



2 Crown Prince meets members of National Assembly office



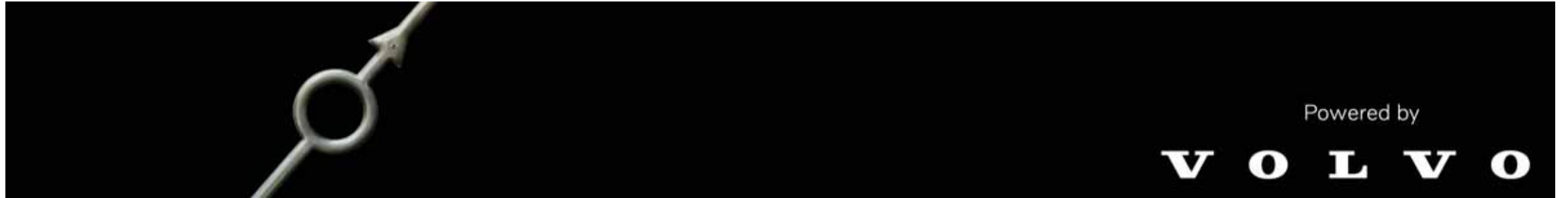
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MoE reduces tuition fees by 25% for 2020-21 school year

Ministry cancels fees due after Feb 26 for students of private Arabic schools for 2019-2020

NOTICE

Eid Mubarak to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition from July 31 to August 3. Readers can stay informed with breaking news, events and information via KuwaitTimes.net and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @KuwaitTimes

News in brief

Flights restart to 20 countries

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced Tuesday that airlines operating at Kuwait International Airport will start commercial flights to 20 countries from Aug 1 - UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iran, Nepal, Switzerland, Germany, Azerbaijan, the Philippines and India. — KUNA

KIPIC starts operation of gas line

DUBAI: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Co (KIPIC) has begun operating the gas line that will feed its long-delayed Al-Zour refinery, KUNA said on Tuesday. Originally planned more than a decade ago but repeatedly delayed, Al-Zour will be the largest integrated refinery and petrochemicals plant in Kuwait. Al-Zour's production capacity is estimated at 615,000 barrels per day, increasing Kuwait's overall refining capacity to over 1.5 million barrels a day. — Reuters

Egypt executes 7 over killing

CAIRO: Egypt has executed seven people over the killing of a police officer in the northeastern city of Ismailiya in 2013, a security official said Tuesday. "The prison service on Tuesday carried out the sentence of death by hanging against seven people convicted of killing Captain Ahmad Abu Douma," the security official told AFP. Their bodies had been handed to their families, he added. — AFP

Half of slum residents infected

NEW DELHI: Over half the people living in the slums of Mumbai have had the coronavirus, according to a city-commissioned study released Tuesday that raises fresh doubts about India's official case numbers. Blood tests on 6,936 randomly selected people conducted by Mumbai's city authorities found that 57 percent of slum-dwellers and 16 percent of non-slum residents had virus antibodies. — AFP

'Hunger will kill Lebanon kids'

BEIRUT: Close to a million people in Beirut can no longer afford basic necessities and children are likely to starve to death this year, the charity Save The Children said yesterday. The group said 910,000 people, more than half of them children, in the Greater Beirut area no longer have sufficient amounts of food because of the economic crisis. "We will start seeing children dying from hunger before the end of the year," said Jad Sakr, acting country director of Save The Children in Lebanon. — AFP

KUWAIT: Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi yesterday issued a ministerial resolution reducing tuition fees for the 2020-2021 school year by 25 percent compared to the 2019-2020 academic year. The decision is effective from the beginning of the new school year until students are allowed to return to classes.

Harbi stressed the need for private schools to activate their online learning platforms using virtual classes and various e-learning resources from the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year until students are allowed back on campuses. The minister also warned that schools may not hike fees prior to providing the 25 percent discount until the end of the 2020-2021 academic year.

Harbi also authorized his assistant undersecretary for private and qualitative education affairs Abdul Mohsen Al-

Huwailah to issue further regulations under this resolution, including ones related to online education, e-platforms, assessment methods and study plans, and hold schools that violate the fee reduction decision responsible.

Later yesterday, Harbi issued another decision to cancel fees for the 2019-2020 academic year due after Feb 26, 2020 for students of private Arabic schools from kindergarten to grade 11. Schools that fail to comply with the new decision face punitive measures as per the ministry's regulations, the ministry said in a statement.

Meanwhile, foreign private and bilingual schools are continuing procedures to complete the 2019-2020 school year, with classes to resume online from Aug 4, 2020, five days a week. A report in Al-Anbaa daily said the schools have asked students and parents to resume

studies and complete the second term for all school stages. Notably, private schools were excluded from an education ministry decision earlier this month to end the 2019-2020 school year.

Parents had asked Huwailah to intervene and prevent private schools from demanding full payment of fees for the 2019-2020 academic year, but were met with silence. Sources alleged the education ministry's move to exclude foreign and bilingual schools in its decision to end the 2019-2020 school year was made so that the schools do not lose their right to demand full fees. Parents, however, argue that since schools were online-only from March 2020, they should not have to pay full fees for the last school year.

Meanwhile, unnamed educational sources quoted by Al-Rai Arabic daily said that the education ministry has

started preparing the online education program for grade 12 students due to start on Aug 9, noting that the plan includes online quizzes. The school day will be of four hours - from 8:30 am till 12:30 pm.

The sources added that the public education sector agreed on a mechanism to monitor students' absence - a student who fails to log in to the portal for an entire week will lose one mark, while a decision on those who are absent for one or two days will be up to the teachers. Moreover, the sources said the ministry is currently considering offers it has received to reinforce communication networks in various schools, adding that teachers had already started training on using the program and how to prepare assignments, meetings and online tests. — Agencies

Pilgrims begin downsized hajj amid pandemic

MAKKAH: Mask-clad Muslim pilgrims yesterday began the annual hajj, dramatically downsized this year as the Saudi hosts strive to prevent a coronavirus outbreak during the five-day pilgrimage. The hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam and a must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lifetime, is usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings. But this year only up to 10,000 people already residing in the kingdom will participate in the ritual, a tiny fraction of the 2.5 million pilgrims from around the world that attended last year.

Pilgrims walked into Makkah's Grand Mosque in batches to begin the ritual with their first "tawaf", or walk around the Kaaba, a cube-shaped structure draped in gold-embroidered cloth towards which Muslims around the world pray, state television showed. Pilgrims will be required to wear masks and observe social distancing during a series of religious rites that are completed over five days in the holy city of Makkah and its surroundings in western Saudi Arabia.

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MAKKAH: Pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, at the center of the Grand Mosque in this holy city during the annual hajj pilgrimage. — AFP

Iran targets mock US aircraft carrier in Gulf exercises

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards blasted a mock-up of a US aircraft carrier with missiles yesterday during military exercises in sensitive Gulf waters, state television said. The exercises were held near the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping lane for a fifth of global oil output. They were staged at a time of heightened tensions between Iran and its decades-old arch enemy the United States.

Footage of the war games broadcast on state television showed the Guards' air and naval forces readying for an attack off the country's southwest coast. Speedboats skimmed across the water in formation before ground forces fired cannons and a missile was launched from a helicopter. The mock-up of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier came into view with rows of dummy fighter jets on either side of its landing strip.

The television then cut to rockets being fired out to sea from the backs of trucks, before showing damage to the hull of the mock-up aircraft carrier. Another missile fired from a helicopter left a trail of smoke before appearing to smash into the side of the fake warship. Armed forces were then seen rap-



This handout photo shows a mockup US aircraft carrier encircled by Iranian speedboats during a military exercise near the Strait of Hormuz. — AFP

pling onto the deck of the vessel, before around a dozen speedboats circle around it.

"What was shown today in these exercises, at the level of aerospace and naval forces, was all offensive," Guards commander Major General Hossein Salami told state television. The war games come only days after Tehran accused US fighter jets of harassing an Iranian commercial airliner in the skies over Syria. At least four passengers on board the Mahan Air plane were injured in Thursday's incident, after the pilot took emergency action to avoid the warplanes.

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Yemen separatists abandon self-rule, push peace deal

RIYADH: Yemeni separatists abandoned their declaration of self-rule in the south yesterday and pledged to implement a stalled Saudi-brokered peace deal, mending a rift between allies in the war against Houthi rebels. The Southern Transitional Council (STC) proclaimed self-governance in April after accusing the government of failing to perform its duties and of "conspiring" against the southern cause, pushing the war-ravaged country deeper into crisis.

The breakdown between the one-time allies had complicated a long and separate conflict between a Saudi-led military coalition and the Iran-allied rebels, who control much of the north, including the capital Sanaa. The STC "announces that it is abandoning its self-rule declaration" to allow the implementation of a power-sharing deal known as the Riyadh Agreement, spokesman Nizar Haitham wrote on Twitter.

He acknowledged the announcement came after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates exerted pressure to row back on their decision. Saudi Arabia said it had proposed a plan to "accelerate" the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, the official Saudi

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Local

Crown Prince assures MPs on Amir's health

Sheikh Nawaf urges lawmakers to cooperate for achievement



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and members of the National Assembly office. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, and members of the National Assembly office at Seif Palace yesterday. During the meeting, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf assured the lawmakers on the health of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and expressed gratitude to citizens and residents for their sincere sentiments towards His Highness the Amir.

His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince also praised the parliament's work, highlighting the cooperation between Speaker Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and

applauded the 'legislative achievements' made at the National Assembly. He urged lawmakers to continue putting effort and cooperation in order to complete issues pending on the assembly's schedule.

His Highness Sheikh Nawaf took the opportunity as well to greet the lawmakers on Eid Al-Adha. Speaker Ghanem and members of the assembly's office expressed contentment on being reassured about His Highness the Amir's health, and appreciation for the guidance they received from His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince, vowing to continue bearing their responsibility towards Kuwait and its people.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh

Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince received on Tuesday cables from Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani and Senegal's President Macky Sall, who inquired about the health of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing him good health and wellbeing. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince expressed deep gratitude for their sincere gestures, wishing them good health. — KUNA



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Facemask: Who wears it and who doesn't?

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The most powerful weapon against the coronavirus is the facemask. According to WHO-backed research, wearing a facemask can reduce the spread of COVID-19 by 85 percent. The research claimed that the chance of infection or transmission is three percent with a mask compared to 17 percent without a mask. Holger Schunemann, a professor at McMaster University, said in the statement quoted in a medical journal: "Our findings are the first to synthe-

size all direct information on COVID-19, SARS and MERS, and provide the currently best available evidence on the optimum use of these common and simple interventions to help 'flatten the curve'."

Wearing a facemask has become mandatory in many countries around the world. In Kuwait, those not wearing a facemask face punishment of a maximum of three months in jail or a KD 5,000 fine. When the rule was implemented in March, people started wearing masks in public places, streets, government facilities, private companies, malls and offices. Many establishments have implemented strict measures obliging all employees and individuals to wear a mask or they will not be allowed to enter their premises.

To check whether everyone is strictly adhering to Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines, Kuwait Times went to three separate locations to observe the flow of people and how they are following these guidelines. We found out that a majority of people are wearing

and adhering to the facemask policy. Out of 300 people surveyed, none of them was without a facemask. The question however is whether they are wearing it properly or not.

Kuwait Times went to Rai near Lulu Hypermarket and counted 100 people with or without a facemask. We repeated the same in both Kuwait City in Maliya near Souq Muttahida and in Salmiya in the old souq near the MRG Building, and here are the results:

Al-Rai (100:3) (at 11:30 am)

Out of 100 people, three are not wearing the facemask properly. They all have a mask - one is carrying it in his hand, while the other two have lowered it on their chin.

Kuwait City (100:9) (at 1 pm)

Out of 100 people, nine are not wearing the facemask properly. But at 1 pm, not many people are around.

Salmiya (100:16) (at 5 pm)

Out of 100 people, 16 are not wearing the facemask

properly. Salmiya is a crowded area with a mix of nationalities. Five in the afternoon is considered rush hour and many are either rushing to buy something in the supermarkets or rushing home. When asked why he wasn't wearing the facemask properly, Bassam, a Syrian man, said he has health issues. "I am experiencing shortness of breath. But I am wearing it - I just wanted to breathe fresh air," he said.

Meliza, a Filipina nurse, said she regularly wears a facemask but removes when there are no people around her. "Doctors are telling us to breathe fresh air as well - they are telling us that it is also harmful to our health if we wear a mask all the time. But we need to wear it in public so we can be spared from this killer virus," she said. Sujin, an Indian national, removed his facemask because he said he is not in a crowded area. "I always have it when I am out of the house. I don't want to pay the KD 5,000 fine or be imprisoned," he said.

Pilgrims begin downsized hajj...

Continued from Page 1

Those selected to take part in the hajj were subject to temperature checks and placed in quarantine as they began trickling into Makkah at the weekend. State media showed health workers sanitising their luggage, and some pilgrims reported being given electronic wristbands to allow authorities to monitor their whereabouts. Workers, clutching brooms and disinfectant, were seen cleaning the area around the Kaaba. Using his bare hands, one worker was shown daubing its outer wall with perfume.

Hajj authorities have cordoned off the Kaaba this year, saying pilgrims will not be allowed to touch it, to limit the chances of infection. They also reported setting up multiple health facilities, mobile clinics and ambulances to cater to the pilgrims. "There are no security-related concerns in this pilgrimage, but (downsizing) is to protect pilgrims from the danger of the pandemic," said Saudi Arabia's director of public security, Khalid bin Qarar Al-Harbi. The foreign press are barred from this year's hajj, usually a huge global media event, as the government tightens access to Mecca.

Saudi authorities initially said only around 1,000

pilgrims residing in the kingdom would be permitted for the hajj, but local media reports say as many as 10,000 will be allowed to take part. Some 70 percent of the pilgrims are foreigners residing in the kingdom, while the rest are Saudi citizens, authorities said. All worshippers were required to be tested for coronavirus before arriving in Makkah and will also have to quarantine after the pilgrimage as the number of cases in the kingdom nears 270,000 - one of the largest outbreaks in the Middle East.

They were given elaborate amenity kits that include sterilized pebbles for a stoning ritual, disinfectants, masks, a prayer rug and the ihram, a seamless white garment worn by pilgrims, according to a hajj ministry document. "I did not expect, among millions of Muslims, to be blessed with approval," Emirati pilgrim Abdullah Al-Kathiri said in a video released by the Saudi media ministry. "It is an indescribable feeling... especially since it is my first pilgrimage."

The hajj ministry said foreign residents of the kingdom from around 160 countries competed in the online selection process but it did not say how many people applied. Some disappointed applicants have complained that the government-run lottery was not clearly outlined and that no reason was given for their rejection. The hajj ministry has fielded a deluge of anguished queries on Twitter from rejected applicants. But Hajj Minister Mohammad Benteen insisted the process was transparent, telling the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya television that "health determinants" formed the basis of selection. —AFP

Yemen separatists abandon self-rule...

Continued from Page 1

Press Agency (SPA) reported early yesterday. The plan calls for the Yemeni prime minister to form a new government within 30 days, as well as the appointment of a new governor and security director for second city Aden where the government had set up base.

"Once this is implemented, the government should commence its work in Aden, and oversee the completion of the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement in accordance with all its clauses and tracks," SPA said, citing an unnamed Saudi official. Yemen's internationally recognized government welcomed the

announcement, with spokesman Rajeh Badi expressing hope that this would be a "serious and true start" to implementing the Riyadh Agreement. Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, exiled in Riyadh, separately announced the appointment of a new police commander and governor for Aden.

Saudi Arabia's efforts "have succeeded in bringing together the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council in accepting the mechanism proposed by the kingdom to implement the Riyadh Agreement," deputy defence minister Prince Khalid bin Salman said on Twitter. If it holds, the breakthrough should allow the Saudi-led coalition and its allies to refocus their energies on the war against their common foe - the Houthi rebels.

"This largely means the Saudis want to de-escalate in Yemen and push the warring parties towards peace," Fatima Abo Alasar, a scholar at the Middle East Institute, told AFP. — AFP

Iran targets mock US aircraft carrier...

Continued from Page 1

Tensions have escalated between Iran and the United States since US President Donald Trump uni-

laterally withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal in 2018. The arch foes have come to the brink of war twice since June 2019, when the Guards shot down a US drone in the Gulf. Their animosity deepened after Iran's most prominent general, Qasem Soleimani, was killed in a US drone strike near Baghdad airport in January. One of the most recent confrontations was in mid-April, when the United States accused the Guards of using speedboats to harass its warships in the Gulf. — AFP

Local

Kuwait National Assembly to hold sessions next week

MPs demand probe on Malaysian fund case

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said Tuesday the house will hold two regular sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday next week to debate issues on its agenda, based on a decision by the assembly office.

Ghanem said that although next Monday will be a public holiday for the Eid Al-Adha, the assembly will coordinate with the ministry of health to test MPs and staff who are likely to take part in the sessions. High on the agenda are two grillings against the ministers of finance and interior over alleged violations in the two key ministries.

In the meantime, two lawmakers yesterday demanded a probe into why a government investigation into the Malaysian fund corruption case was shelved by authorities two years ago. The public prosecution appears to be headed to press charges against high profile personalities accused of being involved in money laundering and transfer of millions of dollars in connection with the Malaysian fund through Kuwaiti firms and personalities.

MP Abdullah Al-Roumi said that he has submitted a motion calling for an assembly debate into the reasons for shelving the government investigation into the issue two years ago. He said that the reason given that time for suspending the probe was that there was no crime and

now the public prosecution is investigating into the case. Roumi said the national assembly should not remain silent on the authorities' reluctance to confront corruption cases and that the government must explain to the assembly the reasons for the suspension in a bid to clean Kuwait's image abroad.



Two grillings on assembly's agenda

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari called on the government to investigate why there had been a delay in referring the Malaysian fund case to the public prosecution, adding that it may have been the result of ignorance or participation and in either case an investigation must be carried out. The two lawmakers praised the government authorities for referring a number of corruption cases to the public prosecution.



The National Assembly.

Minister forms panel to modify money laundering law

KUWAIT: Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Sheetan on Tuesday issued a ministerial resolution to form a panel to examine the amendment of Law 106/2013 on money laundering and terrorism financing, mainly with regards to the tasks undertaken by the financial inspection unit. Minister Sheetan explained in a statement to the press that his decision was intended to affirm his keenness and continuous support for activating the inspection unit since he took office in February. The unit's personnel have taken measures referring money laundering suspects to the public prosecution, the minister said, affirming its key role at this level. The committee which he has ordered to be formed will examine shortcomings in existing legislations and propose adequate modifications to enhance efficiency of the financial inspection team's personnel, back up their independence, and boost their jurisdictions and tools for attaining the aspired objective, Sheetan



Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan

added. This approach, he continued, is aimed at preserving Kuwait's image with respect of combating money laundering and terrorism funding. — KUNA

Corruption scandals dominate local headlines

KUWAIT: Reports on investigations in corruption cases that have recently surfaced in Kuwait dominated front pages of Arabic dailies that published yesterday. Al-Qabas reported that customs inspectors were given strict instructions to thoroughly inspect all vehicles and shipping trucks at border checkpoints out of concern that at least 10 social media influencers whose names were mentioned in investigations in corruption cases could try to escape out of the country. Meanwhile, the same report quotes a source familiar with the investigations who said that travel bans were issued against 14 former senior officials involved in at least four major corruption scandals that are currently under investigation. The source warned that an estimated 300 convicted citizens have managed to escape after being convicted by court in the past few years.

Al-Jarida reported meanwhile that the public prosecution plans to question nine more social media influencers on suspicions over their 'inflated bank accounts', in addition to 10 others and an 'online boutique' which are currently under investigations in a money laundering case. This comes while the Ministry

of Commerce and Industry closed 54 social media accounts that host online auctions for valuable items on suspicions that they were used to facilitate money laundering operations, the same daily reported.

The judge had denied requests made by attorneys of five suspects questioned in one of the money laundering cases under investigations to release their clients, and remanded them in custody until August 12 when they will stand again before the judge for questioning. The five suspects (two Kuwaitis, one Iranian, one Egyptian and one Belgian nationals) had denied charges of money laundering, bribe and trafficking of alcoholic drinks, Al-Anbaa daily reported.

In the meantime, Al-Rai claimed possession of official letters between the State Audit Bureau and the general secretariat of the council of ministers, which the daily says reveal that the Interior Ministry used some of the money donated to support Kuwait's fight against the spread of COVID-19 to fund arm deals. Nearly KD 54 million were collected during the public donation drive in March, which was launched by dozens of local charities to support the government's efforts in its fight against the spread of the deadly disease. However, the State Audit Bureau reportedly approved the Interior Ministry's request to sign multiple deals worth KD 1.6 million to purchase ammunition and bullet proof vests, funded from the donations. Al-Rai's report quotes a statement from the State Audit Bureau which explains that the approvals were made "in light of the current unusual circumstances due to the spread of COVID-19, and in order to achieve public security."

News in brief

Kuwait seeks safe vaccines

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced that Kuwait would only procure COVID-19 vaccines after they are approved by global health organizations and cleared to be safe for human use. Kuwait is currently coordinating with international organizations and research institutes, including the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), as a pre-emptive step to help secure the vaccine as soon as its test results return effective and safe, the ministry explained in a statement.

Employee tests positive

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) announced that one of its employees tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The PACI building was closed yesterday, but civil ID distributions remained available. PACI will resume work as usual on the first day after the Eid Al-Adha holiday, it added.

National Guard to release prisoners

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary, Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Rifai on Tuesday ordered the release of imprisoned guards who have been held for disciplinary offenses, on the occasion of the upcoming Eid Al-Adha. Kuwait National Guard said in a statement the order came in line with instructions by Kuwait National Guard Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and the KNG Deputy Chief Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

4,870 passengers

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 26 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 4,870 passengers. They included 17 flights to Egypt, three flights to the UAE, two flight to Lebanon, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Pakistan, one flight to Bangladesh, and one flight to Yemen.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Japan ambassador wishes Kuwait Eid Mubarak

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Japan to the State of Kuwait Masato Takaoka extends his warmest wishes and sincerest congratulations to the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha. Takaoka also prays for the speedy recovery of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Japan's Ambassador
Masato Takaoka

State working to facilitate Eid prayers

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Justice Dr Fahad Mohammad Al-Afasi said Tuesday the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs was working with other competent state bodies to make it easy and safe for worshippers to perform Eid Al-Adha prayers on Friday morning. The interagency coordination has crucial importance this year amid the precautions to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Dr Afasi, who is also Minister Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, said in a press release. The statement followed a coordinative meeting held by the mosques' sector in the Ministry of Awqaf to review the preparations for the prayers at mosques and in outdoor areas countrywide. Dr Afasi noted that the mosques' sector plays an important role in raising the public awareness about the correct values and concepts of Islam as well as the health safety. On July 13, the ministry decided to lift the four-month ban on Friday congregational prayers as from July 17. —KUNA

Client reserves right to end automatic renewal at any time

Read contract before signing: Consumer protection department

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Always read the contract and be sure of what services you are buying, and how you will pay for them, before you sign. Failure to do so can result in a tangled effort to cancel and you might end up paying long after you have terminated or stopped using the service.

Kuwait Times recently spoke with the consumer protection department at the Ministry of Commerce regarding this issue. According to the consumer protection department, many customers don't read the entire contract they sign, which gets them into trouble later.

When someone subscribes to a service like a satellite channel for instance and signs a contract, they are liable for the entire period of the contract, even if they want to stop the service early. "In this case, the service provider has the right to charge for the remaining period of the contract. Also, the terms of the contract are obligatory for the client, and in most contracts for such services, renewal is automatic, which means that even after the contract period ends, it renews automatically unless the client withdraws from it," said Abdullah from the consumer protection department call center.

Automatic renewal, however, is another matter. A contract can stipulate automatic renewal of a subscription service but must leave the customer the option of cancelling. "Automatic renewal can't be applied by any service provider unless clearly mentioned in

the contract that was signed by the client. Even in this case, the client should be able to cancel it without delay," he added.

Different fields of services follow different institutions, where consumers can file their complaints. "For instance, any complaint related to telecommunication services should be filed at the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), complaints against shipping companies at the General Administration of Customs, and against home businesses and selling items

of a local bank. Ahmad himself was a victim of another TV service provider.

"I signed a contract for one year. I wasn't even watching TV much. When the year ended, I still received a deduction message from my account. I called the company saying the contract had expired, but they replied that it has been renewed automatically. So I requested to cancel it, and they did cancel it. But the next month the monthly fee was deducted again from my account, and when I asked why, they told me the cancellation request takes two months to process, so I had to pay for two more months," Ahmad said.

Other banks have different charges for issuing a new credit card. "We frequently receive complaints against various service providers. If the client considers it as fraudulent, we may cancel their credit card and issue a new one free of charge. The service provider won't be able to deduct any payments from the client's account, even if the credit card wasn't a prepaid one and is connected to their account, unless the client gave his account number to the service provider," noted Sana from the call center of another bank.

Customers who feel they have been scammed or cheated can complain with documentary proof at the consumer protection department, or call them on the hotline 135. Customers should always carefully read the contract they sign when subscribing to any services, especially those related to the Internet, TV channels, gaming, etc.



Complaints received on 135 hotline

online by individuals who don't have commercial license should be made at the Interior Ministry's Cyber Crimes Department. For the services provided by a seller that doesn't have an agent in Kuwait, the only solution is filing a court case," explained Abdullah.

"In this case, the client can demand blocking their credit card so no further payments can be made to that service provider. The bank will then issue a new credit card for a fee of KD 15," said Ahmad from the call center

KIPIC activates Zour refinery gas pipeline

KUWAIT: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) announced Tuesday completion of the vital stage of the Al-Zour refinery by introducing hydrocarbon to run its gas pipeline. This achievement came by efforts of Kuwaiti workers and various other groups in KIPIC as well as advisers and contractors of the project, said Deputy

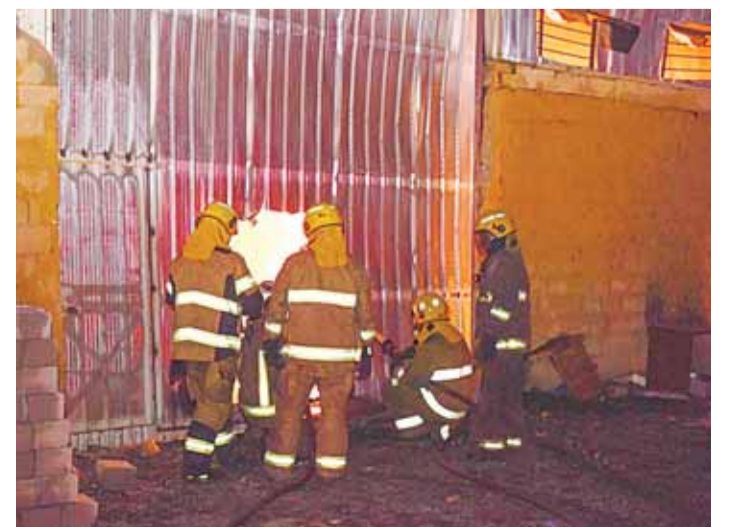
CEO of Al-Zour Refinery Khalid Al-Awadhi in a statement. Awadhi expressed gratitude to Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) for cooperation and efforts to complete operation of the gas pipeline for Al-Zour refinery. The success was due to determination of the workers in completing Al-Zour refinery despite the COVID-19 pandemic, he added. Al-Zour refinery is the largest project with a refining capacity of 615,000 barrels per day, built to refine different types of Kuwaiti crude oil. The project is one of the main initiatives in the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), envisaged in the 2040 strategy, which aims to expand capacity by building a new oil refinery with a capacity of 615,000 barrels per day, representing 43 percent of the total refining capacity of Kuwait. —KUNA



Fire guts four warehouses in Sulaibiya

KUWAIT: Ten fire squads worked together to battle a huge blaze that gutted four warehouses located over an area of 8,000 square meters in Sulaibiya agricultural area yesterday. The fire was reported at 1:15 am, prompting Kuwait Fire Service Department (KFSD) to send teams from eight different fire stations, while Kuwait Army and Kuwait National Guard sent their fire teams to back them

up. Several refrigerating gas cylinders exploded during the fire, KFSD said, noting that the warehouses were used to store petrochemical substances, air-conditioning spare parts, electrical appliances and fiberglass materials in violation of the terms of their licenses for agricultural use. No injuries were reported in the fire, and a case was filed to investigate the causes.

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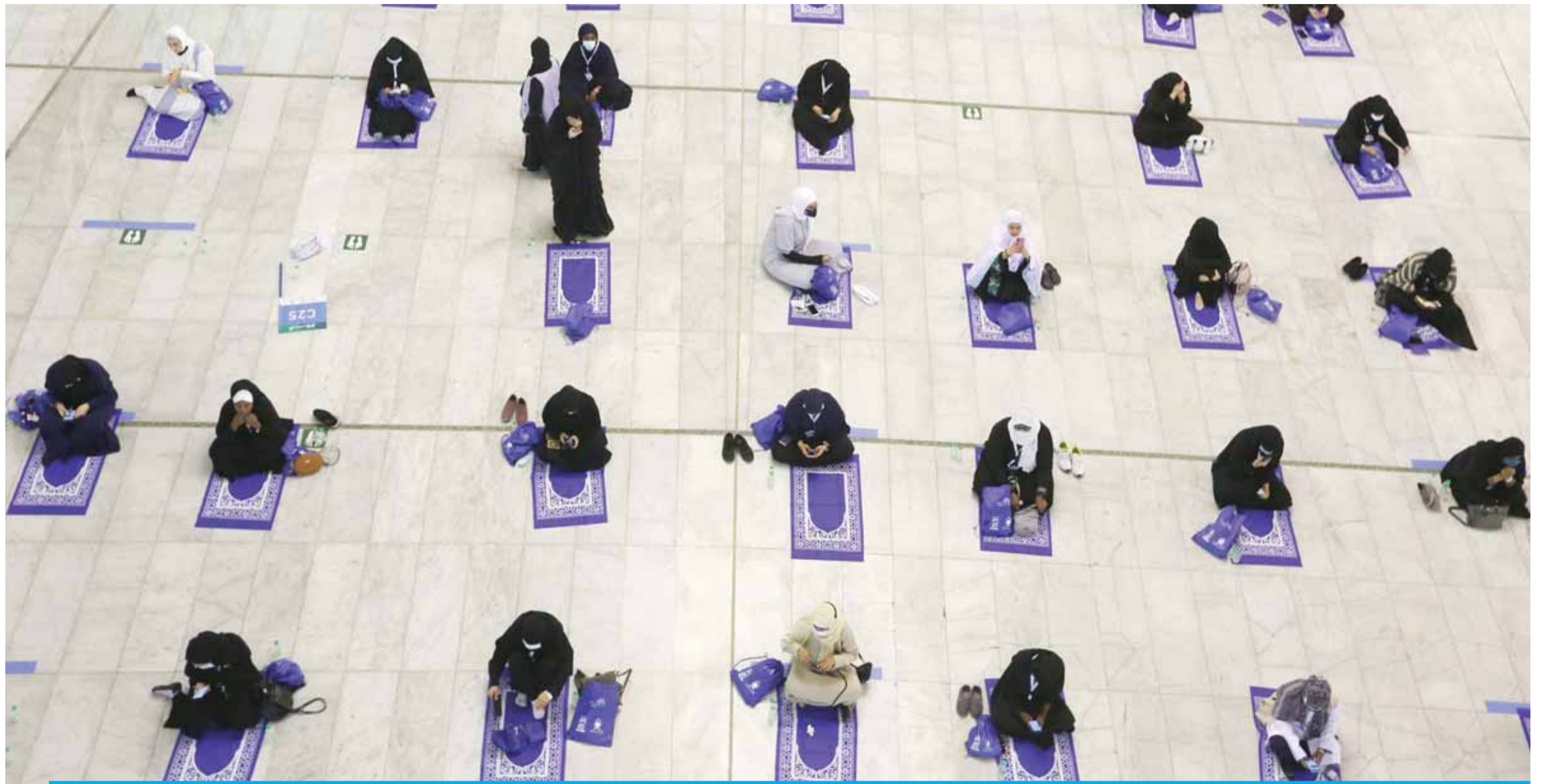


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MAKKAH: Photo shows the first group of female pilgrims praying in the Grand mosque in the holy city of Makkah at the start of the annual Muslim Hajj pilgrimage. — AFP

Coronavirus deaths surge in US

Scaled-down hajj begins amid pandemic

WASHINGTON: Coronavirus deaths in the United States surged to their highest level in months as Muslim pilgrims began yesterday a pandemic-curtailed version of their sacred hajj. The human toll of the disease surged to a level not seen since mid-May in the United States, the world's hardest-hit country, with nearly 1,600 deaths recorded in 24 hours, Johns Hopkins University reported on Tuesday.

Case numbers have been rising for weeks across swathes of the nation, leaving health authorities and leaders to watch nervously for a feared spike in fatalities. President Donald Trump's effort to be re-elected in November has been dogged by a crisis that has already killed nearly 150,000 Americans and wreaked havoc on the world's biggest economy.

Twitter removed a video that Trump retweeted in which doctors made allegedly false claims about the pandemic, saying it was in violation of its "COVID-19 misinformation policy." Earlier, Facebook had also withdrawn the video, which claimed masks and lockdowns were not necessary to counter the pandemic. Resurgent virus

outbreaks have forced nations around the world to step up measures against the contagion, leaving holiday tourism and event calendars in shambles.

The annual hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia's Makkah drew 2.5 million Muslims last year, but in pandemic-shadowed 2020 just 10,000 already residing in the kingdom will be allowed in. The chosen ones were subject to temperature checks and placed in quarantine as they began trickling into Makkah over the weekend. State media showed health workers sanitizing their luggage, and some pilgrims reported receiving electronic wristbands to let authorities monitor their whereabouts.

In addition to being a spiritual highlight to faithful Muslims, the pilgrimage normally provides a boost to the local economy that will be sorely missed this year. In Europe, resurgent virus cases are blasting a similar hole in local hopes for a financial windfall in summer holiday hotspots. Spain, one of the countries hit hardest by the pandemic, insists it is a safe destination for tourists despite tackling 361 active outbreaks and more than 4,000 new cases.

'Rapidly and uncontrollably'

Several countries have nonetheless imposed quarantines on people returning from Spain, including its biggest tourist market, Britain. Spain's strict lockdown destroyed more than a million jobs during the second quarter of the year, the National Statistics Institute (INE) reported Tuesday—mainly in tourism. Germany, which has registered an average of 557 new cases a day over the past week, also tweaked its mask rules, saying they must be worn outdoors wherever social distancing was not possible. "We must prevent that the virus once again spreads rapidly and uncontrollably," its disease control agency said Tuesday.

Iran suffered its worst day yet of the pandemic, reporting 235 new deaths on Tuesday, a record toll for a single day in the Middle East's hardest-hit country. "The situation is worrying," health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said, with Tehran, the most populous province, hitting the highest category on the country's coronavirus risk scale. Officials have made masks mandatory in enclosed public spaces and allowed Tehran and other hard-hit provinces



KATHMANDU: A health worker collects a swab sample from a woman for a COVID-19 PCR test in the Mahaboudha area of the Nepalese capital on Tuesday. — AFP

reimpose restrictions progressively lifted since April to reopen Iran's sanctions-hit economy.

Lebanon also raised fears for its crisis-hit health sector after recording 175 cases on Saturday, its highest daily tally. On Tuesday, it announced a full lockdown July 30-August 3 over the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, and limits on

bar and restaurant capacity. And in Colombia, President Ivan Duque announced an extension of lockdown measures until August 30, as the number of cases in the South American country continues to climb. Colombia has reported more than 9,000 COVID-19 deaths in nearly five months of the pandemic. — AFP

Turkey tightens grip on social media

ISTANBUL: Turkey's parliament yesterday passed a controversial bill giving the government greater control of social media and criticized by human rights advocates as an attempt to increase online censorship. Under the new law, social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter have to ensure they have local representatives in Turkey and to comply with court orders over the removal of certain content or face heavy fines.

The legislation targets social networks with more than a million unique visits every day and says servers with Turkish users' data must be stored locally. If companies refuse to comply, they will face fines and restriction of bandwidth making the platform unusable. The bill was submitted by the ruling AKP and its nationalist partner the MHP, which have a majority in the parliament, and passed after debates beginning on Tuesday and lasting into Wednesday. After the night-long debate, the parliament went into summer recess till October.

'Dark era'

Human rights groups and the opposition are worried over what they call the erosion of freedom of expression in Turkey, with

thousands of people subject to criminal proceedings for "insulting" President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on social media. They argue that increased control of social media will also limit Turkish access to independent or critical information in a country where the news media is in the hands of government-friendly businessmen or controlled by the state.

"Why now?" asked Yaman Akdeniz, professor at Istanbul's Bilgi University and also a cyber rights expert. "While print and broadcast media platforms are already under government control, social media networks are relatively free. Social media has become one of the few spaces for free and effective expression in Turkey," he told AFP.

Human Rights Watch expressed concerns that the law would enable the government to control social media, to get content removed at will and to arbitrarily target individual users. "Social media is a lifeline for many people who use it to access news, so this law signals a new dark era of online censorship," said Tom Porteous, deputy program director at Human Rights Watch in a statement before the legislation passed. The legislation has aroused deep concerns for many Internet users in Turkey who mobilized online in recent weeks using the hashtag "don't touch my social media".

'No obstacle'

Ibrahim Kalin, Erdogan's spokesman, brushed off fears the law would hamper free speech. "There is no obstacle to social media users freely expressing their opin-

ion," he told CNN-Turk television on Tuesday. "Here is the rule: whatever is a crime in real world is also a crime in cyber world ... there must be a limit to criticism." Erdogan vowed to tighten government control over social media earlier this month after he said "dark-hearted" users insulted Finance Minister Berat Albayrak and his wife Esra, the president's daughter, following the birth of their fourth child.

And last month, the Turkish leader met with a spate of negative comments during a video-conference with young people. The Turkish presidency then turned off comments but there were 388,000 clicks on the "thumbs down" button, compared with 114,000 on the "thumbs up" button. Erdogan is not a fan of social media despite a large following on different platforms, including Twitter. He once compared the media platforms to a "murderer's knife" and previously promised to "eradicate" Twitter.

His government previously blocked Twitter and YouTube in 2014 after audio recordings were posted implicating the president, then prime minister, and his inner circle in an alleged corruption scandal. Erdogan's aversion of social media also dates back to anti-government protests in 2013, which were often mobilized by Twitter and Facebook posts. A Turkish court in January lifted a ban on the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia after almost three years. According to Twitter's latest "transparency report" for the first half of 2019, Turkey ranked number one for seeking content removal with more than 6,000 requests. — AFP

Scientists revive microbes from 100 million years ago

PARIS: Scientists have successfully revived microbes that had lain dormant at the bottom of the sea since the age of the dinosaurs, allowing the organisms to eat and even multiply after eons in the deep. Their research sheds light on the remarkable survival power of some of Earth's most primitive species, which can exist for tens of millions of years with barely any oxygen or food before springing back to life in the lab.

A team led by the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology analysed ancient sediment samples deposited more than 100 million years ago on the seabed of the South Pacific. The region is renowned for having far fewer nutrients in its sediment than normal, making it a far-from-ideal site to maintain life over millennia. The team incubated the samples to help coax the microbes out of their epoch-spanning slumber.

Astonishingly, they were able to revive nearly all of the microorganisms. "When I found them, I was first skeptical whether the findings are

from some mistake or a failure in the experiment," said lead author Yuki Morono. "We now know that there is no age limit for (organisms in the) sub-seafloor biosphere," he told AFP. URI Graduate School of Oceanography professor and study co-author Steven D'Hondt said the microbes came from the oldest sediment drilled from the seabed.

"In the oldest sediment we've drilled, with the least amount of food, there are still living organisms, and they can wake up, grow and multiply," he said. Morono explained that oxygen traces in the sediment allowed the microbes to stay alive for millions of years while expending virtually no energy. Energy levels for seabed microbes "are million of times lower than that of surface microbes," he said. Such levels would be far too low to sustain the surface microbes, and Morono said it was a mystery how the seabed organisms had managed to survive.

Previous studies have shown how bacteria can live on some of the least hospitable places on Earth, including around undersea vents that are devoid of oxygen. Morono said the new research, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, proved the remarkable staying power of some of Earth's simplest living structures. "Unlike us, microbes grow their population by divisions, so they do not actually have the concept of lifespan," he added. — AFP

International

Aliens, 'reptilians': US viral video doctor's odd beliefs

'This virus has a cure-it is called hydroxychloroquine'

WASHINGTON: A Houston physician who praised hydroxychloroquine as a miracle coronavirus cure in a viral video retweeted by President Donald Trump blames gynecological problems on sex with evil spirits and believes the US government is run by "reptilians." Stella Immanuel's viral speech has drawn attention to a little-known group calling themselves "America's Frontline Doctors" who appear to exist to promote the common antimalarial drug in the fight against COVID-19.

"Nobody needs to get sick. This virus has a cure-it is called hydroxychloroquine," Immanuel exclaimed Monday as she stood on the steps of the Supreme Court in Washington at a so-called "White Coat Summit" of likeminded physicians. Early on in the pandemic, scientists were eager to find out whether hydroxychloroquine's antiviral properties would make it effective in real-world patients with SARS-CoV-2. So far though, all the major clinical trials that have reported their findings on this question have found no benefit, and leading national health authorities have moved to restrict its use because of potential cardiac harm.

Nonetheless the family doctor said all 350 patients she had treated with the medicine-including those with serious pre-existing conditions-had survived, and that hydroxychloroquine was so potent it made mask-wearing and lockdowns unnecessary. The clip was shared by Trump and described as a "must watch" by his son Donald Trump Jr. but has since been deleted by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for promoting misinformation.

Asked later by a reporter about his retweet, the president said: "I thought her voice was an important voice, but I know nothing about her." The debate over hydroxychloroquine has become supercharged politically with leaders like Trump



Video clip shared by Trump

and some fellow US conservatives cheerleading heavily in its favor. And the curious case of Immanuel and colleagues-first reported in depth by The Daily Beast-underscores just how far the drug's advocates are willing to go.

Right-wing political group

The website for "America's Frontline Doctors" was registered just 11 days ago, a web domain age checker revealed-and the site was taken down by Tuesday afternoon. "Tea Party Patriots," a right-wing political group backed by wealthy Republicans, said on its website it was responsible for organizing the Washington summit. Further



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro shows a box of hydroxychloroquine to supporters outside the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia. — AFP

research on Immanuel's web page, now accessible only via an archived website viewer, as well as her YouTube account, reveal a long list of bizarre and unscientific beliefs. These include that "tormenting spirits" routinely have "astral sex" with women, which in turn causes "gynecological problems, marital distress, miscarriages" and more. In a 2015 video,

Immanuel, who leads a religious group called Fire Power Ministries, said: "There are people ruling this nation that are not even human," describing them as "reptilian spirits" who are "half human, half ET." In the same video she rails against the use of "alien DNA" to treat sick people, which she said had resulted in human beings mixing with demons. — AFP

News in brief

Nile dam saga to 'drag on'

CAIRO: Egypt's president said Tuesday that talks over Ethiopia's Nile dam would "drag on", but voiced hope for a negotiated settlement to the dispute. "We are negotiating and these negotiations will be a long battle," President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said. But, he added, "we will succeed, God willing." Sisi's comments, in a speech broadcast on state TV, came amid heightened tensions between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over the vast Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile. For nearly a decade, talks between the three countries over the operation and filling of the mega-dam have faltered. Last week, Ethiopia announced it had reached its first-year target for filling the reservoir, a move that sparked anxiety in downstream Egypt and Sudan, who fear for their vital water supplies. — AFP

Biden to pick vice president

WILMINGTON: Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, said Tuesday that he will pick his running mate next week for the November election against President Donald Trump. "I'm going to have a choice in the first week in August," Biden told reporters. "And I promise, I'll let you know when I do." Biden, who has pledged to put a woman on the Democratic ticket, was asked whether he would be able to meet face-to-face with his vice presidential pick because of the coronavirus pandemic. "We'll see," the 77-year-old former vice president said. Biden joked that he would have to try to "trick" journalists camping outside his Wilmington home to allow him to meet discreetly with his choice before making an announcement. — AFP

Uganda leader eyes 6th term

KAMPALA: Veteran Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was on Tuesday nominated as his party's candidate in the 2021 presidential election in which he will be seeking a sixth term in office. Museveni, 75, a former rebel leader who seized power in 1986 and was first elected a decade later, changed the constitution in 2005 to abolish a two-term limit. In 2019 the Supreme Court confirmed the scrapping of the age limit for the presidency, paving the way for a further election bid. "The president was today nominated as the party flag bearer in the coming general elections," said Rogers Mulindwa, spokesman for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM). "There has been common desire within the party that the president becomes our sole candidate given his great contribution to the country and Africa," Mulindwa said. Museveni is facing a challenge from music star-turned-politician Bobi Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi. — AFP

Migratory river fish populations

PARIS: Populations of migratory river fish collapsed by 76 percent on average in the last 50 years, according to a report by conservation groups Tuesday, warning the "catastrophic" declines could impact people and ecosystems around the world. Overfishing and loss of habitat have had a devastating impact on migratory fish, according to the research by groups including the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, WWF, World Fish Migration Foundation and the Zoological Society of London. Almost one in three of all freshwater species are threatened with extinction, the report said, with migratory fish "disproportionately threatened". The study looked at 247 species of fish from around the world and found that their populations had declined on average 3 percent per year between 1970 and 2016. — AFP

Trump ditches new tone on coronavirus to tout questionable theories

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's much heralded new tone on the coronavirus pandemic evaporated Tuesday in a burst of misleading medical speculation, criticism for his own top virus expert, and praise for an eccentric preacher-doctor touting conspiracy theories. Just a week ago, Trump sought to get his shaky reelection campaign back on track by addressing national criticism of a leadership void in a crisis that has already killed nearly 150,000 Americans and wreaked havoc on the world's biggest economy.

The president admitted things were going to "get worse before they get better." He indicated he was embracing the science. He finally urged the wearing of masks. But at a press conference in the White House on Tuesday, it was the old Trump in full. He said it was unfair that the leading US infectious diseases specialist Anthony Fauci was more popular than him. "Nobody likes me," he said. He pushed his pet theory-counter to advice from his own government and most doctors-that the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine can be used to treat COVID-19



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks to the press in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

patients. "Many doctors think it's extremely successful." And he took pains to praise Stella Immanuel, a doctor and preacher who believes in witchcraft and a plot being carried out to vaccinate people against being religious, calling her "spectacular."

Social media outcast

Trump's testy press conference, which he abruptly ended while answering a second question about his praise for Immanuel, followed an overnight row with social media giants Twitter and Facebook over some of the same controversies. Twitter took the rare step of removing clips tweeted by Trump from a video earlier deleted by Facebook in which



FLORIDA: Cars line up for Covid-19 test at a 'walk-in' and 'drive-through' coronavirus testing site in Miami Beach, Florida. — AFP

Slow tests and poor tracing: Virus disaster unfolds in Florida

MIAMI: Florida has emerged as a major new epicenter of the US coronavirus battle, but two key weapons in the state's fight are misfiring badly: testing and contact tracing. Health officials say that when a person is tested they need to get the results in 48 hours or less, so if they are in fact positive they can self-isolate right away and avoid infecting others. But in the Sunshine State it is taking up to 10 days for results to return.

Such was the case of Gemma Garcia, a Spanish journalist who waited 11 days for her test results. During that span she practiced social distancing but did not quarantine. Her test came back positive, and then she did isolate herself. "And I contacted all the people I had been with," said Garcia, who is 53. Luckily, they all came back negative. This lag between testing and results coming back is one of the reasons Florida is a red hot spot in the pandemic-along with Texas and California-in the country hardest hit by the virus sweeping the globe.

Right now one of every 50 people in Florida is

infected with the virus, and as of Tuesday it has killed more than 6,000 people. New cases are around 10,000 a day. The latest single daily death toll was a record 186. "What do I do with a patient that I test today, and the results come back in three, four, five, six days-when between the test and the time of a positive result they have been with a load of people?" asked Alberto Dominguez-Bali, a doctor at Hialeah Hospital in Miami. "That is poor management of the situation," he said.

With things so messy, people are pointing fingers searching for a culprit. Two weeks ago Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, a firm ally of President Donald Trump and of reopening the economy despite the warnings of health experts, blamed the labs doing the testing. DeSantis threatened to stop sending work to those labs that take a long time to return the results. "You have somebody going through one of the sites, and then they get a result back 10 days later. That is not really going to be very helpful," he said. Since then two big lab companies, Quest Diagnostics and LabCorp, said the government has allowed them to do what are called pool tests to save time. This means several samples are combined and examined altogether. If that group tests positive, then the individual parts that compose it are tested one by one. LabCorp told AFP this is helping to speed things up. — AFP

Record 212 environmental activists murdered in 2019

PARIS: At least 212 environmental campaigners worldwide were murdered in 2019, making last year the deadliest on record for frontline activists battling the destruction of Nature, watchdog group Global Witness reported yesterday. Colombia and the Philippines combined accounted for just over half of the confirmed deaths - 64 and 43, respectively-followed by Brazil, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala.

The real number is likely higher due to unreported or misrepresented cases, especially in Africa, the NGO said in its annual review. About 40 percent of victims were indigenous people, and over two-thirds died in Latin America. One in ten were women. For decades, native communities in the forests of Central and South America, Asia and Africa have seen ancestral lands degraded and destroyed, sometimes with the blessing of corrupt local or national governments.

Of the 141 murders last year that could be linked a specific economic sectors, more than a third involved campaigners protesting mining operations, some legal most not. Thirty-four killings related to agribusiness were overwhelmingly in Asia, especially the Philippines. Two Indonesian activists were stabbed to death in October near a palm oil plantation in northern Sumatra. In the Philippines, police and counter-insurgency operations led to the massacre of 14 sugar plantation farmers on Negros island in March, only months after nine others had been killed in similar circumstances.

"Agribusiness and oil, gas and mining have consistently been the biggest drivers of attacks against land and environmental defenders," said Global Witness campaigner Rachel Cox. "They are also the industries pushing us further into runaway climate change through deforestation and increased carbon emissions."

Burning forests not only robs the planet of greenhouse gas absorbing vegetation, it also releases stored CO2 into the atmosphere. Logging operations were directly linked to 24 deaths, with another 14 related to illegal crop substitution, 11 to land reform, and six to water management or dam construction. — AFP

International

Hit by COVID and drought, rural Moroccans tighten belts for Eid

Snap domestic travel restrictions cast a pall over trade

SKHIRAT: Moroccan farmer Hamid had pinned his hopes on selling his sheep for the Eid al-Adha feast, to make up for a year of drought and the economic paralysis linked to the novel coronavirus pandemic. But snap domestic travel restrictions imposed by the North African country's authorities on Sunday after a surge in new infections has cast a pall over trade ahead of the festival Friday.

While the Moroccan countryside has seen fewer infections than the kingdom's cities, it has been hit hard by the economic repercussions of the crisis. "We lowered our prices in response to weak demand," Hamid said, a mask slung under his chin. For the 54-year-old farmer, who heads to market every year ahead of Eid to sell his livestock for slaughter, "the most important thing is to earn money after months of hardship when we had zero income."

According to a study by the High Commission for Planning (HCP), in charge of official statistics, the drop in income has affected 70 percent of the rural population compared to 59 percent of urban dwellers, and 77 percent of farmers have seen their revenues fall in recent months. This is in part because people from rural areas "who work in the city and transfer a good part of their income to their families have stopped doing so after losing their jobs," agronomist Larbi Zagdouni told AFP.

'Pay off debts'

The lockdown imposed for around 10 weeks from mid-March compounded problems for farmers already facing a severe drought in a country heavily dependent on agriculture. In difficult times, many farmers rely on selling their livestock to "reduce losses and pay off debts," 34-year-old farmer



SKHIRAT, Morocco: Moroccans buy sacrificial animals ahead of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha at a livestock market in the coastal city of Skhirat. — AFP

Abdellatif said. Eid al-Adha will still be celebrated this year even though mosques will not hold public prayers and travel restrictions will limit the traditional family gatherings held during the holiday. Seated on the back of a truck carrying sheep to the Skhirat market near the capital Rabat, Abdellatif says he thinks not celebrating the feast of sacrifice "would be a disaster".

Zagdouni echoed this, saying, "This festival is important for rural areas and particularly during this period of crisis. Banning it would be a catastrophe for rural areas." Last year, overall revenues related to Eid al-Adha reached about 12 billion dirhams

(around \$1.3 billion), according to the agriculture ministry. But concerns have been raised, cited by local media in recent weeks, that celebrating the holiday could exacerbate the health crisis as a result of families coming together.

Authorities decided not to ban celebrations but have required social distancing and wearing masks, levying fines for non-compliance. But observance of the measures on the ground is mixed, with social distancing largely ignored in markets packed with un-masked buyers and vendors. Faced with general laxity on anti-virus rules, authorities have increased calls for "responsibility" and Health

Minister Khalid Ait Taleb urged the population to "avoid unnecessary visits", limit physical contact and "ensure preventive measures are respected during family gatherings".

Morocco has in recent days seen record case numbers, reporting 811 new infections on Saturday and 633 on Sunday. The total number of cases in the kingdom stands at 20,278, including 313 deaths. The travel restrictions slapped on eight cities over the weekend sparked chaos across the country, with giant traffic jams on the roads and train stations crammed with people wanting at all costs to spend the festival with family. — AFP

News in brief

Three migrants shot dead

TRIPOLI: Three Sudanese migrants were killed in a shooting in Libya after the country's coast guard intercepted them at sea and returned them to shore, the UN refugee agency said Tuesday. The International Organization for Migration said separately that "local authorities started shooting when the migrants attempted to escape from the disembarkation point". The UNHCR said it "deplores the tragic loss of three lives and calls for an urgent investigation" into the shootings at Al-Khums, a port city about 100 kilometers east of Tripoli late Monday. "The shooting occurred after more than 70 people were disembarked from a vessel," the UNHCR said, adding that two migrants died at the scene and a third en route to hospital, while two more were wounded. "The remaining persons who were disembarked were moved to detention," it said in a statement. — AFP

Mali PM urges unity govt

BAMAKO: Mali's Prime Minister tried to break the country's political deadlock Tuesday, visiting the home of a key opposition figure and inviting him to bring his movement into a unity government. Boubou Cisse visited the influential religious leader imam Mahmoud Dicko—regarded as the figurehead of the June 5 Movement (M5-RFP) — at his home in Bamako in the Badalabougou district, close to the mosque where he preaches. Cisse "asked the imam to get involved so that ... the M5-RFP accept the outstretched hand of (President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita) by joining the government of national unity, by favoring dialogue as an unavoidable solution to end the crisis", the prime minister's office said. But the June 5 Movement's (M5-RFP) figurehead, was scathing about the latest government offer in a statement earlier Tuesday. — AFP

Philippines eyes nuke power

MANILA: The Philippines has taken a big step towards tapping nuclear power, its energy minister said yesterday, after President Rodrigo Duterte created an inter-agency panel to study the adoption of a national nuclear energy policy. As power demand soars in what has for years been among the world's fastest-growing economies, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi has been passionately advocating use of nuclear power, despite public concern over safety in a country hit frequently by natural disasters. Nuclear power is seen as a potential answer to the Philippines' twin problems of precarious supply and Southeast Asia's highest electricity costs, but Duterte has yet to express full support for Cusi's proposal. In a July 24 executive order and made public on Wednesday, however, Duterte created a committee to conduct the study, indicating openness to reviving the country's nuclear energy ambitions. — Reuters

Papua New Guinea's outbreak

PORT MORESBY: Papua New Guinea ramped up coronavirus testing and rushed to build field hospitals yesterday after an outbreak was found to have spread beyond its locked-down capital. More than 70 people have been isolated and contact tracing was underway at four hotels in the second city of Lae, after a health conference attendee tested positive for COVID-19, the provincial health authority said. It was the first infection detected in the city. Papua New Guinea is among the poorest countries in the Pacific and had until recently been spared a serious coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

Hong Kong implements tough virus restrictions

HONG KONG: Hong Kong is on the verge of a "large-scale" coronavirus outbreak that could overwhelm hospitals, its leader warned yesterday, as authorities implemented their toughest social distancing measures yet. From yesterday all residents in the densely packed city of 7.5 million must wear masks when they leave their homes while restaurants can only serve takeaway meals.

No more than two people from different households can gather in public with fines of up to HK\$5,000 (\$625) for those who breach the new emergency rules. The latest measures are a bid to reverse a sudden spike in coronavirus cases that has upended the city's otherwise enviable battle against the deadly disease. More than 1,000 infections have been confirmed since early July — more than 40 percent of the total since the virus first hit the city in late January.

New daily infections have been above 100 for the past six days. "We are on the verge of a large-scale community outbreak, which may lead to a collapse of our hospital system and cost lives, especially of the elderly," Chief Executive Carrie Lam said in a statement released yesterday to coincide with the new measures. "In order to protect our loved ones, our healthcare staff and Hong Kong, I appeal to you to follow strictly the social distancing measures and stay at home as far as possible," she added.

During their lunch break yesterday, many residents were eating takeaway meals outside in the intense summer heat and humidity. "It's so hot outside now," a construction worker, who gave his surname as Chow said as he tucked into a pork chop in an alcove outside a department store. "Ten minutes after I start work, my shirt is all sweaty," he said, adding he missed the air conditioning of restaurants. Hong Kong has some of the world's smallest and most expensive apartments. Some residents barely have a kitchen to cook in, making them hugely reliant on cheap eateries.

From success to sudden surge

The finance hub was one of the first places hit by

In Kashmir, the hills are alive with the sound of schooling

DOODHPATHRI: Sitting cross-legged and hunched over her textbooks in a lush meadow surrounded by mountains and pine trees, Tasleem Bashir can hardly contain her joy at being back at school. The 14-year-old is among hundreds of students attending open-air classes in Doodhpathri, high above Srinagar in Indian-controlled Kashmir, as the coronavirus continues to cripple life in the country. "It feels so good to have school in this fresh air. At home I didn't study much because there were many house chores to do," Bashir said.

"After classes, I sit around with friends and we also play together before walking back home," she told AFP. The relief is obvious for everyone involved in the classes in the clouds held at an altitude of 2,730 meters (9,000 feet). Parents and grandparents walk or carry their children up a slope to the flat patch of grass ahead of the daily classes. Children run to a glacier-fed stream to dip their feet in the cool water during breaks, while others jump in after classes for a bath before heading home.

Even before the coronavirus epidemic, schooling in restive Kashmir had been severely disrupted by a strict curfew imposed almost a year ago when New Delhi stripped the Muslim-majority region of its



HONG KONG: Pedestrians wear face masks in the Kowloon-side Sham Shui Po district of Hong Kong in the early morning of yesterday, as new social distancing measures come into effect which include having to wear masks in public, to combat a new wave of coronavirus infections. — AFP

the coronavirus when it emerged from China at the start of the year. It initially had remarkable success in controlling the outbreak — helped in part by a health-conscious public embracing face masks and an efficient track and trace program, forged in the fires of the deadly SARS virus in 2003. By June, local transmission had all but ended. But the virus later sneaked back into the city and began spreading.

Health officials have been scrambling to uncover the source of the latest outbreak. Some have blamed exemptions from the usual 14-day quarantine that the government granted to "essential personnel", including cross-boundary truckers, air and sea crew and some manufacturing executives. The government has since tightened restrictions for some of those groups. Gladys Chan, who was taking her lunch break, said she felt the government had not done enough to monitor those with exemptions. "I think the government has failed us, especially with this third wave of the pandemic," she told AFP, adding the latest measures were "too little, too late". As isolation wards fill up, authorities have announced plans to build a temporary 2,000-bed field hospital near the city's airport, something Chinese authorities have offered to help with. The latest lockdown measures are a new body blow for a city that was already mired in recession thanks to the US-China trade war and months of political unrest last year. — AFP

Philippines: Deadliest country in Asia for land defenders

MANILA: The Philippines was the deadliest country in Asia for land and environmental defenders again last year while slipping to second most dangerous in the world behind Colombia, a watchdog said yesterday. A total of 43 defenders were killed in the archipelago—the vast majority on the fertile and resource-rich islands of Mindanao and Negros—compared with 30 in 2018, Global Witness said in a report. Nearly half of the killings recorded since President Rodrigo Duterte took power in 2016 have been linked to the armed forces or paramilitary groups, it said.

Who is being killed?

Indigenous leaders, farmers and state employees charged with protecting the environment were among the victims. More than half the deaths were related to agribusiness, Global Witness said. Sixteen killings were linked to mining—the highest in the world. Nearly half of those killed lived on Mindanao, where the army has long maintained a heavy presence in the fight against communist and Muslim insurgents. The island was under martial law until the end of last year. Large numbers of defenders were also killed on Negros, a sugar-producing island in the central Philippines that is also heavily militarized and where activists have long campaigned for land reform to reduce inequality and poverty.

"Defenders living in Mindanao and Negros made up almost 90 percent of land and environmental activists killed in the country in 2019," the report said. Kaylo Bontolan, a leader of the Manobo tribe on Mindanao, was among them. He was killed in a military airstrike in April last year when he returned to his mountain home to help document violence against fellow tribe members. "Like Datu Kaylo, many of those killed were indigenous people asserting their right to self-determination and their ancestral lands," the report said. The impact of climate change has dialed up the pressure on defenders as they seek to protect indigenous land rights and stop commercial loggers and miners destroying pristine rainforests and polluting the environment. — AFP



DOODHPATHRI: Students attend a class at their open-air school situated on top of a mountain in Doodhpathri, Indian-administered Kashmir. — AFP

semi-autonomy. With India now the third-most infected nation in the world—with almost 1.5 million infections—it is not yet clear when classes will restart. Unable to afford smartphones, and with limited internet access in remote villages, many students were unable to attend online lessons. So parents turned to the education department, pleading for help.

Face masks and sanitizer

"We decided to organize classes for these children in the open air, where we observe social distancing," local education department official Mohammad Ramzan told AFP. In this meadow, pupils from 15 vil-

lages are supplied with face masks and sanitizer before sitting in eight groups divided by age. Teachers carried whiteboards to the meadow to use during the three- to four-hour classes. "It felt wrong to receive my salary sitting at home," said teachers Manzoor Ahmad. "I really enjoy teaching in this enchanting atmosphere rather than inside usually cramped classrooms," he told AFP. Shabnam, 12, who walks over a mile to the makeshift classroom, said she initially felt suffocated by wearing a face mask during lessons. "But now I feel good and enjoy it here very much," she said. "I had thought my school was over for good and I would never meet my school friends again." — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2020

Quest to recreate sun's energy on earth Scientists seek to demonstrate fusion power can be generated sustainably and safely

SAINT-PAUL-LES-DURANCE, France: Fourteen years after receiving the official go-ahead, scientists on Tuesday began assembling a giant machine in southern France designed to demonstrate that nuclear fusion, the process which powers the sun, can be a safe and viable energy source on Earth.

The groundbreaking multinational experiment, known as ITER, has seen components arrive in the tiny commune of Saint-Paul-les-Durance from production sites worldwide in recent months. They will now be painstakingly put together to complete what is described by ITER as the "world's largest puzzle."

The experimental plant's goal is to demonstrate that fusion power can be generated sustainably, and safely, on a commercial scale, with initial experiments set to begin in December 2025.

Fusion powers the sun and other stars when light atomic nuclei fuse together to form heavier ones, releasing huge amounts of energy in doing so. The challenge is to build a machine which can harness this energy which is meant to be held in place in the reactor vessel and controlled by an immensely strong magnetic field. "With fusion, nuclear holds promise for the future," French President Emmanuel Macron said in a message broadcast to an event Tuesday to mark the official start of assembly.

As a technology, it promises "clean, no-carbon, safe and practically waste-free energy," added the president, who has long advocated nuclear power in the global fight against climate change driven by the greenhouse gases produced from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

South Korea's President Moon Jae-in, for his part,

hailed "the biggest international science project in human history," which he said offered hope of a clean, safe energy source as soon as 2050.

Low-risk

The ITER project was launched in 2006 by 35 countries including the United States, Russia, China, Britain, Switzerland, India, Japan, South Korea and the 27 members of the European Union. "Fusion is safe, with minute amounts of fuel and no physical possibility of a run-away accident with meltdown" as with traditional nuclear power stations, the partners said in a statement.

A further advantage: The fuel for fusion and lithium to help manage the reaction is found in seawater and is abundant enough to supply humanity for millions of years. "A pineapple-sized amount of this fuel is the equivalent of 10,000 tons of coal," the partners said.

ITER, the world's largest experimental fusion facility, is meant to produce about 500 megawatts of thermal power, equivalent to some 200 megawatts of electric energy if operated continuously, enough to supply some 200,000 homes. Its "Tokamak" nuclear fusion reactor will comprise about a million components in all, some like its hugely powerful superconducting magnets standing as high as a four-floor building and weighing 360 tons each.

"Three-dimensional puzzle"

Some 2,300 people are at work on site to put the massive machine together. "Constructing the machine piece by piece will be like assembling a three-dimensional puzzle on an intricate timeline," said ITER's director general Bernard Bigot. "Every aspect of



A picture shows the exterior of the Tokamak seen from the assembly hall during the launch of the assembly stage of nuclear fusion machine "Tokamak" of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in Saint-Paul-les-Durance, southeastern France, on Tuesday.—AFP

project management, systems engineering, risk management and logistics of the machine assembly must perform together with the precision of a Swiss watch," he said, adding: "We have a complicated script to follow over the next few years."

Once finished, the reactor should be able to recreate the fusion processes that occur at the heart of stars at a temperature of some 150 million degrees Celsius, 10 times hotter than the sun

It could reach full power by 2035, but as an exper-

imental project, it is not designed to produce electricity. If the technology proves feasible, future fusion reactors would be capable of powering two million homes each at an operational cost comparable to those of conventional nuclear reactors, Bigot said. Such "artificial suns," however, are criticized by environmentalists as a cripplingly expensive scientific mirage. The ITER project is running five years behind schedule and has seen its initial budget triple to some 20 billion euros (\$23.4 billion). — AFP

Faded photo giant Kodak gets \$765m for drug business

WASHINGTON: Erstwhile photo giant Eastman Kodak will launch a new business manufacturing pharmaceuticals amid the coronavirus pandemic, using a \$765 million government loan, the company announced Tuesday.

The loan from the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) will fund the creation of Kodak Pharmaceuticals, which "will produce critical pharmaceutical components that have been identified as essential but have lapsed into chronic national shortage," the agency said in a statement.

The firm, which signed a "letter of interest" with the DFC on Tuesday, will produce "up to 25 percent of active pharmaceutical ingredients used in non-biologic, non-antibacterial, generic pharmaceuticals." Kodak, once a giant in the world of photography whose business has struggled in recent years as cell phones have replaced cameras and film, will expand its existing facilities in Rochester, New York and St. Paul, Minnesota.

The company said the new pharmaceutical business will support 360 direct jobs and 1,200 indirectly. "By leveraging our vast infrastructure, deep expertise in chemicals manufacturing and heritage of innovation and quality, Kodak will play a critical



From photos to pharmaceuticals: The former giant in the world of cameras will now be producing components of generic drugs.—AFP

role in the return of a reliable American pharmaceutical supply chain," the company's Executive Chairman Jim Continenza said in the statement.

The DFC loan is the first to be made after President Donald Trump in May signed an executive order aimed at encouraging domestic production of materials needed to fight COVID-19. While Americans consume about 40 percent of the components

used to make generic pharmaceuticals worldwide, only about 10 percent of those are made in the country's borders, the DFC said.

"We are pleased to support Kodak in this bold new venture," DFC Chief Executive Adam Boehler said. "Our collaboration with this iconic American company will promote health and safety at home and around the world." — AFP

Barclays takes £3.7bn virus hit as profits slump

LONDON: British bank Barclays said yesterday that first-half net profits tumbled by two thirds, as it set aside £3.7 billion (\$4.7 billion, 4.0 billion euros) to deal with coronavirus fallout, and warned over a possible second wave. Profit after taxation dived to £695 million in the six months to the end of June, compared with £2.07 billion in the same portion of 2019, Barclays said in a results statement.

And net profit tanked 91 percent to just £90 million in the second quarter, when it took a £1.6-billion hit from pandemic turmoil on top of the £2.1 billion it had set aside for the first quarter. The cash should help Barclays weather the increased risks that customers may not be able to repay bank loans on the back of the coronavirus-induced recession.

The sharp economic downturn was sparked by the three-month nationwide lockdown on March 23 which was not relaxed until early June.

'Bridge to recovery'

"This has been a period focused on supporting our customers, clients and the UK economy through the COVID-19 pandemic—providing the people and businesses that we serve with a bridge to recovery in every way we can," said Chief Executive Jes Staley.

"Credit impairment charges increased to £3.7 billion in the first half due to the forecast impact of COVID-19." He added: "While the remainder of 2020 will be chal-



lenging, our diversified model means we can remain financially resilient and continue to support our customers and clients."

Barclays meanwhile took the vast £3.7-billion charge despite assistance from the Bank of England and UK government to help lenders boost lending and keep businesses afloat. The impact of the coronavirus has been cushioned somewhat by emergency action from the BoE and other major central banks, which have together injected enormous amounts of liquidity—and thanks to separate government stimulus.

However, Barclays cautioned Wednesday that the drastic measures were also indicative of the depth of the

downturn following the emergency health crisis. "The actions taken by the UK government and the Bank of England, may indicate a view on the potential severity of any economic downturn and post recovery environment, which from a commercial, regulatory and risk perspective could be significantly different to past crises and persist for a prolonged period," it warned.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a weakening in gross domestic product (GDP) and an expectation of higher unemployment and lower house prices in the UK. These factors all have a significant impact on the modelling of expected credit losses by Barclays Bank UK Group." —AFP

Tech titans in spotlight at US antitrust hearing

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers were yesterday poised to grill the chiefs of Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google about how they wield marketplace power in what promises to be a rare political spectacle.

The House of Representatives hearing comes amid rising concerns over Big Tech dominance, which has become even more pronounced during the coronavirus pandemic. The unprecedented joint appearance before the House Judiciary Committee features Tim Cook of Apple, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Sundar Pichai of Google and its parent firm Alphabet.

The CEOs of four of the world's most powerful companies will testify remotely, less than 100 days before the US election. It will be the first time Bezos has testified before a congressional committee.

The world's richest man will paint online giant Amazon as an example of US entrepreneurship. "I believe Amazon should be scrutinized," Bezos said in prepared remarks posted online, defiantly adding that "when you look in the mirror, assess the criticism, and still believe you're doing the right thing, no force in the world should be able to move you."

Zuckerberg called social media colossus Facebook a "proudly American company" in prepared remarks ahead of the hearing. "Our story would not have been possible without US laws that encourage competition and innovation," he said.

But, he is to say, the rules of the internet need updating.

Pichai will highlight how Alphabet is helping America remain a technology leader in the face of growing competition. Cook will say scrutiny is "reasonable and appropriate" but that Apple will make "no concession on the facts." Apple does not have a dominant position in any market, and the iPhone faces fierce competition, according to Cook's prepared remarks.

Political theater?

The hearing is part of a congressional probe into "online platforms and market power" and takes place against a backdrop of antitrust investigations in the US, Europe and elsewhere. "The Street will be laser focused on this next step in the Big Tech vs. Beltway UFC battle," Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives said in a recent note to investors. "Will this be a grandstanding event with minimal substance or a potential Fort Sumter moment for the anti-trust momentum against tech stalwarts?" he wrote, referring to the opening salvo of the US Civil War.

Avery Gardiner, an antitrust expert at the Center for Democracy & Technology, said the hearing will offer a timely focus on key issues around competition and concentration of economic power.

"People are feeling frustrated with the way our society is organized, and antitrust is one tool to go after powerful companies," she said. Current US antitrust laws make it difficult for enforcers to target companies simply for being large or dominant without also showing harm to consumers or abuse of market power. Because of that, —AFP

Business

Boubyan Bank records KD 44m in operating profits for H1 2020

Bank allocates KD 25 million as precautionary provisions for first half of this year

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 44 million in operating profits for the first half of this year, despite the exceptional situation the world and Kuwait are going through due to the unprecedented repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe over the past months, leading to the halt of almost all aspects of our daily lives.

Furthermore, the Bank continued its prudent approach by allocating KD 25 million in provisions, thereby ending the first half of the year with KD 17 million in net profits.

Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, the Bank's Vice-Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, commented: "Thanks to Allah, we built on our experiences over the past years, and managed to deal with the ongoing crisis professionally by continuing to record profits, and we hope all businesses in Kuwait will return to work normally."

"Of course, we had to allocate additional precautionary provisions to strengthen the bank's financial position, and to bolster our ability to face any future repercussions of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, which is normal as a result of this unprecedented crisis; a first of its kind in our modern world," he added.

With Boubyan Bank's acquisition of the Bank of London and Middle East "BLME" during Q1 of this year, the combined assets of Boubyan Bank Group grew by 28 percent until the end of Q2 to reach KD 6.1 billion. Also, the total of customers' deposits grew by 19 percent to reach KD 4.7 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 28 percent to reach KD 4.5 billion, and operating income grew by 8 percent to reach KD 79 million.

Post COVID-19

Al-Majed went on to add: "Everyone is focused

upon the post Covid-19 stage, and that many things will change as we are now facing new challenges whether those related to the nature of business, or the new investment opportunities in light of the clear change in business models. The bank is currently working with its partners to align its business model with the post Covid-19 era, and to evaluate the impact of such unprecedented challenges on Kuwait, and the economic sectors therein."

"During the crisis, the bank's human resources demonstrated that they were able to face the difficulties and the risks caused by COVID-19, and this ability manifested itself when the bank continued to perform in the best possible manner without failing to serve customers owing to the skills of our staff who worked during the crisis", Al-Majed added.

Boubyan Bank during the crisis

Moreover, Al-Majed highlighted the most significant initiatives of the bank during the crisis, starting with the bank's contribution to the KD 10 million fund established by the Central Bank of Kuwait, and co-funded by Kuwaiti banks, to support the government's efforts to fight the Covid-19 outbreak.

Also, the bank dedicated all its resources in implementing the resolution of deferring all the installments of financing and credit cards for all customers in addition to deferring the installments for SMEs for a six-month period effective April 2020, without charging any additional profits or other charges for the deferral period. Al-Majed stated: "During this crisis, we reaped the fruit of our investment in our digital banking services. Since the beginning of the crisis, we noticed the growing usage of our digital banking services by our customers whether through the bank's website or through the bank's mobile App."



Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed

"Without delving into details about the services and products available to our customers via our website or our mobile banking App, customers can now perform many of their banking transactions without the need to visit our branches. They can now do so while staying at home, especially during curfew times", he added.

In April, the bank started to receive applications for concessional financing announced by CBK as a part of the stimulus package to support corporate customers & SMEs impacted by the ongoing crisis. All financing procedures are easily and smoothly processed electronically, while ensuring the confidentiality of information and data, thereby meeting the objectives of CBK to facilitate and accelerate access to financing to the specific sectors included within the economic stimulus package.

This step aims at supporting vital sectors, and activities which add value to the Kuwaiti economy, and which were efficiently operational before the crisis, while working hand-in-hand with the Central Bank of Kuwait and other bodies to prevent any exacerbation of the situation, by turning from a liquidity crisis to a solvency crisis, and to maintain the national manpower and circular flow of funds between economic sectors. Al-Majed thanked all entities that managed the crisis, especially frontline personnel, and thanked CBK as well for the measures taken by it, which alleviated the severity of the crisis.

Achievements of the first half of year

Al-Majed pointed out that: "Boubyan Bank has succeeded in its regional and international offering of its debut unsecured sukuk under the umbrella of a sukuk program with total bids amounting to \$4.6 billion approximately, i.e., the issuance was oversubscribed by more than six-fold over the targeted amount (i.e. \$750 million), with the sukuk subsequently listed on the Irish Stock Exchange."

During Q1 of this year, Boubyan Bank announced its acquisition of additional shares in the Bank of London and Middle East "BLME", amounting to 45.25 percent approximately. Accordingly, the total holding grew to approximately 71 percent of BLME's ordinary issued shares after adding the shares already owned by Boubyan Bank Group.

Al-Majed stressed: "Increasing our shareholding in BLME will help us develop its business and grow both banks. Following the completion of the acquisition, Boubyan Bank's intention is for BLME to continue to work as an independent bank as a part of Boubyan Bank Group."

"Furthermore, Boubyan Bank has continued to top the pyramid of customer service in Kuwait, supported by earning two awards from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank received the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner, for the fifth time in addition to being named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the tenth year in a row since 2010. Additionally, the bank received the Decade's Award for the best Islamic bank", Al-Majed noted.

Moreover, the bank was named the Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait in 2019 by Global Finance for the fourth consecutive year.

NBK Economic Report

Oil prices remain range-bound in July as virus clouds outlook

KUWAIT: Oil prices have been range-bound for most of the last month, trading in the low \$40s and inching up only in the last week to four-month highs of \$44.32/bbl for the international benchmark Brent crude and \$41.96/bbl for the US marker West Texas Intermediate (WTI). Gains stemming from a visibly tightening physical market have largely been kept in check by worries over prolonged oil demand weakness due to resurgent Covid-19 infections in the US and elsewhere.

As proxies for oil demand, the weekly movements in US crude and product stocks and, to a lesser extent, refinery processing rates, have been the primary barometers of market sentiment and the triggers for movements in oil prices. This has been more pronounced since supply-side fundamentals are roughly pointing in the right direction thanks to the supply-tightening efforts of OPEC+.

Fiscal and monetary stimulus to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic have also been significant price influencers. News of the European Union's EUR750 billion recovery fund propelled Brent crude to its four-month high last Tuesday. News on anti-COVID drugs and vaccine development has a powerful effect on the oil and broader financial markets.

Nevertheless, it has been the OPEC+ oil supply cuts and those involuntary supply curtailments in the US shale patch and Canadian tar sands developments that have really underpinned price gains since the end of April: a third consecutive month of price rises looks on the cards in July, with Brent up almost 6 percent this month (though still down more than 34 percent in 2020). The decision by the OPEC+ group after the recent JMMC meeting to begin tapering its 9.7 mb/d worth of production cuts and start pumping again in August for the first time since April had negligible impact on the markets, much of it having already been priced in thanks to careful signposting by the producer group. Moreover, expected additional volumes in August will be about half as much as initially scheduled, since producers such as Iraq, Nigeria and Angola will have to continue to make deeper cuts to compensate for not meeting their targets in May, June and perhaps even July.

Kuwait Export Crude (KEC), has risen by a sizeable 19.5 percent this month; after months of heavy discounts, the medium sour blend finally caught up to the price levels of competitor crude grades of similar quali-

ty. KEC jumped above \$40 on 1 July and was as high as \$44.8/bbl last Thursday before slipping a little to \$43.4/bbl on Friday.

Indeed, medium crudes such as KEC, Saudi Arab Medium and Basra Light, which traditionally sell at a discount compared to lighter crudes that yield more gasoline, diesel and jet fuel per barrel, have had a good run in recent months, commanding higher than usual prices as a result of weak demand (and therefore refining margins) for diesel and jet fuel due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Oil demand outlook

The spike in coronavirus infections in economies newly emerging from weeks of lockdown has, however, been troubling, especially in the US. Some restrictions on mobility have had to be reimposed. Coming in the midst of the peak summer driving season, when gasoline usage usually rises, the persistence of the pandemic is bound to add to US oil demand woes especially. The threat of prolonged oil demand weakness was a major caveat in the International Energy Agency's (IEA) upwardly revised oil demand forecast for 2020. The agency, in its July oil market report, noted that its 360 kb/d upward revision to oil demand growth (vs. June estimate) in 2020 is contingent on the pandemic being brought under control. This would bring the year average contraction in global oil demand to 7.9 mb/d rather than 8.1 mb/d as forecast earlier. The estimate of the year-on-year decline in 2Q20 is an eye-watering 16.4 mb/d. These are unprecedented figures for demand destruction, and with the pandemic raging in large parts of the southern hemisphere and persisting in heavy oil consuming economies in the northern hemisphere, downside risks to the oil demand outlook are sizeable.

For the time being, oil consumption is accelerating in countries emerging from lockdown. In the far east, in Europe and in the middle east, where summer temperatures typically drive increased domestic demand for power generation (cooling etc.) Indeed, Saudi energy minister Prince Abdulaziz pointed to such seasonal oil demand effects being even more 'pronounced' this year as GCC populations stay indoors amid continued travel restrictions. The Prince assured market watchers fearful of a deluge of new Saudi supply that "not a single additional barrel will be exported". Russian energy minister Novak echoed the Prince's remarks, saying that he believed that most of the additional oil be consumed by domestic market rather than exported.

The improvement in oil demand has been most noticeable in China. Figures from the country's National Bureau of Statistics showed that crude refinery throughputs hit an all-time high of 14.14 mb/d in June, rising 9 percent y/y on the back of record-high crude import volumes (13 mb/d in June, according to General Administration of Customs data), much of which is admittedly opportunistic buying as China capitalizes on

low oil prices. In India, petroleum product consumption is recovering from its 13-year low in April (9.9 million tons), with fuel demand reaching over 92 percent of pre-COVID levels in June, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas reported. This has been led by gasoline and diesel demand, as commuters prioritize private over public transportation—a recurring theme of the post-lockdown global landscape. In contrast, aviation fuel demand remains considerably weak.

OPEC+ to taper supply cuts

OPEC-13 crude production fell to a three-decade low of 24.3 mb/d in June as producers, led by Saudi Arabia, slashed output to bring supply and demand closer to balance. OPEC-10 recorded compliance of 110 percent in June (Libya, Iran and Venezuela are exempt from production quotas). After including the 10-non-OPEC members led by Russia, aggregate compliance reached 106 percent in June, up from 85 percent in May.

The OPEC+ group therefore delivered around 10.3 mb/d of output cuts (or more than 10 percent of pre-pandemic global oil supply), exceeding their target of 9.7 mb/d, according to non-OPEC figures assessed by Platts. At July's Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee meeting (JMMC), the group agreed to begin winding down these cuts, to 7.7 mb/d for the period of August to end-December.

In practice, however, only about half of the 2 mb/d of additional supply is expected in August, since non-compliant producers, such as Iraq, Nigeria and Angola, have promised to continue with deeper cuts to compensate other members for the months in which they failed to cut output to the required level.

Tighter supplies should see global inventories draw down in 2H20

According to our estimates, which draw on IEA demand and non-OPEC supply projections, global stocks should begin to decline from this quarter onwards—by 4.8 mb/d in 3Q20 and 6.2 mb/d in 4Q20 on average—having ballooned in 2Q20 (+9.3 mb/d) on the back of rampant oversupply and dramatic demand destruction. (See chart 2.) This should help OPEC+ achieve its key target of returning global inventories back to their five-year average. The IEA estimated that global (OECD) inventories stood at 3.22 billion barrels in May, 258.5 million barrels above the five-year average, the most recent month in which there is data.

The outlook, of course, is dependent on continued OPEC+ compliance and oil demand growth recovering in tandem with consumer and industrial activity. A persisting pandemic and/or a second flare up of infections in the autumn/winter represents a major downside risk factor for oil prices. News that a University of Oxford Covid-19 vaccine has shown promise and moved into phase three clinical trials would be just the right medicine for the oil market as well.



A McDonald's restaurant in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. — AFP

McDonald's profits tumble, shifting focus to value

NEW YORK: The coronavirus pandemic took a bite out of McDonald's profits and the Big Mac maker said Tuesday it plans to focus on affordability in upcoming marketing campaigns as US consumer surveys reveal mounting recession fears. But while there is still a lot of uncertainty because of COVID-19, executives expect the second-quarter to be the low mark for the year.

The fast-food company suffered a 68 percent drop in profits to \$483.8 million, but the impact was mitigated somewhat by drive-through sales that are becoming a bigger factor, including in European markets. Chief Executive Chris Kempczinski cautioned that there are "a lot of warning signs out there that would suggest the consumer sentiment and consumer concerns about the economy is negative and going in the wrong direction." "The vagaries of the pandemic create an unpredictable operating environment," he said on a conference call with analysts.

"In many markets around the world, most notably the US, the public health situation appears to be worsening." The chain saw revenues plunge 30 percent to \$3.8 billion, but he added that the second quarter would likely be the "trough in our performance."

Comparable sales tumbled throughout major markets for the fast food giant, but the US outperformed other regions because of drive-through and takeaway service that continued even where in restaurant dining service was stopped. The company had trimmed back its advertising spending in the first half of 2020, but had amassed a "marketing war chest" that it would use the rest of the year. "It's time for us to get back on the front foot," he said. —AFP

Independent experts clear AfDB chief

ABIDJAN: An independent panel of experts, headed by former Irish president Mary Robinson, has cleared the beleaguered leader of the African Development Bank (AfDB) of corruption, according to a report obtained by AFP. Akinwumi Adesina, 60, a charismatic speaker known for his elegant suits and bow ties, became the first Nigerian to helm the AfDB in 2015 — but a 15-page report earlier this year claimed that under his watch the bank had been tarred by poor governance, impunity, personal enrichment and favoritism.

The panel of three experts, led by Robinson alongside Gambia's Chief Justice Hassan Jallow and the World Bank's former integrity vice president Leonard

McCarthy, cleared Adesina of all charges alleged by whistleblowers. "The Panel concurs with the Committee in its findings in respect of all the allegations against the President and finds that they were properly considered and dismissed by the Committee," Monday's report concluded.

The African banking institution and Adesina—who is the sole candidate for the bank's August's presidential elections—has been battered by the rollercoaster of allegations after the whistleblowers' complaints were leaked to the media in April.

The former Nigerian finance minister had always declared himself "innocent" of the charges. Robinson—who led Ireland from 1990 to 1997 before serving as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights until 2002 — dismissed the 16 whistleblower allegations against Adesina.

The panel did not investigate the charges themselves, as that was not within their mandate. The AfDB plays an important role in largely behind-the-scenes role in African economies, financing projects in agriculture, health, energy, education, transport and other develop-

ment sectors. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, has firmly backed Adesina in the face of the allegations. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said the panel's report "validates his competence and integrity to lead" the bank. —AFP



In this file photograph, African Development (AfDB) president Akinwumi Adesina gestures as he addresses a press conference after a G5 Sahel Energy Summit in Ouagadougou. — AFP

CBK to serve clients during Eid holidays

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced that it would continue serving its clients during the Eid Al-Adha holidays starting today (July 30) until Monday (August 3) through the self-service branches at CBK headquarters, Hawally branch on Beirut street, Jahra branch, Ajlaj branch in addition to the services provided online at the bank's website, CBK mobile, WhatsApp on number 50888225 as well as the bank's call center on 1-888225.

The bank will officially resume work at all branches on Tuesday, August 4, 2020.

Business

Ooredoo Group posts revenue of QAR 14bn and net profit of QAR 818m in H1 2020

Customer base increased by 2% to reach 117 million

DOHA: Ooredoo Q.P.S.C. ("Ooredoo") - Ticker: ORDS yesterday announced its financial results for the half year ended 30 June 2020.

• Revenue declined by 3 percent year-on-year to QAR 14.1 billion due to the COVID-19 impact. A reduction in handset sales and roaming business as well as macroeconomic weakness in some of our markets was partially offset by robust growth in Indonesia, Tunisia and Myanmar.

• EBITDA declined by 5 percent year-on-year to QAR 6.0 billion, impacted by movement restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19 in our markets as well as challenging market conditions in Algeria, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman.

• Group Net Profit attributable to Ooredoo shareholders declined by 3 percent to QAR 818 million in H1 2020, compared to the same period last year, due to the reduction in EBITDA which was partially offset by a more favorable Foreign Exchange environment compared to the same period last year.

• Data revenues account for more than 50 percent of total Revenue driven by our data leadership and digital transformation initiatives across the countries we operate in.

• Ooredoo Group has healthy cash reserve and liquidity levels to be able to absorb the impact of COVID-19 for the year 2020.

Operational highlights:

• COVID-19 response: Ooredoo Group remained sharply focused on mitigating the impact of COVID-19 during Q2 2020. Measures included enhancing health and safety and work from home initiatives for employees, continuing to provide uninterrupted connectivity and services for customers, optimized data traffic flows across our fixed and mobile networks, relief to communities that need it the most and targeted CSR campaigns and donations.

• Ooredoo Group enabled more people to work, study and socialize from home, with its customer base increasing by 2 percent to 117 million customers, boosted by additions in Myanmar and Qatar during H1 2020.

• Ooredoo Group continued to demonstrate its global leadership in 5G commercial deployment, with Ooredoo Oman being the latest to launch 5G Home Internet, enabling customers to experience connectivity up to 10 times faster than current home internet services and bringing high speed internet access to new areas of the country.

• In Qatar, Ooredoo reached a milestone of half a million mobile postpaid customers, while its 5G plans, launched in December 2019, have attracted more than 200,000 customers.

• Ooredoo Group maintained its world ranking in the 2020 edition of the Telecoms 300 report, as one of the top 50 global telecommunications brands for the fourth year in a row, with a brand value worth over \$3.5 billion. It also maintained its Brand Rating status of AA+ for the second consecutive year.

• Ooredoo Group launched a Ramadan campaign under the theme "In a time when we can't be together, at least we can still be close," showcasing the power of technology to bring families and friends together during the traditional Holy Month, and to enable communities around the world to overcome the current disruptions in their daily lives.

Commenting on the results, Sheikh Faisal Bin Thani Al-Thani, Chairman of Ooredoo, said:

"Ooredoo Group, with its strong balance sheet and geographically diversified operations, has built a resilient business to successfully navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to our strong digital capabilities, and innovative technology, Ooredoo Group was able to partially contain the erosion in its



Sheikh Faisal Bin Thani Al-Thani



Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al-Thani

Financial Highlights:

	Quarterly Analysis			Half Year Analysis		
	Q2 2020	Q2 2019	% Change	H1 2020	H1 2019	% Change
Consolidated Revenue (QAR m)	6,823	7,316	-7%	14,118	14,508	-3%
EBITDA (QAR m)	2,973	3,166	-6%	5,996	6,339	-5%
EBITDA Margin (%)	44%	43%	-	42%	44%	-
Net Profit Attributable to Ooredoo Shareholders (QAR m)	432	421	3%	818	841	-3%
Customers in million (consolidated)	117	115	2%	117	115	2%

bottom line, despite the decline in revenues. Consequently, Ooredoo Group reported Net Profits of QAR 818 million for the first half of 2020, which were slightly down compared to the same period last year. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our world in an unprecedented manner and has impacted every aspect of our lives. Throughout this period, our priorities at Ooredoo Group have been clear: the health and safety of our employees and customers; the continued provision of uninterrupted services to keep our customers connected at all times, and the empowerment of frontline workers and disadvantaged communities through CSR activities and donations. For our customers, we provided more value with free data offers, upgrades and bundles, free access to educational and health resources online and increased convenience with access to fully digital services.

Digital transformation and technology continue to be a driving force for Ooredoo Group and our early investments in this area have enabled us to seamlessly respond to the new operating environment and serve our customers in a safe and convenient way. To accommodate the steep growth in data traffic during the pandemic, we are continuously optimizing data traffic flows across our fixed and mobile networks. Additionally, experience sharing and cross-OpCo collaboration activities were implemented to help reduce the required resources and time to market.

These efforts have enabled us to stay true to our mission of enriching the digital lives of our customers, which is now more important than ever, and therefore, we have managed to accelerate our digital transformation plans across all markets. We now offer 5G speeds in three of our markets, with Ooredoo Oman being the latest to launch 5G Home Internet plans in Q2 2020 and 5G trials are ongoing in Indonesia, Myanmar and Maldives."

Also commenting on the results, Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al-Thani, Group Chief Executive Officer of Ooredoo said: "Ooredoo Group reported revenues of QAR 14.1 billion in H1 2020, down 3 percent year-on-year due to movement restrictions designed to contain the spread of the pandemic, reductions in handset sales and macroeconomic weakness in some of our other markets. This was partially offset by strong performances in Indonesia, Tunisia and Myanmar. Indosat

Ooredoo's revenues increased 6 percent, driven by its refreshed strategy and Ooredoo Tunisia's value creation plan supported a 6 percent rise in its revenues. Strong demand for data supported an 8 percent increase in Ooredoo Myanmar's revenue during the period.

Group EBITDA declined 5 percent to QAR 6.0 billion during H1 2020, compared to the same period last year, due to declining revenue and challenging market conditions in Algeria, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman. Across all our OpCos we remain committed to carefully optimizing costs and driving operational efficiencies. In our home market of Qatar, our post-paid customer base crossed the half a million mark and the 5G plans launched in December attracted over 200,000 customers already.

In Kuwait and Oman, we have partnered with the respective Ministry of Education to launch e-learning platforms from home for the upcoming school year 2020-2021. With digitalization at its core, we continue to invest in new products and services to power the future of connectivity. In Oman we launched 5G Home Internet which enables customers to experience connectivity up to 10 times faster than the current home internet services, while bringing high speed internet access to new areas of the country, and in Algeria we continue to operate the fastest 4G network in the country spanning all 48 Wilayas.

Operational Review Ooredoo Qatar

Ooredoo Qatar withstood significant pressure and strengthened its leadership position during the first half of 2020, despite the unique challenges created by the global COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on roaming revenue and shop accessibility in particular. Reported revenue was down 4 percent year-on-year to QAR 3.5 billion (H1 2019: QAR 3.7 billion). EBITDA stood at QAR 1.9 billion (H1 2019: QAR 2.1 billion). Customer numbers were 3.4 million, up 1.3 percent year-on-year.

The strength of Ooredoo Qatar's network proved an important asset during the period, as the company re-optimized its mobile and fixed network to accommodate a significant increase in data traffic demand and extended network and telecom support to quarantine

centers and hubs across the country. In addition, more than 200,000 customers have now signed-up for Shahrly 5G and Qatarna 5G plans.

Ooredoo Qatar's #StayHomeWithOoredoo continued to provide dedicated services for customers working from home, while the 'Hadaya' campaign for Ramadan, which encouraged customers to interact with the Ooredoo app, saw more than 300,000 customers participate. Ooredoo Qatar's popular loyalty program Nojoom celebrated its 11th anniversary with a variety of promotions. The company also launched Ooredoo Money sub-wallets for family members and domestic staff and partnered with Netflix to bring the streaming service to Ooredoo tv.

Ooredoo Oman

Ooredoo Oman reported revenues of QAR1.3 billion, a reduction of 4 percent compared to the first half of 2019 due to a decline in prepaid mobile and roaming revenues as well as fewer sales due to retail outlet closures (for up to 14 weeks). Free local call offers were extended to the community in support of the national "Stay at Home" initiative during the period.

EBITDA declined 7 percent to QAR 684 million during the first half of 2020, compared to the same period in the previous year. Ooredoo Oman's commitment to maintaining operational efficiency enabled it to maintain a robust EBITDA margin of 54 percent for H1 2020 as the company focused on optimizing its marketing and advertising spend.

The company continued to deliver innovative solutions to its customer base of 2.6 million customers, such as the launch of 5G Home Internet in the Sultanate which offers connectivity of up to 10 times faster than current home internet services and brings high speed internet access to new areas.

Supporting education in these times of uncertainty, Ooredoo Oman partnered with the Ministry of Education to launch an e-learning platform for the academic year 2020-2021. Additionally, during H1 2020 the company offered free minutes to help connect families and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ooredoo Oman won two gold awards at the Stevie Awards Middle East 2020 for "Innovative Use of Technology in Customer Service" and "Innovation in the management, planning application of technologies". The company was also awarded "Excellence in Digital Transformation and Innovation Telecom Industry in the Middle East, by the Annual Global Brands Magazine Awards after being evaluated alongside 10,000 companies.

Ooredoo Kuwait

Ooredoo Kuwait reported revenues of QAR 1.2 billion for the first half of 2020, down 10 percent compared to the same period last year, as measures implemented to manage the COVID-19 pandemic - such as Free Daily 5GB Internet usage and Free Unlimited Local Calls - impacted an already competitive market environment.

The decline in Revenue had a negative impact on Ooredoo Kuwait's EBITDA for H1 2020, which stood at QAR 316 million compared to QAR 432 million during the same period last year. The company enhanced its plans to drive efficiency and further optimize costs in order to manage the pressure on its top line. Despite these market challenges, Ooredoo Kuwait continues to progress with its digital strategy to better serve its customer base of 2.4 million. Strong demand for the company's 5G home broadband product enabled it to grow its 5G user base during the period and its fully digital mobile solution, ANA, remains popular with a user base of

over 10,000.

Ooredoo Kuwait became the first telecommunications company in Kuwait to launch an e-learning solution as it sought to support schools across the country in the provision of uninterrupted education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asiacell - Iraq

Government measures designed to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Asiacell's results for the half year ended June 30, 2020. The company reported revenues of QAR 1.9 billion in H1 2020, down 10 percent compared to the same period last year. As a result, EBITDA declined to QAR 828 million (H1 2019: QAR: 970 million) during the first half of 2020. Asiacell continued to manage costs to absorb the impact of revenue declines by optimising operational efficiency and controlling its marketing spend.

Asiacell's customer base decreased by 4 percent to 13.3 million customers at the end of H1 2020, as movement restrictions and curfews were implemented across the country. To help keep communities connected during the COVID-19 pandemic, Asiacell offered its customers data bonus on recharge, doubled their quota on emergency credit and extended the validity of prepaid lines.

The company continued to prepare for the launch of 4G as the Government committed to allow operators to launch LTE services in 2021.

North Africa Ooredoo Algeria

Ooredoo Algeria continued to be impacted by challenging economic conditions, intense price competition and currency depreciation as the Algerian Dinar depreciated by 3 percent year on year. The company reported revenues of QAR 1.1 billion in H1 2020, down 11 percent compared to the same period last year. Consequently, EBITDA declined to QAR 371 million (H1 2019: QAR 459 million) during the first half of 2020. Ooredoo Algeria remains focused on optimizing its cost base through a more efficient marketing spend.

Ooredoo Algeria launched 'Dima Ooredoo', a new digital portfolio launched through an innovative interactive campaign featuring sitcom actors; and launched 'Yara', a VOD platform that attracted 350,000 daily active users, as it continues to develop its digital ecosystem across all 48 Wilayas, to better serve its 12.9 million-strong customer base. The company donated to the Red Crescent to support the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ooredoo Tunisia

Ooredoo Tunisia reported revenues of QAR 731 million for the half year ended 30 June 2020, up 6 percent compared to the same period last year, despite deteriorating economic conditions following the implementation of Government measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

EBITDA declined 2 percent to QAR 314 million during H1 2020 due to increased bad debt provisions as the economy slowed and one-off reversals that took place in H1 2019. The company continued to focus on cost optimization to manage the deceleration in revenue growth.

Ooredoo Tunisia's customer base remained stable at 8.8 million customers in H1 2020, reaffirming its position as the number one telecom player by customer market share. The company supported hospitals and confinement centers with data access throughout the pandemic and extended its free Mobicash card promotion until the end of July.

KFH continues to serve customers during holiday

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to offer round the clock services for its customers in Kuwait and overseas during Eid Al-Adha holiday. Customers can use KFH services through its KFHonline that offers a wide range of e-services, in addition to the alternative channels KFH Go, XTM, Call Center and the social media channels.

The self-banking station (KFH Go) allows customers to conduct their transactions and perform many banking services in minutes in a very modern way using advanced tools through visual and audio communication options: conference call with KFH staff who are always available and ready to answer all customers' questions. Customers can purchase and receive Gold biscuits (10grams) and instant cheque printing through KFH Go smart branches.

KFH has uniquely rolled out innovative services that can be completed online and via mobile using robotics, AI, XTM and the smart branches KFH Go. This contributed to adding value to the customer's experience, confirming that the easy banking services encourage customers to use KFHonline in their transactions. KFH offers online financial so-



lutions, including local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque book request, opening KFH gold account, conducting gold transactions (purchase, sell and trade), requesting financing, opening an account, applying for Al-Khair card, and checking the PINs for credit and debit cards.

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always attempts to provide the best services and offers to its customers and reward them with prizes that meet their expectations. In this context, the bank announced MIN Jana Derbas Mohammad Al-Omar as the winner of Al-Jawhara Monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for July 2020.

Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Commenting on Al-Jawhara monthly draw Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "At NBK, we always strive to reward our customers, especially Al-Jawhara Account holders, as

part of our keenness to provide a variety of rewards and prizes that suit the expectations of all customers all year round.

"Al-Jawhara Account is a key pillar of NBK efforts to promote the culture of saving among all segments of society. It also plays a pivotal role in light of our endeavors to provide an integrated banking experience to our customers, giving them the opportunity to save money with a chance to gain profit and plan for a successful future," he continued. Al-Nusif added: "NBK is committed to reward its customers and provide them with top-notch services, and exceptional offers and prizes, noting that all Al-Jawhara Account holders have the chance to win, in addition to a variety of services and benefits offered by this account. Al-Nusif affirmed that anyone could open an Al-Jawhara Account by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, while NBK Customers can open an account through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws of KD 5,000 including:

Sarah Abdulaziz Abdulh Al-Wazzan, Bader Ali M o - h a m m e d Saleh Al-K a n d a r i and Abdul-

lah Mohammad Al-Darawshah. The draw was held live on NBK Instagram page in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al Jawhara, monthly and quarterly draws are supervised by Deloitte.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to offer customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes that suit the expectations of customers all year round.



Hisham Al-Nusif

Classifieds

Thursday, July 30, 2020

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www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Very hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with light to moderate south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind later on with speed of 08 - 30 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	43 °C	34 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	46 °C	33 °C
ABDALY	46 °C	32 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	47 °C	33 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	40 °C	33 °C
SALMIYAH	37 °C	34 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	44 °C	32 °C
WAFRA	47 °C	30 °C
SALMY	48 °C	34 °C

SFC. CHART		29/07/2020 0000 UTC

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	07/30	Very hot and some scattered clouds will appear	50 °C	34 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 32 km/h
Friday	07/31	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	50 °C	35 °C	NW-VRB	15 - 40 km/h
Saturday	08/01	Very hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas	48 °C	32 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h
Sunday	08/02	Very hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas	49 °C	33 °C	SW-SE	08 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:36
Sunrise	05:06
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:30
Sunset	18:42
Isha	20:09

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	46 °C
MIN. Temp.	33 °C
MAX. RH	60 %
MIN. RH	19 %
MAX. Wind	SE 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

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

To Whom It May Concern



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For review contact on mobile: 94124082
 Email: uyilmaz@kolin.com.tr



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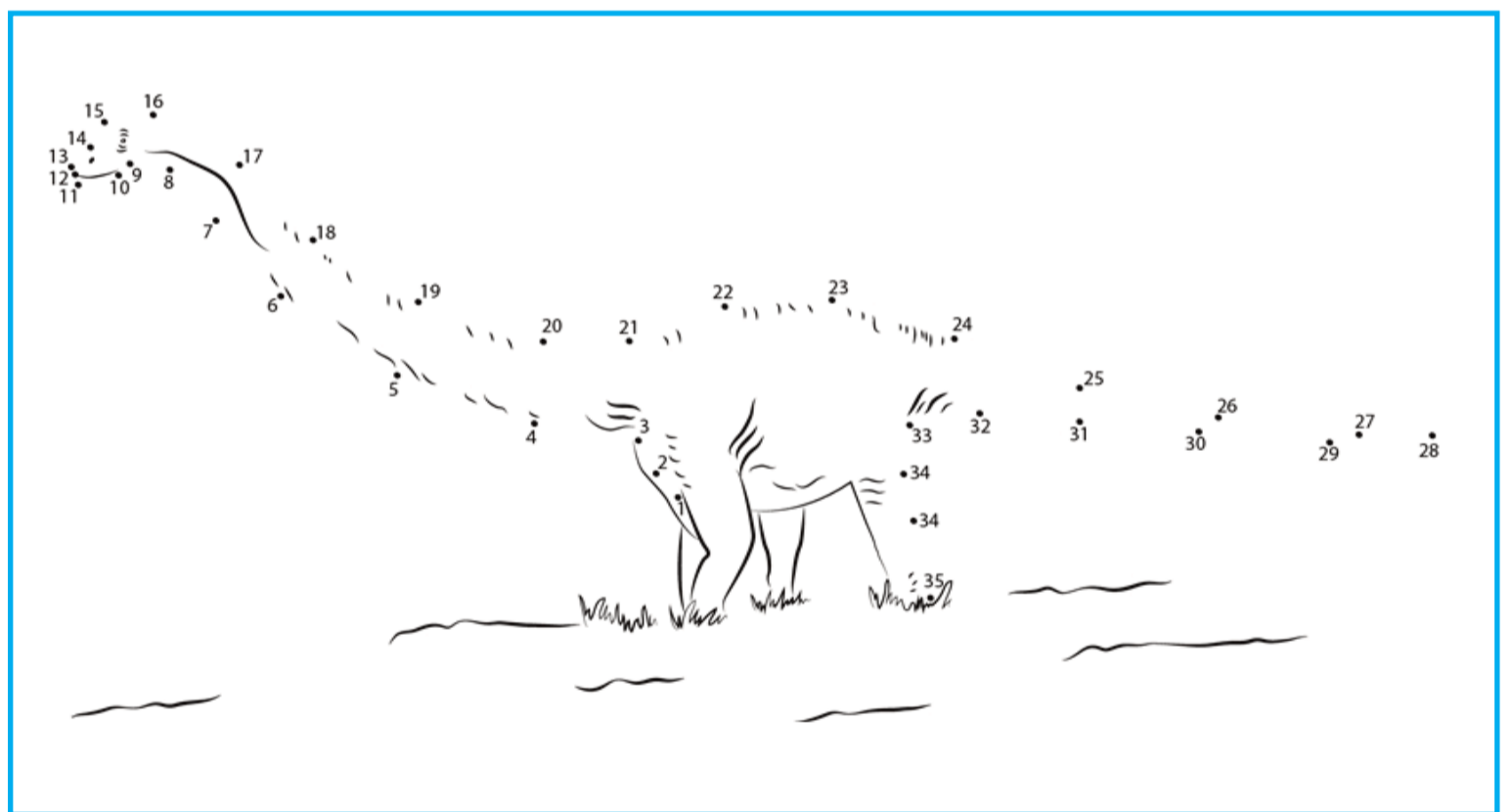
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CARRYON	LOUNGE	PILOT
CHECK IN	LUGGAGE	RESERVATION
CLAIM	MASK	SEAT
CREW	MEAL	SEATBELT
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ECONOMY	OVERHEAD	TAKE OFF

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STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

This is going to be a rather intense day, Aries. On the positive side, you'll accomplish a lot. On the less positive side, you may be exhausted by the end of the day. You're advised to try and pace yourself. Remain focused on what's truly important rather than let yourself get caught up in trivia. Keep the big picture in mind and the little things will take care of themselves.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Much has happened recently, Cancer. Have you allowed enough time to process it? It's likely that big changes are brewing at home or work. Stay focused on the job at hand rather than fret about events over which you have no control. You may feel as if you're on a roller-coaster ride, but everything will settle down in a few days. Blink to adjust your eyes to the strange new light.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This isn't the most cheerful time, Libra, because important issues are rearing their heads again and forcing you to address them. You'd rather not, but you can't wish them away. The time has come to deal with them once and for all. It's especially important that you make an effort to make your home life more positive and upbeat. Your loved ones look to you to set the tone.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You have a keen analytical mind that has served you well in business. Alas, Capricorn, this characteristic doesn't always serve you well in your personal life. It's likely that someone close has bristled from your lack of empathy. Take time to reflect upon the events of the past few weeks. Did you inadvertently send a wrong message? Correct any unintentional slights. A simple "I'm sorry," will do wonders.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today it's important that you make your own decisions and stick with them, Taurus. Much as you prefer to depend on others, your judgment really is best. You'll be paralyzed if you think only of how others will react to your decisions. You do know what is best, and everyone will benefit when you act on your beliefs. This is no time to be wishy-washy. Just do it.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You've made progress these past few weeks, especially where your temper is concerned, Leo. It has taken some effort, but it does seem that you can overcome your tendency to speak before thinking. Don't lose the ground you've gained. There's one person whose mission seems to be to make you explode. Don't let him or her rankle you. Take a deep breath and rise above it.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Don't try to force anything or anyone right now, Scorpio. You'll find that today's elements are just as stubborn as you are. Today's planetary configurations will force you to finally start to turn your dreams into reality, whether you want to or not. Face it - you've been planning for a long time without making much concrete progress. All that is about to change.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

This is the beginning of an exciting period in your love life, Aquarius. Your relationship with a significant other may have been in a rut lately, but that's about to change. Both of you are ready for something big. Perhaps a move is in store or you could both decide to commit to one another more permanently. Follow your instincts, because they'll lead you where you're meant to go.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You're a dreamer, Gemini. Everyone loves you for it, but today the planetary aspects urge practicality. There are personal issues to resolve, and it does no good to have your head in the clouds. This is a time to focus on loved ones. Perhaps your partner or your children feel neglected. Do whatever is necessary to let your family know you're available and eager to give them what they need.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

This is likely to be an intense day, Virgo. Family and friends may seem testy, so you're advised to stay out of their way. Don't worry - it isn't anything you've done. It's the planetary energy. If you can go someplace private and shut the door, do it. If someone tries to pick a fight, don't rise to the bait. Tomorrow the air will clear and good spirits will reign again.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You're incredibly productive, with good business sense, Sagittarius. However, lately you may have felt dissatisfied with where you are in life. As you look around, you might wish you had more possessions to show for all your hard work. Don't pursue this line of thought. Real value comes from relationships and the pride you get from doing a job well. A new car or fancy clothes may lift your spirits, but it's superficial.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have a passionate nature, Pisces. Sometimes it's difficult for you when other people don't share your exuberance. This is a good time to tone things down a notch. There's some tension in the air, and your enthusiasm only serves to annoy rather than charm, as it usually does. Don't pout. It's only temporary. Tomorrow you'll be the center of attention again and bestowing hugs and kisses to all.

Lifestyle | Features

EMMY TAKEAWAYS: RECORD FOR BLACK ACTORS, NEW NOMINEES AND MICHAEL JORDAN

The Emmy nominations on Tuesday yielded a step forward for diversity, a new record for Netflix and nods aplenty for ESPN's popular Michael Jordan documentary. Here are some top takeaways from the announcement by the Television Academy, ahead of the Emmy Awards on September 20:



In this file photo an Emmy statue is seen on the stage at the 71st Emmy Awards Governors Ball press preview at LA Live in Los Angeles, California.—AFP

Diversity

Of the more than 100 acting nominations in the series, limited series and television movie categories, more than a third of them went to black actors—a new record. Among them are Billy Porter ("Pose"), Sterling K. Brown ("This Is Us" and "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"), Issa Rae ("Insecure") and Regina King ("Watchmen"). The increased number of nominations for black performers confirmed efforts by the Television Academy to boost racial diversity on the small screen. "Black Lives Matter. Black Stories Matter," the Academy tweeted Tuesday. The Emmy nominations announcement comes amid a national reckoning over race, with protests against racism and police brutality taking place across the country.

"This type of representation is a long time coming. There's no shortage of talent within the black community," Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, a nominee for HBO's "Watchmen," told Entertainment Tonight. "Sometimes it takes certain circumstances in the world for people to open their eyes and people to open up, to

widen their periphery." But while black and Asian actors made gains this year, the lack of any Latino actors in the mix was glaring.

Newcomers fare well

The amount of television content eligible for Emmys increases just about every year, and this year, while Netflix earned a record 160 nominations, a few new streaming platforms earned their first nods. Disney+ made its mark with 19 nominations — 15 of them for its flagship series, the "Star Wars" spinoff "The Mandalorian." Apple TV+ nabbed 18 nominations, including for Jennifer Aniston, Steve Carell and Billy Crudup for its flagship launch program "The Morning Show." The fledgling short-form streaming platform Quibi also scored 10 nominations, including for cop spoof revival "Reno 911!" and dystopian thriller "Most Dangerous Game."

Father/daughter nominees

"This Is Us" actor Ron Cephas Jones and his daughter Jasmine Cephas Jones shared the limelight Tuesday as they both received Emmy nods. Jones was nominated for outstanding guest actor for the NBC tearjerker, for which he won an Emmy in 2018. His daughter, who earned fame as a member of the original cast of the Broadway musical "Hamilton," joined the club of Emmy nominees for her role in the Quibi drama "#FreeRayshawn." "I'm still in shock! Thank you to @TelevisionAcad for this Emmy nomination!" Jasmine Cephas Jones said in a tweet, in which she also congratulated her dad. "Proud to be a part of important stories during this climate," she added.

The salacious Netflix series "Tiger King," which was all the rage at the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown, will face off against "The Last Dance," which revolves around basketball legend Michael Jordan's career with the Chicago Bulls, in the outstanding documentary or nonfiction series category. The two shows will compete against Hulu's "Hillary," about failed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, PBS's "American Masters," which examines the lives of outstanding artists, and HBO's "McMillion\$," about the McDonald's Monopoly game scam.—AFP

Emmy nominees in key categories

Here is a list of the nominees in key categories for the 72nd Emmy Awards, which will be handed out in Los Angeles on September 20. HBO's "Watchmen" leads the way with 26 nominations, and is competing in the limited series categories. Amazon hit comedy "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel" was in second place with 20 nominations. On the drama side, dark crime thriller "Ozark" and family drama "Succession" led the pack with 18 nominations each.

OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES

"Better Call Saul"
"The Crown"
"The Handmaid's Tale"
"Killing Eve"
"The Mandalorian"
"Ozark"
"Stranger Things"
"Succession"

OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES

"Curb Your Enthusiasm"
"Dead to Me"
"The Good Place"
"Insecure"
"The Kominsky Method"
"The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"
"Schitt's Creek"
"What We Do In The Shadows"

LEAD ACTOR, DRAMA

Jason Bateman, "Ozark"
Sterling K. Brown, "This Is Us"
Steve Carell, "The Morning Show"
Brian Cox, "Succession"
Billy Porter, "Pose"
Jeremy Strong, "Succession"

LEAD ACTRESS, DRAMA

Jennifer Aniston, "The Morning Show"
Olivia Colman, "The Crown"
Jodie Comer, "Killing Eve"
Laura Linney, "Ozark"
Sandra Oh, "Killing Eve"
Zendaya, "Euphoria"

LEAD ACTOR, COMEDY

Anthony Anderson, "black-ish"
Don Cheadle, "Black Monday"
Ted Danson, "The Good Place"

Michael Douglas, "The Kominsky Method"
Eugene Levy, "Schitt's Creek"
Ramy Youssef, "Ramy"

LEAD ACTRESS, COMEDY

Christina Applegate, "Dead to Me"
Rachel Brosnahan, "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"
Linda Cardellini, "Dead to Me"
Catherine O'Hara, "Schitt's Creek"
Issa Rae, "Insecure"
Tracee Ellis Ross, "black-ish"

SUPPORTING ACTOR, DRAMA

Nicholas Braun, "Succession"
Billy Crudup, "The Morning Show"
Kieran Culkin, "Succession"
Mark Duplass, "The Morning Show"
Giancarlo Esposito, "Better Call Saul"
Matthew Macfadyen, "Succession"
Bradley Whitford, "The Handmaid's Tale"
Jeffrey Wright, "Westworld"

SUPPORTING ACTRESS, DRAMA

Helena Bonham Carter, "The Crown"
Laura Dern, "Big Little Lies"
Julia Garner, "Ozark"
Thandie Newton, "Westworld"
Fiona Shaw, "Killing Eve"
Sarah Snook, "Succession"
Meryl Streep, "Big Little Lies"
Samira Wiley, "The Handmaid's Tale"

SUPPORTING ACTOR, COMEDY

Mahershala Ali, "Ramy"
Alan Arkin, "The Kominsky Method"
Andre Braugher, "Brooklyn Nine-Nine"
Sterling K. Brown, "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"
William Jackson Harper, "The Good Place"
Daniel Levy, "Schitt's Creek"
Tony Shalhoub, "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"
Kenan Thompson, "Saturday Night Live"

SUPPORTING ACTRESS, COMEDY

Alex Borstein, "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"
D'Arcy Carden, "The Good Place"
Betty Gilpin, "GLOW"
Marin Hinkle, "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel"

Kate McKinnon, "Saturday Night Live"
Annie Murphy, "Schitt's Creek"
Yvonne Orji, "Insecure"
Cecily Strong, "Saturday Night Live"

OUTSTANDING LIMITED SERIES

"Little Fires Everywhere"
"Mrs America"
"Unbelievable"
"Unorthodox"
"Watchmen"

OUTSTANDING TELEVISION MOVIE

"American Son"
"Bad Education"
"Dolly Parton's Heartstrings: These Old Bones"
"El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie"
"Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs the Reverend"

LEAD ACTOR, LIMITED SERIES OR MOVIE

Jeremy Irons, "Watchmen"
Hugh Jackman, "Bad Education"
Paul Mescal, "Normal People"
Jeremy Pope, "Hollywood"
Mark Ruffalo, "I Know This Much Is True"

LEAD ACTRESS, LIMITED SERIES OR MOVIE

Cate Blanchett, "Mrs America"
Shira Haas, "Unorthodox"
Regina King, "Watchmen"
Octavia Spencer, "Self Made"
Kerry Washington, "Little Fires Everywhere"

Programs with most overall nominations:

"Watchmen" - 26
"The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" - 20
"Succession" - 18
"Ozark" - 18
"The Mandalorian" - 15
"Schitt's Creek" - 15
"Saturday Night Live" - 15
"The Crown" - 13

Top five platforms with most overall nominations:

Netflix: 160
HBO: 107
NBC: 47
ABC: 36
FX: 33—AFP



LOYAC produces a new song despite COVID-19 challenges

LOYAC's chairperson, Farea Al-Saqqaf recently expressed her great joy on the production of a new song written by the great poet, Waddah, the music composed by Abdullah Al-Qa'oud, distributed by Rabea' Al-Saidawi and sung by Abdul Aziz Al-Mesbah under the title of 'Ya Hamam' (Oh, pigeons).

Al-Saqqaf stressed that the artists responded and communicated with LOYAC despite COVID-19 circum-

stances to produce the song. "We faced many challenges while producing the song and could not shoot a video clip thus we opted to archive photos from KTV and ATV channels", she explained expressing gratitude to both channels and Kuwait Sheraton Hotel.

On his part, music composer Abdullah Al-Qa'oud stressed that he was overwhelmed when LAPA offered the project and found the song lyrics extraordinary. "Due to COVID-19, I com-

posed the music and sent it to distributor, Al-saidawi who did his part and sent the song to Al-Mesbah without meeting once", he explained noting that this was the most bizarre experience for him. Distributor, Al-saidawi also expressed his pride with the experience as well as cooperation with the production team and Al-saqqaf. Young singer, Abdul Aziz Al-Mesbah also expressed joy for cooperating with the group.

Jagger, Stipe sign letter demanding campaign song consent

Several top musicians, including Mick Jagger and Sheryl Crow, have signed a letter demanding that politicians get their consent before playing their songs at campaign rallies. The soundtrack to political events was a hot topic during the 2016 election and is again this year, with several stars objecting to President Donald Trump playing their songs without permission. Michael Stipe of REM, Regina Spektor and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler were among others to put their name on the letter, which was written in partnership with the Artist Rights Alliance. Rolling Stone magazine reported. "No artist should be forced to compromise their values or be associated with politicians they don't respect or support," the Artist Rights Alliance tweeted on Tuesday. "To defend free speech and political expression, we're calling on campaigns to get permission before using music at political events," it added.

Last month, British rock legends the Rolling Stones threatened legal action against Trump for his use of their classic "You Can't Always Get What You Want" at campaign rallies. The same month, the family of rock musician Tom Petty issued a cease and desist letter over Trump's use of "I Won't Back Down" at a rally in Tulsa on June 20. Queen complained when Trump walked on stage to their anthem "We Are The Champions" during a Republican Party event in Cleveland, Ohio in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. Pharrell Williams, Rihanna, Aerosmith, Adele, Neil Young and the estate of singer Prince all have also hit out after Trump used their songs. Other signatories of the letter revealed Tuesday include Lionel Richie, Elvis Costello, and bands Blondie, Green Day and Pearl Jam, Rolling Stone said. — AFP



In this file photo English singer, songwriter and actor Mick Jagger arrives for the screening of the film "The Burnt Orange Heresy" during the closing night of the 76th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

Room with a view: Virgin Galactic gives peek at spacecraft cabin

The Virgin Galactic spaceship that will someday carry very moneyed tourists boasts windows and cameras galore for easy selfies with planet Earth. The company, founded by British billionaire Richard Branson, provided a virtual tour Tuesday of the inside of the ship that will transport people willing to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for a brief taste of being at the edge of space. Besides all the windows and cameras, the craft will have a mirror in the back of the cabin so people can admire themselves.

There is no firm date for the first commercial flight and the company has repeatedly pushed it back, but executives said recently it is a question of months and not years away. Several test flights must still be made before Branson himself steps aboard. The inside of the

cabin, which will have seats for six passengers and a two-member crew, will feature 12 windows and 16 cameras. It is designed to give the best possible view of our planet.

An AFP reporter made a remote tour of the spacecraft with a virtual reality headset provided by the company. Each seat

is close to a large oval-shaped porthole, and a camera is attached to each window in such a way that passengers can be photographed with Earth behind them, with no need to take a selfie of their own. The travellers can unbuckle their seatbelts and float. Portholes in the ceiling will give them a spectacular view of the blue plan-

et standing out against a jet black sky.

So far, 600 people who have paid up to \$250,000 — Virgin Galactic calls them "future astronauts"—have been waiting for years to take their seat on SpaceShipTwo. Its development has been delayed by a devastating crash of the first one in 2014 due to a pilot error.

The spacecraft will be taken up by a special plane and released in high altitude. Seconds later, the spaceship—part plane, part rocket—will ignite its engine and blast upward with an acceleration of 3.5 g, meaning three and a half times that of Earth's gravitational force. — AFP



Images courtesy of Virgin Galactic show the Virgin Galactic spaceship cabin design and seats.—AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



Emirati rapper Saud Waled Ibrahim performs at his recording studio in the Gulf emirate of Ajman, northeast of Sharjah.—AFP photos



Hassane "Big Hass" Dennaoui, a Saudi host of a UAE-based radio show dedicated to hip hop, poses for a picture at Akil cinema in the Gulf emirate of Dubai.



Suhaib S. Alises, a Jordanian-born Palestinian rapper who was raised in the UAE, poses for a picture at a coffee shop in the Dubai Design District of the Gulf emirate.



Emirati rapper Saud Waled Ibrahim (right) performs at his recording studio in the Gulf emirate of Ajman, northeast of Sharjah.

UAE'S EMERGING HIP HOP SCENE SEARCHES FOR ITS IDENTITY

Saud Waled Ibrahim raps in a mixture of Arabic and English, a blend that has become a hallmark of a hip hop scene in search of its identity in the United Arab Emirates. The burly Emirati, better known as SG, is recording a new track in his small but modern studio in a low-key part of the Gulf state best known for its glittering skyscrapers and artificial palm-shaped islands. "There is no country that doesn't have rap... but we're still seen as intruders," said the 24-year-old, sporting an over-sized Adidas T-shirt and obligatory headphones. And in a country made up of residents drawn from all over the world, and with little street culture to speak of, the hip hop scene has yet to find its "sound", he told AFP.

Growing up to the beats of Tupac and Eminem, SG said it was the genre's tradition of free expression that drew him in,

even if as the years went by, reality bit. "As we got older, we realised we are a society with deep-rooted principles, which we can't violate," he said of his generation of performers. Born in the street culture of the United States in the 1970s, hip hop has spread across the world and given a voice to young people, particularly those in marginalised communities. Before making its way to the Gulf, rap emerged as an art form in other Arab countries where performers defy censorship and repression to address sensitive political and social issues.

The oil-rich United Arab Emirates is considered one of the more open states in the Gulf region, even if security laws remain stringent. It has invested heavily in arts and cultural events and a handful of homegrown rap names have emerged among those who have settled in the

UAE, including Freek and Adamillion who are both from Somalia. But like the wider cultural scene, the hip hop community is trying to find its place in a conservative country where foreigners make up some 80 percent of the population and where provocative or explicit topics are taboo. "Unlike in France, the US, Morocco, Egypt... we don't have our own sound because we are more focused on foreign influences rather than our own creativity," SG said.

'Represent the reality'

Hassane "Big Hass" Dennaoui, a UAE-based host of a radio show dedicated to hip hop, said although identity in the region is still evolving, one thing for sure is that it is "one of diversity". Originally from Saudi Arabia, Big Hass, with his signature bandana and white beard, founded The

Beat DXB which organises live performances and promotes regional artists. By drawing performers from all over the world, the UAE is rich in languages and culture, he said, even if many are content to stick to lyrics about life and love, rather than political issues of the day. "When I talk to a Palestinian rapper, they say how can we talk about love when I have an army tank on the roof of my house?" he told AFP at Dubai's independent Cinema Akil, a favourite hipster haunt. "In the Gulf, we may live comfortably but that doesn't mean people don't have struggles. As a rapper, you have a duty to represent the reality."

Eminem meets Fairuz

To relay that reality, Palestinian rapper Suhaib S. Alises, who was born in Jordan but grew up in the UAE, performs in

a mixture of English and Arabic. "This is to reach as many people as possible... and at the same time drive my message across," he told AFP. "There should always first and foremost be a message, and rap is an expression of poetry and emotion."

His inspirations range from the great Arab singers such as legendary Lebanese diva Fairuz to the plight of his own people and African-American culture. For him, the genre has evolved from the days of "gangsta rap" that dominated his own teenage years. "It has become a respectful form of expression and adapts to where the person is... addressing what is happening around the person's life and their own reality."—AFP



The triptych 'Mediterranean Sea View 2017', showing orange life vests washed up on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in reference to Banksy's judgement on Europe's response to the refugee crisis.—sputniknews.com

Banksy triptych raises \$3 million for Palestinian hospital

A triptych of a Mediterranean shipwreck donated by British street artist Banksy raised nearly \$3 million on Tuesday at a Sotheby's auction held to raise funds for a Palestinian hospital in the West Bank. The trio of highly stylised paintings by the mysterious artist shows orange life vests and an oar washed up on a rocky shore. They first appeared in the Walled Off Hotel that Banksy helped set up in the Israeli-occupied city of Bethlehem in 2017. The "Mediterranean Sea View 2017" was seen as Banksy's stern judgement on Europe's hesitant response to the migrant crisis that peaked some five years ago.

Tens of thousands are thought to have died as European countries on the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas turned away people fleeing violent conflicts across North Africa and the Middle East. "This work juxtaposes an historic fine art genre with grim contemporaneity," Sotheby's said in its sales listing for the work. "Though posing as eighteenth or nineteenth-century paintings of the 'Natural Sublime', the present work undermines and subverts the viewer's expectations to broach a difficult contemporary issue."

It officially raised £2,235,000 (\$2.9 million, 2.5 million euros) — well shy of the record £9.9 million set for a Banksy in October when his "Devoled Parliament" painting went under the hammer in the middle of Britain's Brexit struggle with the EU. Banksy donated the triptych to raise money for a new stroke unit and to buy children's rehabilitation equipment at the Bethlehem hospital. "We're often led to believe migration is a drain on the country's resources, but Steve Jobs was the son of a Syrian immigrant," he said in a rare public comment on the piece. "Apple is the world's most profitable company... and it only exists because they allowed in a young man from Homs".

Banksy depicted Jobs in a work entitled "The Son of a Migrant from Syria" that showed him carrying a knapsack and an Apple computer. The sale came in the middle of a broader virtual auction Sotheby's was staging from its London gallery entitled "Rembrandt to Richter Evening Sale". One of only three self-portraits by Rembrandt still in private hands sold for £14.5 million—a record for one of the Dutch master's famous depictions of himself.—AFP



Wouter van der Veen, of the Van Gogh Institute, poses next to the alleged spot where Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh painted his last canvas before his mysterious death from a gunshot wound, in Auvers-sur-Oise.—AFP photos



Wouter van der Veen, of the Van Gogh Institute, poses next to the alleged spot where Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh painted his last canvas before his mysterious death.



Wouter van der Veen, of the Van Gogh Institute, poses next to the alleged spot where Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh painted his last canvas before his mysterious death.

Spot where Van Gogh painted his last canvas 'discovered'

A researcher claimed Tuesday to have discovered the exact spot where Vincent Van Gogh painted his last canvas before his mysterious death from a gunshot wound. The tortured Dutch artist had been working on "Tree Roots", a jumble of brightly-coloured tree trunks, roots and stumps near Auvers-sur-Oise, north of Paris, on a hot July day in 1890 when he staggered back wounded to the village inn. Wouter van der Veen, of the Van Gogh Institute, which looks after the artist's room at the Auberge Ravoux where he spent his final 70 days, said most of the tangle of roots is still there, a stone's throw from the inn.

Experts at the Van Gogh Museum in

Amsterdam have backed the finding, saying it was "an interpretation, but it looks like indeed it is true." The museum's director Emilie Gordonker and the great grandson of Van Gogh's younger brother Theo travelled to the village Tuesday to unveil a plaque at the spot. Both Vincent and Theo, who had supported the painter for much of his life and outlived him by just six months, are buried next to each other in the village cemetery.

Van der Veen told AFP that he made the breakthrough from a postcard of the village from the turn of the 20th century, which shows an embankment with the trees on the main road through the hamlet, 30 kilometres (18 miles) north of Paris.

He was going through some documents during the coronavirus lockdown when "my eye was caught by a detail from the postcard".

'Shot by accident'

He compared it with the painting and found "that the trunks and roots corresponded." "Discovering the place where Van Gogh painted his last and most mysterious work is a waking dream which I am still trying to comprehend," the researcher added. Teio Meedendorp, of the Van Gogh Museum, told AFP that Van Gogh would have often passed the spot "going out to the fields behind the chateau of Auvers where he painted in

the last week of his life." Because of the way the light falls in the painting, Van der Veen said Van Gogh was probably still working on it late in the afternoon, "about 5:00 pm or 6:00 pm".

This, he argued, could help disprove the controversial theory that Van Gogh had not killed himself but had got drunk and fought with two local boys who shot him by accident. The theory was first floated in a biography of the painter by the Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith nine years ago, and featured in the 2018 movie "At Eternity's Gate" starring Willem Dafoe.—AFP

Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan slams 'virus death' trolls

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan has threatened to unleash his legion of fans on online trolls wishing him death from the coronavirus, after earlier speaking out about the stigma suffered by patients. Bachchan and his actor son Abhishek have been in a Mumbai hospital for over two weeks with COVID-19, while his actress daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai and granddaughter Aaradhya were discharged on Monday. They are the highest-profile family to contract the virus in India, the world's third most infected nation with almost 1.5 million cases.

The 77-year-old and his son are in an isolation ward, with the elderly actor dispensing regular messages to his millions of fans on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. The megastar's messages usually focus on thanking fans and medical staff at the hospital, but in a blog post published overnight Monday to Tuesday, he wrote that some people had sent him vicious hate mail, praying for his death. In response, Bachchan vowed to "exterminate" such trolls once out of hospital, by asking his millions of fans to turn on them. Describing his fans as his kin, he wrote: "That extended family shall in the flash of an eye become 'extermination family'."

Bachchan also revealed that he was able to hug his granddaughter before she left the hospital, recounting his emotional reaction to the news that she and her mother could go home. "The tears flow out .. the little one embraces and tells me not to cry .. you'll be home soon" she assures .. I must believe her," he wrote. A blog entry posted Saturday

touched on the mental trauma and stigma suffered by COVID-19 patients.

Bachchan, idolised in India and affectionately known as "Big B", has worked for more than half a century in the film industry. India's film and financial capital



Amitabh Bachchan

Mumbai accounts for over seven percent of all cases in the nation of 1.3 billion people. The South Asian giant has lifted most lockdown restrictions to restart the struggling economy. But numerous states have had to reintroduce shutdowns amid local spikes in infections. Late Tuesday authorities in the eastern state of West Bengal, home to about 90 million people, extended its lockdown—only imposed for two days each week—to the end of August. "The goal is to prevent the circulation of the virus and create favourable conditions to gain time before the arrival of effective drugs and vaccines," West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said.—AFP

Rare Rembrandt sells for £14.5 million at UK auction

One of only three self-portraits by Rembrandt still in private hands sold in London Tuesday for £14.5 million (\$18.7 million, 16 million euros), setting an auction record for one of the Dutch master's self-portraits. The work, "Self-portrait wearing a ruff and black hat", went under the hammer at Sotheby's in London as part of a 71-lot auction—"Rembrandt to Richter"—featuring more than half a millennium of art history. Its sale price was within expectations after being listed with a guide price of £12-16 million and bidding getting underway at £10 million. Sotheby's said the work was "chased by six determined bidders", handily beating a £6.9 million record set for another self-portrait by the artist in 2003.



A handout picture released by Sotheby's shows an assistant holding a self-portrait by Dutch artist Rembrandt in London.—AFP

The third self-portrait is on a long-term loan to the National Gallery of Scotland. The work sold Tuesday, one of 80 Rembrandt created during his career, is the earliest in date of that trio. It was painted towards the end of 1632, when the 26-year-old was establishing himself in Amsterdam and enjoying his first flush of commercial success. "Rembrandt's face is instantly recognisable to us at every stage of his adulthood—far more so than any other painter," said George Gordon, Sotheby's co-chairman of Old Master Paintings Worldwide.

"We know that this painting was created in a remarkably short period of time, because he laid in the background first, but when he signed it upon completion, the background was still wet, so the signature is impressed into it by his brush." Tuesday's auction, spanning the Italian Renaissance and Dutch Golden Age through to pop art and postmodern abstraction, kicked off with in-person attendance limited due to the coronavirus pandemic. The pieces being sold, including works by German artist Gerhard Richter, Spanish artist Joan Miro and British artist Francis Bacon, have been on display at Sotheby's since July 3.—AFP

Sports

Photo of the day



Luciano Benavides (ARG) of the Red Bull KTM Factory Racing Team performs during Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Russian athletics asks to delay suspension

MOSCOW: Russia's athletics federation on Tuesday sent a letter to the world athletics body, asking them to delay a planned review after it failed to pay a doping fine.

World Athletics is set to discuss the situation regarding the Russian Athletics Federation (RUSAF) on July 30 and may completely revoke its status, ending hopes for athletes to compete under a neutral flag.

This has been a looming threat following the failure by RUSAF to pay half of a \$10 million fine by July 1, part of a set of sanctions for breaching anti-doping rules.

In a letter to World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe, RUSAF hoped the World Athletics council would consider "postponing the decision on the RUSAF case to a later date." It promised the federation is committed to "overcome the crisis" with crucial reforms and noted that "the entire RUSAF platform should be revised to become a trusted ally of World Athletics."

The federation once again said it had failed to pay the fine on time due to lack of funds. "The external financial assistance RUSAF expected to receive has not been secured" by the deadline, it said in the letter the federation shared with AFP. Russian athletics has been in crisis since 2015 when it was banned for repeated doping scandals, and its athletes missed the 2016 Olympic Games.

The world body had frozen the process of allowing clean athletes to compete as neutrals last November but then allowed 10 athletes to be authorised in exchange for the fine being paid.

Yevgeny Yurchenko, who became RUSAF president in February to deal with the crisis, said on July 1 that RUSAF "does not have the money" in a blow to athletes who had hopes to compete in next year's Olympic Games.

He proceeded to quit two weeks later. Frustration has been building in the athletics community with some top competitors leaving Russia while others have threatened to quit or switch countries. —AFP

Bubble-wrapped NBA readies for relaunch

Players arriving in Orlando required to spend 48 hours isolated in their hotel room

ORLANDO: Four months after COVID-19 sent basketball into an unprecedented shutdown, the NBA takes a leap into the unknown today as the league bids to resurrect its season at Disney World in Florida.

The Utah Jazz launch the rebooted campaign against the New Orleans Pelicans before LeBron James and Kawhi Leonard go head-to-head in a heavyweight Los Angeles derby between the Lakers and the Clippers.

The two games mark the start of a painstakingly crafted plan to stage the remainder of the basketball season safely in the midst of an ongoing pandemic which has already claimed around 150,000 lives in the United States.

To mitigate the risks, the NBA is basing 22 teams within a tightly controlled "bubble" inside Disney World's sprawling 40-square mile campus in Orlando. Teams will play games at three venues inside the ESPN World Wide of Sports complex inside the park, with no fans in attendance and only a smattering of journalists at each game.

Just over 350 players will be housed at three hotels located throughout Disney World, with access to each location severely restricted and visits from outsiders strictly forbidden until the playoffs start.

Players arriving in Orlando were required to spend 48 hours isolated in their hotel rooms until they had received two negative tests for COVID-19. Testing will continue inside the bubble but it is not known how frequently this will take place.

While multi-millionaire stars such as the Lakers' James have joked that entering the bubble felt like starting a jail term, so far the launch of the project has gone smoothly.

Practice games have passed off without a hitch, and the most recent round of testing found zero positive cases out of 346 players tested.

"It requires significant sacrifice from our players," NBA commissioner Adam Silver told the New York Times this week.

"From my standpoint, it's going very well, and I'm cautiously optimistic that we're on the right track," Silver added. "But I also recognize what we're doing has not been done before, and the competition is just beginning. The real test will come when players are commingling, playing basketball without masks and without physical distancing."

There have been some early glitches however as players adjust to the relatively spartan surroundings of the bubble. Los Angeles Clippers guard Lou Williams was forced to quarantine for 10 days after being photographed at an Atlanta strip club during a trip to attend a family funeral.

The Sacramento Kings' Richaun Holmes also landed back in quarantine after he left the bubble to pick-up a delivery of take-out food. Inside the bubble's three arenas, meanwhile, the legacy of the tumultuous protests which erupted in the weeks following the death of George Floyd in May will be on full view.

Giant "Black Lives Matter" slogans have been written on each court, while players will be allowed to wear jerseys adorned with social justice messages ranging from "I Can't Breathe" to "Justice Now" and "Education Reform."

On the courts, all eyes will be on James and his Lakers teammates as they attempt to return to the pinnacle of the NBA when the season wraps in October.

After a disappointing first season in Los Angeles, where the Lakers failed to reach the playoffs, James returned with a vengeance this season, leading the team to the top of the Western Conference before the COVID-19 pandemic erupted. The Lakers and five other Western Conference teams — the Clippers, the Denver



ORLANDO: Kyle O'Quinn #9 of the Philadelphia 76ers handles the ball against the Dallas Mavericks during a scrimmage on July 28, 2020 at HP Field House at ESPN Wide World of Sports in Orlando, Florida. —AFP

Nuggets, Utah Jazz, Oklahoma City Thunder and Houston Rockets have already assured themselves of spots in the playoffs, which start on August 17.

The biggest threat to James' hopes of winning a fourth NBA championship is expected to come from the Eastern Conference, where Giannis Antetokoumpo is aiming to guide the Milwaukee Bucks to their first title in nearly half a century. The Bucks had ran away with the Eastern Conference before the hiatus, opening up a 6.5 game lead over the Toronto Raptors.

Antetokoumpo, who grew up in poverty in Greece as the son of Nigerian immigrants, smiles at the sugges-

tion NBA players are facing hardship in their confined environment in Orlando.

"It doesn't matter where you are in life, there's always something to complain, there's always a problem and an issue," Antetokoumpo said.

"My apartment in Greece, when I was younger, with my four brothers, was way smaller than the suite that I have in the hotel, so I'm just trying to enjoy the moment."

Antetokoumpo's viewpoint was echoed by Oklahoma City Thunder's Steven Adams. "Let's be clear mate," the New Zealander said. "This is not Syria. We're living in a bloody resort." —AFP

Red Bull's athlete Ahmad Daham reveals the most advanced Lexus drift machine on the planet

KUWAIT: Drift star Ahmad Daham has again teamed up with Lexus, this time to develop the most powerful, most advanced Lexus drift car on the planet.

The thoughtful build set out to not only develop on the success of his previous RCF Drift effort, but also to showcase Lexus top-flight performance-craft to the global Drift community. This Red Bull athlete's latest FIA Drift-spec machine is a 1,200hp RCF-based weapon weighing 1250kg/2755lb - covered in abe-spoke featherweight Carbon Kevlar body shell.

Moreover, there was a purpose and a focus to this build beyond just raw power and speed. Daham's RCF Carbon Kevlar, which he hopes to be campaigning in drift championships around the world, involves an obsessive attention to detail in the chassis, power train, and presentation that elevates the craft of its execution to mirror Lexus levels of takumi car-building.

The result is a unique, world-class drift car that, even in a region renowned for high-power ultimate-level builds, is truly exceptional. Daham chose the Lexus RC F as the platform for his latest project after building his first RC F drift car which thrilled the crowds on its debut at The Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2019.

"I am honored to be partnering with a brand like Lexus. I am really thankful for the support the team has provided me as I built the new RC F Carbon Kevlar for the upcoming season. This car is so much fun to drive and I cannot wait to push it to its limit. We have learned a lot in 2019 as we kept a 'Kaizen' philosophy in our research and development. I look forward to another successful season and am confident with this partnership we will be able to achieve all our objectives," said Ahmad.

"Building a car like this took so much effort not only from me, but from the team and partners to help me achieve my goals with this machine. I would

like to thank every single partner for their continuous support and labor done to complete this project," he added.

This second car has many refinements over the first RC F drift car, not least because Daham had more time to build it. The first car was conceived and built in a record 70 days and stands as testament to the builder's capability and resourcefulness.

Two themes are central to the latest RC F Carbon Kevlar drift car - more power and less weight. The weight loss over the standard RCF was achieved by thoroughly rethinking the stripped platform and then fabricating this race vehicle using materials focused on weight reduction. In addition, mass was also more optimally positioned in the chassis to support car's drift mission. The locally fabricated "Python Garage" fabricated super-light Carbon-Kevlar body panels helping the whole car shave more than 500kg of the showroom RC F as part of the mission to achieve a weight that is competitive amongst other drifters.

The power part of the equation has been provided by inserting a heavily tuned - 1,200hp is four times the standard output - version of the tuner-favorite 2JZ straight-six single turbo motor in place of the standard car's naturally aspirated V8.

The iron-blocked 2JZ motor, which drives through a four-speed Samson as sequential gearbox and twin-plate Competition Clutch, was chosen due to the wide variety of readily available tuning parts.

The 2JZ's legendary robustness, compact size and familiar architecture have made it a proven source of motivation for high output drift efforts around the globe. Ahmad's years of familiarity with this engine also helps make it easier to tune, modify and adjust quickly at drift events.

Key tuning components include a Garrett GTX3584 turbocharger, GSC Power Division valve train and a triple-pump fuel system from Radium



Engineering.

A Titan Motorsport dry sump has been added to improve reliability and a Nitrous Express 200hp kit bolted on to help spool up the turbo and cool the intake charge.

Since keeping a close eye on all these systems is critical to drift success, Daham has included his preferred equipment from New Zealand's Link company - a Thunder ECU and MXS Strada dash.

With the power and the weight where Daham wanted them, he turned his attention to the chassis tuning to make the most of the changes.

The most significant alterations include swapping the rear differential for a Winters unit - purely to enable swift trackside ratio changes. And the replace-



ment of the brakes with Wilwood racing calipers, to reduce unsprung mass - which enables faster changes of direction.

FIG's engineering was tapped to make the angle kit, a drift car essential. Three-way BC racing coilovers are used to allow adjustments to both rebound and compression damping to allow Daham to perfect his set up.

The finishing touches are a set of Japan's finest Rays Engineering 57CR wheels riding on R888R TOYO rubber.

Sports

Hole in none: How screen golf got serious in South Korea

'I feel more at ease in front of the giant screen'

DAEJEON: On the final green of the tournament, Ha Ki-won carefully took his stance and addressed the ball. A gentle strike, and it rolled forward.

In front of him it circled the hole, making a rattling sound as it dropped, and Ha raised his fist in triumph, taking victory and a 20 million won (\$17,000) winner's cheque by a single shot.

The ball, though, was not in a hole, but still on the carpet. This was a professional screen golf tournament in South Korea, which hosts what organisers say is the world's only such tour.

For Ha, 38, screen golf has offered a competitive lifeline: he first wielded a club at the age of 17, and reached the second tier of the professional KPGA tour, but never made a cut in tournament play.

In screen golf, though, he now has five victories, and in 2017 he gave up real-life competition altogether, converting fully to simulator action.

"Now I feel more at ease in front of the giant screen," said Ha. Just like on a real course, players compete in several groups simultaneously, each taking shots in turn.

But rather than walking in open countryside to reach their next lie, they step in front of a screen measuring 5.8 by 3.0 metres. Sensors on the floor and ceiling track the trajectory of the ball after impact and project its onward path down the virtual course. The country's biggest screen golf operator Golfzon — which has more than 1,300 centres across the South — set up the tour in 2012, with seven events a year, culminating in November's GTour Championship, worth 150 million won to the winner.

There were 130 competitors at this month's tournament in Daejeon, south of Seoul, eight of them first-tier KPGA professionals. The popularity is driven by accessibility: traditional golf is a hugely successful spectator sport in South Korea, which is a global powerhouse in the women's game, provid-

ing eight of the current world top 20.

But with more than 65 percent of South Korea made up of mountains and a population of 52 million, land for golf courses is at a premium, club memberships are highly exclusive, and green fees can cost hundreds of dollars.

GREENS ON SCREENS

Screen golf has stepped into the breach: Golfzon says 60 million rounds were played at its centres last year, and sales were up 10 percent in the first six months of 2020.

Technological improvements have "narrowed the



Competitive lifeline

gap between real golf and screen golf", Golfzon representative Yoo Young-sang told AFP, adding that interest from first-tier KPGA players has been "on the rise". Screen golf tournaments also attract fans of their own, he added: as many as 200 fans will attend tournaments, said Yoo, although this month's event was held without spectators as a coronavirus precaution.

South Korean female professionals are less interested than their male counterparts, according to Yoo, as the real women's game in South Korea is more lucrative than the men's, with more tournaments offering larger prizes and greater prospects



DAEJEON: This photo taken on July 24, 2020 shows a South Korean golfer hitting a ball in a simulation booth during the GTour screen golf tournament in Daejeon, south of Seoul. — AFP

for commercial sponsorship.

It's a reflection of their diverging fortunes on the global stage, where South Korean men fall far short of their countrywomen's dominance.

Theories for the contrast include that the average physical differences between Asians and Westerners are smaller among women than men, and that male South Korean players' development is interrupted by compulsory military service.

The Daejeon venue has no fewer than 27 golf booths, equipped with speakers to provide special effects to enhance the experience: good shots are

met with rounds of applause and women calling "congratulations".

If a ball lands in a bunker, the player has to play their next stroke from a deep-pile mat to simulate the effect of blasting out from sand.

But there is still a gap between virtual and real, said competitor Kim Da-hun, 24, who first picked up a club aged eight and is currently in the second tier of the KPGA tour. "Out on the field, even the subtlest feeling in your hands and wind movements affect your play," he said. "But here, your play is mostly dependent on a shot angle and speed." — AFP

Un-sponsored elite runners to be provided with carbon-fibre shoes

PARIS: World Athletics announced Tuesday it was creating a scheme to provide un-sponsored elite runners with the same carbon-fibre versions of shoes that have revolutionized road running, in an acceptance that the technological advances are irreversible. Elite athletes wearing versions of the Nike Vaporfly, the carbon plates of which lend a propulsive sensation to every stride, have set a host of personal bests and Nike runners have practically swept the board in long-distance events—they took 31 of the 36 podium places at the six marathon majors last year.

Eliud Kipchoge wore an advanced version of the shoes when the Kenyan became the first man to break the two-hour barrier for the marathon in October 2019. The shoes, which are now being produced by other sportswear manufacturers, have led to accusations that they create unfair competition. World Athletics has already limited the thickness of the sole on the shoes to 40 millimeters, a rule it kept in place Tuesday.

In a new initiative, track and field's governing body said it would provide athletes with the shoes if they do not already receive them from sponsors, under a "Athletic Shoe Availability Scheme". "The Working Group on Athletic Shoes will develop this scheme including timelines, elite athlete criteria, numbers of pairs of shoes required and method of distribution," it said in a statement.

The governing body says the rules are designed



VIENNA: File photo taken on October 12, 2019, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge, wearing the Nike AlphaFly prototype shoes, celebrates as he crosses the finish line at the end of his attempt to bust the mythical two-hour barrier for the marathon in Vienna. World Athletics announced on July 28, 2020, it was creating a scheme to lend elite athletes without sponsorship deals the same carbon-fibre versions of shoes that have revolutionized road running, in an acceptance that the advances in technology are irreversible. — AFP

"to maintain the current technology status quo" until the Tokyo Olympics. After that the Working Group on Athletic Shoes, which includes representatives from shoe manufacturers and the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry, will work "to set the parameters for achieving the right balance between innovation, competitive advantage and universality and availability."

World Athletics CEO Jon Ridgeon said the post-

ponement of the Tokyo Olympics as a result of the coronavirus pandemic had given the governing body "more time to consult with stakeholders and experts and develop amended rules that will guide the sport through until late 2021". "We have a better understanding now of what technology is already in the market and where we need to draw the line to maintain the status quo until after the Tokyo Olympic Games," Ridgeon said. — AFP

Patriots rocked as players opt out over virus fear

LOS ANGELES: The New England Patriots' pre-season preparations were in turmoil on Tuesday as six players abruptly opted out of the 2020 campaign over coronavirus fears. The wave of opt-outs included Dont'a Hightower and Patrick Chung, two three-time Super Bowl champions who have been pillars of the Patriots defense for several years. Running back Brandon Bolden, offensive tackle Marcus Cannon, fullback Danny Vitale and reserve offensive lineman Najee Toran have also opted out.

Hightower, 30, told NFL Network his decision to opt out of the season was influenced by the birth of his first child on July 16. "Me and my fiancée are just more concerned with the health of our family than football—especially the new addition to our family," Hightower said. Hightower's mother also has Type 2 diabetes, putting her at a higher risk from COVID-19, NFL Network reported. Hightower is known affectionately as "Mr February" by Patriots coach Bill

Belichick for his habit of producing crucial plays during Super Bowl campaigns.

The 30-year-old's sack of Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan in the Super Bowl in 2017 was pivotal in helping the Patriots score their comeback win. Chung, 32, meanwhile, was a member of the Patriots teams that won the Super Bowls for the 2014, 2016 and 2018 seasons. Chung is also expecting a child with his wife. Under an agreement brokered between the NFL and NFL Players Association, players who are deemed to be at high risk for COVID-19 can opt out of the season and be paid \$350,000 with contracts rolling over. Players not deemed to be at risk can opt out and receive \$150,000.

The opt-outs come as the Patriots were already facing a major defensive rebuilding effort following the departure of free agents Kyle Van Noy, Jamie Collins and Elandon Roberts. Quarterback Tom Brady also left the club for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers earlier this year. Concern over the potential impact of COVID-19 on the NFL has dominated the build-up to the new season, which kicks off on September 10. Pre-season games due to start in August have been cancelled while players have repeatedly voiced concerns over safety protocols in place for the season. — AFP

Bill Williams confirms Sydney Roosters return

SYDNEY: Cross-code superstar Sonny Bill Williams confirmed Wednesday that he will return to Australia's NRL with the Sydney Roosters after COVID-19 forced his Toronto Wolfpack to withdraw from England's Super League.

Williams, who has won two Rugby World Cups with the All Blacks and two NRL premierships in Australia, said he would arrive in Sydney on Thursday and undergo two weeks' mandatory quarantine.

"It's just the challenge that I get so excited about, it lights that fire inside of you," Williams told Australia's Channel Nine before departing from Britain.

Williams played with the Roosters in 2013 and 2014, winning a premiership in his first year with the club, and said he had remained in contact with Roosters chairman Nick Politis. "Nick hit me up and asked if I had a couple of months in me to come back," he said.

"To be honest, I hadn't trained for a bit. I'd been on holiday mode. We actually booked flights, me and my wife

booked flights for a little family European holiday."

Williams, who will turn 35 next week, was at a loose end after the Canada-based Wolfpack said COVID-19 had created "overwhelming financial challenges" that meant it could not compete as Super League's only transatlantic club.

Williams is still under contract with the Wolfpack, which would normally bar him from playing in the NRL, but the game's hierarchy bent the rules to allow him in due to "exceptional circumstances" created by the virus.

The New Zealand citizen also needed a special exemption from the government officials to fly into Sydney with his wife and children, as only Australian citizens are being allowed in at the moment. Once quarantine is completed, he could potentially take the field for the Roosters' round 15 match against Wests Tigers on August 22.

Williams played 58 times for the All Blacks, winning World Cups in 2011 and 2015, as well as numerous Bledisloe Cups and Rugby Championships.

Other honours include a Super Rugby title in 2012 and NRL premierships in 2004 and 2013. He also represented New Zealand in rugby sevens at the 2016 Olympics and triumphed in all seven of his professional heavyweight boxing bouts, winning the New Zealand title in 2012. — AFP

CAS reveals Manchester City ignored UEFA probe

LONDON: Manchester City showed a "blatant disregard" for UEFA's investigation into alleged Financial Fair Play (FFP) breaches, according to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), but European football's governing body failed to prove City had disguised funding from the club's owners as sponsorship income. Earlier this month, CAS overturned a two-year ban from European competitions imposed on City by UEFA and reduced a fine of 30 million euros (£27 million, \$35 million) to 10 million euros.

The full reasoned judgment by CAS released on Tuesday showed that the fine was to reflect "a severe breach" in City's unwillingness to cooperate with UEFA's investigation. But that the charges of alleged concealment of equity funding were more significant violations and that "based on the evidence the panel cannot reach the conclusion that disguised funding was paid to City."

City's fortunes on the field have been transformed since a takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family, in 2008. The club were accused of deliberately inflating the value of income from Emirati sponsors Etisalat and Etihad Airways to meet UEFA's FFP regulations, which limits the losses clubs can make to spend on player transfer fees and wages.

UEFA launched an investigation after German magazine Der Spiegel published a series of leaked emails relating to City's finances in 2018. CAS indicated that witness statements from senior City executives as well as a letter from Sheikh Mansour - all provided to CAS but not to UEFA during the first process - could have swung the original verdict in City's favor.

"The appealed decision is therefore not per se wrong but, at least to a certain extent, is a consequence of MCFC's decision to produce the most relevant evidence at its disposal only in the present appeal proceedings before CAS," said the court. The judgment also found that UEFA's case was hampered by the necessity to finalize the appeal before the start of the 2020/2021 Champions League as it relinquished a request for more evidence to be provided from City's emails.

"UEFA's approach in this regard is understood, because it was faced with a dilemma between trying to obtain additional evidence and having an award issued before the start of the 2020/2021 UEFA club competitions season," added the CAS panel. Nine Premier League clubs—Arsenal, Burnley, Chelsea, Leicester, Liverpool, Man United, Newcastle, Tottenham and Wolves—filed an application to UEFA for City not to be allowed to compete in European competition if a verdict was not reached before the start of the 2020/21 season. — AFP

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Inter stay second in Serie A final push

Lazio fourth, will play Brescia

MILAN: Inter Milan eased past Napoli 2-0 to hold on to second place in Serie A on Tuesday ahead of Atalanta who earlier fought back to beat Parma.

Juventus have already sealed their ninth straight league title, but three teams are fighting for second spot — Inter Milan, Atalanta and Lazio — going into the last round of matches in Italy. Antonio Conte's Inter have a one-point lead on Atalanta with the two teams set to go head to head in their final match this season on Saturday.

Lazio, in fourth, will play Brescia later, with Simone Inzaghi's side also still in with a chance of finishing second, with their final game against Napoli at the weekend.

Daniilo D'Ambrosio put Inter ahead after 11 minutes at the San Siro with Lautaro Martinez adding a second with 15 minutes to go against seventh-placed Napoli. Gennaro Gattuso admitted Napoli would need to find goal-scoring solutions before they face Barcelona in the Champions League last 16 on August 8.

"We have to work, we're lacking a bit of soul," said Gattuso, whose side have nothing to play for in the league as they are already assured a place in the Europa League as a result of the Italian Cup win.

"After the Italian Cup we've performed well but don't have the knife between our teeth. Against Barcelona it will be a different story."

Atalanta reacted well after a difficult start in Parma, with Ruslan Malinovskyi and Papu Gomez's second-half goals sealing a 2-1 victory.

"That was probably our worst first half of the season," said coach Gian Piero Gasperini.

"After 12 matches at this rhythm, there could be drop in pace but if we come back as good in the second half, it's because we're in form."

The Bergamo club's former Swedish midfielder Dejan Kulusevski had opened the scoring for mid-table Parma just before the break.

But Malinovskyi sent in a free-kick with 20 minutes to go, and Gomez

grabbed the winner six minutes from time as Atalanta warmed up for next month's Champions League quarter-final against Paris Saint-Germain.

Gasperini's side are already assured of Champions League football next season and are targeting a club-best second-place finish in the league.

Parma dominated early at home with Kulusevski, on loan from Juventus, putting the hosts ahead two minutes before the break.

Ivorian Gervinho broke through from midfield, sending the ball forward for 20-year-old Kulusevski who fired in for his third goal in as many matches.

Atalanta struggled after losing defender Jose Luis Palomino who pulled up injured and could be in doubt against PSG.

But Malinovskyi finally got the equaliser with his free-kick passing through the Parma wall, and captain Gomez rifled in the winner to extend his side's unbeaten league run to 17 games, with the club's 98th league goal this season. —AFP



MILAN: Napoli's German midfielder Diego Demme (R) jumps for the ball past Napoli's Polish defender Piotr Zielinski during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Napoli played behind closed doors at the San Siro Stadium in Milan. —AFP

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Wishing you
a peaceful
and blessed
Eid Al-Adha

