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Millions face Easter under virus curbs as cases surge

Philippines extends lockdown in economic hub • US logs 100m vaccinations



PESHAWAR: A water cannon is used to disinfect St John's Cathedral Church as a preventive measure against COVID-19 on the eve of Easter yesterday. — AFP

ROME: Millions of Christians around the world were yesterday facing another Easter weekend under restrictions because of coronavirus surges, but there was good news from the hard-hit United States as it crossed the milestone of 100 million vaccinations. There have been worrying spikes in infections in many parts of the world, even as vaccine rollouts gather pace, forcing the reimposition of deeply unpopular restrictions. Kuwait yesterday reported 1,235 new COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths, taking total cases to 235,989 and deaths to 1,339.

Italy began a strict Easter lockdown yesterday, with the entire country considered a high-risk "red zone" during a time when families usually hold reunions. At the Vatican on Good Friday, a handful of onlookers caught a glimpse of Pope Francis presiding over the "Way of the Cross" ceremony in an empty St Peter's Square, with restrictions preventing large gatherings for a second year in a row.

New curbs were also coming into force yesterday in France, where authorities are scrambling to deal with a dramatic rise in cases that has overwhelmed hospitals in Paris. Restrictions had been already intensified in other European nations such as

Belgium. In Germany, the government scrapped plans for a strict Easter lockdown, but Chancellor Angela Merkel urged people to limit their social contacts ahead of the break. Across the Atlantic, fresh curbs were also imposed ahead of Easter in Ontario and Quebec, Canada's two most populous provinces.

And in the Philippines, a lockdown affecting more than 24 million people was being extended for another week as authorities deploy tents and health workers to overwhelmed hospitals. People in Metro Manila - the national capital region - and four neighboring provinces will have to stay home for another week unless they are essential workers, presidential spokesman Harry Roque said. The announcement came as the number of new infections for a single day hit a record high of 12,576, taking the country's caseload to more than 784,000, including over 13,400 deaths.

But there was a step towards normalcy in Jerusalem's Old City, where a lockdown dampened Easter last year. There was a modest crowd this year as most major sites opened thanks to Israel's successful vaccine rollout.

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News in brief

Bahrain to release 126 prisoners

DUBAI: Bahrain announced Friday it would allow more than 100 inmates to serve the balance of their jail time out of prison. The public prosecution said in a statement that 126 prisoners would serve the remainder of their sentences in an "alternative" or non-custodial setting, adding that the convicts would be monitored electronically. Bahraini authorities said last week that three people at the kingdom's Jaw prison were infected with COVID-19. — AFP

Ties with Israel 'beneficial'

RIYADH: Normalization with Israel would bring "tremendous benefit" to the region, the Saudi foreign minister has said, but such an accord with the kingdom would depend on progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. "It would be extremely helpful both economically but also socially and from a security perspective," Prince Faisal bin Farhan said Thursday during an interview with CNN. — AFP

Medical expertise for oil

BEIRUT: Officials from Beirut and Baghdad signed a preliminary agreement Friday that would see Lebanon trade its medical expertise for Iraqi fuel supplies, Lebanese state media reported. Lebanon's state-run electricity company faces dire cash shortages, while oil-rich Iraq suffers from a chronic lack of drugs and medical care. Under the accord, inked in Beirut, Lebanon would receive 500,000 tons of Iraqi oil annually, or a sixth of its needs. — AFP

Tendulkar hospitalized

MUMBAI: The cricket world united to send support to Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar after he announced that he was hospitalized Friday as a precautionary measure to combat the coronavirus. The 47-year-old "little master" of batting is one of the most high-profile cases of a new pandemic surge in the country of 1.3 billion people. "As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalized," Tendulkar said on Twitter. "I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone." — AFP

Officer killed in US Capitol car ramming

WASHINGTON: A US Capitol police officer was killed and a second injured Friday after a vehicle rammed through security and crashed into a barrier at the Washington complex, forcing it into lockdown less than three months after a mob assault on Congress. Capitol Police shot dead the driver after he jumped out of the car and lunged at them with a knife, Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman told reporters.

President Joe Biden, who was with first lady Jill Biden at Camp David for

the Easter holiday, offered his "heartfelt condolences" to the family of William Evans, the veteran policeman killed in the attack. "Jill and I were heartbroken to learn of the violent attack at a security checkpoint on the US Capitol grounds," Biden said in a statement.

US media said officials had identified the attacker as Noah Green, a 25-year-old black man from Indiana and an adherent of the black nationalist Nation of Islam movement. Pittman said there was no immediate indication of his motivation or police file on him. "It does not appear to be terrorism-related, but obviously we will continue to investigate," Washington Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee added.

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WASHINGTON: Law enforcement investigate the scene after a vehicle charged a barricade at the US Capitol on Friday. — AFP

US lifts Trump sanctions on ICC prosecutor

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Friday revoked sanctions imposed by Donald Trump on the top prosecutor of the International Criminal Court as the new administration seeks a more cooperative

approach, resolving an intense disagreement with European allies. Former secretary of state Mike Pompeo last year denounced the "kangaroo court" in The Hague and imposed both financial sanctions and a US visa ban on its Gambian-born chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda.

Pompeo acted after she launched an investigation into alleged war crimes by US military personnel in Afghanistan. The court in The Hague further annoyed the United States by opening an investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories by Israel, a US ally which rejects the authority

of the court. Biden said the United States still has concerns with the ICC. But "the threat and imposition of financial sanctions against the Court, its personnel, and those who assist it are not an effective or appropriate strategy", he said in a statement.

Pompeo's successor, Antony Blinken, said the United States continued to "disagree strongly" with the moves on Afghanistan and Israel. "We believe, however, that our concerns about these cases would be better addressed through engagement with all stakeholders in the ICC process rather than through

Continued on Page 2

Qatar climber in quest for 'Grand Slam'

KATHMANDU: A Qatari royal is set to scale Everest, as she chases her dream of becoming the first woman from the Middle East to complete the Explorers Grand Slam of summiting each continent's highest peaks and reaching the poles. Sheikha Asma Al-Thani, a mountaineer and member of the Qatar Olympic Committee, arrived in Nepal's capital Kathmandu on Thursday and is prepared to head to Everest base camp.

She is expected to attempt to ascend the 8,848-m mountain in mid-May, depending on local conditions. If she succeeds, she will become the first woman from Qatar to summit the world's tallest mountain. Sheikha Asma first dreamt of

reaching the skies in 2003 when she was just 14, writing "climbing mountains" on her wish list. At that time, no woman from the Gulf region had reached Everest's summit.

Years later as she set out on conquering each peak to achieve the Slam, Sheikha Asma was questioned about her abilities - from being able to climb to carrying mountaineering gear - because she was a woman. "These are the stereotypes people have with women and for me, it's the idea that no matter what, we can achieve our dreams," she told AFP.

The 31-year-old began her journey as a mountaineer in 2014 by summiting Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak. She has since climbed Argentina's Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Americas, and skied to the North Pole. Sheikha Asma hopes her feats will inspire other female climbers to follow in her footsteps. "For me, my dream would be that I'm no longer the first woman of Qatar," she said. "But not only mountains but achieving their goals. It would make me

feel very, very happy."

Nepal has reopened its borders, but mountaineers must quarantine until they test negative for COVID-19. The country has so far issued 151 permits for various Himalayan mountains, including 72 for Everest. Authorities expect around 300 foreign climbers to attempt to summit the world's highest mountain this spring season.

The Tibetan part of Everest continues to be closed to foreigners this year, possibly adding more climbers on the Nepal side. Before the pandemic, Nepal was struggling to cope with the large number of people summiting Everest. Some 11 climbers died on the mountain in 2019, with at least four blamed on overcrowding. — AFP



Qatari climber Sheikha Asma Al-Thani. — AFP

Local

Kuwait welcomes OPEC+ deal, stresses continued cooperation

Kuwait's quota rises by 29,000 bpd in May and June each

KUWAIT: Minister of Oil Mohammad Al-Fares extolled the successful meeting of OPEC+, affirming the importance of continuing cooperation to restore market balance. The positive developments of the last period contributed to a noticeable improvement in oil market situation that reflected on expectations to improve demands in light of the spread of coronavirus and distribution of vaccines, Al-Fares, who also doubles as Minister of Higher Education, said in a statement carried by the Ministry of Oil on Thursday. Based on this development, OPEC+ ministers agreed on moving forward with a gradual increase of output with 350,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May and June each, and 440,000 bpd in July, he noted.

Kuwait's quota of this rise is 29,000 bpd in May and June each, and 38,000 bpd in July, he revealed. Saudi Arabia will gradually increase its output with 250,000 bpd in May, 350,000 in June and 400,000 in July, he said. The minister underlined the importance of abiding by the specific quotas stipulated in the deal. The next OPEC+ meeting will be held on April 28 to review the effect of the deal and market situation in the upcoming period, he pointed out.

Positive contributions

The 15th meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC ministers took place via videoconference on Thursday, under the chairmanship of Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, and Co-Chair

Alexander Novak, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, and decided to raise output as of May. The meeting emphasized the ongoing positive contributions of the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) in supporting a rebalancing of the global oil market, said a statement by the OPEC secretariat. These outcomes are in line with the historic decisions taken at the 10th (Extraordinary) OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting on 12 April, 2020 to adjust downwards overall crude oil production, and subsequent decisions, it added.

The ministers noted, with gratitude, the value of the prudent policy approach by Saudi Arabia of maintaining its additional voluntary adjustments of 1 mb/d in April 2021 for third month in a row. The meeting approved the adjustment of the production levels for May, June and July 2021, while continuing to adhere to the mechanism agreed upon in the 12th OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting (December 2020) to hold monthly OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meetings to assess market conditions and decide on production level adjustments for the following month, with every adjustment being no more than 0.5 mb/d, it noted. The ministers reviewed the monthly report prepared by the Joint Technical Committee (JTC), including the crude oil production data for February. They recognized the improvements in the market supported by global vaccination programs and stimulus packages in key economies but noted that the volatility observed in recent weeks warrants a con-

tinued cautious and vigilant approach in monitoring market developments. The meeting observed that in February, oil stocks in OECD countries fell for the seventh consecutive month, but still remained above the 2015-2019 average, it stated. The meeting welcomed the positive performance of participating countries. Overall conformity reached 115 per cent in February 2021, reinforcing the trend of aggregate high conformity by participating countries, it pointed out.

The ministers noted that since the April 2020 meeting, OPEC and non-OPEC Participating Countries in the DoC had contributed to adjusting downward global oil supply by 2.6 billion barrels of oil by the end of February 2021, which has accelerated the rebalancing of the oil market. The ministers expressed their thanks to those countries that have submitted plans for previous compensation shortfalls and continue to work towards compensating for overproduced volumes, it said. They urged all participants to achieve full conformity to reach the objective of market rebalancing and avoid undue delay in the process. In this regard, the ministers agreed to the request by several countries that have not yet completed their compensation for an extension of the compensation period until the end of September 2021.

Outstanding volumes

The ministers agreed that participating countries with outstanding overproduced



volumes will submit their plans for implementation of any required compensation for overproduced volumes to the OPEC Secretariat by April 15, 2021. The meeting commended Saudi Arabia for its recently announced "Saudi Green Initiative" and "Middle East Green Initiative" as important contributions to global efforts to combat climate change, and welcomed Saudi Arabia's commitment to transfer knowledge and share experiences as part of these initiatives, it elaborated.

The oil and gas industry can be part of the solution to climate change. OPEC possesses critical resources and expertise that can help meet the challenge of reducing global greenhouse

gas emissions. The group will explore ways to enhance collaboration in this important area. G20 Leaders have already endorsed the strategy advanced by Saudi Arabia to deal with climate change - the Circular Carbon Economy and its 4Rs - reduce, reuse, recycle, and remove - as an inclusive and balanced solution for dealing with greenhouse gas emissions. The ministers thanked the JTC and the OPEC Secretariat for their contributions to the meeting. The next meetings of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) and OPEC and non-OPEC Ministers are scheduled for April 28, 2021, it said. — KUNA



KUWAIT: One million square meters of asphalt has been applied on roads around the country since the curfew started on March 7, the Ministry of Public Works announced. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Officer killed in US Capitol...

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Green had graduated from Christopher Newport University in Virginia, where he played football, with a degree in finance in 2019, the school confirmed. Some of his online postings in March suggested a level of despair and paranoia. He said he was unemployed and had health problems, and made references to biblical concepts of the end of times. He wrote that he had faced "unimaginable tests" and was "in search of a spiritual journey".

In one post he spoke of being tormented by the FBI and CIA, hospitalized and subjected to "mind control," and called the government "the #1 enemy of Black people!" He also said he was a follower of Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, who promotes black nationalist, anti-white and anti-Semitic thinking. Facebook said it had removed Green's account from the social network as well as Instagram, and that it would remove "any content that praises, supports, or represents the attack or the suspect".

Top officials expressed shock over the attack and sympathy for Evans, an 18-year veteran of the force. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ordered flags lowered to half-staff on the Capitol, calling Evans "a martyr

for our democracy". "Members of Congress, staff and Capitol workers, and indeed all Americans, are united in appreciation for the courage of the US Capitol Police," she said. Biden also lowered White House flags. "We know what a difficult time this has been for the Capitol, everyone who works there, and those who protect it," he said.

The attack came with scars still raw and security tight after the January assault on Congress by hundreds of supporters of then-President Donald Trump. National Guard troops were mobilized Friday and staff at the huge Capitol complex ordered to stay away from windows and seek cover after alerts went out over the incident shortly after 1:00 pm (1700 GMT).

While Congress was in recess for the Easter holiday, text messages sent to staffers still working inside told them no one could enter or leave the building. "If you are outside, seek cover," the messages said, while television footage showed what appeared to be the attacked officers being loaded onto gurneys and into ambulances. A blue sedan could be seen crashed into a security barrier on one of the streets leading to Congress.

In the Jan 6 attack, hundreds of extremist Trump-backers smashed into the Capitol building yelling threats against politicians and shutting down the legislature. One Capitol Police officer died as a result of the attack, as well as four other individuals who took part or were nearby. Since then security officials have said there is an ongoing threat from extreme-right groups and Trump supporters. — AFP

Millions face Easter under...

Continued from Page 1

The pandemic has claimed more than 2.8 million lives worldwide. But the United States, the hardest-hit nation, became the first country to administer at least one shot to more than 100 million people - around half of its adult population. President Joe Biden has vowed to cover the vast majority within weeks. But infections remain on the rise in parts of the US, and Biden urged Americans to keep wearing masks and taking other precautions.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guidance to say that fully vaccinated people

can travel without observing quarantines, although they should still wear masks. Vaccination campaigns have struggled to gain steam in much of Europe due to supply issues.

One of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks is devastating Brazil, which has reported more deaths than any country after the United States. It is the epicenter of an unfolding crisis in Latin America, where infections have soared past 25 million, likely fueled by a more contagious variant first detected in Brazil. The devastation in Brazil has frightened neighbors already battling their own surging caseloads.

Peru has gone into an Easter lockdown, Chile has closed all borders, Ecuador announced fresh restrictions and Bolivia sealed its border with Brazil. Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez announced late Friday that he had tested positive. He had received the two-shot Sputnik V vaccine from Russia. The president, who turned 62 on Friday, was in isolation as a precaution but said he was "physically well". — AFP

US lifts Trump sanctions on...

Continued from Page 1

the imposition of sanctions," Blinken said in a statement. Biden revoked an executive order by Trump on the sanctions, also lifting sanctions against senior ICC official Phakiso Mochoko and visa bans on other court staff. Bensouda is leaving her job in June and will be

replaced by British human rights lawyer Karim Khan, who now can open his work without the burden of looming sanctions. Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi, the head of the Association of States Parties to the ICC, voiced hope that the decision "signals the start of a new phase of our common undertaking to fight against impunity" for war crimes.

France, which like other European allies had been aghast by the last administration's move, hailed the reversal and pledged support for the ICC. "This decision is excellent news for all who are committed to the fight against impunity, for multilateralism and for an international order founded on the rule of law," Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said. — AFP

Local

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed to deliver food from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to Fajr, Maghreb and Isha prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government later allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day after a one-month closure but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit www.moci.shop, enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swabs and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

Omariya Co-op
WhatsApp 6041-0067

Farwaniya Co-op
WhatsApp 6767-8211

Qairawan Co-op
WhatsApp 9000-3749

Jahra Co-op
WhatsApp 5160-2458

Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-6338

Nuzha Co-op
WhatsApp 9784-5531

Khaitan Co-op
WhatsApp 6777-9745

Ardhiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6902-0779

Rabiya Co-op
WhatsApp 2438-8316

Wafra Farm Co-op
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085

Salmiya Co-op
Tel: 22253225

Jabriya Co-op
Tel: 1805-353
WhatsApp 6566-6084

Rawdha & Hawally
WhatsApp 9662-2883

Shaab Co-op
WhatsApp 9090-4455

Wafra Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-0539

Keifan Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-1719

Rehab Co-op
WhatsApp 9222-2358

Mishref Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-9900

Faiha Co-op
Tel: 1861-000
WhatsApp 9098-6000

Rumaihiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045

Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500

Fahaheel Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-9951

Adan & Qusour Co-op
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975

Salam Co-op
WhatsApp 9788-7832

Police man checkpoints during curfew in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti policemen control traffic at checkpoints on the Fourth Ring Road and King Faisal Road during a curfew imposed by the authorities in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus over the weekend. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Authority penalizes violators of COVID measures

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower said its inspectors registered several violations of the coronavirus safety procedures in markets and stores in the industrial area of Al-Rai on Thursday. In a press statement, head of the inspection team Fatma Al-Julaibi said the violations included not wearing masks or putting markers on the floor for social distancing. She added that the team made about 46,000 visits to different locations from June 30, 2020 to February 26, 2021, issuing 12,410 warnings and fining 80 places. The women team also went on 28,000 visits, issuing 4,400 warnings to avoid a fine, fining 444 places and shutting four

others. Meanwhile, judicial officer at the authority Saqer Al-Otaibi said the teams also inspected the markets' commitment to providing hand sanitizers and checking visitors and workers' temperature.

Kuwait had on Friday reported 1,233 new coronavirus infections, raising the total to 234,754, while eight more fatalities upped its death toll from the outbreak to 1,327, the health ministry said. Some 1,384 people had recovered from the virus over the same period to take the total to 219,257, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He added that the number of people hospitalized with the virus stood Friday at 14,170, with 241 of them needing critical care. He revealed that some 9,450 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the total to 2,075,498, while the positive case to test ratio was 13 percent. He went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, in order to halt the spread of the virus. — KUNA

Man arrested with 2 kg of narcotics

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of an Arab man with two kilograms of marijuana. The ministry's General Directorate of Drug Control received information of the person possessing the narcotics for the purposes of using and dealing, the ministry's security media and public relations department said in a statement. A permission from the public prosecution was obtained and the man was arrested, while the quantity was confiscated, it added. The person admitted his crime during investigation, it noted. Therefore, the concerned body will take legal measures against him. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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News in brief

Diwan mourns Sheikha Munira

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan on Friday mourned death of Sheikha Munira Saud Al-Jaber Al-Fadhel Al-Sabah who passed away at the age of 73. The deceased was laid to rest yesterday. (Condolences by texting for men on the following phone number: 66445598. For Women: 99017169.) Meanwhile, in the name of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the gracious Al-Sabah Family, the Amiri Diwan expresses gratitude to citizens and residents of Kuwait who have extended condolences on the demise of Sheikha Nouriyah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, widow of Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Bahraini speaker hails ties

MANAMA: Speaker of the Bahraini Council of Representative Fawzia Zainal affirmed the depth of Kuwaiti-Bahraini relations in all fields. This came while Zainal's reception of Deputy Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) said. Zainal said these ties mirror historical and fraternal deep-rooted bonds under the leaderships of Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Issa Al-Khalifa and His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Zainal has also extolled joint parliamentary cooperation with Kuwait's National Assembly, and coordination in regional and international parliamentary forums. The Bahraini top lawmaker noted that this strengthens the role of Gulf parliamentary diplomacy, and sharing experiences and visits between MPs and secretariats of both parliaments. Meanwhile, Shuhoumi voiced pride over bilateral ties, commending the two leaders' care for promoting coordination and cooperation in all fields. The two sides reviewed latest parliamentary issues of common concern. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People watch as a flock of birds hover above the Gulf waters, north of Kuwait City, on Friday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Indian embassy launches two-year long celebrations

KUWAIT: Embassy of India in Kuwait organized a curtain raiser event to launch the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of independence of India on March 31.

Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Secretary (CPV & OIA), Ministry of External Affairs, India, delivered the inaugural address and launched the two-year-long celebrations, according to a press release issued by the embassy. On the occasion, the logo of the 60th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait was also released.

Indian Ambassador Shri Sibi George delivered the opening welcome remarks in which he spoke about the confluence of the twin key milestones

of India @ 75 and India-Kuwait @ 60. A special video encapsulating the spirit of the extremely close bilateral relations between India and Kuwait was screened during the event. In addition, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' was also played. The winner of the logo contest, who beautifully captured the essence of India-Kuwait partnership in his design; and Rangoli artists who created a splendid, colorful design on the festive occasion of Holi, were felicitated on the occasion.

Ashok Kalra, Advisor to Indian Business Network (IBN); Dr Susovana Sujit Nair, 'She-The Change Nari Udyami Award 2019' Awardee; Rajpal Tyagi, Pravasi Bhartiya Samman



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George delivers opening remarks during the inaugural event.

Awardee; Dr Amir Ahmed, president of the Indian Doctors Forum; and Kaizer Shakir, Chairman of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, Kuwait Chapter, also addressed the

gathering on the occasion. The event witnessed tremendous response with hundreds of people from different walks of life in Kuwait participating virtually, the release added.

China keen to boost ties with Kuwait, official says

BEIJING: China is eager to develop and promote cooperation with Kuwait on all levels, a senior Chinese official said on Friday. This can be done through resuming mutual high-level visits and boosting cooperation in economy, trade, energy and investment, as well as on people-to-people and cultural bases, the official said after talks with Kuwait's Ambassador to China. Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo member Yang Jiechi and Kuwaiti Ambassador Samih Jawhar Hayat discussed historical strategic bilateral relations, existing between the two countries, for more than 50 years. He added, "China looks strategically at relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council, and is ready to continue strengthening (this) cooperation."

The Chinese official went on to praise the wisdom, sophistication and balance of Kuwait's foreign policy, led by its leadership, and its efforts to consolidate the foundations of peace and stability in the region, according to a Kuwait Embassy statement.



BEIJING: Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo member Yang Jiechi meets Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Samih Jawhar Hayat. — KUNA

Meanwhile, Ambassador Hayat said the bilateral talks focused on strengthening cooperation, adding that both share a common aspiration to elevate this cooperation to a wider scope, in line with the directions of their leaderships. He noted to cooperation in the "political, economic, commercial, investment, cultural, scientific and academic" domains. Kuwait is greatly interested in developing friendly relations with Beijing, which have achieved positive results over the years, he added, hoping this would be "mutually beneficial" to both countries. — KUNA

NBK organizes webinar on fraud schemes

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is keen to consolidate its leading position on social media platforms and precedence in keeping pace with them since they emerged. In that context, NBK launched its account on Clubhouse social media platform, making it the first bank in Kuwait to launch an account on the new audio-chat social media app.

NBK is constantly updating the content of its social media pages, with material related to educational and media awareness campaigns. In line with that, and as part of its ongoing support to the Central Bank of Kuwait's campaign "Let's be aware", the bank organized a webinar on Clubhouse platform themed "Credit Cards and Latest Fraud Schemes".

A group of banking executives participated in this webinar including Yousef Al-Majed, Chairman of Banking Cards Committee at Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid, Assistant General Manager of Communications Department at National Bank of Kuwait, Dina Al-Bader, AGM - Card Operations at National Bank of Kuwait, and Bashar Ibrahim, Executive Manager - Cards Operations Department at National Bank of Kuwait. The webinar witnessed remarkable interaction from followers of NBK's social media pages.

On this occasion, Farah Bastaki, Senior Manager - Communications Department at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Our precedence in presence on Clubhouse platform consolidates the NBK's leading role and our strategy in relying on digital channels to deliver our social responsibilities, especially in view of the prevailing exceptional circumstances."

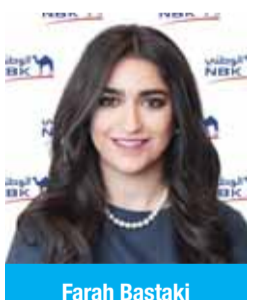
"Our approach in supporting the Central Bank's "Let's

Be Aware" initiative is ongoing through all our digital channels, ranging from publishing educational materials, awareness content to organizing events with the aim of enhancing financial knowledge among different segments of society and highlighting customers' rights," added Bastaki.

Bastaki affirmed that NBK is keen to increase customers' awareness of the innovative fraud schemes and the ways to avoid them, and to provide guidance and advice that enable them to protect their accounts from these suspicious activities. Bastaki called on the bank's customers and other segments of society to follow NBK's social media pages to benefit from the wide-range content provided on these accounts which targets all segments of followers.

The number of followers of all NBK social media pages reached 1.7 million by the end of 2020, up by 13 percent compared to last year, with 200,000 new followers during last year. The content of NBK social media pages witnessed remarkable interaction all year round, as the number of interactions grew by 8 percent annually to reach 4 million, compared to 3.7 million for last year, preserving the bank's dominant share among the social media pages of all banks.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all the initiatives and campaigns of the Central Bank of Kuwait which aim to raise financial awareness and spread the banking culture among all segments of society. As the leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region, NBK frequently organizes various activities that contribute to raising awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes a wide range of training courses for its employees to enhance their expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crimes.



Farah Bastaki

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Myanmar's rebel groups voice support for protesters as junta continues crackdowns

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Taiwan mourns deadly train disaster

Taiwan train crash survivors recount horror and loss

HUALIEN, Taiwan: Grieving relatives of those who died in Taiwan's worst rail disaster in decades held prayers at the crash site yesterday as salvage crews worked to remove the tangled mass of wrecked carriages. Officials said Friday's devastating collision, which killed at least 50 people and injured more than 170, was caused when a parked railway maintenance vehicle slipped down an embankment and onto the tracks. A train packed with as many as 500 people at the start of a long holiday weekend then hit the truck just as it entered a narrow tunnel near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.

The truck driver—who railway officials said may have failed to secure the parking brake properly—has been released on bail after being interrogated by prosecutors and is barred from leaving Taiwan pending further investigation. Around one hundred relatives held an emotional Taoist prayer ceremony near the crash site yesterday afternoon, shaded under a canopy of black umbrellas. Many wept openly as they surveyed the scene, some holding makeshift shrines inscribed with the names of those who died.

Some called out the names of their loved ones as other family members held them tight. Rescuers described an appalling scene as they rushed into the tunnel and found the front of the train pulverized into a twisted mesh of metal. "Car number eight had the most serious injuries and number of deaths," rescue worker Chang Zi-chen told reporters yesterday, referring to the most forward passenger car. "Basically more than half of the carriage was split open and bodies were all piled up together." Specialist teams spent hours extracting victims and survivors on Friday. Yesterday, focus shifted to removing carriages now blocking one half of the sole train line down Taiwan's remote and mountainous eastern coastline. Two giant cranes were being used to move the carriages and rescuers said further bodies might still be found inside the most damaged cars inside the tunnel.

'Really devastating'

The Interior Ministry ordered all flags to be lowered to half-mast for three days while President Tsai Ing-wen visited the wounded in Hualien's hospitals.

"Government agencies are making an all-out effort in the hope of minimizing the impact of the disaster so the deceased can rest in peace and the injured can recover soon," she told reporters. Friday's crash took place at the start of the Tomb Sweeping Festival, a four-day public holiday when many Taiwanese return to villages to tidy the graves of their ancestors. A French and an American national were among the foreigners killed, authorities said. The youngest victim was 4-years-old.

Survivors gave terrifying testimony of their ordeal inside the train after the crash. Many of those on board were standing in the aisles because the route was so busy with those leaving the capital Taipei and heading to their home villages. "I saw bodies and body parts all over the place, it's really devastating," a man surnamed Lo told the Apple Daily newspaper. "Humans are fragile and their lives are gone all of a sudden." Investigators are focusing on how the maintenance truck could have slipped onto the tracks. The driver was part of a team that conducts regular landslide checks on the mountainous route. Officials said he may have failed to properly engage the parking brake. Apple Daily reported that prosecutors had also raided the offices of the company contracted to do the trackside maintenance work.

Taiwan's eastern railway line is a popular tourist draw down its less populated eastern coastline. With the help of multiple tunnels and bridges, it winds its way through towering mountains and dramatic gorges before entering the picturesque Huadong Valley. Friday's crash took place near two of the most famous landmarks on the eastern shoreline—the Tarako Gorge and dramatic Qingshui Cliffs. A world-class bullet train system also serves the heavily populated western side of the island. Friday's crash looks set to be one of Taiwan's worst railway accidents on record.—AFP



HUALIEN, Taiwan: Relatives of the victims who died on the derailed train, pray at the accident site on the mountains of Hualien, eastern Taiwan yesterday. — AFP

CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

RECALL INFORMATION

Mercedes-Benz Cars
MODEL: AMG GT 4-doors Coupe (290 platform)
Model year: 2019 - 2021

RECALL REASON

Mercedes-Benz AG has found that the wheel hub covers that feature the Mercedes star may not have been manufactured in accordance with the specifications in certain AMG GT 4-door coupé (model series 290) vehicles. In this case, the catch mechanism of the wheel hub covers may not withstand the load applied during driving operation. A loss of the wheel hub covers while driving could result in a risk of injury for other road users.

REMEDY

The wheel hub covers will be replaced on the affected vehicles as a precautionary measure. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

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International

US, Iran to start indirect talks to salvage nuclear deal

Washington will not take part directly but delegation will be present

BRUSSELS, Belgium: The United States and Iran will open indirect talks next week in Vienna as the European Union spearheads efforts to bring President Joe Biden's administration back into a nuclear accord. Participants in the accord over Tehran's nuclear ambitions—including China, France, Germany, Russia, and Britain—will meet in-person on Tuesday in the Austrian capital, the European Union said after a video conference. The United States will not take part directly but, for the first time since former leader Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement in 2018, a US delegation will be present. The European Union said its mediator will hold "separate contacts" with the United States in Vienna.

The painstakingly negotiated 2015 accord saw Iran granted relief from international sanctions in exchange for accepting limits on its nuclear program aimed at easing fears it could acquire an atomic weapon. Biden has promised to rejoin the agreement on condition Iran first returns to respecting commitments it abandoned in retaliation for Trump pulling out and reimposing swingeing sanctions. Tehran says Washington has to end the sanctions before it will make any moves to get back in line, and is refusing to hold direct negotiations with the US.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif insisted the aim of the talks was to "rapidly finalize sanction-lifting and nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran

ceasing remedial measures". "No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary," he wrote on Twitter. US State Department spokesman Ned Price called the Vienna talks a "healthy step forward" and said Washington "remains open" to a direct encounter with Tehran. He cautioned that "these remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead". The deputy State Department spokeswoman, Jalina Porter, said sanctions relief steps will be "up for discussion" but declined to elaborate further.

'Substantial work ahead'

EU diplomat Enrique Mora described Friday's virtual meeting that he chaired as "positive", but warned there was much left to do to revive the deal. "Substantial work ahead for a key opportunity to bring JCPOA back to life," he tweeted, using the acronym for the nuclear deal's formal name. A senior EU official said Brussels—which acts as coordinator—hoped to see a final agreement on a US return to the deal within the next two months. The official said two groups of experts from the remaining participant countries would work simultaneously, with one focused on US sanctions and the other on rolling back Iran's breaches.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said it was "good that all the relevant actors would meet in Vienna next week". "We have no time to waste. A treaty that is fully respected once again would be a

plus for security throughout the region," he said. Russian diplomat Mikhail Ulyanov said "the impression is that we are on the right track but the way ahead will not be easy and will require intensive efforts. The stakeholders seem to be ready for that". "Possible US return to JCPOA apparently will require Washington's full compliance with the nuclear deal," he wrote on Twitter.

Creative solution?

In 2018, Trump dramatically withdrew from the pact and reimposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran. The following year, Tehran announced it would start breaking limits agreed on nuclear activity. The remaining participants in the deal have scrambled in recent years to salvage it from total collapse as Tehran has made good on its threat, while insisting it is not seeking a nuclear weapon.

Some analysts have seen Biden's hesitation at immediately removing sanctions as a way to pressure Iran—or a way to preserve political capital for other priorities as the nuclear deal remains fiercely opposed by Trump's Republican Party. Republicans quickly pounced on news of the Vienna meeting. Senator Tom Cotton, who has called in the past for attacking Iran, tweeted that the Biden administration was "so desperate to get back to a broken deal that they're giving up all their leverage and offering concession after humiliating concession."

But some observers saw the Vienna meeting as



WASHINGTON: In this file photo US State Department spokesman Ned Price speaks during a press briefing at the State Department in Washington, DC. —AFP

a way to break the logjam and return to an accord with which UN inspectors say Iran was complying before Trump trashed it. "Proximity talks are a creative solution to overcoming the current impasse," said Suzanne DiMaggio, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. —AFP

Chauvin's use of force on Floyd 'totally unnecessary'

MINNEAPOLIS: Police officer Derek Chauvin's use of force against George Floyd was "totally unnecessary," the longest-serving officer in the Minneapolis Police Department testified on Friday. Lieutenant Richard Zimmerman, giving evidence for the prosecution on the fifth day of Chauvin's murder and manslaughter trial, said the sacked 19-year veteran officer had violated department policies on the use of force. Zimmerman told prosecutor Matthew Frank that he had reviewed bystander video and police bodycam footage of Floyd's May 25, 2020 arrest by Chauvin and three other officers who are also facing charges.

Asked by Frank what he thought about the 45-year-old Chauvin's use of force against Floyd, Zimmerman said: "Totally unnecessary." "Pulling him down to the ground facedown and putting your knee on a neck for that amount of time, it's just uncalled for," he said. "I saw no reason why the officers felt they were in danger—if that's what they felt, and that's what they would have to feel—to use that kind of force," he said.

Video shows Chauvin, who is white, kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed Floyd for more than nine minutes following the arrest of the 46-year-old Black man for passing a counterfeit \$20 bill in a nearby store. Floyd's death sparked protests against racial injustice and police brutality across the United States and around the world. Prosecutors are seeking to prove that Chauvin's actions led to the death of Floyd, who was lying on his stomach, facedown in the street saying repeatedly: "I can't breathe." Eric Nelson, the former officer's defense attorney, claims Floyd died due to illegal drug use and underlying medical conditions.

'His safety is your responsibility'

A paramedic testified on Thursday that Floyd was already dead when he arrived on the scene in an ambulance and that Chauvin was still kneeling on his neck when he showed up. Zimmerman, who joined the Minneapolis Police Department in 1985 and currently heads the homicide unit, was asked by Frank if he had been trained to "kneel on the neck of someone who is handcuffed behind their back in the prone position?" "No I haven't," he said.

Once a suspect is handcuffed "that person is yours," he said. "He's your responsibility. His safety is your responsibility." "Once a person is cuffed, the threat level goes down, all the way," he said. "They're cuffed. How can they really hurt you?" Zimmerman also said that once a suspect is in handcuffs "you need to get them out of the prone position as soon as possible because it restricts their breathing." "You need to turn them on their side or have them sit up," he said.

Zimmerman's testimony came a day after that of the police sergeant who had been Chauvin's shift supervisor on the day of Floyd's arrest. David Pleoger, who has since retired, was asked by prosecutors to give his opinion about the use of force in Floyd's arrest.

"When Mr. Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers they could have ended their restraint," Pleoger said. Derek Smith, a paramedic, testified on Thursday that Chauvin and other police officers were still on top of Floyd when he and a fellow paramedic arrived on the scene. Smith said he checked the carotid artery in Floyd's neck to see if he had a pulse. "I did not feel one," he said. "In lay terms, I thought he was dead." —AFP

Florida prohibits vaccine passports, citing 'freedom'

MIAMI: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis on Friday banned the use of "vaccine passports" in the southeastern US state, citing "individual freedom." The Republican governor's executive order prohibits government offices from issuing any "standardized documentation" certifying that an individual has been immunized against COVID-19. It also prohibits private companies in Florida from requiring any type of document from their customers certifying their vaccination, or immunity after they have recovered from the coronavirus.

The order by DeSantis, an ardent supporter of former president Donald Trump who is seen as a future potential presidential candidate, argues that "so-called COVID-19 vaccine passports reduce

individual freedom and will harm patient privacy." Earlier this week DeSantis said such requirements imposed by the government on the private sector would be "unacceptable." "You want to go to a movie theater. Should you have to show that? No. You want to go to a game? No. You want to go to a theme park? No. We're not supportive of that," he told a press conference on Monday.

The order came after The Washington Post reported that President Joe Biden's administration is developing its own guidelines for such passports as it seeks to lift pandemic restrictions in the United States. Such a document is also being discussed internationally as part of a bid to revive travel and tourism.

China launched a system of passports in March, with citizens able to download the new certificates and use them to enter and leave the country. It is not mandatory and is only available to Chinese citizens. The European Union is also set to propose rules for a vaccine digital "green pass" allowing people to move safely around the bloc or abroad. In Florida, a state of 21 million people which is economically dependent on tourism, nearly six million



MIAMI: In this file photo Florida Governor Ron DeSantis arrives at the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse and Museum for a campaign event with US President Donald Trump in Jupiter, Florida. —AFP

have now received at least one vaccine dose. As of Monday, vaccinations will be available to all the state's adult population. —AFP

For migrants, arduous US journey ends with sigh of relief on a plane

MCALLEN, United States: It will be the first time on a plane for most of the undocumented families that arrive daily at the McAllen, Texas airport, holding envelopes that read "Please help me, I don't speak English." The envelopes are not passports per se, but might as well be: Inside are the families' boarding passes and negative COVID tests—everything they need to continue onward on their long journeys fleeing their home countries. After risking their lives to travel hundreds of miles (kilometers) by bus, car, trailer and on foot, trekking dangerous routes controlled by drug traffickers, and crossing the Rio Grande River, they have finally arrived in the United States.

Everything is new for the dozens of families who come to the airport daily and mostly hail from rural areas: English, airplanes and even the escalator are novelties. At least for the moment the sky is quite literally the limit as they wait to board their planes

to go stay with relatives ahead of their immigration court dates.

'There was no other option'

"We're flying in the clouds!" shouts four-year-old Isaac from Honduras, nose pressed to the window, as the plane takes off from the southeast Texas border city. "I want to touch them." His mother, Lidia, is on the final stretch of her long journey to reunite with her husband and eldest son, age six, whom she has not seen in two years. "It will be the happiest moment of my life to see my son again," the 23-year-old said as she waited near the boarding gate to Houston for the first leg of their flight. "We had to separate to find a better future for our children. There was no other option," she said, citing hunger, poverty and violence in Honduras.

Her husband will not be at the Newark airport to pick her up—he is undocumented and fears arrest, so will send a friend to retrieve his family.



NEW YORK: Samuel and his son Daniel from Honduras embrace as his wife Dania watches at LaGuardia airport in New York, after being separated for months. —AFP

Lidia and her son were detained by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents after crossing the Rio Grande near McAllen. Like other immigrants, she was held for several days while they took her fingerprints and recorded her contact information, before being taken for a COVID-19 test.

Then, like many families, she was released. She and her son walked to a Catholic shelter, the Humanitarian

Respite Center, where she waited for her husband to send the plane tickets—with the shelter providing the envelopes that migrants take to the airport. Within the next 60 days she is required to report to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office near her final destination for her hearing "or face removal from the US," according to a document border agents provided her. —AFP

Shadow of murderous brothers hangs over Libyan town

TARHUNA, Libya: "They spared no child, no woman, no old man," said Mohamed Amer, mourning those murdered during a reign of terror by six brothers who ruled a Libyan town with bloodshed. "I am the father of the martyr Moaid, killed in cold blood by the criminal gang of Kaniyat," said Amer, a silver-haired father in his fifties. The Kaniyat were a gang of six brothers who commanded a militia that traumatized the town of Tarhuna in war-ravaged Libya, systematically executing not only their opponents but slaughtering their entire families. Those they did not kill they cowed into submission.

The brothers paraded through the town in shows of force—with a pair of leashed lions roaring at the crowd. Libya has been ravaged by conflict since the fall and killing of veteran dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-backed 2011 revolt, and an array of armed groups and militia forces arose to fill the vacuum. In Tarhuna, it was the Al-Kani militia, also known as the Kaniyat, who took power in 2015.

Hundreds missing

Now the brothers are gone, toppled from power



TARHUNA, Libya: Libyans take part in a funeral procession for 12 bodies that were identified from mass graves found in Tarhuna town, 80km southeast of the capital. —AFP

last year, but their shadow still hangs over the town. After their ousting, digging began to exhume the corpses of the people they butchered. Multiple mass graves have been unearthed in the farming town some 80 kilometers southeast of the capital Tripoli. Some bodies were found blindfolded with their wrists tied. Amer, like many of the dusty town's

residents, prays for the latest bodies dug up. Near a mosque, where a line of 10 ambulances are parked on an avenue of palm trees, posters on the wall bear the images of the "martyrs" of Tarhuna. Some of the posters are of small children. The last conveyer took away 13 bodies. "Most of Tarhuna's sons are in the soil," Amer said. —AFP

International

Myanmar's rebel groups voice support for protesters as junta continues crackdowns

Rebel group says more than 12,000 displaced by Myanmar junta air strikes

YANGON: Ten of Myanmar's major rebel groups threw their support behind the country's anti-coup movement yesterday, fanning fears that a broader conflict could erupt in a country plagued for decades by on-and-off fighting between the military and the ethnic armies. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power on February 1, triggering an uprising that the junta has sought to quell with deadly crackdowns. According to a local monitoring group, more than 550 people have been killed in the anti-coup unrest, bloodshed that has angered some of Myanmar's 20 or so ethnic groups and their militias, who control large areas of territory mostly in border regions. Yesterday, 10 of these rebel groups met virtually to discuss the situation, condemning the junta's use of live ammunition on protesters. "The leaders of the military council must be held accountable," said General Yawd Serk, leader of rebel group the Restoration Council of Shan State. Last week, the junta declared a month-long ceasefire with ethnic armed groups, though exceptions might be made if "security and administrative machinery of the government... are encroached on". The announcement did not encompass stopping lethal force against anti-coup demonstrations.

But Yawd Serk said the ceasefire means security forces should halt "all violent actions", including against protesters. The 10 rebel groups that met online are signatories to a nationwide ceasefire agreement that was brokered by Suu Kyi's government, which attempted to negotiate an end to the ethnic militias' decades-long armed struggle for greater autonomy. But distrust runs deep for the ethnic minorities of Myanmar, and Yawd Serk said the 10 signatories to the nationwide ceasefire would "review" the deal during their meeting.

"I would like to state that the (10 groups) firmly stand with the people who are... demanding the end of dictatorship," he said. Last week, a UN special envoy on Myanmar warned the Security Council of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath".

'No reason for conflict'

The rebel groups' meeting also comes a week after one of them, the Karen National Union (KNU), seized a



YANGON: A protester makes the three-finger salute as other make noise by hitting metal objects and singing revolutionary songs during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon's Ahlone township yesterday. — AFP

military base in eastern Karen state, killing 10 army officers. The junta retaliated with air strikes. The KNU has been a vocal opponent of the military junta and said it is sheltering hundreds of anti-coup activists. Yesterday, it condemned the military's use of "excessive force by engaging in non-stop bombing and air strikes" from March 27 - 30, which have "caused the deaths of many people including children".

"The air strikes have also led to the further displacement of more than 12,000 people," it said. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said the military has only been targeting KNU's 5th Brigade—which led the seizure of the military base. "We had an air strike on that day only," he told AFP. "We have signed a nationwide ceasefire agreement... If they follow the NCA, there is no reason for conflict to happen," Zaw Min Tun said. Ethnic Karen local media and rights groups have reported multiple bombings and air strikes across the

state over recent days. With the junta cutting wifi services, mobile data and imposing a nightly internet blackout that has gone on for nearly 50 days, information flow in the country has been effectively throttled. "This madness must stop," UN rights rapporteur Tom Andrews in a tweet. "Sanctions & an arms embargo must be imposed to cut their [the junta's] access to revenue and weapons." At least two cities saw security forces violently crack down before yesterday noon. In eastern Mon state, a man was shot in the stomach and died on his way to the hospital. "He was trying to help our young protesters," a fellow protester told AFP. Demonstrators in Yangon, Mandalay and the central city Monywa continued yesterday to come out, wearing helmets and using sandbags as barricades as they faced off against authorities. But "two were shot in the head," said a rescue worker in Monywa who had to pick up the bodies. —AFP

A decade on, women recount horrors of Ivory Coast massacres

ABIDJAN: Odette Klahon took the witness stand, her burgundy red wrap a sign of mourning, then recounted the violence a decade ago that left her without her husband, her grandson and her left hand. "In the Carrefour neighborhood, they didn't waste any time, breaking down doors, looking for able-bodied men," the woman in her 60s said Thursday with the help of a translator, describing where she lived in the city of Duekoue in western Ivory Coast. "It was during those troubles that my husband was arrested and executed in front of me."

She went on to describe how her "executioner" overcame her resistance to taking her four-year-old grandson, knocking the boy unconscious with a piece of wood and shooting Klahon's hand. "My grandson died on the spot and I was able to flee to find safety with the town's Catholic mission, my hand in blood and crossing bodies," she said, adding that her hand was later amputated. Klahon's testimony came in the trial of former militia chief Amade Oueremi, in the dock over massacres carried out in Duekoue in 2011 in the wake of the country's disputed presidential election.

Duekoue was the scene of the region's worst massacres during a post-election crisis in 2010-2011. Known as "The Lord", the 57-year-old's trial began on March 24 in an Abidjan court on accusations of mass murder. He faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. Oueremi was head of a militia that fought against rival groups and forces loyal to ex-president Laurent



ABIDJAN: Amade Oueremi (right), a former warlord accused of mass killings in western Ivory Coast in 2011, arrives under police escort at the high court for his trial in Abidjan. — AFP

Gbagbo and says they were acting in self-defense. The accusations particularly involve violence on March 28, 2011 in Duekoue's Carrefour neighborhood, where 817 people were killed in one day, according to the Red Cross. The United Nations has put the toll at 300.

Gbagbo was eventually forced out of office after refusing to accept his defeat by the current president, Alassane Ouattara. The months-long conflict claimed some 3,000 lives and split the country along north-south lines. The former president was tried at the International Criminal Court but acquitted—a decision upheld on March 31, paving the way for Gbagbo to return to his home country. Meanwhile, Oueremi awaits his fate in Abidjan. Another witness in his trial, Myriam Koukade, spoke of the horror she faced. "We heard gunfire everywhere," she said. "We were among 40 people in our house to take shelter from the shooting." The next morning, on March 29, 2011, "they began to enter the houses looking for men and making threats: 'We're going to kill your husbands and leave with you. You will be our wives.'" —AFP



MAE SAM LAEP, Thailand: Hkara, an ethnic Karen resident in Mae Sam Laep town, walks alongside the Salween river in Mae Hong Son province. — AFP

Fresh Myanmar conflict keeps Thai village on edge

THAILAND: A sleepy village in remote northern Thailand became a hub of activity this week when it received refugees fleeing Myanmar—a sight that brought back vivid memories for its ethnic Karen residents. Hkara, 70, said she had spent roughly 30 years crisscrossing the Salween river, which marks the frontier, to flee military attacks on ethnic rebel armies in Myanmar's eastern Karen state. She decided to settle in the Thai village of Mae Sam Laep village two decades ago—a safer bet than Myanmar, then still under full military rule, which lasted nearly 50 years. "I also came from the other side—I feel very bad for them, I am so sad," she told AFP.

Since the weekend, the Myanmar military has launched near-daily airstrikes in Karen state, targeting strongholds of the Karen National Union (KNU) — the first such attacks in the area in 20 years. Around 7,000 people fled their villages—about half of them hopped up in the jungle and around 3,000 crossed the river into Thailand. Thai authorities returned most of them—while insisting they went voluntarily—but a handful stayed to get medical treatment for shrapnel wounds in a tiny local hospital.

The air campaign has left Hkara glued to her phone following the news. "I knew (the attacks) would happen because of my experience," she told AFP, adding that she had pleaded two weeks ago with family remaining in Karen to move away from the targeted areas.

Air strikes

The KNU is one of Myanmar's largest ethnic armed groups and has been fighting the military on and off for decades. It has been critical of the February 1 military coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and of the generals' bloody crackdown on protests, which has left more than 500 civilians dead. The KNU has sheltered hundreds of anti-junta protesters in the territory it controls, and over the weekend seized a military base—triggering the air strikes in response.

Karen rights groups have accused Thailand of forcing the refugees to go back to Myanmar—something the Thai authorities strongly deny. Declining to be drawn on whether the refugees had returned on their own accord, Mae Sam Laep resident Tamu Nochi—also ethnic Karen—said simply that he sympathized with them. "If the Myanmar military is truly the good guy, then these refugees wouldn't have to leave their homes in the first place," he told AFP. The 75-year-old also fled Karen state 30 years ago, and today runs a small grocery store in Mae Sam Laep's only stretch of road with shops. —AFP

30th independence anniversary: Overview of Kazakhstan's key achievements

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence. During this period, the country has undergone transformations in all spheres of life. One of the most significant achievements of the country is the policy in the field of interethnic relations, laid down by First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The ethno-confessional policy of the country is of particular importance in the context of polyethnicity and the confessional heterogeneity of Kazakh society. According to the Kazakh Committee on Statistics, at the beginning of January 2020, Kazakhs accounted for 68.5 percent and other ethnic groups for 31.5 percent of the population. In this context, the preservation of interethnic harmony and the formation of civil identity are basic conditions essential for the country.

The key ideas of ethnopolitics were formulated at the dawn of independence of Kazakhstan in May 1993 by Nazarbayev. They are based on the preservation of interethnic harmony, ethnic diversity, equality of citizens regardless of ethnic affiliation as well as instruction in proper patriotism. It was emphasized that patriotic education implies the formation of a clear self-determination and self-identification for each citizen.

In the article "Plan of the Nation - The Path to the Kazakh Dream" published in 2016, Nazarbayev reiterated that our path is a path of unity and consistent formation of a nation based on a civic identity. Nazarbayev said: "Our aim is to strengthen the common identity and unity of our country via development of Kazakhstan's society on the principles of united citizenship and the national values incorporated in the Manglik El (Eternal Nation) on the basis of consolidating our achievements

since obtaining independence."

Thus, the most important element of Kazakhstan's policy in the field of interethnic relations is unity through diversity. Moreover, Nazarbayev emphasized that "100 Kazakh ethnic groups have at least 100 special and unique features, which give a unique advantage to our united nation." A unique institution, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK), is also called upon to support and promote interethnic harmony. Today, the importance of the APK's activities is also increasing due to the growing importance of the regulation of interethnic and interfaith relations in the modern world.

"Tension and xenophobia are growing everywhere. Noticing the seeds of extremism and suppressing them inside Kazakhstan is our task," said Nazarbayev. The Bolashak (Future), the international educational program, which was launched by Nazarbayev at the dawn of independence in 1993, is also one of the other significant achievements. Over the past period, about 15,000 young Kazakhs have received education in the world's leading universities. The first graduation at Nazarbayev



News in brief

Argentine president tests positive

Buenos Aires: Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez, who has been vaccinated against COVID-19, announced late Friday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus. "At the end of today, after presenting a fever of 37.3 and a slight headache, I performed an antigen test, which was positive," he tweeted, adding he was waiting for the results of a PCR test to confirm the diagnosis. The president, who turned 62 on Friday, was in isolation as a precaution but said he was "physically well." —AFP

Four killed as building collapses

Bangkok: A Bangkok residence building collapsed yesterday, killing at least three rescue workers and a resident and trapping a handful of people under the debris, according to an emergency worker. The three-story house, located in a luxury gated community in western Bangkok, was engulfed in flames around 6 am and the fire raged for about an hour before it was put out. At around 7 am, as firefighters and rescue workers were moving through the razed structure in the Thai capital, it abruptly collapsed, killing at least four, including a resident. "The cause of the collapse remains unknown." —AFP

Jihadist blows herself in Tunisia

Tunis: A suspected foreign jihadist blew herself and her little girl up with an explosives belt as security forces closed in on mountains of central Tunisia, the interior ministry said Friday. It said the child she was carrying died on the spot and another small girl was wounded Thursday as the woman detonated the belt in the remote Mount Selloum area of Kasserine near the Algerian border, a known jihadist hideout. It said the woman's husband was also killed in the operation. —AFP

Four UN troops killed in Mali

Bamako: Four United Nations peacekeepers were killed Friday when suspected jihadists staged a major attack on their camp in Aguelhok, northern Mali, the UN mission said. The peacekeepers "bravely pushed back a complex attack carried out by several heavily armed terrorists," MINUSMA said, adding the attackers had suffered heavy losses and had abandoned "several of their dead". In a statement, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he "condemns in the strongest terms" the assault, commending the bravery of those who repelled the attack. —AFP

Nigerian air force dismisses claim

Lagos: Nigeria's air force yesterday dismissed a claim by the Boko Haram jihadist group that it had shot down a fighter jet that went missing a few days earlier. The Alpha jet lost radar contact on Wednesday while on a mission to support troops battling jihadists in the northeastern Borno state. The air force said it believed the jet with two crew may have crashed. Boko Haram on Friday released a video showing a militant standing on what the group claimed was the wrecked fuselage of the plane with the Nigeria Air Force number 475. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021

Biden hails recovery as jobs surge

Businesses reopening nationwide, vaccine access opening up

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden celebrated a massive rebound in US jobs Friday as a sign of hope "at long last" that the end of the pandemic is within sight, with New Labor Department data showing the economy regained 916,000 jobs in March come as a boon to millions of Americans facing financial ruin - but also lay bare the deep scars left by more than a year of shutdowns and restrictions due to COVID-19.

"We still have a long way to go to get our economy back on track after the worst economic and job crisis in nearly a century," the president said in a televised address. "But my message to the American people is this: Help is here. Opportunity is coming. And at long last, there's hope for so many families."

The increase in jobs was the biggest since August, with nearly a third of the gains in the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector, the Labor Department reported. The rise in hiring pushed the unemployment rate down to 6.0 percent from 6.2 percent in February. However, even as the economy begins to recover from the COVID-19 shutdowns, employment is still 8.4 million jobs lower than the pre-pandemic peak, the report said.

The gain in nonfarm payrolls, which far exceeded the consensus estimate among economists, reflects the accelerating recovery as vaccinations become more widely available, as well as the injection of more government stimulus which sent cash to most households and expanded support to businesses. And with upward revisions to hiring in the first two months of 2021, employment in January and February combined was 156,000 higher than previ-



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks to reporters after talking about the March jobs report in the State Dining Room of the White House on April 2, 2021. — AFP

ously reported, the report said.

Speaking from the White House, Biden said the gains in February and March mean the United States "has seen more new jobs created in the first two months in any administration in history". While acknowledging the work still to be done, he credited a massive \$2 trillion infrastructure plan he unveiled earlier this week, which he said would create 19 million jobs over eight years while restoring

US roads, bridges, ports and broadband internet.

White women big winners

The Labor Department report showed hiring was widespread in manufacturing, construction and education, but leisure and hospitality which bore the brunt of the shutdowns topped the list, regaining 280,000 - 176,000 of those in restaurants and bars. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh credited "good

economic policy but also a competent vaccination plan." And, "A lot more people are getting more confident in coming back into the workforce," Walsh said on Fox Business.

Labor economist Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton one of the few who accurately predicted the blockbuster report, pointed to "the lifting of restrictions on indoor venues and a surge in spring break travel". But the figures showed the white women were the biggest winners last month, with nearly half a million returning to work. "Young mothers who have little to no access to child care returned en masse to the labor force as schools reopened," Swonk said.

Remaining scars

But the data show lasting damage from the pandemic: Black unemployment remains little changed at 9.6 percent, and average hourly earnings fell by four cents to \$29.96, reflecting rehiring of lower wage workers who bring down the average. In addition, there are nearly six million more workers now than before the pandemic who either are working part time because they cannot find a full time position, or are on the sidelines because they have not been able to find work, the report said. With all of those workers included the unemployment rate is 10.7 percent, compared to 7.0 percent in Feb 2020. Robert Frick of Navy Federal Credit Union said the data offered "clues of problems we'll face in the future... foreshadowing that moving millions of Americans back into the labor force will be an issue in the drive to return to pre-pandemic employment levels." — AFP

'Score with Zain' campaign crowns Fatimah Al Kandari with Mercedes A35 AMG Grand Prize

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, concluded its interactive promotional campaign 'Score with Zain', through which the company announced Fatimah Adel Al Kandari as the winner of the Mercedes A35 AMG Grand Prize. Throughout the campaign, Zain awarded tens of customers with weekly cash prizes and valuable smart devices.

'Score with Zain' is one of the company's biggest interactive campaigns launched exclusively for Zain customers. The campaign comes as part of Zain's continuous efforts to offer its customers the latest innovative solutions in the world of Value-Added Services. The company is always keen on offering the best and most advanced services to its customer base, which makes up the largest family of subscribers in Kuwait.

The campaign, which Zain organizes in collaboration with ITG Group, offered unique daily con-

tent via SMS, which tested the general knowledge of subscribers for a chance to win a weekly cash prize of KD 300 and valuable smart devices. In addition, 'Score with Zain' featured the Mercedes A35 AMG Grand Prize which Zain awarded at the end of the campaign.

Zain continuously works on improving all its services to continue its tireless efforts towards adopting the latest and most advanced solutions, with the aim of maintaining its leadership position in the Kuwaiti market. The company affirms its promise to always offer a variety of services and solutions to meet the personal and professional needs of Kuwait's largest family of subscribers.

Zain strives to offer customers the latest services and solutions in the world of Value-Added Services, all with the aim of surpassing customers' expectations. The company will continue to lead the Kuwaiti telecom sector by launching unprece-



dent services, products, and solutions in addition to value added services geared at maintaining its leading position in the country.

US lawmakers press online ad auctioneers over user data

SAN FRANCISCO: A bipartisan group of US senators on Friday sent letters to major digital ad exchanges, including Google and Twitter, asking whether user data was sold to foreign entities who could use it for blackmail or other malicious ends. In the real-time bidding process to decide which personalized ads a user sees when a web page loads, hundreds of businesses receive a user's personal information, including search history, IP address, age and gender.

Questions about the sale of data gathered during the auction process were also sent to AT&T, Index Exchange, Magnite, OpenX, PubMatic and Verizon, according to the office of Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat representing Oregon. "Few Americans realize that some auction participants are siphoning off and storing 'bidstream' data to compile exhaustive dossiers about them," Wyden and other senators wrote in letters to the companies.

"This information would be a goldmine for foreign intelligence services that could exploit it to inform and supercharge hacking, blackmail, and influence campaigns." While online ad exchanges use automated bidding systems to determine which ads to show people using internet services, data such as user locations, devices, and web activity can be gathered, according to the senators.

"These dossiers are being openly sold to anyone with a credit card, including to hedge funds, political campaigns, and even to governments," the senators wrote. Questions sent to the companies included what information is gathered about people in the course of serving up ads and which foreign firms have bought such data from them, according to the release. The companies were given until May 4 to provide answers.

Twitter told AFP it had received the letter and intended to respond. The other companies did not immediately respond to queries for comment. Google has pledged to steer clear of tracking individual online activity when it begins implementing a new system for targeting ads without the use of so-called "cookies". The Internet giant's widely used Chrome browser recently began testing an alternative to the tracking practice that it believes could improve online privacy while still enabling advertisers to serve up relevant messages. — AFP

Japan scientist given Nobel for LED lamp dies

TOKYO: Japanese Nobel laureate Isamu Akasaki, who won the physics prize for pioneering energy-efficient LED lighting - a weapon against global warming and poverty - has died aged 92, his university said Friday. Akasaki won the 2014 prize with two other scientists, Hiroshi Amano and Shuji Nakamura. Together they developed the blue light-emitting diode, described as a "revolutionary" invention by the Nobel jury.

He died of pneumonia on Thursday morning at a hospital in the city of Nagoya, according to a statement on the website of Meijo University, where Akasaki had been a professor. LED lamps last for tens of thousands of hours and use just a fraction of energy compared with the incandescent lightbulb pioneered by Thomas Edison in the 19th century. Red and green diodes had been around for a long time, but devising a blue LED was the holy grail, as all three colors need to be mixed to recreate the white light of the Sun.

The trio made their breakthrough in the 1990s, after three long decades of dogged work, when they managed to coax bright blue beams from semiconductors. "Their inventions were revolutionary. Incandescent light bulbs lit the 20th century. The 21st century will be lit by LED lamps," the Nobel jury said in 2014. As well as providing the missing piece of the puzzle for bright white lamps, their breakthrough also helped develop the color LED screens used in smartphones and a plethora of modern tech.

After winning the prize, Akasaki had advice for young researchers: "Don't be fooled by fashionable subjects. Do whatever you like if it's really what you want to do." "At first, it was said that this could not be invented during the 20th century. A lot of people left (the research project), but I never considered doing so," he said.

Born in 1929 in Kagoshima in southern Japan, Akasaki graduated from the prestigious Kyoto University in 1952. After working for several years as a researcher at Kobe



STOCKHOLM: In this file photo taken on Dec 10, 2014, Nobel Physics laureate Isamu Akasaki poses with the Nobel Prize during the 2014 award ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall. — AFP

Kogyo Corporation - now Fujitsu - he began his academic career at Nagoya University in 1959. In an interview published by Meijo University in 2010, he described the trio's struggle to earn recognition for their work. "When we announced in 1981 results which were important at that time at an international conference, there was no reaction. I felt alone in the wilderness," he said. "But I was determined not to quit this research, even if I was alone." — AFP

LinkedIn gives staff week off for well-being

SAN FRANCISCO: Professional social network LinkedIn is giving nearly all of its 15,900 full-time workers next week off as it seeks to avoid burnout and allow its employees to recharge, the company told AFP Friday. The Microsoft-owned firm said that the "RestUp!" week starting tomorrow is meant to give employees time for their own well-being.

"There is something magical about the entire company taking a break at the same time," LinkedIn said in reply to an AFP inquiry. "And the best part? Not coming back to an avalanche of unanswered internal emails." During the week, LinkedIn will provide employees who may feel isolated the option of taking part in daily activities such as volunteering for worthy causes through "random acts of kindness," according to the company.

"A core team of employees will continue to work for the week, but they will be able to schedule time off later," LinkedIn said. Major technology companies were among the first in the US to adopt working from home last year to help slow the spread of the coronavirus, and most have yet to fully reopen their offices. Twitter has extended remote working indefinitely.

LinkedIn does not expect employees to begin returning to its offices until September, and plans to make it standard practice to let them work from home as much as half of the time. Microsoft in mid-2016 bought LinkedIn for \$26.2 billion in cash, stepping into the world of social networking and adding a new tool for its efforts to boost services for business. — AFP

Business

In coal-addicted Bulgaria, EU climate goal faces hurdles

Two-thirds of Bulgarians support closure of coal plants

GOLEMO SELO, Bulgaria: With its belching smokestacks, Bulgaria's Bobov Dol coal plant symbolizes the type of industry the EU aims to eliminate - and the hurdles it faces in its green transition. Environmental issues barely made a blip ahead of elections taking place today, while critics fear that euro 10 billion (\$11.8 billion) in EU green transition funds could fall prey to Bulgaria's widespread corruption.

Environmentalists say the 27-nation European Union must phase out of coal by 2030 to meet its climate targets. The bloc aims to slash emissions by 55 percent by then. Eleven EU nations have pledged to phase out coal-powered electricity by 2030. Bulgaria, which emits 4.3 times more greenhouse gases per unit of GDP than the EU average, is not among them.

The country relies heavily on coal to heat homes, with 60 percent of electricity production in winter coming from the pollutant. Bobov Dol has been in operation since the 1970s, employs 850 people and alone accounts for around four percent of Bulgaria's energy output. "We definitely have worries" about the plant having to shut, said Bobov Dol's CEO Lyubomir Spasov, adding that his aim is to "keep the maximum amount of jobs".

His priority is keeping the 630-megawatt facility near Sofia open, and to that end he is considering moving away from coal to natural gas or even incorporating a hydrogen plant run on solar power. The plant will submit an application this year for a slice of the euro 10 billion in EU funds earmarked by Brussels for green projects.

'Evils' of corruption

Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, whose center-right GERB party is favored to win today's election, supports the EU's Green Deal, but he has called for more help for eastern European countries that depend on coal. GERB, however, did not make this a prominent theme in its election campaign, even though a recent poll for the ECFR think tank found that two-thirds of Bulgarians support the closure of coal plants. Three-quarters of voters were unaware of the parties' positions on green transition.

Bulgaria is falling short partly because elected officials have been "afraid to engage" on the subject, said Maria Trifonova, assistant professor at the University of Sofia's department of industrial economics and management. After a wave of huge anti-corruption protests which began last summer, combatting graft has been a much bigger issue. The NGO Transparency International ranks Bulgaria as the most corrupt of all EU states. Hristo Ivanov, leader of the small opposition "Da, Bulgaria!" party, worries that the EU's green subsidies might end up enriching Bulgaria's oligarchs.

"Sixty percent of the (EU funding) must be invested in (public) infrastructure, the sector that suffers the most from these evils," said Ivanov, a former minister of justice who quit his office in frustration in 2014 and has since become one of the country's most outspoken anti-graft activists. Ivanov noted that one power plant (not Bobov Dol) that may be in line for green transition money is owned by a prominent, politically well-connected oligarch.



GOLEMO SELO, Bulgaria: A picture taken on March 25, 2021 shows smoke and vapor billowing from the Bobov Dol Thermal Power Plant near this village. —AFP

Environmental campaigners say the transition away from polluting energy sources is long overdue. Desislava Mikova of Greenpeace Bulgaria said Bobov Dol has contaminated local rivers and excess levels of fumes that can cause acid rain have also

been recorded. "My car is all dirty in the mornings, even if I washed it the day before," said a villager who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals. "In the 21st century, to have such a pollutant in your backyard - that can't be right!" —AFP

The road not taken: S Korea's self-driving prof

YONGIN, South Korea: Decades before the race to build a self-driving car became a multi-billion-dollar contest between tech giants such as Tesla and Google, a South Korean professor built an autonomous vehicle and test-drove it across the country - only for his research to be consigned to the scrapheap. Han Min-hong, now 79, successfully tested his self-driving car on the roads of Seoul in 1993 - a decade before Tesla was even founded.

Two years later, it drove 300 km from the capital to the southern port of Busan, on the most heavily-travelled expressway in South Korea. Footage from the period shows the car barreling down a highway, with no one behind the wheel. A 386-chip-powered desktop computer, complete with monitor and keyboard, is placed on the passenger seat. Han is sitting in the back, waving at the camera.

"It felt extraordinary," said the affable inventor. "The workload was very heavy," but he and his team "had an enormous passion as it was something others hadn't done yet, something that hadn't come out in the world yet". At the time, South Korea was more focused on heavy industry, such

as steel and shipbuilding, with the average Korean not yet familiar with cellphones.

The country was yet to become the tech powerhouse it is today, and was still pursuing imitation rather than innovation. On one occasion, Han was told: "Why develop a new technology when you can always pay for it?" Han's projects were seen as dangerous. He was once asked how much he was paying for his life insurance, he said, and whether his wife was aware of "these crazy activities of yours?"

But Han was so convinced of his cars' safety that he rarely wore a seat belt-and has never had life insurance. Even so, unable to see much investment potential, the government eventually cut funding to his research at Korea University. Now, Elon Musk's electric car firm Tesla is a \$600-billion behemoth, while Han's Chumdancha is a small company in Yongin, south of Seoul, where he and one other employee still develop specialist warning systems for autonomous vehicles. Musk is a "tremendous and outstanding" person, Han said. "He came up with his own, firm vision based on what others were doing, and that is really incredible." But Han's invention could have paved the way for South Korea to dominate the industry, he added regretfully.

Raj Rajkumar, an engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute, who reviewed the 1990s footage for AFP, said it "appears to be on par with some of the best work on autonomous vehicles during that period". "The professor and a colleague are not even in the dri-



YONGIN: This picture taken on March 29, 2021 shows retired South Korean professor Han Min-hong looking at his 21-year-old self-driving car in front of his office. —AFP

ver's seat - very bold, confident but very risky thing to do," he added. "It is unfortunate that funding for that project was cut. In hindsight, that was certainly not a wise decision."

Korea University describes Han as "a pioneer and hero in the global field of artificial intelligence", who is known for developing the South's first automotive navigation system and a mini-helicopter seen as a precursor to modern-day drones, as well as his autonomous vehicle work. He is seen in the South as a genius ahead of his time - the 1990s footage has been viewed more than 1.5 million times since it was posted to YouTube in February. —AFP

their experience. Our objective was to showcase the quality of solutions and services that stc has to offer."

He added, "Upon launching a product, we continuously assess the qualities that appeal most to our target audience and ensure that we provide them with a well-rounded experience they greatly benefit from. By offering a rich selection of products and services, which include the latest smartphones, internet routers and entertainment devices, stc aims to grant its customers with an unmatched choice in quality, value, and convenience. Placing the customer experience at heart, the Company offers all its products and services through stc branches, its website (www.stc.com.kw) and mystc App.



Nasser Al-Saadon

Energy giant Eni to halt Tunisia hydrocarbon work

TUNIS: Italy's Eni will stop its hydrocarbon activities in Tunisia to focus on clean energy, the Tunisian energy ministry said Friday, amid recurrent social unrest near oil installations in the country. The giant energy company will give up mining licenses for nine oil concessions it was running jointly with the Tunisian government but will continue to invest in renewable energy in the North African country, a ministry spokesperson said. Eni declined to comment on the report.

It was not immediately clear when the company, which has been operating in Tunisia since 1961, would halt its oil and gas activities. According to its website, the Italian firm's work is concentrated in desert areas in southern Tunisia and in the Mediterranean offshore area of Hammamet. In 2019, oil production was two million barrels (equivalent to just below 40,000 barrels per day) or about one fifth of Tunisia's total production of hydrocarbons. The energy ministry said Eni has not found buyers for its shares in the oil concessions, but that the Tunisian government was looking for new investors. It denied reports that Anglo-Dutch firm Shell and Austria's OMV were also planning to cease activities in Tunisia. The North African country has been rocked by frequent protests in recent years, namely in the marginalized southern Tataouine region where unemployed youths last year blocked an oil installation for months.

In February, the army intervened to stop a dozen protesters from accessing the El-Kamour oil production site and blocking a pipeline, according to the protest movement. The pipeline carries half of the crude produced by Tunisia's modest oil sector and has been blocked several times, notably in 2017 by sit-ins that were followed by clashes with security forces. And on Thursday protesters demanding jobs blocked a hydrocarbon storage site in Skhira, in the central-eastern governorate of Sfax. —AFP

stc Always ON postpaid voice plans deliver a unique experience to customers

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, continues to offer its Always ON postpaid voice plans to deliver a unique and convenient experience to customers on Kuwait's largest 5G network. The plans include voice and internet services, as well as a range of added features to meet the diverse needs of customers at competitive prices.

Through its Always ON postpaid plans, stc aims to deliver an unmatched experience to new customers and those renewing their subscriptions by allowing them to always stay connected in Kuwait through the Always ON connectivity feature, and unlimited local calls. Customers traveling abroad and using internet roaming, can also enjoy free WhatsApp and incoming

calls while roaming, and international minutes are also included in the plans so that customers can stay in touch with friends and family wherever they may be.

Following the Company's commitment to enable digital transformation in Kuwait, stc's postpaid plans allow customers to enjoy the network's 5G service on select 5G enabled devices to experience stc's top internet speeds. For online entertainment, stc offers a subscription to the Jawwy TV app which boasts a range of entertainment services that include OSN, Starzplay, Wide Khaliji, FOX+ and more, all in one place.

Chief Consumer Officer (CCO) of stc, engineer Nasser Al-Saadon, said, "When designing our Always ON postpaid voice plans, we focused on exceeding our customers' expectations by incorporating services and features that would elevate

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Business

ABK holds Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly Meetings for 2020

Bank approves distribution of 5% bonus shares

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait held its Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meetings yesterday to discuss the Bank's financial results for the year ended Dec 31, 2020, and the items on the agenda for the Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meetings. The Ordinary General Assembly meeting started at 10:00 am, followed by the Extraordinary meeting, where all items on the agenda were approved. The attendance quorum reached 93 percent.

Talal Mohamed Reza Behbehani, Chairman of ABK commenced the Annual General Meeting by welcoming the attendees. He presented the Director's Report for the Financial Year Ended 2020, noting that as a result of the Board of Directors resolution to take prudent and proactive measures to mitigate potential credit losses resulting from some defaulting customers affected by the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, which continues to represent real risks to the continuity of normal corporate economic activities, the Bank has conservatively taken provisions amounting to KD 136.5 million, resulting in a net loss of KD 69.7 million for the financial year ended 2020.

Total Operating Income was KD 141.5 million, Credit Assets were KD 3.1 billion and Customer Deposits were KD 3.5 billion. As of year ended 2020, the Bank's Shareholders Equity was KD 499 million with a Non-Performing Loans (NPL) ratio of 1.57 percent, NPL coverage of 339 percent and Capital Adequacy Ratio of 17.26 percent.

Behbehani also referred to the strong investment-grade ratings of ABK Group from international rating agencies, as the Group maintained its rating at A+ by Fitch Ratings and A2 by Moody's. These ratings reflect ABK's robust capital structure and strong fundamentals, including its resilient earnings capacity, stable funding and liquidity sources. The Ordinary General Assembly approved the Directors' Report covering the business and activities of the Bank for the financial year ended December 31, 2020.

The Ordinary General Assembly also approved

the recommendation of the Board of Directors to distribute bonus shares at the rate of 5 percent (five percent) of the issued and paid-up capital, by issuing 80,958,311 new shares to be distributed as free bonus shares to the shareholders registered in the bank's shareholders' records as at the end of the due date specified to be on Thursday, 4/22/2021 (Five shares per one hundred shares), so that the resulting increase in the issued and paid-up capital amounting to KD 8,095,831/170 (Eight million and ninety-five thousand, eight hundred and thirty-one Kuwaiti dinars and 170 fils) from the retained earnings, and authorizing the Board of Directors to dispose of the fractional shares resulting from it, as it deems appropriate.

The General Assembly agreed to select two Independent Board Members to complete the remainder of the current term of the Board of Directors (2019-2021), namely Mr. Raed Abdulkareem Al Moamen and Mr. Zaid Khalid Hassan Al Naqib, and authorized the Board of Directors to determine the annual remuneration for them, taking into account the corporate governance rules issued by regulatory authorities in this regard.

It was a valuable opportunity to outline the strategy for 2021, following a challenging 2020. Talal Behbehani, Chairman of ABK highlighted that the Bank, under the new leadership of Mr. George Richani, recently appointed as Group CEO, will redefine its strategy while focusing on Growth and Transformation.

George Richani, ABK's Group CEO, said: "Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait has maintained its commitment to providing new customer experiences, digital transformation and upgrading operational effi-



Talal Behbehani



Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait holds its Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meetings yesterday.

ciency. The bank is implementing a comprehensive strategy of "transformation and growth" with a careful review of risks at Group level, to better analyze and understand the strengths and weaknesses in order to mitigate the threats while taking advantage of new market opportunities. The results that we will reach will allow us to formulate a road map for transformation in the coming years that will lead us to achieve our new ambitions and aspirations."

He added that the Board of Directors has approved the appointment of external consultants to present a comprehensive study of the Bank's strategy during the coming period, which requires the utilization of the best-in-class expertise available in this field.

He also pointed out that the new strategy will focus on enabling more modern technology tools used by customers, and developing targeted products, with excellence in service and performance together with anchoring of best practices across the entire Group. The Group will also continue to

invest heavily in recruiting talented manpower and maintaining its national cadres, developing human resource performance, and integrating overseas operations into the Group.

The Extraordinary General Assembly approved the item related to increasing the Bank's Capital by KD 8,095,831/170 (KD Eight Million Ninety-Five Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-One and 170 fils), which represents 5 percent of the Capital, by issuing 80,958,311 new shares to be distributed to the Shareholders registered in the Bank's records as bonus shares of 5 percent (five shares per one hundred shares).

The Extraordinary General Assembly also approved the amendment of Article (6) of the Memorandum of Association and Article (5) of the Articles of Association of Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, to make the Company's Capital KD170,012,454 / 500 KD (KD One Hundred Seventy Million and Twelve Thousand Four Hundred and Fifty-Four Kuwaiti Dinars and /500 fils) distributed into 1,700,124,545 shares. Each share is worth one hundred fils.

Nabil Nayef Maroof appointed as CEO of NBK Capital

KUWAIT: NBK Capital announced the appointment of Nabil Nayef Maroof as CEO of the firm, where his extensive experience and competence in the regional, and global markets, makes him the ideal leader to implement the firm's strategic plan. As part of his duties as CEO of NBK Capital, Maroof, with the firm's board of directors and management team, will implement and execute the firm's goals and maintain its position as one of the leading investment companies in Kuwait and the region.

Maroof has nearly 30 years of experience in the banking and investment sector, and unparalleled knowledge of the local and international markets through investment management, advisory services, and trading services. Through his position as CEO of NBK Capital, he will lead the firm locally and regionally, and supervise the progress of its operations.

Commenting on his appointment, Maroof said: "It gives me great pleasure to have the honour of leading the exceptional team at NBK Capital, with world-class professionals capable of navigating all challenges, as I look forward to continuing the company's journey of success and strengthening its position as a leading investment company in the region."

Prior to his appointment as CEO of NBK Capital, Maroof held the position of Deputy CEO for the past six years, during his career he held many leading positions in the banking and investment sectors. Maroof joined the National Bank of Kuwait in 2001 and held the position of Head of Product Development - Investment Services at NBK and Head of Wealth Management at NBK Capital.

Nabil holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a Finance concentration from Boston University, and has participated in many leadership programs in major international universities, including those at Harvard and Wharton University.

NBK Capital is a leading investment company in the region, founded in 2005, with regional and international Assets Under management of US\$ 6.8 billion and a regional presence in Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Turkey.

NBK Capital leverages local and regional experience and expertise by combining the strengths, resources and global network of the National Bank of Kuwait SAKP one of the largest and oldest financial institutions in the region, with best-in-class investment structuring and execution, on a broad array of financial strategies to consistently deliver integrated value-added solutions, innovative products, objective research, creative thinking, timely implementation and excellence in service. Operating regionally from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Turkey and Egypt, and with over 158 investment professionals, NBK Capital prides itself on a reach and scale that is global, a presence that is regional and a service level that always remains personal.



Nabil Maroof

Gulf Bank customers to enjoy flexible shopping at Samsung AlBabtain

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the addition of Samsung AlBabtain as part of a growing list of over 100 shopping partners in its Easy Pay program. Easy Pay, which is the first program of its kind in Kuwait, allows Gulf Bank credit cardholders to shop from a variety of different vendors and pay for their purchases in installments with 0 percent interest and no processing fees.

Established in 1999, Al-Babtain Turnkey Solutions Company specializes in distribution, retail and after-sales services for various mobile and digital devices, and today is the sole authorized agent for Samsung smartphones and tablets. The addition of Al-Babtain Turnkey Solutions Company as a Gulf Bank Easy Pay partner will provide Gulf Bank cardholders with the opportunity to shop for their favorite products via a simple and flexible payment method.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, commented: "Gulf Bank's Easy Pay program is one of the Bank's leading services due to its great impact in facilitating customers' lives by



enabling them to pay for their purchases over 12 months without any interest or additional fees. Today, Gulf Bank is proud to welcome Samsung AlBabtain into its Easy Pay program, and we encourage all our clients to take advantage of a more convenient shopping experience."

Al-Babtain Turnkey Solutions Company's CEO Khaled Al-Mejrin Al-Roumi commented: "Gulf Bank has been a long-time partner with Al-Babtain Group, and going ahead with the new collaboration on Gulf Bank Easy Pay Program, I'm eager to extend our partnership and collaboration to benefit our customers and all the relevant stakeholders. I'm looking forward for the successful execution of this program and for future programs to increase our mutual businesses in alignment

Abdullah Abu Alhous, "For that reason, we focus on providing unique customer experiences that blend human with digital, our digital banking teams are using customer journey maps as a unifying methodology that will help us examine customer experiences across all touchpoints, identify customer pain points, improve existing experiences and design new ones." Abu Alhous added that the implementation of ProgressSoft's Electronic Forms solution, which took place in a fully remote environment during the global pandemic, also comes in line with KFH's vision to completely eradicate manual errors and risks associated with traditional processes.

He explained that ProgressSoft's Electronic Forms solution provides KFH's corporate, SMEs and retail customers with state-of-the-art digital capabilities. "It overcomes manual form procedures with minimal customer interventions which offer a unique and delightful customer journey in line with our vision of leading the international development of Islamic financial services and delivering superior innovation and customer service excellence", added Abu Alhous. The solution provides all KFH branches in Kuwait with the ability to

with our strategy of increasing our brand portfolio."

Gulf Bank's Easy Pay program was designed as part of the Bank's commitment to fulfilling client needs and aspirations, and includes a wide selection of clients' preferred shopping outlets. The process of enrolling any transaction at participating shopping outlets into Easy Pay is seamless. Customers can simply request Easy Pay at the merchant outlet prior to making their purchase, and do not need to submit any additional documents or call the bank. The cashier at the merchant outlet will then process the credit card transaction on the dedicated Easy Pay terminal, and the transaction will be automatically converted into Easy Pay. Customers can also avail multiple Easy Pay facilities on their credit cards at the same time.

KFH launches ProgressSoft's Electronic Forms

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) launched ProgressSoft's Electronic Forms solution which fully transforms traditional banking forms into electronic, secured and automatically validated forms.

Renowned for being a leader in digitizing banking services, KFH chose ProgressSoft as the preference payment solution provider and technology partner in its digital transformation initiatives which comprised numerous implementations in the past few years that aim to provide massive convenience and innovative digital banking services to customers.

"We at KFH, believe that the future of banking will be invisible, connected, insight-driven and purposeful," said KFH's Chief Group Operations Officer,

NBK announces winner of KD 250,000 Al Jawhara Draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is keen to reward its customers by providing them with a distinguished array of draws and prizes all year round, as part of its endeavors to provide top-notch services and offers to its customers and to reward them with prizes that meet their expectations. In this context, the bank organized a special radio activity for Al Jawhara quarterly draw worth KD 250,000 in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a representative from Deloitte as well as representatives from NBK.

The draw was broadcasted live on Diwanayat Al-Yaqout and Al-Ansari program on Kuwait Pulse Radio, during which the bank announced Abbeer Dehrab Ameer Ahmed as the winner of Al Jawhara quarterly prize worth KD 250,000. In addition, the activity featured a competition over the radio including questions about Al Jawhara Account, after which a live

"random draw" was conducted, and two winners received a jewelry voucher worth KD 700 from Ali Al-Arbash- Al Hamra Tower. The activity witnessed noticeable interaction from the followers of NBK's social media accounts. In March, NBK also announced the following winners of the weekly prizes of KD 5,000 each: Aref Mordhi AlAzmi, Abdulaziz Mohamed Hasan, Aziz Fakhrudin Chakkiwala, Ahmed Fouad Behbehani. Al Jawhara Account can be opened very easily by through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking or by visiting the nearest NBK branch.

On this occasion, Mohamed Al-Othman, GM- Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Organizing a special activity for Al Jawhara Account quarterly draw this time comes in line with our commitment to reward our customers in an exceptional way all year round, which is a key part of our strategy to enrich their banking experience."

"Despite the exceptional circumstances and imposed restrictions, we remained closer to our customers through our digital channels that enable them to make all their transactions quickly and easily, as well as to keep them safe and maintain continuous communication with them to meet all their needs and expectations," he added.

Al-Othman pointed out that customers' increased reliance on the bank's digital channels reflects NBK's leader-

use a scanner or barcode gun to scan a wide set of electronic forms including local and international transfers, financing and credit card requests, and more. The forms are then validated, adjusted and posted to core banking and payment systems via smart integration capabilities.

KFH and ProgressSoft continue to work on pioneering projects, including the expansion of the universal ProgressSoft's CBPR+ Ready Payments Hub Platform to cover all types of payments at KFH group starting in Kuwait, and extending to other countries in the region and beyond, with the next phase commencing in KFH-Bahrain. ProgressSoft is honored to be the technology partner of KFH and looks forward to rejoicing additional milestones in this collaborative digital transformation journey.



Abdullah Abu Alhous

ship and excellence in providing top-notch digital banking services to its customers and its successful proactive digital transformation strategy, noting that the number of Al Jawhara Accounts opened through NBK Mobile Banking App increased by 87 percent compared to last year. Al-Othman continued: "We aim to instill the culture of saving in customers from all categories, as part of our endeavors to achieve financial inclusion. Al Jawhara Account is one of the key products offering various benefits, thus contributing to encourage saving."

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.

The minimum opening balance for Al Jawhara Account is KD 400, and the maximum limit to be held in the account by customer is KD 500,000. If no withdrawals or transfers are made on the account during the holding period, the customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win. 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.

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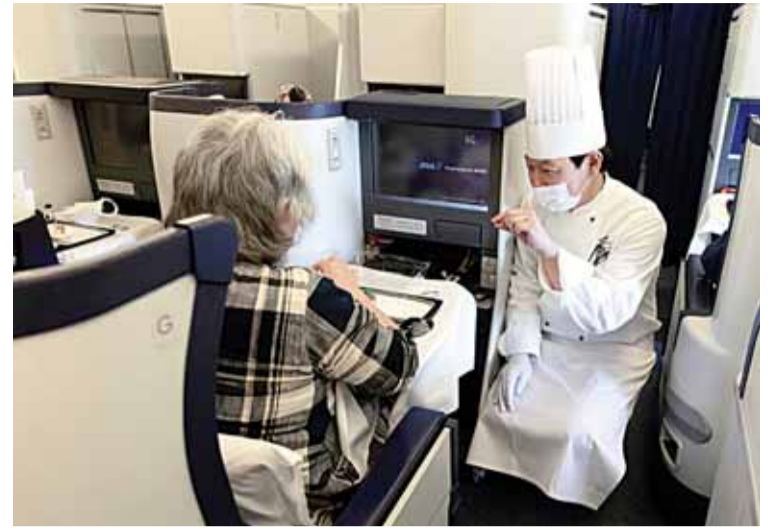
Lifestyle | Features



In this handout photograph taken by All Nippon Airways (ANA), a flight attendant prepares food for customers on a parked plane at Haneda airport in Tokyo. —AFP photos



In this handout photograph by All Nippon Airways (ANA), a customer has his meal on a parked plane at Haneda airport in Tokyo.



In this handout photograph by All Nippon Airways (ANA), a chef speaks with a customer on a parked plane at Haneda airport in Tokyo.

SKY-HIGH: JAPAN AIRLINE OFFERS \$540 MEALS ON PARKED PLANES

Airline food might be one of the last things people are missing during the pandemic, but one Japanese carrier has customers flocking to sample luxury in-flight meals on its parked planes. Foie gras, crab-meat mousse and wagyu beef fillet are all on the menu aboard aircraft belonging to Japan's All Nippon Airways—for a cool \$540. The airline launched its “restaurant with wings” for just a single day on Wednesday, but with demand proving sky-high, they are now planning to expand the offering. The restaurant offered either first class or business class meals usually served on international flights, with “passengers” boarding a Boeing 777 at Tokyo's Haneda airport holding tickets designed to look like boarding passes.

The experience came complete with crew announcements, according to the company, with meals served in cabin seats, though seatbelts were not required. Demand appears strong, despite the prices — 59,800 yen for first-class meals and 29,800 yen for a business class offering. “The tickets for the restaurant sold out in a day,” a spokeswoman told AFP on Thursday, and the company now plans an additional 11 dates. The airline said it could extend the service further if virus restrictions are not tightened. The “restaurant” already observes virus measures, using only 60 seats on the plane to ensure customers can maintain some distance between them.

The Japanese carrier is not the first Asian airline to offer meals aboard

grounded planes to travel-starved customers. Hundreds of travel-starved diners ate lunch and watched seat-back films on two parked Singapore Airlines jets in October last year, with tickets selling for up to Sg\$642 (\$470). Like airlines around the world, ANA has been hit hard by virus-related travel restrictions.

In January it upheld its forecast for a record \$4.9 billion net loss this financial year to March 2021, compared with 27.6 billion yen in net profit the previous year. ANA Holdings' nine-month net loss came to 309.6 billion yen (\$3 billion) — also a record—and a sharp drop from the 86.4 billion yen in profit it logged during the same April-December period last year. —AFP

BTS AGENCY TO ACQUIRE SCOOTER BRAUN'S ITHACA FOR \$1.05 BILLION

The agency behind K-pop phenomenon BTS announced a \$1.05 billion deal Friday to buy the US firm that manages Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande and other major stars. HYBE, formerly known as Big Hit Entertainment, is investing 1.07 trillion won (\$950 million) into its US unit to acquire Ithaca Holdings, headed by American media entrepreneur Scooter Braun. In a separate regulatory filing in Seoul, the company said its US unit will pay

a total of \$1.05 billion to bondholders and others for the merger.

The South Korean firm will “acquire through its wholly owned subsidiary HYBE America, a 100 percent stake in Ithaca Holdings,” it said in a statement. Braun will join the board of HYBE and artists of both entities—including BTS, Bieber and Grande—will participate in the capital increase of the South Korean company, it added. “This is an opportunity for us to make history and fur-

ther innovate the music industry,” Braun said of the merger. BTS have ascended to global superstardom since their debut in 2013, and their single “Dynamite” entered the Billboard Hot 100 at number one last year, making them the first South Korean act to top the US chart. In October, HYBE made a multi-billion-dollar stock market debut. The merger was to “accelerate its entrance into the global market”, the company said in one of the regulatory filings. —AFP



US First Lady Jill Biden speaks during a visit at The Forty Acres, the first headquarters of the United Farm Workers labor union, in Delano, California. —AFP

SWEET SURPRISE: DISGUISED JILL BIDEN PASSES OUT ICE CREAM

US First Lady Jill Biden pranked reporters and staff flying back from a trip with her on Thursday, disguising herself as a flight attendant to pass out ice cream bars for April Fool's. Staff, Secret Service and press were treated to dessert by a woman with short black hair, a black face mask and a nametag that read “Jasmine,” who made her way through the cabins as the first lady traveled home to Washington after visiting California. Five minutes later, “Jasmine” reappeared in the press section, wig removed, revealing herself to be none other than Biden herself. “April Fool's!” a tickled Biden told reporters.

The ice cream bar incident is not the first time Biden has tricked fellow travelers aboard her plane. She once stuffed herself in an overhead compartment on Air Force Two when her husband Joe Biden was vice president, shouting “Boo!” at the first person to open the bin, according to US media. A pool report on Thursday's incident admitted that the journalists had been “totally fooled” but took “comfort in the fact that none of FLOTUS' staff recognized Dr. Biden in disguise either.” The vanilla ice cream bars with hard chocolate coating “were delicious,” it added. —AFP



BTS

Virus-hit ‘Walking Dead’ lurches on as epilogue looms

The pandemic-interrupted 10th season of “The Walking Dead” finally reaches its bloody conclusion today—a 19-month wait since its premiere that has only made the zombie apocalypse show more timely, according to its stars. The comic book adaptation may be far from its ratings heyday, with popular hero Rick Grimes long departed, but it remains the most-watched series on American basic cable (excluding premium channels like HBO) as it approaches its much-hyped conclusion with the subsequent season 11. “It's more relevant than ever now during this pandemic,” Paola Lazaro, a newcomer this

things have been broken, or things have been torn apart,” she said. “The Walking Dead” follows the gory adventures of a group of humans who have survived a catastrophe unleashed by a virus that turns the dead into highly contagious zombies who are endlessly hungry for human flesh. When a real-life virus, COVID-19, shut down production for several months, season 10 had to be chopped in two, with filming of the final six episodes eventually resuming under strict health protocols. As a result, many scenes feature just one or two characters at a time—an experience for the actors that Lazaro, a playwright herself, described as “theatrical.”

experience “a treat for me.” That means more backstory and development for characters like the villainous Negan—including today's final episode. But as “Walking Dead” fans have learned over the years, no character—no matter how major or popular—is safe from sudden, brutal death. Lazaro admitted she herself does not know if Princess will feature throughout the series-concluding season 11, expected later this year and into 2022. “I don't know what's going to happen with the character—I just take it word by word, moment by moment,” she said.

While season 11 will spell the end of “The Walking Dead,” zombies will continue to haunt TV screens thanks to an ever-growing stable of spin-off series set in the same universe. A new show based on the characters of Daryl Dixon and Carol Peletier is expected in 2023, on top of the ongoing spin-offs “Fear The Walking Dead” and “The Walking Dead: World Beyond.” “People have grown with the show—it's been on for so long that people have fallen in love with these characters,” said Lazaro. “They become family, like part of your life.” —AFP



season as Juanita Sanchez, aka Princess, told AFP.

The series is “teaching you how to rebuild a society after

“The COVID episodes have given us the chance to really sit down with these characters and monologues,” she said, calling the

‘Bridgerton’ star Page absent from second series of Netflix smash hit

Rege-Jean Page will not return for the second season of record-breaking Regency romance “Bridgerton,” Netflix said Friday, prompting howls of despair from fans of the dashing Duke of Hastings. The wildly popular series from “Grey's Anatomy” creator Shonda Rhimes puts a modern twist on the books about an upper-class family in early 19th-century England, including color-blind casting. British-Zimbabwean actor Page was a breakout star for the first season, but his character's storylines largely conclude in the opening volume of Julia Quinn's original books, which each follow a different sibling of the Bridgerton family.

“Dearest Readers, while all eyes turn to Lord Anthony Bridgerton's quest to find a Viscountess, we bid adieu to Rege-Jean Page, who so triumphantly played the Duke of Hastings,” said a letter on the show's Twitter account. “We'll miss Simon's presence onscreen, but he will always be a part of the Bridgerton family.” In January, Netflix announced that

“Bridgerton” had become the streaming platform's most popular new series, watched by over 82 million households. It cast several Black actors in high-society roles—including Page—despite the fact slavery was only abolished in 1833 in England and racism was rife.

“Remember: the Duke is never gone,” wrote Rhimes on Instagram. “He's just waiting to be binge watched all over again.” But some fans were apoplectic, with one writing: “It's a joke, right? If not then you just killed that show.” “This better be a belated April fools joke,” wrote another. The first season followed Daphne Bridgerton (Phoebe Dynevor) as she made her debut in Regency London, seeking a husband, while the second will focus on her brother Lord Anthony Bridgerton (Jonathan Bailey): “Daphne will remain a devoted wife and sister, helping her brother navigate the upcoming social season and what it has to offer—more intrigue and romance than my readers may be able to bear,” said the letter published Friday. —AFP



Rege-Jean



Lifestyle | Features

HUNGARY EGG DECORATOR BRINGS NEW SPIN ON ANCIENT CRAFT



Tunde Csuhaj, creator of artfully decorated Easter eggs, presents a goose egg at her workroom in the town of Szekszard, Hungary.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs are seen in the workshop of Tunde Csuhaj in the town of Szekszard.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.

—AFP photos



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.



Artfully decorated Easter eggs made of goose eggs.



Tunde Csuhaj, creator of artfully decorated Easter eggs, works on a goose egg at her workroom.

With lace-like etchings and carvings made with a hand drill, the decorative egg art of Hungarian artist Tunde Csuhaj is bringing a different spin on an ancient handicraft popular at Easter. As in neighboring countries like Ukraine and Romania, Hungary boasts a long tradition of egg painting as part of Easter celebrations. But although Csuhaj's works are in high demand around Easter, the 67-year-old works year-round at her home workshop in Szekszard, 150 kilometers (93 miles) south of Budapest, where she began decades ago. "After 30 years we know each other very well, the egg and I," Csuhaj told AFP. "If I make a mistake and the egg breaks, well that is painful for both me and the egg," she said.

Originally painting eggs in the colorful "Sarkoz" style named after a nearby region, she soon developed her own style, etching and carving eggshells with a hand drill. Her material ranges from smaller pheasant and chicken eggs, to larger goose, emu and ostrich ones. "Goose eggs are the most suitable, they have a large surface, a solid shell, and are white, which is important for coloring and drawing miniature details," she said. After emptying an egg of its



Tunde Csuhaj, creator of artfully decorated Easter eggs, paints a goose egg at her workroom in the town of Szekszard.

contents through tiny pinholes, Csuhaj cleans, washes, and dries it before drawing pattern guidelines on it with a pencil.

Then, using a small fountain pen-like stylus she delicately paints hot beeswax over the patterns, a method called "batik". The shell is dipped in an acidic fluid that thins the parts not

covered with wax. Then the wax is scrubbed off with a toothbrush under running hot water. Finally she uses a drill to punch holes and shapes, creating a sculpted lace-like effect around either the entire shell or part of it to complement a painted motif. Displayed around her workshop are finished eggs decorated with scenes from fairytales and legends, beasts and insects, religious symbols, and intricate geometric patterns. "No egg is the same shape, and all my designs are different," said Csuhaj, whose favorite motifs are "those related to the resumption of nature in spring".

Unsurprisingly, the level of detail requires days of effort, and she can't turn out more than 100 eggs per year. A regular attendee at exhibitions and fairs in Western Europe since the 1990s, Csuhaj says her unique style is popular among collectors. "I don't sign the eggs as everyone knows they were done by me," she said. Although unable to travel this year because of pandemic restrictions, bespoke client orders help to keep her busy. "A fireman asked me recently to paint a fire engine on an egg, I do whatever is special for people," she said. —AFP



Tunde Csuhaj, creator of artfully decorated Easter eggs, works on a goose egg at her workroom in the town of Szekszard.



In this file photograph Jean-Louis Baillot, Director General of Ikea France, poses in Montpellier, southern France, at the opening of the Swedish retailer's eighteenth store in France. —AFP

Suspect arrested for stabbing French theatre director

A man has admitted to stabbing a 76-year-old leading French theatre director in the street because he gave him a "nasty look", prosecutors said Friday. The 35-year-old, who had previously been sentenced to 10 years in jail for drugs, was due to appear before a judge later in the day and may face a charge of attempted murder, the Montpellier prosecutor's office said. Alain Francon, one of France's most prolific theatre directors, was stabbed in the throat and left on the ground bleeding on March 17 near his hotel in the southern city.

Francon, who founded the avant-garde Theatre

Eclate (Shattered Theatre) troupe in the 1970's, said he remembered someone "bumping into" him without saying a word and that he saw his attacker run off. Police had used video surveillance cameras in the city center to track the suspect, the prosecutors said. The man was detained outside his apartment on Thursday and had at first denied everything until his final interview, said Jacques-Philippe Redon for the prosecutor's office. Francon took charge of the prestigious national theatre La Colline in Paris in 1996 and won a Moliere award for his staging of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?" in 2016.—AFP

The show finally goes on: New York's pandemic-shut theaters reopen, slowly

Caroline Baron is wearing shoes she has not worn in a year and a big smile as she walks into The Shed, one of the few major venues in America's cultural capital New York to begin hosting live performances again for the first time since March 2020. "I forgot how to get dressed... it is exciting," the film-maker says as she, along with her partner and teenage son, reach the arts center on Manhattan's West Side for a concert by singer and cellist Kelsey Lu.

Some had hoped that Friday would mark the grand reopening of New York's iconic theaters, a hugely symbolic moment for a metropolis seeking to recapture the effervescence—and millions of tourists—that characterized it before the pandemic. But The Shed is one of the few to take advantage of the New York state governor's permission to reopen as of April 2 with capacity limited to one third, or 150 people maximum. All 150 of those attending the concert had either proof of vaccination against COVID-19 or a negative PCR test less than six hours old.

The venue in the newly-redeveloped Hudson Yards opened in 2019, and thus has advantages that many of New York's older theaters do not: it is not-for-profit, giving it an edge over Broadway venues for whom 33 percent capacity is not profitable; it has a modern ventilation system, and its space is modular, which has allowed it to develop a program adapted to the pandemic, artistic director Alex Poots told AFP. "The most important thing is to keep this precious thing alive called live performance, even if we have to reduce our capacity," he said. "There is this communion between artists and audiences that we've all missed terribly."

The city's myriad stand-up comedy clubs are also throwing open their doors. With one person on stage and spectators seated at tables, spending an evening at a comedy club is "really no different from a restaurant," says Emilio Savone, owner of the New York Comedy Club. He is delighted to have sold all the available seats for this first night.

'Reawakening'

"This is one of the moments

that really signals to people our comeback," New York mayor Bill de Blasio said after attending a performance at another venue: an off-Broadway theater which was hosting "Blindness," a sound and light installation based on the dystopian novel by Jose Saramago. "The theater community means so much to our identity as New Yorkers ... And it also happens to be a part of our economy that accounts for more than \$100 billion a year in economic activity, so it has to come back for so many reasons," he said. But with COVID infection rates holding steady—even as New York ramps up its vaccination program—the opening almost certainly will remain gradual. Between now and the fall, theater will see a "reawakening," says Poots. "That said... it'd be very naive not to think that that is a risk, and I think we're very mindful that if at some point, things increase by a big enough degree, the pandemic, then we'll have to pause," he said. And yet, after more than a year of closure, Savone is philosophical. "How much worse can it get?" he says. —AFP

Sports

Raptors roll to historic 53-point win vs Warriors

Largest margin of victory in franchise history

LOS ANGELES: Pascal Siakam celebrated his 27th birthday by scoring a season-high 36 points as the Toronto Raptors won their most lopsided game in franchise history with a 130-77 rout of the Golden State Warriors on Friday.

The Raptors won by 53 points and led at one point by 61 as they handed the short-handed Warriors their third worst loss ever and the sixth defeat in their last seven contests. "You saw it," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We just got destroyed. Not a whole lot to be said. Humiliating for everybody involved."

The Raptors have been having problems of their own, winning for just the second time in the past 15 games and snapping a four-game losing streak. "Losing is not fun, and anything that lifts us out of that is good," said Siakam.

With Stephen Curry and Draymond Green sitting out, the hapless Warriors looked out of sorts. Curry was ruled out hours before tipoff with a bruised tailbone and Green was scratched with a sprained finger. Curry missed five games earlier before returning for the last two games.

"I just think the game went south on us quickly and we got demoralized," Kerr said. "I think without Steph and Draymond out there I think we were a little bit rudderless when things went south. We didn't have the internal fight that we needed to kind of get over the hump."

The Raptors outscored the Warriors by 51 points in the second and third quarters, the largest point differential over a two-quarter span within a game in NBA history. Golden State also became the fourth

team in the last 25 seasons to trail by at least 60 points in a game. Turnovers have been an issue for Golden State this season as they committed 21, leading to 30 Raptor points. "As a coach, you try to navigate the season with your team as best you can," Kerr said. "So there's times for humor, there's times for joy, there's times for serious discussion and soul searching. This is a time for soul searching for sure."

The Raptors outscored the Warriors 35-16 in the second quarter and 46-14 in the third to build a 108-56 lead. Raptors Siakam also had seven rebounds and five assists and Gary Trent, who was recently acquired in a trade, finished with 24 points. OG Anunoby scored 21 points on eight-of-12 shooting. Malachi Flynn tallied 16 points while Chris Boucher had 10 points, six rebounds and four steals. Andrew Wiggins led Golden State with 15 points while Jordan Poole and Nico Mannion each scored 10 points.

Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 47 points on 18-of-21 shooting from the floor and grabbed 12 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks breezed to a 127-109 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Antetokounmpo also had three blocks in posting his third 40-point performance of the season as the Bucks beat the Trail Blazers for the fifth straight time.

Jrue Holiday chipped in 22 points and 10 assists for Milwaukee, who are now 2-1 at the halfway point of their six-game road trip. Damian Lillard led Portland with 32 points. CJ McCollum notched 18 points and seven assists and Robert Covington scored 18 points in the loss. The loss snapped the Trail Blazers' four-game winning streak and was just their third defeat in the past 10 games.

In New York, Luka Doncic scored 13 of his game-high 26 points in the fourth quarter as the Dallas Mavericks beat the New York Knicks 99-86. The Mavericks were without head coach Rick Carlisle who had tested positive for Covid-19 earlier Friday despite receiving the vaccine shot in January. Carlisle was scheduled to coach in his 1,500th game Friday. Assistant coach Jamahl Mosley filled in for him. In Boston, Jayson Tatum scored 26 points, Jaylen Brown added 22 with 11 rebounds and the Boston Celtics beat the Houston Rockets 118-102. — AFP



TAMPA: Pascal Siakam of the Toronto Raptors drives to the basket during the game against the Golden State Warriors on Friday at Amalie Arena in Tampa, Florida. — AFP



ATLANTA: In this file photo taken on September 24, 2020 the 2021 All-Star Game Logo is displayed on the screen prior to the game between the Miami Marlins and Atlanta Braves at Truist Park in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

Baseball's All-Star Game moved from Atlanta over voting laws

NEW YORK: Major League Baseball moved its 2021 All-Star Game out of Atlanta on Friday after concerns that a new Georgia state law would negatively impact the ability of Black citizens to vote. "The best way to demonstrate our values as a sport is by relocating this year's All-Star Game and MLB Draft," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

Critics of a voting rights law signed by Georgia's Republican Governor Brian Kemp last week say the legislation creates severe restrictions upon voters, with tougher identification requirements for absentee voters and restricted use of ballot dropboxes.

US President Joe Biden told ESPN on Wednesday he supported moving the game out of Atlanta over the voting rights law. Manfred said MLB is "finalizing" plans for a new host city for the contest between American League and National League stars that was set for July 13.

Manfred said the league "engaged in thoughtful conversations" with clubs, former and current players and the players' union to consider their views before making the decision. "Major League Baseball fundamentally supports voting rights for all Americans and opposes restrictions to the ballot box," Manfred said. "Fair access to voting continues to have our game's unwavering support."

The new law has brought protests and threats to boycott such Georgia-based firms as Coca-Cola and Delta Air Lines, which both came out against the new law. "Businesses and organizations have great power in their voices and ability to push for change, and I respect the decision of the players to speak out against this unjust law," US Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock of Georgia said in a statement.

"It is not the people of Georgia or the workers of Georgia who crafted this law, it is politicians seeking to retain power at the expense of Georgians' voices. And today's decision by MLB is the unfortunate consequence of these politicians' actions." Among other moves, the law would make it a crime to hand water to people waiting in long lines to vote, saying it could offer an unfair opportunity to influence voters.

Georgia played a pivotal role in the recent US elections, with Democrats eventually winning two key Senate seats to ensure control of Congress. Georgia governor Kemp meanwhile hit out at the MLB's decision Friday, accusing the league of "caving to fear, political opportunism, and liberal lies." "Georgians — and all Americans — should fully understand what the MLB's knee-jerk decision means: cancel culture and woke political activists are coming for every aspect of your life, sports included," Kemp tweeted. — AFP

MLB risked player walkout if All-Star Game not moved

NEW YORK: Major League Baseball risked having several top players boycott the All-Star Game had it not been moved from Atlanta, according to some who celebrated Friday's announcement by commissioner Rob Manfred.

The July 13 exhibition showdown between National and American league superstars was moved after Georgia passed a law making it more difficult for Black people to vote. "Any intent to suppress any American from voting, I disagree with," said Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, the 2018 and 2019 All-Star Game manager for the National League. "Certainly I'm saddened and disappointed for fans in the state of Georgia. They are the victims in this. It's a difficult decision but I certainly support it."

"It was a tough situation. I feel like it was the right decision," said 17-season MLB pitcher Edwin Jackson. "It's a powerful impact baseball has shown it has on the community." Harold Reynolds, a two-time All-Star player now working as a television commentator, said MLB risked having players refuse to play had the game been staged in Atlanta in the wake of the restrictive voting law. "Players were not going to play," he said. "That's part of taking a stand for social justice. And I'm not just talking about black players in The Players Alliance."

The alliance was a group of active and former MLB players, mostly but not all Black, formed last year in the wake of rising social justice concerns. "We will use our voice, our platform, and our partnerships now more than ever to create real, tangible change for the Black community to stand up for every American's right to vote," the group said in a statement. "We will not be silenced. We won't back down in the fight for racial equity. We will never stop breaking barriers to the ballot box."

'Not an easy decision'

Curtis Granderson, president of the alliance and a three-time All-Star in 16 MLB seasons, was among those who spoke to Manfred as he consulted stakeholders about the decision. "It was emotional," Granderson said. "He was taking a pulse. He was letting us know where he was at. It was great that he was receptive. It was great he reached out to us. We have to commend him. This was not an easy decision to have to make. He got a sense (of players' feelings) and the sense was to go ahead and make that decision to move the game. He made the decision to step up."

Other major sports events have been moved over social issues. The NBA moved the 2017 All-Star Game from Charlotte after a North Carolina state law was passed weakening anti-discrimination laws protecting the gay community. The NFL moved the 1993 Super Bowl from Arizona after the state failed to make Martin Luther King Jr Day an official holiday. — AFP

Al-Kuwait crowned 2020-21 Kuwait Basketball League champions

KUWAIT: Al-Kuwait won their 12th Kuwait Basketball League title after being triumphant twice in a three-game play-off final, most recently an 83-61 win over Kazma on Friday evening. Kazma missed their chance to go top, making it as runners-up for the second consecutive year in a row, with Al-Qadsiyah

trailing in third. A total six clubs have each won the domestic title, the first of which was held in 1961-62. Al-Qadsiyah are the most decorated club domestically with 23 titles, followed by Al-Kuwait (12), Kazma (nine), Al-Arabi (eight), Al-Jahra (five) and Al-Sahel (one). — KUNA



KUWAIT: Al-Kuwait players and staff celebrate with the championship's trophy. — KUNA

Sinner advances to face Hurkacz in Miami final

MIAMI: Italian teen Jannik Sinner rallied past Spanish seventh seed Roberto Bautista Agut at the Miami Open on Friday to book a meeting with Hubert Hurkacz in the biggest final of his young career. Sinner, who reached last year's French Open quarter-finals, defeated Bautista 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to become only the fourth teen to reach the men's final in the 36-year history of the ATP Miami Masters.

Poland's Hurkacz, seeded 26th, won his second straight match over a top 10 player, beating Russian fourth seed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4. Coming off a quarter-final win over second-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, Hurkacz became the first player to take a set off Rublev at the tournament. It's the first time he has earned two top 10 wins in the same tournament.

Sinner, 19 and playing only his third Masters 1000, joined 1990 champion Andre Agassi, 2005 runner-up Rafael Nadal and 2007 winner Novak Djokovic as Miami teen finalists. "Today we both showed great tennis," Sinner said. "It was not easy. It was a little bit windy as well. I'm very happy about my performance today."

Sinner took his eighth career triumph over a top-20 rival and ensured he will rise into the ATP's top 25 next week, although he nearly smashed a racquet in a tense second set. "Sometimes you get the frustration going but just trying to stay calm, which is how I am normally," Sinner said. "Sometimes you have to scream or do something else, but don't break racquet. Please let me don't break racquet."

Sinner seeks his third career ATP title after last year at Sofia and February in an Australian Open tune-up at Melbourne. As excited as he was at reaching the final, he kept a long-term perspective about what it meant for his career. "This kind of stuff can help you a lot. It's good to be in finals here but it doesn't mean anything," Sinner said. "The road is very long and I want to improve day after day and we'll see what's coming." Bautista, who ousted Russian top seed Daniil Medvedev in the quarter-finals, missed out on his second career ATP Masters 1000 final after 2016 at Shanghai, where he lost to Britain's Andy Murray.



MIAMI GARDENS: Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain serves to Jannik Sinner of Italy in the semifinals during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on Friday in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

Keeping it simple

Bautista broke Sinner to open then saved two break points and held for a 2-0 lead. But Sinner broke back at love in the sixth game to level at 3-3. The Spaniard broke again for 6-5 when Sinner netted a backhand and he held to claim the set on his second ace after 51 minutes.

In the second set, Sinner saved four break points in the seventh game to hold but sent a backhand wide on his first break chance in the eighth games as Bautista held for 4-4. Sinner held and then broke when the Spaniard netted a backhand to force a third set.

Bautista broke at love for a 2-1 lead in the deciding set, but Sinner roared back to claim the victory and ensure himself a place in next week's ATP top 25. "I tried to stick with my serve after the second set, maybe a little bit deeper," Sinner said. "Trying to keep my game simple and make it in the best possible way so I'm very happy today." Hurkacz, who already has one victory this season in Delray Beach in January, advanced to the first Masters 1000 final of his career. "After winning a title at the beginning of the year I had a couple of rough matches," Hurkacz said. "I have just been trying to improve my game."

Hurkacz hammered eight aces and broke Rublev's serve three times while being broken just once in their one hour, 27 minute match. Besides dominating on the serve, Hurkacz struck more backhand winners than the Russian. "He played a couple of amazing shots," Hurkacz said of Rublev. "I was able to play to his backhand to get advantages on the rallies."

Rublev fought to stay alive in the opening set before Hurkacz finished it off with a powerful serve on the sixth set point. In the second set, Hurkacz clinched the win on his third match point, blasting a cross court forward winner that froze Rublev in his tracks. Hurkacz and Sinner are doubles teammates so they know each other's games well. "It is going to be a fun match," Hurkacz said. — AFP

Sports

Solskjaer, Tuchel play down Haaland talk

Dortmund standout also linked to Manchester City, Real Madrid and Barcelona



PODGORICA: Norway's Erling Haaland (right) fights for the ball with Montenegro's Aleksandar Scenic (left) and Igor Vujacic during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group G football match between Montenegro and Norway at the Podgorica City Stadium in Podgorica on March 30, 2021. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel have played down reports their clubs will go head to head in the race to sign Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Braut Haaland. Haaland has emerged as one of the world's top forwards after scoring 21 goals in 21 appearances in the Bundesliga this season.

The 20-year-old Norwegian snubbed United to join Dortmund from RB Salzburg in 2019, but there is growing speculation Solskjaer will make another attempt to sign him in the close season. Solskjaer coached Haaland at Molde and talk of a summer move from Dortmund has intensified after the player's agent Mino Raiola and father Alf-Inge Haaland were pictured in Spain. He has also been linked with Manchester City, Real Madrid and Barcelona. Asked if he can afford to miss out on Haaland again, Solskjaer said: "Well, I'm focusing on the next two months and whatever happens in the world of football. There's only so many places anyone can go to. I just focus on the ones who are here and even though I've worked with Erling it's not right for me as a Man United manager (to be) talking about Erling. I can talk about him as an ex-coach of his but he will make his own mind up."

Solskjaer refused to confirm if Haaland was on his wanted list, adding: "I think the way the world works at the moment, you'd like to do, of course, all your business on the quiet and all your talks on the quiet. 'Hopefully we can suddenly sit here with players that no-one's written about and thought we're going to go to.'"

Tight-lipped Tuchel

With Germany forward Timo Werner struggling to adapt to the Premier League, Chelsea could do with a quality addition to their attack. But Tuchel wouldn't be drawn on Chelsea's potential interest in Haaland, instead claiming his agent was trying to stoke up a bidding war.

"I will not answer that, out of respect for the player and for Borussia Dortmund," Tuchel said when asked if Chelsea would speak to Raiola. "He's a Borussia Dortmund player, and of course there's big news around him and his agent. And it seems like they are creating a race for the player. But still everybody needs to accept, and I will fully accept, that he is a Borussia Dortmund player. A very promising player of course, but with respect to the situation he's not in our squad, he's not in our club so there's no comment on anything else regarding him."

Chelsea have also been linked with a move for Sergio Aguero after Manchester City's record goalscorer confirmed he will leave at the end of the season. Keeping tight-lipped on the mooted Aguero interest, Tuchel said: "I don't need to talk, it's the same, the same answer as for Haaland. It's absolutely clear that we have full respect for Man City and Sergio Aguero who is a big player for them. There is no word needed from me about that. His career is outstanding, it speaks for itself, and it's not finished yet. He will still help Man City to achieve their goals this season. But I will never speak more than that about a player of a rival." — AFP

Benghazi face Pirates in first CAF club match in Libya since 2010

JOHANNESBURG: Al-Ahly Benghazi will become the first Libyan club since 2010 to host a CAF club match when they tackle South African visitors Orlando Pirates today in the Confederation Cup. Deadly violence in the post-Muammar Gaddafi era forced Libyan national teams and clubs to stage home matches in other north African countries, mostly Tunisia and Egypt.

A recent United Nations-supervised deal has restored calm to the country and Benghazi hosted an Africa Cup of Nations qualifier against Tunisia last week. Here, AFP Sport previews matchday 3 in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League with the first and second seeds in the four groups meeting.

Group A

Former Pirates star Joseph Makhanya has advised German coach Josef Zimbauer to sharpen his attack and lay siege to the Benghazi goalmouth in pursuit of maximum points. Makhanya told the Sowetan newspaper that the experiment of using Namibia winger Deon Hotto as a central forward must end, and he wants Tshogofatso Mabasa and Malawian Frank Mhango chosen as a twin strike force. "The way Pirates have been playing is like going to war and leaving your weapons at home," said Makhanya of a team that has netted seven times in five CAF matches this season.

Group B

Title-holders Renaissance Berkane of Morocco will look to 35-year-old Mouhcine Iajour for goals as they seek to bounce back from a loss at Coton Sport of Cameroon when they host leaders JS Kabylie of Algeria. The Orange Boys have scored four goals in their latest African campaign and three have come from the veteran forward, who played in Switzerland, Belgium, Qatar and Saudi Arabia before returning home. It is win or bust for bottom club NAPSA Stars of Zambia when they host a Coton team with an impressive CAF away record this season of three wins from four matches.

Group C

The clash between Etoile Sahel and frontrunners CS Sfaxien in Rades pits Tunisian clubs with outstanding Confederation Cup records against each other. Sfaxien have won the competition a record three times and Etoile twice and both have also been runners-up since the competition launched in 2004. Both sides hope leading scorers — Souleymane Coulibaly of Etoile and Firas Chaouat of Sfaxien — can put recent barren outings behind them.

Group D

Something has to give when Raja Casablanca of Morocco face Pyramids of Egypt as they are the only clubs among the 16 in the group phase with 100 percent records after two matchdays. Both north African outfits have beaten Namungo of Tanzania and Nkana of Zambia to create a six-point gap between them and their rivals. Soufiane Rahimi is an in-form Raja attacker while nine of the Pyramids team have scored at least once, including Burkinabe Eric Traore, Palestinian Mahmoud Wadi and Uruguayan Diego Rolan. — AFP

COVID fall-out may prevent City replacing Aguero, says Guardiola

LONDON: Pep Guardiola said Manchester City may well not replace record goalscorer Sergio Aguero due to the financial fall-out from the coronavirus pandemic. Guardiola added the runaway Premier League leaders possessed enough talent to cope without Aguero when his contract expires at the end of the season.

The Argentine joined City from Atletico Madrid in 2011, three years after the club was taken over by Abu Dhabi owners, and will leave after 10 trophy-laden years, with 257 goals in 384 games so far. City have been linked with Norwegian star Erling Haaland, England captain Harry Kane and France's World Cup winner Kylian Mbappe but Guardiola is not sure such targets are realistic. Although City are one of the richest clubs in the Premier League they like others have had no fans coming through the turnstiles for a year.

"There is a lot of big chances that maybe we are not going to sign a striker for next season," said Guardiola at Friday's press conference. "We have enough players in the first team right now and we have interesting players in the academy. There is a big chance, with the situation in the world, the economic problems in world football, we are not going to sign any striker for next season." Guardiola admits Aguero is such an icon at the club that it was incredibly tough not to renew the contract. However, Aguero has had a frustrating season due to injury and had to sit out a month due to coronavirus.

City chairman Khaldoon Al-Mubarak has revealed a statue of the striker has been commissioned to stand alongside those currently being made to honor his former team-mates David Silva and Vincent Kompany. "We know how important a player he is in the present and was in the past," said Guardiola. "These decisions are never easy." Aguero has won four Premier League titles, with a fifth looking almost certain this season. They also remain in the hunt for a historic quadruple. — AFP



LONDON: England's striker Harry Kane (right) tangles with Poland's defender Jan Bednarek (left) during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group I qualification football match between England and Poland at Wembley Stadium in London on March 31, 2021. — AFP

Mourinho rebuffs Kane speculations

LONDON: Jose Mourinho refuses to "play that game" regarding speculation over Tottenham Hotspur star striker Harry Kane's future after he was linked with replacing Sergio Aguero at Premier League rivals Manchester City. Mourinho said he did not know if England captain Kane always had a smile on his face "but he is always professional".

Kane has reason to smile as Korean star Son Heung-min — with whom he has forged a highly effective partnership — is fit to return for today's clash with struggling Newcastle. Son suffered a hamstring injury in the north London derby defeat to Arsenal and missed two games as well as his country's friendly with Japan last week.

Mourinho's case in trying to persuade Kane to stay with his boyhood club would be helped with Champions League football next season and ending Spurs trophy drought. Both are within reach. Spurs

revived league form with four victories in five league games, after an alarming slump, sees them just three points off fourth-placed Chelsea.

They also have a date with Manchester City in the League Cup final — the last trophy they won in 2008 — on April 25. "I cannot play that game," said Mourinho referring to speculation over Kane's future. "I have to focus on what he is for us. I'm always pleased when my players go to their national teams and do well. I don't know if he always has a smile on his face but he's always professional. He has some nice challenges, a final to play, a challenge for Europe and the Euros."

Son's return will be heartening for his team-mates as they enter the business end of the campaign. He and Kane have contributed 30 of Spurs 49 league goals this season and 22 assists between them. "Son is good. He will be selected," said Mourinho. "He was injured, he trained with the team fully for the first time this morning. Yesterday he was coming to do partial exercises, not a complete session, this morning was the first day he did it. Last week he didn't train at all so it was completely impossible to play internationals. This time was a good chance for him to recover." — AFP

Classifieds

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
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Dasmah	22532265
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Five-star Albion hammer Chelsea

Stunning defeat ends Tuchel's unbeaten start

LONDON: Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel suffered the first defeat of his reign as struggling West Bromwich Albion took advantage of Thiago Silva's red card to earn a stunning 5-2 win yesterday.

Tuchel had overseen a 14-match unbeaten run in all competitions since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January. But that impressive start came to an embarrassing end as West Brom ran riot at Stamford Bridge.

Christian Pulisic put Chelsea ahead early in the first half, only for Brazil defender Thiago to get his marching orders moments later for a second booking. That proved the turning point as Albion's Matheus Pereira struck twice in first half stoppage-time.

Mbaye Diagne grabbed West Brom's third goal and Callum Robinson netted twice to leave Tuchel shell-shocked. Mason Mount's reply was no consolation as Chelsea's bid to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish in the Premier League suffered a significant blow.

The Blues, beaten for the first time in 10 league games, remain fourth for now, but both West Ham and Tottenham would go above them if they win on Monday and Sunday respectively. After conceding just two goals in Tuchel's reign, with seven consecutive clean-sheets since the defense was last breached at Southampton in February, this was a rude awakening for Chelsea.

For the first time since 2011 against Arsenal, Chelsea conceded five goals at home in the league. It was the worst possible preparation for their Champions League quarter-final first leg against

Porto on Wednesday.

West Brom remain second bottom but their first league win at Chelsea since 1978 gives them a glimmer of hope in the fight to avoid relegation. Sam Allardyce's team are seven points from safety with eight games left. Thiago was making his first Chelsea start since February 4 after recovering from a thigh problem, but he was completely out of touch on his return.

Ominous signs

The early signs were ominous when Jorginho's wayward pass was intercepted by Pereira on the edge of the Chelsea penalty area, forcing Thiago into a cynical foul that earned him a yellow card. Despite their sloppy start, Tuchel's men took the lead in the 27th minute.

Marcos Alonso's 25-yard free-kick cannoned back off the post and Pulisic was first to react as he alertly steered his shot past Sam Johnstone from close-range. But Thiago gifted Albion a lifeline two minutes later when he jumped into a rash two-footed foul on Okay Yokuslu.

The 36-year-old could have no complaints about his first dismissal since he saw red while playing for Paris Saint-Germain in 2013. In keeping with their erratic display, Chelsea were punished for some dismal defending in first half stoppage-time.

A long punt forward by Johnstone should have been dealt with easily, but Kurt Zouma allowed Pereira to run behind him and guide a superb lob over the exposed Edouard Mendy. Suddenly incapable of getting out of their own half, Chelsea fell behind with virtually the



LONDON: West Bromwich Albion's Senegalese striker Mbaye Diagne (second right) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. — AFP

last kick of the half.

James surrendered possession and Diagne found Pereira, who danced through the shambolic Chelsea defense before guiding cool low finish past Mendy from 10 yards. Chelsea nearly drew level immediately when Johnstone made a hash of James' cross, forcing Semi Ajayi to turn Alonso's shot onto the post.

Mount, on as a half-time substitute, nearly caught out Johnstone with a clever free-kick, but Chelsea suffered a hammer blow in the 63rd minute. A flowing move from the visitors ended with Robinson running onto Darnell Furlong's cross to smash a superb volley past Mendy from 12 yards.

Chelsea were in tatters and West

Brom compounded their misery with a superb 68th minute break that featured a flurry of deft passes before Diagne slotted home. Mount reduced the deficit with a close-range finish from Timo Werner's pass in the 71st minute. But Tuchel's misery was complete in stoppage-time when Robinson struck again with a dinked finish. — AFP



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