood to believe Messi's release clause expired in June, and that he remains under contract until the end of the 2021 season. "In principle, this clause expired on June 10, but the unusual nature of this sea-

son disrupted by the coronavirus opened the way for Messi to ask to be released from his contract now," wrote Spanish sports daily Marca.

"It's the first step towards opening negotiations over his departure, on the basis of which his release clause amounts to 700 million euros (\$828 million)."

Messi joined Barcelona's youth academy at the age of 13 and made his debut in 2004 as a 17-year-old, before going on to score a club record 634 goals. But his future at Barca was thrown into serious doubt by the 8-2 loss to Bayern, the first time Barca had conceded eight goals in a game since losing to Sevilla 8-0 in the 1946 Spanish Cup.

The defeat has sparked drastic changes. Coach Quique Setien was sacked after barely six months in charge, and sporting director Eric Abidal was also dismissed. According to Spanish media, Messi met with new coach Ronald Koeman last week and told the Dutchman he saw himself "more out than in" at the club.

Koeman has vowed to "fight to put Barca back on top" and said at his unveiling he was hopeful Messi would remain at the club for several more years. But Koeman has reportedly told Luis Suarez he is no longer part of Barca's plans, delivering a similar message to Arturo Vidal, Ivan Rakitic and Samuel Umtiti.

'ROCK BOTTOM'

"The club needs changes," said defender Gerard Pique following the Bayern demolition. "Nobody is untouchable, least of all me. Fresh blood is needed to change this. We've hit rock bottom." Argentine sports daily Ole described Messi's wish to leave as a "complete bombshell", but he has had regular disagreements with the club's board in recent times.

The Lisbon loss, Barca's heaviest in Europe, ex-



LISBON: In this file, Barcelona's Argentine forward Lionel Messi waves as he leaves the hotel to the stadium in Lisbon. Lionel Messi has informed Barcelona he wants to 'unilaterally' terminate his contract with the Spanish giants, a club source confirmed Tuesday. — AFP

posed an ageing team that Messi repeatedly had said was simply not good enough. He said it in February and again in July, when a rant in the aftermath of handing Real Madrid the title turned into a brutal, but honest, assessment of their season.

As his relationship with the club hierarchy grew increasingly strained, Messi also reacted publicly when Abidal appeared to blame the players for the sacking of Ernesto Valverde in January. He also led

the fightback from the Barcelona players over a dispute with the board in March regarding pay cuts during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Respect and admiration, Leo. All my support, friend," tweeted Barca great Carles Puyol, a long-time former team-mate of Messi, to which Suarez replied with two applause emojis. Vidal also tweeted: "When you shut a tiger in a cage he doesn't give in, he fights back." — AFP

Germany to rest Bayern stars for Nations League games

BERLIN: Germany coach Joachim Loew omitted Bayern Munich's Champions League-winning players from his squad announced Tuesday for upcoming Nations League games against Spain and Switzerland, giving them extra time to recover.

Captain Manuel Neuer, Joshua Kimmich, Serge Gnabry and Leon Goretzka were all left out for next month's double-header, although Bayern centre-back Niklas Sule was selected along with Leroy Sane following his switch from Manchester City.

"My priority is the Euros next year because I know how much energy that will require, that's why I've decided not to pick the players from Bayern or Leipzig," Loew said. Germany host Spain in Stuttgart on September 3 and then travel to Basel four days later to play Switzerland.

RB Leipzig defenders Marcel Halstenberg and Lukas Klostermann were not considered either after their team's run to the Champions League semi-finals in Lisbon.

Thilo Kehrer, who started for Paris Saint-Germain in Sunday's final, was included as was Julian Draxler, who made an appearance off the bench for the French club.

"Draxler and Kehrer are part of the squad because they're coming off a long break in France where football was stopped and need to find some rhythm again," said Loew.

Asked about a possible recall for Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller, both dropped from the Germany set-up after a disastrous 2018 World Cup, Loew remained steadfast in his approach.

"They are exceptional players but we decided after the World Cup to invest in new players by giving them the chance to develop. My role is to look to the future," explained Loew.

Atalanta full-back Robin Gosens and Borussia Moenchengladbach Florian Neuhaus received their first Germany call-up, while uncapped Hoffenheim goalkeeper Oliver Baumann was picked in the absence of Neuer and Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen, who is out following knee surgery.

Squad:

Goalkeepers: Bernd Leno (Arsenal/ENG), Kevin Trapp (Eintracht Frankfurt), Oliver Baumann (Hoffenheim)

Defenders: Matthias Ginter (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Robin Gosens (Atalanta/ITA), Thilo Kehrer (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Robin Koch (Freiburg), Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea/ENG), Nico Schulz (Borussia Dortmund), Niklas Sule (Bayern Munich), Jonathan Tah (Bayer Leverkusen)

Midfielders: Julian Brandt (Borussia Dortmund), Emre Can (Borussia Dortmund), Julian Draxler (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City/ENG), Kai Havertz (Bayer Leverkusen), Toni Kroos (Real Madrid/ESP), Florian Neuhaus (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Suat Serdar (Schalke)

Forwards: Luca Waldschmidt (Benfica/POR), Timo Werner (Chelsea/ENG), Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich). — AFP

Conte commits to Inter Milan next season

MILAN: Antonio Conte will continue at the helm of Inter Milan next season, the club confirmed on Tuesday, only days after the fiery Italian hinted he was ready to quit after just one campaign.

Conte held a "constructive meeting focused on continuity and strategy" with the club's Chinese president Steven Zhang and team management which lasted just over three hours in a villa outside Milan.

"The two parties laid the foundations to continue working together on the club's project," the club said in a statement. Inter opted for continuity after finishing second just one point behind champions Juventus, with the Chinese owners also confirming confidence in the

entire management team. Conte will now lead the club's bid to topple Juventus with coaching novice Andrea Pirlo having replaced Maurizio Sarri as coach at the nine-time reigning Serie A champions.

The 51-year-old Conte's departure was being heralded following an outburst after Inter Milan's 3-2 Europa League final defeat to Sevilla last week. "Now we'll return to Milan, we'll take a couple of days off. We will try to plan the future of Inter with or without me," said Conte, after the team missed out on a first trophy since 2011. "It has been a very tough season from all points of view, the best decision must be taken for the good of Inter, with the utmost cordiality." "I didn't like some situations."

The former Chelsea and Juventus boss took over in May 2019 on a three-year contract worth a reported 12 million euros (\$14 million) a season. But his relationship with club management and CEO Giuseppe Marotta in particular was reported to be tense. On the final day of the domestic season Conte slammed the fact that players had been offered "little protection from the club". "I don't want another year like that." — AFP



SOUTHAMPTON: England's James Anderson (L) is congratulated by Pakistan players on reaching 600 test match wickets after play on the fifth day of the third Test cricket match between England and Pakistan at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton, southern England. — AFP

Anderson celebrates 600th Test wicket

SOUTHAMPTON: James Anderson says he still loves the hard grind of fast bowling after becoming the first pacer to take 600 Test wickets on Tuesday as England were forced to settle for a draw against Pakistan.

Anderson, only the fourth bowler to achieve the feat, cemented his place in cricket history in the closing stages of the rain-marred third and final Test in Southampton. Fresh downpours prevented play on the last day until 1515 GMT, meaning the home side, 1-0 up in the series, did not have enough time to force a victory. But despite the tame end to the contest, all eyes were on Anderson and the 38-year-old did not disappoint, striking with his 14th ball of the day to reach the 600-wicket milestone.

Defying a docile pitch, he produced a rising delivery that moved away from Pakistan captain Azhar Ali, a first-innings century-maker, with England skipper Joe Root holding a head-high catch at first slip.

There was applause and cheers from Anderson's team-mates, with the nick off the shoulder of Azhar's bat clearly audible at an empty Ageas Bowl.

With no certainty as to when England's rescheduled

series against Sri Lanka or a Test campaign in India pencilled in for the New Year will take place due to the coronavirus pandemic, there was a chance that Anderson could have been stranded on 599 Test wickets.

The bowler is well past the age at which pacemen of earlier generations retired but is still passionate about the sport. "I absolutely love it — there is no better feeling than putting the boots on, going out there and doing what I love doing," he told Sky Sports.

"It felt amazing to get 600 wickets. I went to bed last night not expecting to bowl a ball so credit to the groundstaff, who have worked tirelessly. Even if I didn't get it today there are worse numbers to be stuck on for a few months (than 599) so I'd have been happy either way." Azhar, dismissed for 31 following his first innings 141 not out, was happy to be a part of history. "At least I will get more air time now because they will show that wicket again and again," he told the BBC. "Hats off to him (Anderson), he's a fantastic bowler. He doesn't give you anything, you have to bring your A-game. He's still bowling at decent pace, with swing and seam."

Root paid tribute to Anderson, an international bowler for 17 years, by saying: "For him to stand up and perform at the elite end of Test cricket for such a long period of time is an incredible effort."

Part-time off-spinner Root dismissed Asad Shafiq to leave Pakistan 172-4 but a draw was agreed not long after the match entered the last hour, with Pakistan 187-4 and Babar Azam 63 not out. — AFP

Maguire withdrawn from England squad after court case

LONDON: Harry Maguire has been withdrawn from the England squad for their Nations League matches against Iceland and Denmark after the Manchester United captain was given a suspended prison sentence following a brawl in Greece.

Maguire was handed the punishment after being found guilty of aggravated assault, resisting arrest and repeated attempts of bribery. The 27-year-old defender plans to appeal against the verdict, but England manager Gareth Southgate opted to take him out of the squad for September's matches, just hours after naming him in the group.

"In light of this evening's developments, I can confirm I have withdrawn Harry Maguire from the England squad for the matches against Iceland and Denmark," Southgate told the FA's website.

"As I said earlier today, I reserved the right to review the situation. Having spoken to Manchester United and the player, I have made this decision in the best interests of all parties and with consideration of the impact on our preparations for next week." Maguire, who denied all charges, was arrested along with his brother Joe and a friend Christopher Sharman on Thursday after an altercation with police on the Greek island of Mykonos.

Maguire's sentence of 21 months and 10 days in prison was suspended because it was a first offence and the charges were misdemeanours.

Having flown back to England before the trial, Maguire, who became the world's most expensive defender following his £80 million (\$105 million) move from Leicester last year, released a statement vowing to clear his name soon after the guilty verdict. "Following the hearing today, I have instructed my legal team with immediate effect to inform the courts we will be appealing," Maguire said.

"I remain strong and confident regarding our innocence in this matter - if anything myself, family and friends are the victims." United centre-back Maguire initially convinced Southgate to select him for the Nations League games after explaining his side of the incident to the England boss.

But Southgate had told the media earlier in the day that he would keep his options open if the situation changed and he wasted little time removing Maguire from the squad.

It remains to be seen if Maguire will retain the United captaincy, although the club issued a statement backing their star.

The Maguire scandal completely overshadowed preparations for Southgate's first England matches since their 4-0 win in Kosovo in November 2019. Southgate's side face Iceland in Reykjavik on September 5 before playing Denmark in Copenhagen on September 8.

Talented youngsters Phil Foden, Mason Greenwood and Kalvin Phillips have all been called-up for the first time. Foden, 20, has emerged as a future star in Manchester City's midfield, while the goals of 18-year-old striker Greenwood were key to Manchester United qualifying for next season's Champions League. "It's a step up for them but they are both more than capable. They have shown playing in big matches for big clubs that they are talented boys," Southgate said.

"They are both hugely exciting players who can be part of England's future. It is up to them to take it forward. "It is now the right time a year away from the European Championships. Let's see if they can start to break into that team and that squad." Phillips' mature displays in midfield helped Leeds win promotion from the Championship last season. — AFP

14 There will be fans at Tour de France, vows race boss Prudhomme



15 Messi divorce: 'Bombshell' fax signals end of era, legal fight at Barcelona



15 Anderson celebrates 600th Test wicket



CHICAGO: Edwin Encarnacion #23 of the Chicago White Sox is tagged out at third base by JT Riddle #15 of the Pittsburgh Pirates during the third inning at Guaranteed Rate Field in Chicago, Illinois. —AFP

Giolito's no-hitter keeps White Sox rolling

Olson, Semien rip homers in Athletics' win over Rangers

CHICAGO: Right-hander Lucas Giolito pitched the 19th no-hitter in Chicago White Sox franchise history on Tuesday night, striking out 13 and walking one to boost Chicago to a 4-0 victory against the visiting Pittsburgh Pirates. Giolito retired the final 18 Pirates he faced as the White Sox won for the eighth time in nine games and snapped Pittsburgh's season-high three-game winning streak. Chicago right fielder Adam Engel snagged a liner off the bat of Pirates shortstop Erik Gonzalez to end the game, as the White Sox recorded their first no-hitter since Philip Humber threw a perfect game in a 4-0 win over the Seattle Mariners on April 21, 2012. Giolito (3-2) threw 74 of his 101 pitches for strikes. He walked Gonzalez on four pitches to lead off the fourth, but it proved to be the Pirates' only baserunner. Tim Anderson and Eloy Jimenez had RBIs singles in a three-run second for Chicago, and catcher James McCann, Giolito's batterymate, contributed a sacrifice fly in the fourth.

A'S 10, RANGERS 3

Matt Olson and Marcus Semien each hit two-run homers, and Stephen Piscotty ripped a three-run

double to help propel Oakland to a win in Arlington, Texas. The A's, whose 21 wins are the most in the American League, have won five of their past seven games. The loss was the ninth in 10 outings for the Rangers. Texas' lone win in that stretch came on Monday in the opener of the current four-game series. Sean Manaea (2-2) allowed three runs, one earned, on six hits in five innings to garner the victory. He struck out three and did not walk a batter in his 86-pitch outing. T.J. McFarland, Lou Trivino and Jordan Weems combined for four scoreless innings of relief for Oakland.

RED SOX 9, BLUE JAYS 7

Rafael Devers hit a bases-loaded triple in a six-run sixth inning and Boston defeated host Toronto in the opener of a three-game series at Buffalo. Xander Bogaerts added three hits and Mitch Moreland had two hits, two RBIs and two walks for the Red Sox, who overcame an early four-run deficit. Phillips Valdez (1-0) allowed one hit and one walk in 1 2/3 innings for the win. Matt Barnes picked up his second save despite allowing the 11th homer this season by Teoscar Hernandez.

PHILLIES 8, NATIONALS 3

J.T. Realmuto hit a three-run homer to lift visiting Philadelphia past Washington. Jean Segura contributed three hits and two RBIs, and Roman Quinn had two hits and two steals for the Phillies, who won their second in a row following a five-game losing streak. Andrew McCutchen knocked in two runs, scored twice and stole two bases. Phillies starter Jake Arrieta tossed five solid innings before an hour-long rain delay, giving up three hits and one run. Arrieta (2-3) threw only 54 pitches, 34 for strikes, while walking one and striking out one. Adam Eaton homered and singled while Trea Turner also hit a home run for the Nationals, who dropped their second straight. Asdrubal Cabrera had two hits. Washington starter Erick Fedde (1-2) allowed seven hits and four runs in five innings. He fanned one and walked one.

INDIANS 4, TWINS 2

Shane Bieber struck out 10 batters and Francisco Lindor belted a two-run homer in the sixth inning to lift host Cleveland to a victory over Minnesota. Bieber (6-0), who has recorded double-digit strike-

outs in five of his seven starts this season, allowed two runs on four hits in six innings to improve to 5-0 in 10 career appearances (nine starts) against Minnesota. Indians relievers Oliver Perez and James Karinchak bridged the gap to Brad Hand, who retired the side in order in the ninth inning for his eighth save of the season.

RAYS 4, ORIOLES 2

Tyler Glasnow struck out a career-high 13 batters over seven innings, and Hunter Renfroe and Manuel Margot hit consecutive homers as Tampa Bay bumped off visiting Baltimore. Glasnow (1-1) turned in his best appearance through six starts this year, going a season-high seven innings and yielding two runs on five hits and one walk. Margot finished 2-for-3 with the homer, a walk and a stolen base, and Renfroe scored twice. Baltimore starter Tommy Milone (1-4) worked 5 1/3 innings and gave up four hits. The left-hander allowed four runs, two earned, and walked one while striking out six. Renato Nunez went 2-for-4 with a solo home run as the Orioles lost for the first time in four meetings against their American League East rival in 2020. — Reuters

Serena crashes out, Djokovic reaches q-finals

NEW YORK: An out-of-gas Serena Williams crashed out of the Western & Southern Open on Tuesday, losing in three sets to 13th seeded Maria Sakkari 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 in New York. The 23-time Grand Slam winner finished with a whimper at the end of the two-hour, 17-minute match as Sakkari clinched the victory with a backhand down the line that a dejected Williams just watched without making an effort to move.

At other points in the match, Williams flung her racket into the spectator-less stands and rebuked the chair umpire for slapping her with a time violation. Sakkari, of Greece, advances to the quarter-finals of the no-spectator event where she will face Johanna Konta who cruised past Vera Zvonareva in straight sets 6-4, 6-2.

The joint WTA and ATP tournament was moved from Cincinnati to New York where the same quarantine bubble will house the US Open starting on August 31. It was the second straight two-hour-plus match for Williams who at 38 was trying to become the oldest winner of the event. She still holds the record, having won this event in 2015 at age 33.

Williams survived a scare in her opening match, prevailing in a two hour, 48-minute marathon over qualifier Arantxa Rus. It was her longest match since 2012. "It is hard to play the way I have been playing and stay positive," Williams said. "To play nine hours in a week is too much. I don't usually play like that. It is all new for me."

Williams made seven double faults and won just 66 percent of her first serve points against Sakkari. After losing the second set in a tiebreaker she tossed her racket over her shoulder into the empty stands behind her.

Williams, who has lost her cool at events in New York before, also admonished chair umpire, Aurelie Tourte of France, during a changeover for calling a

time violation for slow play. "I am walking all the way to get my towels... I mean, I am getting my own towels. That's not fair," said Williams.

"You didn't give me a warning. I am actually a really fast player. Next time you warn me. I'm done." The ball people usually get the towels for the players but not in the COVID-19 bubble.

On the men's side, world No. 1 Novak Djokovic won his 20th straight match of 2020 with a hard-fought 6-2, 6-4 victory over Tennyson Sandgren. Djokovic, who captured the Australian Open in February, needed six match points to tough out the straight sets victory and reach the quarter-finals of the hardcourt tournament.

Djokovic breezed through the final game by winning four straight points, closing it out with a cross-court forehand winner to take it in 88 minutes on Tuesday. "All in all it was a great performance," said Djokovic. "I felt better and played better than last night. I am going in a great direction."

American Sandgren, who is ranked 55th in the world, made the Serb work for the victory as he survived five match



NEW YORK: Maria Sakkari of Greece celebrates match point against Serena Williams during the Western & Southern Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP

points in the ninth game of the second set. Djokovic advances to the quarters where he will play German Jan-Lennard Struff, who defeated seventh seed David

Goffin 6-4, 3-6, 6-4. Djokovic had pulled out of doubles on Sunday with pain in his neck, but did not appear to be bothered by the injury against Sandgren. — AFP