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Ghanem vows to counter smear attacks against him

MP claims names of 359 Kuwaitis in Panama Papers

Public prosecution closes Boutiqaat case, finds no wrongdoing

KUWAIT: Kuwait's public prosecution has concluded an investigation into local e-commerce site Boutiqaat and dismissed the case 'without prejudice' after finding no evidence of money laundering or other illicit activity.

Boutiqaat's funds were frozen in July 2020 when the government began investigating it following allegations of money laundering. But the firm always denied any wrongdoing and Kuwait's Attorney General Dirar Al-Asousi decided in March 2021 to unfreeze the funds and financial accounts of Boutiqaat with all local banks.

The popular ecommerce site is one of Kuwait's most notable online success stories and was looking at a valuation of between \$700 million and \$1 billion last summer, prior to the investigation.

Boutiqaat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that he and a number of MPs have been the target of "unprecedented" smear attacks, adding he will refute the unfounded charges. Ghanem charged that the attacks against him were "financed" by some and are mere groundless accusations and claims that are unacceptable, adding that facts will be revealed shortly. The speaker vowed he will refute such claims in the coming Assembly session scheduled for next week.

Opposition MPs have harshly criticized Ghanem for allegedly violating the law while declaring the membership of leading opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum null and void. They also accused him of manipulating voting on a key resolution to delay all grillings against HH the Prime Minister until October 2022. Some MPs also charged that he appointed a relative of a lawmaker in the Assembly in violation of the law.

Meanwhile, opposition MPs Hasan Jowhar, Muhannad Al-Sayer and Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf yesterday demanded that the speaker must add their grilling against the prime minister to the agenda of the next meeting. Based on a vote last week, which opposition MPs claim was illegal, Ghanem postponed all grillings against the prime minister for over 18 months.

MP Mudhaf meanwhile claimed that names of 359 Kuwaitis have appeared in the so-called Panama Papers, which include millions of documents about people allegedly involved in corruption. The lawmaker asked the prime minister if authorities have conducted any investigations into the Panama Papers and what are the results of the investi-



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is seen during a parliamentary session at the National Assembly on March 30, 2021.

gations, if any. He also asked the premier to provide him with the names of all Kuwaitis revealed in the Papers, and inquired if a Cabinet member is involved in the documents.

MP Musaed Al-Mutairi yesterday proposed that the government should declare the last 10 days of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which is scheduled to start next week, as a public holiday. He also proposed to increase the pension of retired Kuwaitis by KD 120 monthly once every three years.

Boutiqaat

Boutiqaat Group for Perfumes and Beauty Products

بوتيكات

مجموعة بوتيكات للعطور ومواد وادوات التجميل

Issued in Kuwait on April 05, 2021

A statement from Boutiqaat, regarding the conclusion of a eight-month investigation by the AGPP with no charges filed

We are pleased to announce that the eight-month investigation into our business operations by The Kuwait Attorney General of Public Prosecution (AGPP) has cleared the company from all the allegations.

Following a review of over 3 million transactions, Boutiqaat was found to be compliant with all regulatory and financial policies. Every transaction in Boutiqaat is documented, serialized and fully traceable. The investigation reviewed all company records including audited financial statements since establishment, all of which have been previously audited by one of the four leading accounting firms. It also examined all dealings with local and international suppliers, contracts with social media influencers, and import and export documents. Moreover, it reviewed all the company's sales records, payment methods, and associated bank accounts.

By conducting several visits to Boutiqaat headquarters and warehouses, the authority officials verified the accuracy of the company's systems and physical documents. In addition, they conducted several physical audits to ensure our inventory's accuracy.

We have maintained our integrity and we are glad that we can finally put this matter behind us. We would like to sincerely thank our customers, partners, staff, and suppliers for their continued trust, and for their support throughout what has been a challenging period. Moving forward, our focus will remain on providing exceptional experience to our customers, and to continue our journey to establish Kuwait on the world's ecommerce stage.

ENDS

For Press Inquiries: press@boutiqaat.com

Local

Kuwait Amir receives Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib

Crown Prince assures Jordan king of Kuwait's support



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Dr Ahmad Mohammad Al-Khatib. — Amiri Diwan photo

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Dr Ahmad Mohammad Al-Khatib. In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to the Indonesian President Joko Widodo over the victims of floods and landslides that struck parts of Indonesia and East Timor. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow mercy on the souls of victims, wishing a speedy recovery to those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Separately, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah told Jordan's King Abdullah II in a phone call on Sunday that Kuwait stands alongside Jordan and supports all the measures it takes to keep its security and stability intact. Describing bilateral relations as tight-knit, His Highness the Crown Prince said the security of the Hashemite Kingdom is closely intertwined with Kuwait's, wishing Amman continued development and prosperity. In return, the Jordanian king thanked

His Highness the Crown Prince for the gracious gesture, saying his genuine emotions are indicative of the close bond the two countries share. — KUNA

Kuwait
condoles
with Indonesia
President

KUWAIT: Vendors display dates, a popular Ramadan commodity, for sale at Souq Mubarakiya yesterday as people around Kuwait prepare for the holy month. — Xinhua

India tightens
screws as COVID
cases hit record

NEW DELHI: India's worst-hit state ramped up its coronavirus restrictions as nationwide the daily infections exceeded 100,000 for the first time yesterday. The United States is the only nation that has regularly registered so many cases in one day. Brazil recorded triple digits once in March. In India, hopes at the start of the year that the outbreak may be subsiding in the vast nation of 1.3 billion people have been dashed in recent weeks as a fresh wave pushed the national total to 12.5 million infections and 165,000 deaths.

Maharashtra, the worst-hit state and home to India's financial and entertainment capital Mumbai,

recorded nearly 60,000 cases in the last 24 hours. Struggling state authorities on Sunday tightened the evening curfew to allow only people involved in essential services out of their homes from 8:00 pm to 7:00 am. The region of 110 million people will also see weekend lockdowns, with gatherings of over four people banned and places of worship and restaurants shut.

In Mumbai over the weekend, one of Bollywood's biggest stars, Akshay Kumar, became the latest celebrity to test positive. Yesterday, shooting of the religious epic "Ram Setu" that Kumar was making was halted after 45 crewmembers also tested positive. "How long shooting remains halted depends on Akshay Kumar's recovery. We can replace all our crewmembers, but we cannot replace the star of the film," Ashok Dubey from the Federation of Western India Cine Employees told AFP. Kumar, 53, tweeted meanwhile that he had been hospitalized "as a precautionary measure under medical advice".

Jordan prince
remains defiant
amid turmoil

AMMAN: Jordan's Prince Hamzah, accused of a "wicked" plot against his elder half-brother King Abdullah II, has struck a defiant tone, insisting he will not obey orders restricting his movement. The government has accused Hamzah of involvement in a seditious conspiracy to "destabilize the kingdom's security", placed him under house arrest and detained at least 16 more people.

But 41-year-old Hamzah, who says he has been ordered to stay inside his Amman palace, vowed he would defy limits on his movement and communications, in an audio recording posted on Twitter late Sunday. "I don't want to make moves and escalate now, but of course I'm not going to obey when they say you can't go out, you can't tweet, you can't communicate with people, you're only allowed to see your family," he said.

Hamzah - a former crown prince who was stripped of that title by Abdullah in 2004 - has emerged as a vocal critic of the monarchy, accusing Jordan's leadership of corruption, nepotism and authoritarian rule. In a video he sent to the BBC Saturday, he bemoaned "incompetence that has been prevalent in our governing structure for the last 15 to 20 years and has been getting worse". He charged that "no-one is able to speak or express opinion on anything without being bullied, arrested, harassed and threatened".

'Wicked slander'

Hamzah denied being involved in any "nefarious" plot, but said he had been placed under house arrest, with his phone and internet cut, by Jordan's military chief, General Youssef Huneiti. In the recording released Sunday, Hamzah said that "when the head of the joint chiefs of staff comes and tells you this... I think it's kind of unacceptable".

He added that when Huneiti visited his home, "I recorded what he said and sent it to my friends abroad and to my family, in case anything happens". According to residents, the internet has been cut off for two days in the posh district of Dabouq, in the west of the capital

Awareness

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is anxious to avoid imposing a new national lockdown after a shutdown in March 2020 caused widespread human and economic misery. Modi on Sunday chaired a high-level meeting and a statement afterwards announced an awareness campaign from April 6-14 "with emphasis on 100-percent mask usage, personal hygiene and sanitation at public places/workplaces and health facilities".

In the capital New Delhi, the chief minister has ruled out a new lockdown despite the surge in cases. Police say they are issuing more fines to people not wearing masks. "The fear of COVID-19 has gone away. Most people don't wear masks properly, including many of my passengers," auto-rickshaw driver Surjit Singh, 68, told AFP.

Rajesh Mohan Bindlish, 34, a bank executive in Noida outside the capital, said that police should be stricter but that the government should avoid another lockdown. "The economy will be hit very

hard and it won't be good for all of us. We can't afford to disrupt our economic recovery as so many jobs depend on it," Bindlish told AFP. "The cases have risen because the people outside became too lax about the entire situation. If fines are increased and there is strictness in their implementation, things will improve," he said.

India has so far administered almost 80 million vaccine shots. Last week, it opened up vaccinations to all those over 45 years old to speed up its flagging national inoculation drive. India is using two shots for its drive, a locally produced version of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, and Covaxin, which was developed by domestic firm Bharat Biotech.

Yesterday, New Delhi-based Panacea Biotech said it had reached an agreement with the backer of the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, the Russian Direct Investment Fund, to produce 100 million doses in India each year. The new deal brings Sputnik V's total production agreements in India to 852 million doses. — AFP

Amman, where Prince Hamzah and other royals live.

King Abdullah, 59, named Hamzah crown prince in 1999, in line with their father's dying wish, but stripped him of that title five years later and named his own son Prince Hussein, now 26, heir to the throne. Hamzah's mother, American-born Queen Noor, defended her son, tweeting that she was "praying that truth and justice will prevail for all the innocent victims of this wicked slander".

Analyst Ahmad Awad said the turbulent events were "a first" in Jordan's history. "This is the beginning of a crisis and not the end," said the head of the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics research institute in Amman. "This shows that there is a need for political, economic and democratic reforms."

Linchpin of stability

The crisis has laid bare divisions in a country usually seen as a bulwark of stability in the Middle East. Washington, major Gulf powers, Egypt and the Arab League were all quick to pledge their support for Abdullah and all his steps to ensure stability, and a similar message came from Russia yesterday. Jordan has only about 10 million people, but outsized strate-

gic importance in a turbulent region.

It borders Israel and the occupied West Bank, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, hosts US troops and is home to millions of exiled Palestinians and more than half a million Syrian refugees. The Washington Post had first reported Saturday that Hamzah had been "placed under restriction" amid a probe into an alleged plot.

"This sedition was nipped in the bud," Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Sunday, charging that the plotters had linked up with foreign parties "to carry out wicked plans" to destabilize the kingdom. Among those arrested were a former finance minister, Bassem Awadallah, who was chief of the royal court in 2007-08, and Sherif Hassan bin Zaid, a junior member of the royal family.

Safadi declined to identify the alleged foreign parties, but also charged that an individual "with links to foreign intelligence services" had offered to spirit Hamzah's wife out of the country by plane. An Israeli who said he is a close friend of Hamzah, Roy Shaposhnik, said he had "extended an invitation for the prince's wife and children to stay at his home in Europe". — 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

Online shopping booms in Kuwait amid COVID-19 fears

KUWAIT: With a worrying increase in COVID-19 cases in Kuwait, there have been marked changes in the residents' habit as more of them now avoid going to public places and fill their needs by online shopping.

Modhi Al-Otaibi, a 46-year-old retiree from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity, said she purchases her grocery from online sites, and all the needed items such as vegetables, fruits, bread, cheese and clothes are just a click away.

For Hamad Al-Enzi, a 35-year-old employee of a local bank, the hands-on visit to the old Al-Mubarakiya market for meat is no longer necessary, because his mobile phone serves him well in ordering meat directly from the supplier Al-Mawashi company.

Currently, it comes as no surprise to see many delivery trucks loaded with goods travelling across Kuwait. "This scene was imposed by the coronavirus outbreak and encouraged by companies which provided and developed their online services for customers, and competed through their offers," Khalid Al-Otaibi, vice-president of the Kuwait Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, told Xinhua. E-shopping saves time and effort and provides safety in such circumstances of COVID-19, Otaibi said.

Research showed that the online grocery in Kuwait exceeded \$500 million in 2020, with expectations of a further jump to more than \$700 million by the end of 2021, an impressive fact for a country known for its commercial complexes which were almost always crowded before the coronavirus outbreak.

Tamadur Al-Saleh, who works for the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education as a teacher, told Xinhua that she was a shopaholic like most of the people in the country. "Before the coronavirus, I would go to Avenues Mall (the largest



shopping mall in Kuwait) at least twice a week, to keep up with the new trend and fashion and buy whatever suits me," she said.

However, her fear of getting infected led her to buy new collections online from the famous clothing stores that have activated their websites and social media accounts with discounts to attract more customers.

Nadine Aref, a 37-year-old Jordanian who works for a private company in Kuwait, told Xinhua that she has become more economical in spending money amid the instability of the labor market and the high risk of being laid off, and turned to a grocery app to buy vegetables and fruits. "I spend about KD 10 (\$33) a week in buying vegetables and fruits through this

app," Aref said. "Their service is very good and fast, and it allows me to save time and avoid exposure to the risk of infection, in addition to a very competitive price," she added.

Maitham Al-Shakhs, a Kuwaiti economic analyst, told Xinhua that consumer goods have played a major role in promoting e-commerce in Kuwait after coronavirus changed the people's purchase behavior and motivated them to buy online.

He expected the delivery applications and electronic website services to expand in the future to include other sectors such as maintenance services if the current anti-coronavirus precautionary measures continue. — Xinhua

Exemptions to over-60 expat ban mullied

KUWAIT: Informed sources said there is a possibility to exclude those who were born in Kuwait and who have reached the age of 60 but do not have a university degree from the ban on renewal of work permits, which will be decided by the director general of the Public Authority for Manpower. The sources said the amendments are still under study and no decision has been made so far in this regard.

They added that senior PAM officials are also discussing exempting those who have lived in Kuwait for more than 30 years. They said specialists and labor directors at PAM presented several recommendations with regards to the decision, including imposing a fee of KD 3,000 for

renewing the work permit annually, which was reduced after discussion to KD 2,000, but this has not been adopted yet.

The most notable amendments to the over-60 ban decision include exempting those born in Kuwait; those who have been living in Kuwait for more than 30 years; comprehensive private health insurance, in addition to government insurance for the elderly; special fee for work permits for this group which will be doubled annually; and coordinating with the interior ministry to ease transfers to dependent visas for this group. PAM had said Sunday that a final decision is expected to be announced within a couple of weeks.

In January, Kuwait began implementing a ban on work permit renewals of expatriates aged 60 who do not hold university degrees. More than 70,000 workers are set to leave Kuwait this year due to the ban, according to Kuwaiti media. — Al-Qabas

MoI underscores importance of uniting GCC security efforts

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) Lieutenant General Essam Al-Naham underlined yesterday the importance of unifying security efforts among the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), through cooperation and coordination between various security sectors to deal with crime in all its forms. Naham made these remarks in a speech at the 11th meeting of MoI's undersecretaries in the GCC countries, held in Riyadh, through video conferencing. A statement issued by MoI's General Department of Security Relations and Media said that Al-Naham welcomed in his speech the secre-

taries of the Interior Ministries in the GCC countries, stressing the depth of security relations between them and the continuous coordination to reach the Gulf security integration that everyone seeks. He thanked and showed gratitude to the Secretariat General of the GCC for their great efforts in strengthening joint Gulf security coordination and cooperation. The meeting discussed common security issues that contribute to strengthening the process of joint Gulf security cooperation in the GCC countries, identifying the latest developments in the region, and coordinating efforts as required at the current stage. — KUNA

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Kuwaiti-funded village offers housing to 255 displaced Yemeni families

First phase includes 104 housing units, mosque and school

ADEN: A residential complex in Yemen, funded by Kuwaiti donations, was inaugurated in the Red Sea city of Al-Khokha on Sunday, providing housing for dozens of displaced families. A total 255 families will benefit from the homes, which will replace tents, protecting the displaced families from the harsh cold weather and rains, as well as providing them with safety and security. The housing complex, includes a mosque, a school and a water well. The first phase, which is now complete, includes 104 housing units. Each home consists of two rooms, a courtyard and a bathroom. Speaking to the press at the opening ceremony, Al-Hodeida Governor Al-Hasan Taher expressed the gratitude of his people for the initiative, which came about thanks to the donations provided by the Kuwait-based charity Al-Rahma International. "This is further evidence of the noble humanitarian gestures of the State of Kuwait in supporting the Yemeni people," he said. —KUNA



HODEIDA: Displaced Yemenis move to shelters provided by Kuwait's Rahma International Charity in Yemen's war-ravaged western province of Hodeida on Sunday. — AFP photos



Crimes

Hangry customers beat deliveryman

KUWAIT: An Indian food deliveryman told police he was beaten by two men, who took the food and threw the money at him before going inside the house he delivered the food to. Detectives went to the house and arrested the two. Both confessed to beating the deliveryman, claiming they were hungry and could not control their anger, as he was late. The two will be referred to concerned authorities for further legal action.

Drug bust

Air cargo customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle the drug "chemical" in a parcel that arrived from Britain. Officers became suspicious about the parcel, so they inspected it and found 21 kg of grass containing chemical. Drugs Control General Department officers are looking for the addressee.

Curfew breaker arrested

Police arrested a Kuwaiti roaming the streets during the curfew hours, who attempted to escape from a checkpoint in Salmiya. Police noticed the vehicle approaching the checkpoint, then when they asked the driver for his ID and permit, he became nervous and asked to park on the side. He then attempted to escape, but was chased and stopped. The suspect had psychedelic pills on him.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

ACK School of Aviation continues its achievements

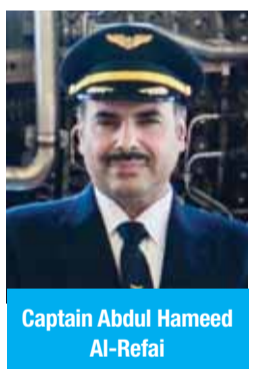
KUWAIT: Since the beginning of the pandemic, the School of Aviation (SOA) at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) is determined to provide aviation students the best teaching methods and ultimate expansion opportunities. Hence, the SOA in line with the current situations adopted the (E-learning) and started its academic 2019/2020 year through Microsoft Teams platform, after receiving the needed approvals from all aviation authorities such as Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA).

It is worth mentioning that it was a common argument of all relevant people that Aviation students would still have to attend their practical sessions in person and the EASA license examinations should be conducted in person too. In this sense, the SOA in collaboration with the Health and Safety Department of ACK has created COVID-19 safe campus protocols after receiving the necessary approvals from the local authorities. Thus, aviation students and instructors were able to resume the required practical sessions from campus. The aforementioned

achievements reinforced the determination of the aviation team and management and made them work hard to develop and introduce new courses despite the challenging situation.

Also, one of the greatest achievements during this time was that the SOA had successfully introduced the B1.1+B2 combined course providing its B1.1 graduates additional progressive path, which also allows them to pursue their education and earn recognition locally, regionally and internationally. Upon course completion, students may then apply for B1.1 and B2 AME licenses. This combined course will grant ACK's students an advantage and priority in the job market.

Commenting on the continuous achievements, the Senior Director of the SOA at ACK, Captain Abdul Hameed Al-Refai said: "We are constantly monitoring the market trends in the aviation industry to ensure our response to the market needs and equip our students with the latest industry knowledge and technologies. These achievements will definitely provide our students with the ability to develop their skills and to succeed in this field."



Captain Abdul Hameed Al-Refai

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KUWAIT: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mishaan Al-Otaibi held a meeting recently with top Ministry of Electricity and Water officials to discuss the ministry's plans and preparations to meet the high demand on energy projected for the summer. — KUNA



Bangladesh ferry disaster death toll hits 26, several still missing

Israel's Netanyahu on trial as coalition talks ramp up

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An elderly villager and her grandson stand in floodwaters in front of their damaged home in the village of Haitimuk in East Flores after flash floods and landslides swept eastern Indonesia and neighboring East Timor. —AFP

90 dead in Indonesia, East Timor floods

Dozens missing as tropical cyclone Seroja pounds South Asian nations

LEMBATA, Indonesia: Tropical cyclone Seroja pounded Indonesia and East Timor yesterday after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that have killed at least 91 people and left dozens missing. Packing heavy winds and rain, the storm heaped more misery on the Southeast Asian nations after Sunday's disaster turned small communities into wastelands of mud and uprooted trees and forced thousands of people into shelters.

Downpours are expected over the next day as the storm triggers offshore waves as high as six meters (20 feet), Indonesia's disaster agency said. The cyclone, which was picking up strength as it moved toward the west coast of Australia, hampered efforts to reach trapped survivors.

Indonesia's disaster agency said at least 70 people have been killed, with another 70 missing. In East Timor, at least 21 people have been killed according to an official in the tiny half-island nation of 1.3 million that lies between Indonesia and Australia. Many of the deaths were in Timor's inundated capital Dili, where the front of the presidential palace was transformed into a mud pit. In Indonesia's remote East Flores municipality, torrents of mud washed over homes, bridges and roads, while strong waves have prevented search teams from accessing the hardest-hit areas.

On Lembata, an island east of Flores, parts of some villages were swept down a mountainside and carried to the shore of the ocean. Soon after flash floods began tearing into resident Basir Langoday's district

in the early morning, he heard screams for help from a nearby home covered in rubble. "There were four of them inside. Three survived but the other one didn't make it," he told reporters. Langoday and his friends scrambled to try and save the trapped man before he was crushed to death.

"He said 'hurry, I can't hold on any longer,'" Langoday added. Juna Witak, another Lembata resident, joined his family at a local hospital where they wept over the corpse of his mother who was killed in a flash flood Sunday. Her body was found by the seashore. "There was a rumbling sound and the floods swept away homes, everything," Witak said.

'Medicine, food, blankets'

Indonesian President Joko Widodo expressed "deepest condolences" over the devastation in the southeast end of the archipelago. "I understand the deep sorrow suffered by our brothers and sisters because of this disaster," he said in a nationwide address. Across the region, residents have flocked to temporary shelters or taken refuge in what was left of their homes. "The evacuees are spread out. There are hundreds in each sub-district but many others are staying at home," said Alfons Hada Bethan, head of the East Flores disaster agency.

"They need medicine, food, blankets." Some 2,500 people had been evacuated in East Timor, with several thousand more in Indonesia. Pounding rains challenged efforts to find any survivors. "We suspect many

going to be the outcome of the questioning." The couple said they were incredibly sad to leave Myanmar, which was their home for eight years, and hope the country stabilizes soon. A spokesperson for Canberra's foreign affairs department said Australian diplomats had "provided support for their departure from Yangon on 4 April." The couple ran a bespoke consultancy business in Yangon.

A third Australian, economist Sean Turnell, was arrested a week after the putsch and remains in custody. The university professor and advisor to Suu Kyi was the first foreign national arrested following the coup. He has been charged with a violation of state secret laws, along with Suu Kyi late last month. More than 2,500 people have been detained since the coup, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. It also recorded the death toll as 564 as of Sunday, as security forces continue to use lethal force against protesters.

Despite six weekend deaths, demonstrators returned to the streets yesterday in Mandalay, Yangon, Bago, a small town in Kachin state and Pale township in Sagaing region, according to social media posts. —AFP

For weeks Manila has called on Beijing to withdraw the "maritime militia" vessels, saying their incursion into the Philippines' exclusive economic zone is unlawful. But China—which claims almost the entirety of the resource-rich sea—has refused, insisting they are fishing boats sheltering from bad weather and are allowed to be there.

Duterte, who has fostered warmer ties with his superpower neighbor since taking office in 2016, has expressed concern to the Chinese ambassador over the ships, according to his spokesman.

Until Monday he had left the tough talking in public to his defense and foreign ministers. But in the strongest remarks yet from his office, Duterte's top legal counsel Salvador Panelo warned China's "present territorial incursions is producing an unwelcome stain in their bond and may trigger unwanted hostilities that both countries would rather not pursue." —AFP

people are buried but it's not clear how many are missing," Bethan said. In Lembata, local officials were forced to deploy heavy equipment to reopen the roads. Images from the island showed barefoot locals wading through mud and past collapsed houses to evacuate victims on makeshift stretchers. Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the Indonesian archipelago during the rainy season.

January saw flash floods hit the Indonesian town of Sumedang in West Java, killing 40 people. And last September, at least 11 people were killed in landslides on Borneo. The disaster agency has estimated that 125 million Indonesians—nearly half of the country's population—live in areas at risk of landslides. The disasters are often caused by deforestation, according to environmentalists. —AFP

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Australian couple released from house arrest in Myanmar

YANGON: An Australian couple was released from house arrest in Myanmar and allowed to leave the country, as protests against the military junta continued yesterday. Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and derailed the country's experiment with democracy.

Business consultants Matthew O'Kane and Christa Avery, a dual Canadian-Australian citizen, tried to leave the country on a relief flight in late March but were barred from departing and placed under house arrest. "I am of course incredibly relieved to have been released and to be on my way home with my husband Matt," Avery said in a statement.

"Even though I knew that I had done nothing wrong it was very stressful being held under house arrest for two weeks, not knowing what was

Duterte aide warns of 'unwanted hostilities' in South China Sea

MANILA: The presence of Chinese vessels at a disputed reef off the Philippines could ignite "unwanted hostilities", a top aide to President Rodrigo Duterte warned yesterday, intensifying a diplomatic spat over the ships. More than 200 Chinese boats were first spotted on March 7 at Whitsun Reef, around 320 kilometers (175 nautical miles) west of Palawan Island in the contested South China Sea. Most of them have since scattered across the Spratly Islands, but last week dozens of the Chinese-flagged vessels were still anchored at the boomerang-shaped reef, according to Philippine military patrols.

International

Israel's Netanyahu on trial as coalition talks ramp up

PM made 'illegitimate use of great governmental power entrusted to him'

JERUSALEM: Israel's legal and political dramas converged yesterday, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in court for his corruption trial as the president launched talks on forming a government. Netanyahu, ordered to appear in person for opening arguments, sat in the Jerusalem District Court wearing a black mask as the prosecution accused him of misusing his office to advance his political interests.

Netanyahu denies wrongdoing in the case, in which he has been charged with accepting improper gifts and seeking to trade regulatory favors with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

Lead prosecutor Liat Ben-Ari told judges that Netanyahu was involved in "a serious case of government corruption". He "made illegitimate use of the great governmental power entrusted to him," in his dealings with media executives "in order to advance his personal affairs - including when he faced his desire to be re-elected," she said. As Ben-Ari laid out the criminal case against Israel's longest-serving leader, across the city President Reuven Rivlin began meetings that could determine Netanyahu's political fate.

Israel's March 23 election was its fourth inconclusive vote in less than two years, prolonging the worst political crisis in the nation's history. Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party finished first, winning 30 seats in the 120-member parliament, but his ability to form a stable governing coalition is precarious, a reality that has plagued him for several years.

Rivlin yesterday began two days of consultations with party officials to determine who has a plausible path towards a 61-seat majority, in a parliament bitterly divided between those who back Netanyahu and those committed to ending his 12-year tenure. Before his first meeting, with Netanyahu's envoys from Likud, Rivlin said he would seek to nominate a candidate who has "the best chance of forming a government that will have the confidence of the new Knesset".

Customarily, Rivlin gives the leader with most recommendations from individual lawmakers a 28-day window to form a government. That can be extended by 14 days at the president's discretion.



JERUSALEM: Prosecutor Liat Ben-Ari (center) attends the hearing for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's trial for corruption at district court yesterday. — AFP

'Out-of-the-ordinary coalitions'?

Rivlin confirmed that Likud had endorsed Netanyahu, as expected. The prime minister is also likely to win the backing of the 16 lawmakers representing Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties as well as six from the far-right Religious Zionism alliance. That makes a likely total of 52 — nine short of the absolute majority needed. Because the ideologically divided anti-Netanyahu camp has no agreed leader, Netanyahu may receive the most recommendations.

Within the anti-Netanyahu bloc, the centrist Yesh Atid party, led by former television host Yair Lapid, won the most seats with 17. Lapid's envoys were next to meet the president.

An anti-Netanyahu alliance would require a tightrope deal among Lapid, Likud defector Gideon Saar, Netanyahu's estranged protege Naftali Bennett—a hardline religious nationalist—and a group of centrist and left-wing parties.

Long legal process

In an unprecedented twist for Israeli coalition politics, it appears impossible for either camp to form a government without support from the conservative Islamic Raam Party, which controls four seats. Leader Mansour Abbas has said he is open to hearing from all sides, but the far-right Religious Zionism party has ruled out sitting in a government with Raam, further complicating Netanyahu's coalition hopes. It is also far from certain that the anti-Netanyahu bloc can unite, raising the prospect of a fifth election in less than three years.

Rivlin will select a leader tomorrow charged with trying to form a government. If they fail to do so, the president will then move on to the next name on his list.

Dozens of anti-Netanyahu protesters, who dub him the "Crime Minister", were at the court on Monday, taunting the premier as he entered. Netanyahu's supporters were also on hand. — AFP



PEMBA: Internally displaced women (IDP) from Palma are seen at the Pemba Sports center in Pemba. — AFP

'Significant' number of militants killed in Palma battle

MAPUTO: Mozambique's military said Sunday a "significant" number of militants had been killed during a battle over a key northern town and gas hub captured by the Islamic State last month.

Palma was seized by the jihadists during coordinated attacks on March 24, in what was seen as the biggest escalation of the insurgency ravaging the north of the African nation since 2017. The true death toll is not yet known, but thousands were displaced from the town of some 75,000 and the French energy giant Total suspended operations at its multi-billion-dollar plant. On Sunday, the army escorted officials and journalists through the ravaged town, claiming a "significant" number of militants had been killed, and that they had now secured the surrounding area.

Commander Chongo Vidigal, leading the military

operation to regain control of the town, said the area was "safe"—but fell short of declaring the army had regained control. "The airfield area was the only one we needed to clear and we did that this morning. It's completely safe," Vidigal said.

"I think that it is a significant number of terrorists who were shot down," he said, adding they would clarify the exact number later. Last week, the government said dozens of civilians had died during the fighting, but Vidigal said they had not finished counting the bodies.

In the first footage of the aftermath, state television broadcast videos of soldiers hastily pulling black plastic sheets over the dead on the streets. A few civilians were collecting bags of grain, while one man was shown trying to clear a destroyed stall. The town's hospital was destroyed, as were commercial banks and the state prosecutor's office. Vidigal said the Total gas plant, which the company abandoned on Friday, was secure. "The facilities are safe, they are protected," he explained.

Total pulled out its staff on Friday, while the United Nations suspended civilian evacuation flights over security concerns. More than 11,000 civilians are known to have fled Palma in recent days, according to the UN. —AFP

part of a deal agreed with the hardline group last year—a date US President Joe Biden has said will be tough to meet. Ghani's three-stage proposal, key elements of which have been obtained by AFP, includes reaching a political settlement with the Taliban and announcing an internationally monitored ceasefire.

He then proposes holding an early presidential election in which the Taliban could take part to form a "government of peace". That would lead to a slew of

Florida homes evacuated as wastewater leak risks flood

MIMAI: Emergency crews in central Florida were working to prevent an environmental catastrophe at a leaking reservoir that risked sending millions of gallons of contaminated wastewater toward nearby homes and into the Tampa Bay.

More than 300 homes near the site of an abandoned phosphate mine and fertilizer-production facility in Manatee County were under mandatory evacuation orders, and Governor Ron DeSantis on Saturday declared a state of emergency to free up funds to tackle the crisis. "What we are looking at now is trying to prevent, and respond to if need be, a real catastrophic flood situation," DeSantis told a press conference after viewing the site by helicopter Sunday.

He said emergency workers, assisted by the Florida National Guard, were pumping about 33 million gallons of water daily out of a wastewater reservoir at the site, which has sprung a growing leak in its plastic lining. "According to on-site engineers, a controlled release was necessary to prevent a catastrophic failure," the governor said.

The wastewater "meets water-quality standards for marine waters," he said, with the exception of phosphorus and nitrogen levels. Marine algae thrive on such elements, and environmental groups fear the release of millions of gallons of nutrient-rich water into the ocean could trigger a deadly "red tide," or algal bloom, that can suffocate fish and other aquatic life and deter tourist activity.

Manatee County's acting administrator Scott Hopes said inmates and staff at the local jail had been moved to the second floor of the two-story building as a precaution. Hopes sounded a slightly more optimistic note later Sunday, saying the situation should be in a "much better position" by today. But "we are not out of the critical area yet," he warned. A collapse of the reservoir also risked sending water into nearby stacks of phosphogypsum, a leftover from fertilizer production. Phosphogypsum is considered radioactive as it contains isotopes such as radon, as well as toxic heavy metals like arsenic, lead and mercury. —AFP

development programs across the country, followed by rebuilding the constitutional framework. Ghani has already shared his plan with several international diplomats, officials said. Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation said Sunday it would pull together its own proposals after collecting 30 documents from different political parties and civil society members, as well as from Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the council. —AFP



KANDAHAR: Afghan security forces stand on Humvee vehicles during a military operation in Arghandab district of Kandahar province on Sunday. — AFP

Afghan president to unveil new peace proposal

KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has drawn up a new proposal for peace with the Taliban ahead of an international conference aimed at jump-starting faltering talks between the two warring sides, official sources said. It comes after the United States-backed by Russia and other stakeholders—said in its own leaked proposal that it wants to see some form of transitional government involving the Taliban, although Ghani has insisted leaders can only be chosen at the ballot box.

According to official sources, Ghani intends to present his three-stage plan at a United Nations-backed conference in Turkey to be attended by the United States, Russia and other key regional countries.

A date for the event has not been finalized. The United States is just weeks away from a May 1 deadline to withdraw all foreign troops from Afghanistan as

News in brief

Palestinians OK 36 groups for poll

RAMALLAH: Palestinian election officials announced Sunday that 36 candidate lists had been approved to run in legislative elections set for next month, the first Palestinian polls in 15 years. The vote, which precedes a presidential election called for July 31, is part of an effort by the dominant Palestinian movements—Fatah secularists and Hamas Islamists—to boost international support for Palestinian governance. Groups had until tomorrow to submit their lists of candidates to contest in the May 22 legislative polls. Individual names on each list are due to be published today, but the Palestinian electoral commission announced on its website that it had approved all 36 applications. — AFP

Concern over activity near Ukraine

BRUSSELS: European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday pledged the bloc's "unwavering" support for Kiev as he expressed major worries over Russian troop movements around Ukraine. "Following with severe concern the Russian military activity surrounding Ukraine," Borrell tweeted after a phone call with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. "Unwavering EU support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Borrell said he would hold further talks on the issue with Kiev's top diplomat and foreign ministers from the EU's 27 nations at a meeting later this month. — AFP

Sex abuse in Algeria police custody

ALGIERS: Algerian police said they had launched an investigation after videos on social media claiming officers sexually abused a teenage boy arrested during anti-government protests sparked fury. The 15-year-old was arrested on Saturday in Algiers, the capital of the North African country, where a long-running pro-democracy protest movement known as the Hirak holds regular demonstrations demanding political change. "After the circulation of a video on social networks in which the authors claim that a minor was mistreated in a police station in Algiers, security forces... informed the public prosecutor, who immediately ordered an investigation," a police statement said. — AFP

Portugal keeps border closed

LISBON: Portugal has decided to extend its land border closure for tourists until April 15 because of a surge in COVID-19 cases, the interior ministry said Sunday. The measure, imposed in late January when new daily cases peaked at around 16,500, affects road and river border crossings with Spain. The crossings are open for the movement of goods, cross-border workers and emergency services. The ban, imposed in accord with Spain, does not prevent Portuguese citizens and residents from returning home, or foreign nationals from leaving the country, the ministry said. — AFP

Russia extends Twitter slowdown

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday it was extending a deadline for Twitter to remove illegal content by a month to mid-May, after the social media giant started cooperating when Russia slowed down its operations. State telecommunications watchdog Roskomnadzor imposed slowdowns on Twitter's services in mid-March, accusing it of failing to remove content related to child pornography, drug use and calls for minors to commit suicide. The watchdog gave Twitter a month to remove the content or face a complete blockage in Russia. The move raised concerns among Kremlin critics who fear the clampdown on Twitter and other social media is aimed at silencing opposition voices. — AFP

Republicans dangle 'easy' win for pared Biden plan

WASHINGTON: Republicans opened the door to supporting a pared down version of Joe Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan, saying concentrating on physical improvements would deliver an "easy bipartisan win" for the US president. Biden's American Jobs Plan—the second massive spending initiative of his 10-week old administration, after a \$1.9 trillion short-term COVID rescue bill—would modernize America's public works and make its energy system greener.

But the proposal announced last week faces major hurdles in Congress amid criticism from Republicans and business lobbies who oppose the higher corporate taxes that would pay the bill. Roy Blunt, the chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, implored Democrats to focus on the traditional pillars of infrastructure—"roads, bridges, ports and airports"—and not the more expansive spending Biden envisions to create jobs, fight climate change and stand up to a rising China. Blunt spoke out as senior administration figures hit the Sunday talk show circuit to sell the policy to the American people as a vital component of sustained job growth. —AFP

International

Bangladesh ferry disaster death toll hits 26, several still missing

Rescuers pull the vessel out of the water

NARAYANGANJ, Bangladesh: The death toll from a ferry disaster in Bangladesh jumped to 26 yesterday after rescuers pulled the vessel out of the water and found more bodies inside, officials said yesterday.

The sunken ferry was extracted from the heavily polluted Shitalakshya River in the central district of Narayanganj as hundreds of onlookers and relatives of the missing watched from the shore.

"We have found 21 bodies today after the ship was pulled out of the water," local official Mustain Billah told AFP. The one-and-a-half storey Sabit Al Hasan sank after it collided with a bigger cargo vessel on Sunday. The vessel had departed less than an hour earlier from Narayanganj, 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Dhaka, officials said. A local police inspector said the ferry was packed with passengers after the government confirmed it would impose a seven-day lockdown across the country to combat the recent rise in coronavirus cases.

Billah said the ship was carrying at least 46 people when it left. "Some 20 people swam to safety after the vessel sank," he said, adding several people could still be missing. "We have ordered a probe into the accident," he said.

Local police chief Dipak Saha said rescue efforts were hampered for hours by a powerful storm that hit after the accident. Under the lockdown, all domestic travel services—including buses, ferries, trains and flights—will be suspended from yesterday. Shops and malls will be shut for a week and a night curfew in



NARAYANGANJ: Onlookers and relatives gather after the authorities recovered the capsized boat in Shitalakshya River, in Narayanganj yesterday.—AFP

effect. Public and private sector businesses were told to only have a skeleton crew in their offices. Ferry accidents are common in Bangladesh, a delta nation crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers.

Millions of people are heavily reliant on ferries for transport, particularly in the country's southern coastal region, but the vessels have a poor safety record. Experts blame poor maintenance, lax safety standards

at shipyards and overcrowding for many of the accidents. In June last year, a ferry sank in Dhaka after it was hit from behind by another ferry, killing at least 32 people. In February 2015, at least 78 people died when an overcrowded ship collided with a cargo boat in a central Bangladesh river. The number of accidents has dropped sharply in recent years as authorities crack down on unseaworthy vessels. —AFP

Vietnam's pandemic response leader sworn in as president

HANOI: The man behind Vietnam's successful handling of the coronavirus pandemic, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, was formally sworn in as president in Hanoi yesterday. Phuc, 66, was Vietnam's prime minister for the last five years, a period in which the economy boomed, and his government's COVID-19 response won plaudits at home and abroad. Following secret voting yesterday, Phuc scored the maximum votes among the almost 500-member rubber-stamp national assembly. "This is his well-deserved award," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a Vietnamese politics expert from New Zealand's Victoria University of Wellington.

Authoritarian Vietnam is run by the Communist Party and officially led by the party general secretary, president, and prime minister, with key decisions made by the 18-member politburo. Vietnam is in the midst of its twice-a-decade leadership transition, with 76-year-old Nguyen Phu Trong re-elected in January as party gener-

al secretary, the most important of the three roles. Phuc was the only candidate nominated for president, as Trong—who had held the presidency since 2018 after the sudden death of his predecessor—stepped down. The National Assembly said earlier this was "the first time ever a prime minister was nominated to the position of the president".

After his swearing in, Phuc told the nation he was "lucky and honored" to be given the position, which is now only second to Trong in the power escalator. Politburo leaders are usually expected to retire at 65, but Vietnam has bent the age rules for both of them. Although the presidency is largely a ceremonial role, "Mr Phuc will now be the second-ranked member in the party which makes a strong case for him to claim the general secretary post if Mr Trong has to step down earlier than expected," Giang told AFP.

Rumors have swirled in recent years about Trong's health after he took a month-long absence in 2019. According to Giang, Phuc's experience of "well managing Vietnam's relationship with the US under the turbulent administration of Donald Trump" will stand him in good stead for his foreign affairs responsibilities as president. Phuc will later designate a successor for the prime ministerial role. Sources said the position will be given to Pham Minh Chinh, 62, a former deputy minister of public security. —AFP



HANOI: Former prime minister and Vietnam's newly elected President Nguyen Xuan Phuc (center) taking oath during the National Assembly's spring session in Hanoi.—AFP

China's 'wolf warrior' diplomats howl at Xinjiang critics

BEIJING: China's "wolf warrior" diplomats are back after a brief lull, firing insults over Twitter, smearing critics and suggesting conspiracies. The hyperactivity of the envoys follows renewed global pressure over Beijing's treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority in China's Xinjiang region. Here are five things to know as the wolf warriors once more bare their teeth:

When did it start?

The term "wolf warrior diplomacy" became common parlance in 2019, when Chinese envoys—most prominently spokesman Zhao Lijian—adopted a vociferous defense of the Communist-led country on social media platforms such as Twitter, which is blocked in China. The nickname derives from a film about a Rambo-like Chinese special forces soldier.

China insists it was forced into the change of tone, which came amid the fulminations of Donald Trump's White House. But officials like Zhao, who made headlines in 2019 over controversial tweets as an envoy to Pakistan, took to his fresh combat role as foreign ministry spokesman with particular aplomb a year later. He has promoted conspiracy theories including that the US military might have brought COVID-19 to China, and then railed against Canberra in tweets alleging "the murder of Afghan civilians & prisoners by Australian soldiers".

That post came with an illustration of a soldier holding a bloody knife to a child's throat. It was denounced by Australia's prime minister, but set the tone for feuds that still dominate relations. Trump's rhetoric over the

"China virus" saw Beijing's envoys up the ante as the pandemic roiled the world. Experts say the switch into attack mode partly reflects the new assertive China of President Xi Jinping.

Why did the wolves return?

As Joe Biden settled into the US presidency in January, China's diplomats floated hopes of a reset in relations. But the ceasefire collapsed at a US-China meeting in Alaska in mid-March, where the Chinese Communist Party's top diplomat Yang Jiechi threatened action over "US interference".

"Yang's tough talk in Anchorage seems to have encouraged senior Chinese diplomats to indulge in inflammatory remarks," said Mathieu Duchatel, director of the Asia Programme at Paris-based think-tank Institut Montaigne. China's consul-general in Rio de Janeiro Li Yang has since referred to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "boy" while calling Canada a "running dog of the US". And in late March as the European Union, Britain, Canada and the United States imposed sanctions over Xinjiang, foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying went as far as to suggest the CIA helped cook up rhetoric on the northwestern region to destabilize China.

In response to backlash against brands like H&M and Nike who raised concerns over the textile supply chain in Xinjiang, Hua showed a photo she said showed Black slaves in US cotton fields. Referencing the transatlantic slave trade that same week, she argued others were in no position to criticize China. China's envoys say Beijing has been forced to retaliate as rivals—particularly in the West—gang up to curtail its rise. But officials' attitudes have markedly shifted under Xi from late leader Deng Xiaoping's philosophy to "hide your strength, bide your time". When France recently summoned the Chinese ambassador over "unacceptable" behaviour, the embassy said he would not immediately comply and instead come to "make representations" over sanctions and Taiwan issues. —AFP



PRISTINA: Newly-elected President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani reacts after being sworn-in during a parliament session on Sunday.—AFP

Vjosa Osmani elected as new Kosovo president

PRISTINA: Lawmakers elected Kosovo's most popular politician Vjosa Osmani as president Sunday, overcoming an opposition boycott that had kept parliament short of a quorum one day earlier. The 38-year-old law professor, a standard bearer of a generation determined to fight corruption, received 71 votes from the 82 deputies present, and was thus "elected president of the republic", speaker Glauk Konjufca declared.

"I will work for the strengthening of the state, the rule of law," Osmani told lawmakers, adding that "I will be the president of all". Osmani was backed by Prime Minister Albin Kurti and his Vetevendosje movement which won more than 50 percent of the vote in a general election in February.

That poll turned the page on a 120-member legislature which had been dominated by former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas who fought Serb forces in a bitter 1998-99 war. The victory on Sunday on the parliament's third attempt resolved a stalemate caused by members including the former guerrillas and minority Serbs both boycotting the vote on Saturday. Osmani and Kurti must now mend a weak economy that provides Kosovars with an average monthly salary of just 500 euros (less than \$600), and has pushed youth unemployment to around 50 percent.

Many young people have emigrated to Switzerland and Germany, and Kurti and Osmani both pledged more "justice and jobs" during their campaigns. With six female ministers in a 15-strong cabinet, their new administration is also pushing back on longstanding exclusion of women from power. "Today, Kosovo elected a woman president," a visibly moved Osmani said Sunday, adding "the girls have the right to be wherever they want... every dream of yours can become a reality" in remarks addressed to young women. —AFP

Malaysia's Najib starts appeal over 1MDB conviction

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia: Former Malaysian leader Najib Razak began an appeal yesterday against his corruption conviction and 12-year jail term over the multibillion-dollar 1MDB scandal, which contributed to his government's downfall in 2018. Najib was found guilty on all counts last year in the first of several trials he is facing related to the looting of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad sovereign wealth fund. The 67-year-old—who remains free on bail—and his cronies were accused of stealing billions of dollars from the investment vehicle and spending it on everything from high-end real estate to pricey art.

Yesterday, the former prime minister began his first challenge at the Court of Appeal. "There was a miscarriage of justice," defense lawyer Muhammad Shafee Abdullah told reporters after proceedings wrapped up for the day. He argued the judge in the original trial did not have sufficient experience in handling criminal cases.

"This alone should make this appeal successful and

News in brief

Crowdfunding to pay damages

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean blogger said he had crowd-funded almost \$100,000 that he was ordered to pay as damages for defaming the prime minister by sharing an article on Facebook. Leong Sze Hian was sued by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong after sharing the piece, which linked Lee to the money-laundering scandal at state fund IMDB in Malaysia. Critics say the case is the latest example of the government seeking to silence dissent online in the tightly regulated city-state. A court last month found in Lee's favor and ordered the blogger to pay the prime minister Sg\$133,000 (\$99,000) plus costs, which are yet to be determined. —AFP

Funeral for Salvadoran woman

SAN SALVADOR: A Salvadoran woman who died at the hands of Mexican police was buried Sunday in the southwest of El Salvador, in the presence of family and close friends. The coffin of Victoria Salazar was driven in a white car from a funeral home in Sonsonate, 65 kilometers (40 miles) southwest of San Salvador, to a private cemetery in La Genesera, on the outskirts of the city. "The family gave Victoria a Christian burial today, and close friends attended the funeral," a spokesman for the presidential office, which helped Salazar's family repatriate her body from Mexico, said. —AFP

Four Niger soldiers killed in attack

NIAMEY, Niger: Niger's defense ministry said Sunday that four of its soldiers had been killed the day before in twin "terrorist" attacks in the country's southeast, the day after President Mohamed Bazoum was sworn in. "Several terrorists" had been killed in the simultaneous Saturday morning attacks against military positions, the ministry said using a term usually used to describe jihadists. It added that the "heavily armed" attackers "came from a neighboring country" in a reference to Nigeria, where groups linked to Boko Haram are active. —AFP

Charred bodies found in Mexico

OAXACA, Mexico: The charred bodies of three police officers were found in their burnt-out car Saturday on a road in southern Mexico, in an area rife with violence between rival gangs, investigators said. The prosecutor's office said the victims were the director of the San Pablo Coatlan municipal police and two subordinates, attacked in their patrol car on a rural road in southern Oaxaca state. The area is plagued by violence between rival gangs involved in marijuana cultivation, and disputes over farmland. More than 300,000 people have been murdered in Mexico since the government deployed the military to fight drug trafficking in 2006, according to authorities, who say most of the killings are linked to gang violence. —AFP

Night of 'disorder' in Belfast

LONDON: Northern Ireland police said Sunday that Unionist protesters threw 30 petrol bombs at officers and torched cars during a night of "disorder" in a suburb of northern Belfast. The violent clashes on Saturday evening came after protesters hurled manhole covers, masonry and petrol bombs at police late Friday in another loyalist neighborhood and Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis appealed for calm. North Area Commander Chief Superintendent Davy Beck in a statement released Sunday said some 30 protesters, some in masks, had gathered on Saturday evening. Several dozen men mounted an "orchestrated attack on police", he said. A 47-year-old man was arrested and remains in custody. —AFP

the court can reverse the (earlier) judgment," he said. Anger at the plunder played a large part in the shock loss of Najib's long-ruling coalition at elections in 2018, and he was arrested and hit with dozens of charges following his defeat. Following a lengthy trial, he was found guilty of abuse of power, money-laundering and criminal breach of trust over the transfer of 42 million ringgit (\$10.1 million) from a former 1MDB unit to his bank accounts.

As well as the jail term, he was fined almost \$50 million. He denies any wrongdoing. At the start of the appeal, his lawyer sought to get proceedings delayed by a month, saying he wanted to obtain additional documents from overseas to add to the evidence. But the three judges hearing the case dismissed the bid. During the appeal, set to run until April 22, Najib's lawyers will argue he had no knowledge of the transactions into his accounts, according to documents submitted to the court.

They are seeking to portray him as a victim and blame financier Low Taek Jho—a key figure in the scandal who has been charged in the United States and Malaysia—as the mastermind.

Low is believed to have played an influential role in the operations of 1MDB, although he held no official role. The financier, whose current whereabouts are unknown, maintains his innocence. If he loses the appeal, Najib still has a final chance to challenge the conviction at Malaysia's top court.—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2021

Facing pressure at home, Chinese tech giants expand in Singapore

Chinese firms need a 'Plan B' if they have to separate their global and Chinese operations

SINGAPORE: Chinese tech giants are expanding in Singapore as they face a crackdown at home and growing pressure in other key markets—but they may struggle to find talent in the city-state. Messaging-and-gaming behemoth Tencent is opening a hub and TikTok owner ByteDance is on a hiring spree after establishing a regional HQ, while e-commerce giant Alibaba is investing in property and recruiting. The tech firms are shifting their focus to booming Southeast Asian markets as authorities tighten the screws at home amid concerns about the platforms' growing power.

Regulators have launched a blitz on the sector, hitting several firms with heavy fines, and threatening to slice up massive companies whose reach now extends deep into the daily lives of ordinary Chinese. Meanwhile, festering tensions between Washington and Beijing after an assault on Chinese tech titans during Donald Trump's presidency make the United States an unattractive prospect, and problems abound elsewhere.

"Chinese tech companies are facing regulatory pressures and sanctions from governments in other countries, notably the US but also other nations such as India," Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit, said. India has banned a swathe of Chinese apps since a border clash last year, while the European Union and other Western powers recently imposed sanctions over China's treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority, prompting retaliatory sanctions.

But Singapore, a prosperous financial hub, maintains good ties with Beijing and the West, and tech firms have come to view it as a safe bet to expand their operations without upsetting either side. In the current climate of geopolitical uncertainty "Singapore is considered as a more neutral country", Chen Guoli, professor of strategy at the Singapore campus of business school INSEAD, said.

Hiring spree

In addition, long-running turmoil in traditional rival Hong Kong may have dimmed its appeal, although observers stress other factors are likely more important. The influx of Chinese cash will be welcome in Singapore, whose economy has been hammered by the coronavirus and which is seeking to build itself up as a tech center. It is already home to major offices of US tech titans Facebook, Google and Twitter, while ByteDance recently moved into bigger offices in the financial district, and has launched a hiring drive.

Between September and February, a third of ByteDance's job postings were in Singapore, more than twice the ads it placed in China, with a focus on hiring specialized engineers, said Ajay Thalluri, an analyst with data and analytics firm GlobalData. Meanwhile, Alibaba last year bought a 50 percent stake in an office tower, where its e-commerce unit Lazada is the main tenant, while its affiliate, fintech giant Ant Group, won a license to operate a wholesale digital bank in the city-state.

Alibaba "is building teams in Singapore with significant key senior and mid-level job postings related to talent acquisition, product management, and legal compliance", said Thalluri.

The e-commerce firm, co-founded by Jack Ma, has come under fierce pressure in China, with authorities pulling the plug on Ant's record initial public offering in November.

Talent crunch

ByteDance and Tencent, which announced its Singapore expansion plans in September, say they are primarily focused on growing their businesses in Southeast Asia, a booming region of 650 million, rather than avoiding tensions elsewhere. By building up their Singapore presence, the tech giants are hedging their bets in case fric-



SINGAPORE: People take pictures beside the pond of the ArtScience Museum against the city skyline in Singapore.—AFP

tions with the West hit a new nadir, analysts say. Chen of INSEAD said Chinese companies needed a "plan B" in case they had to separate their global and Chinese operations, in which case Singapore could become their international hub.

However, a major challenge in expanding in the city, with a population of just 5.7 million, is recruiting workers with the correct skills. "Technology is developing and accelerating at a speed that far surpasses the supply of talent

needed to scale," said Daljit Sall, senior director for information technology at the Singapore office of global recruitment firm Randstad.

Singapore is trying to attract overseas talent, although that may cause unease in a country where there are already concerns about the large foreign population, while schools are offering courses to prepare youngsters for tech jobs. Nevertheless, "there still remains an urgent need to fill these skills gaps now", Sall said.—AFP

Inquiry in France over 'clandestine' COVID-defying dinners

PARIS: A report by a French television channel alleging "clandestine" luxury dinners in Paris despite the pandemic has sparked an investigation and a political furor over the claims the elite were brazenly ignoring rules they themselves had set. The M6 private channel on Friday broadcast a reportage based on footage recorded with a hidden camera purportedly from a clandestine restaurant in a high-end area of Paris where neither the staff nor the diners were wearing masks.

All restaurants and cafes remain closed in France for eating in and the country this week began a new limited nationwide lockdown to deal with surging COVID-19 infections. The hashtag #OnVeutLesNoms (We Want the Names) went viral on Twitter, as speculation swirled over who may have attended such dinners.

Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said Sunday that a criminal probe had been opened after the reportage into putting the lives of others at risk. The investigation would assess "if these evenings were organized in defiance of health rules and to determine who were the possible organizers and participants."

One source interviewed by M6, whose identity was not revealed and whose voice was distorted, told the channel that such evenings had taken place and guests present had even included ministers. The source was later identified by media and bloggers as Pierre-Jean Chalencon, who runs the luxury Palais Vivienne event venue in the center of Paris. In statement sent to AFP through his lawyer late Sunday, Chalencon implicitly acknowledged he was the source but also appeared to retract the claim ministers were involved, saying he was only showing "humor" and the "sense of the absurd". But the report was no laughing matter for members of the government, days after President Emmanuel Macron ordered new restrictions including a brief closure of schools to keep cases down before the effects of the vaccine drive kick in.

Chalencon had been recorded saying in February that government spokesman Gabriel Attal, a rising cabinet star, would be attending such a dinner. Attal vehemently denied the claim. But deputy interior minister Marlène Schiappa told French TV that if ministers or lawmakers were involved "they should be fined and penalised like any other citizen". Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire insisted: "All the ministers, without exception, respect the rules." Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said those involved in such dinners should be prosecuted if the allegations in the report were true.

"There are not two types of citizens — those who have the right to party and those who do not," he said.—AFP

LG to close down smartphone business

SEOUL: LG Electronics, South Korea's second-largest appliance firm after Samsung, is closing down its mobile phone business, the company said yesterday, after the division lost billions in recent years. The firm was once considered a pioneer of the Android operating system, collaborating with Google on the Nexus series in the early 2010s.

But it has long struggled to increase sales, entering the market late and facing tough competition from emerging cheaper Chinese rivals such as Huawei. It was regularly listed among the world's top 10 smartphone manufacturers but according to tracker Counterpoint the last time it recorded a global market share of three percent or more was in the second quarter of 2018.

The unit has recorded losses for 23 consecutive quarters since 2015, with the cumulative deficit reaching about 5 trillion won (\$4.4 billion) by the end of last year. The division has "failed to produce results" amid "intensifying price competition among



SEOUL: A South Korean flag (center) and LG flags flutter in front of the headquarters of LG Electronics in Seoul yesterday.—AFP

major competitors in the entry-level mobile phone market", the company said in a statement.

The decision will enable the firm to "focus resources in growth areas such as electric vehicle

components", robotics and smart homes, it added. LG reportedly held talks with Vietnam's Vingroup over a potential sale, but it broke down over price differences, according to local reports.—AFP

Greece reopens shops despite high infections

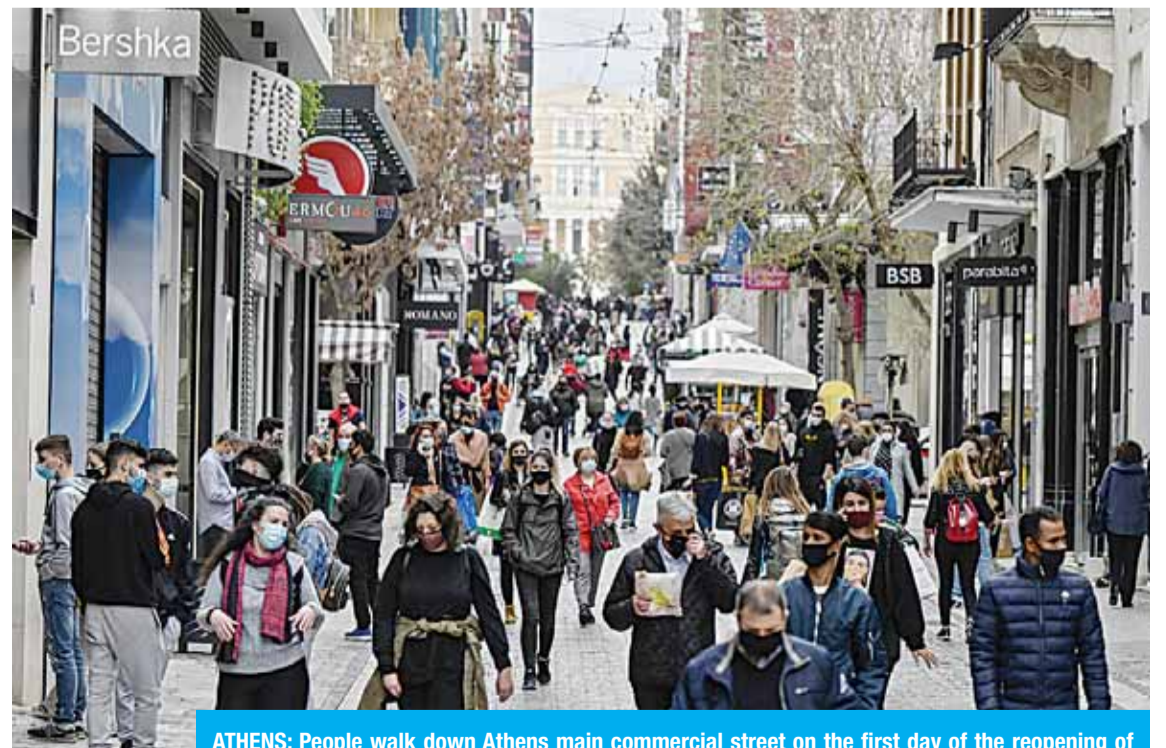
ATHENS: Greece yesterday relaxed a nationwide lockdown by opening most retail shops despite a high level of COVID-19 infections and fatalities. By allowing people to "decompress" outside their homes as the weather improves, the government hopes to also stem damage to the economy that has taken a major revenue blow from reduced tourism.

Customers must pre-book appointments before visiting shops, and up to 20 people will be allowed inside at a time. "We are fully booked till Saturday. It's going to be a good month," Filippos Hortis, an Athens sports store owner, told Skai TV.

Critics have noted the paradox of the lockdown being relaxed while new cases of the virus are reported at a rate of over 3,000 daily. That is around 1,000 more than when the restrictions were announced in November, with the daily number of deaths now more than double.

"I too was surprised when informed of the recommendation (to reopen stores) seeing the daily increase (in infections)," the governor of Central Macedonia prefecture Apostolos Tzitzikostas told Skai TV. Yesterday reopening does not affect department stores and malls, whose operation will be re-evaluated later in April. Restrictions on retail also remain in place in areas around Thessaloniki and Patras, Greece's largest cities after Athens, because of spiking infections.

The finance ministry yesterday announced addi-



ATHENS: People walk down Athens main commercial street on the first day of the reopening of retail stores yesterday amid the coronavirus pandemic.—AFP

tional support measures for closed stores to mitigate anger among retail owners in affected areas. Greece has so far registered more than 275,000 coronavirus cases and over 8,300 deaths since the start of the pandemic, including nearly 150 over the weekend. Some 750 people are in intensive care.

A firm backer of European vaccine passports, Greece is hoping to kickstart its tourism season

from mid-May onwards to claw back some badly needed revenue. Greece expects to spend some 11.6 billion euros (\$14 billion) this year to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on its economy, on top of 24 billion euros spent in 2020.

The Greek budget forecasts economic growth of 4.8 percent, scaled back from an earlier 7.5-percent estimate owing to lockdown.—AFP

Business

NBK Macroeconomic Outlook

Bahrain economy expected to see gradual post-pandemic recovery

Debt levels to remain above 100 percent of GDP

KUWAIT: Bahrain's economic recovery is expected to be gradual with GDP up 2 percent in 2021, then a stronger 3.9 percent on average over the medium term. Our outlook reflects the expected recovery in the non-oil sector, which contracted an estimated 7.5 percent in 2020 including a confirmed -7.8 percent y/y in Q1-Q3 led by falls in the hospitality, telecommunications and transportation sectors. Non-oil growth is seen at 3.6 percent in 2021 assisted by rapid vaccine deployment - which stood at around one-quarter of the population by mid-March and could reach above the 60 percent threshold by the end of August as Bahrain ranked as one of the top performers on vaccination rollout.

Moreover, the expansion of Bapco's oil refining capacity (expected completion in 2022) could help lift non-oil growth to around 3.3 percent over the medium term. However, the recovery in the hospitality sector (around 7 percent of GDP) to pre-crisis levels could be delayed to beyond 2023 as it hinges more on the global path of the pandemic and unwinding lockdowns.

Oil GDP in Bahrain is expected to fall by 4.4 percent in 2021 following the estimated rise of 2.9 percent in 2020. The decline reflects the anticipated fall in oil production by 5.9 percent on average in 2021 to 175,000 b/d due to the OPEC+ agreement. Over the medium term, oil production is likely to increase to around 200,000 b/d in 2023, while gas output is estimated to grow by 5 percent annually, reflecting the gradual pickup in global energy demand with the development of the Khalij al Bahrain field and gas reservoirs.

Modest inflation

Monetary policy will remain accommodative over the medium term; with interest rates typically tend to move in line with the US policy rates given the pegged exchange rate regime. Inflation was negative at -2.3 percent in 2020 but could increase moderately in 2021 due to weaknesses in real estate after the fall in expat population by 2.9 percent in 2020. Government stimulus that have supported the economy so far could be gradually withdrawn in 2022. Inflation could increase mildly over 2022-23 at 1.2 percent, up from -2.3 percent in 2020. In addition, the loan installment deferment (until June 2021) will provide some support to domestic demand this year. Retail banks' credit to the private sector could rise by 3.6 percent during 2021-23, boosted by economic recovery and government support policies.

Declining fiscal deficit

The dual shock of COVID-19 and the plunge in oil prices worsened the fiscal position with the deficit estimated at 13 percent of GDP in 2020. The govern-

Table 1: Key economic indicators

		2019	2020e	2021f	2022f	2023f
Nominal GDP	\$ billion	38	34	36	39	42
Real GDP	% y/y	2.0	-5.7	2.0	4.3	3.5
- Oil	% y/y	2.2	2.9	-4.4	9.0	4.4
- Non-oil	% y/y	1.9	-7.5	3.6	3.3	3.3
Budget balance	% of GDP	-4.7	-13.0	-7.2	-4.4	-3.5
Current account	% of GDP	-2.1	-9.6	-3.5	-4.1	-3.8
Headline inflation	% y/y	1.0	-2.3	0.9	1.0	1.4

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates

ment fiscal and monetary packages estimated at BHD 4.5 billion, or 34 percent of GDP (BHD 3.7 billion of which for raising the central bank loan facilities, allowing instalments to be deferred and credit to be extended) while the rest include salary payments for Bahrainis, waiving utility bills and municipality fees.

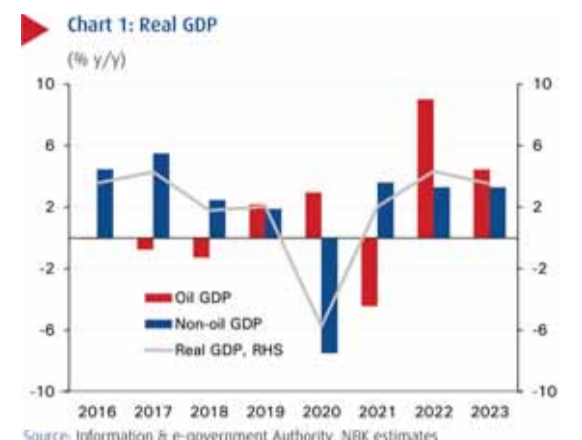
These measures are expected to increase spending by BHD 0.9 billion compared to 2020 budget. However, the so-far high rate of vaccination deployment could allow economic support measures to be withdrawn faster. The budget for 2021-22 is estimating a deficit of \$3.2 (around 9 percent of GDP) billion on slightly lower recurrent spending while increasing capital spending by 35 percent to \$0.7 billion. However, we expect the deficit to decline to around 7.2 percent of GDP in 2021, and to an average of 4 percent of GDP in 2022-23 on higher oil revenues and non-oil economic recovery.

Public debt is estimated at 114 percent GDP in 2020 and will stay above 100 percent over 2022-23. The government was successful in retaining market access with a total of \$5.5 billion in medium and long-term bonds and Sukuk in 2020 at favorable pricing at yields ranging from 3.95-7.38 percent given Bahrain's non-

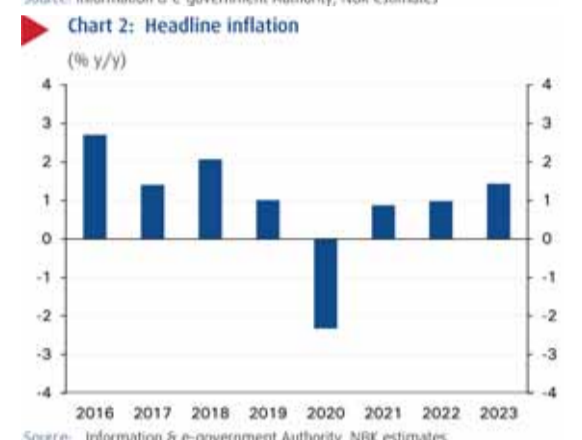
investment credit rating. Nevertheless, we expect an easing in financing needs due to the government's commitment under the \$10 billion aid package from some GCC neighbors in 2018 to consolidate its budget, though the target of balancing the budget by 2022 is no longer feasible.

Foreign reserves

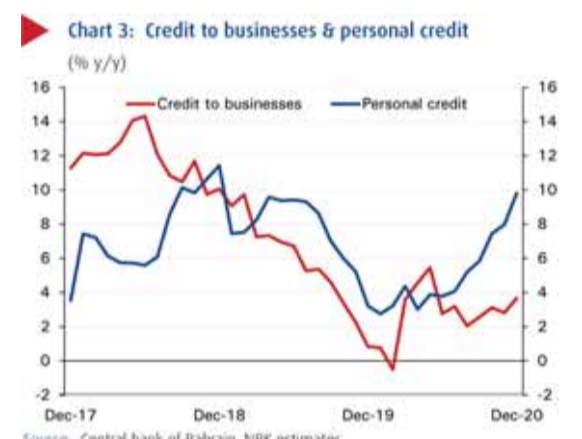
Higher oil prices are expected to decrease the current account deficit to around 3.8 percent of GDP over the forecast period, up from 9.6 percent in 2020, with non-oil exports rising alongside the rebound in the non-oil economy. This will help to replenish central bank foreign reserves, which stood \$2 billion (less than 3 months of imports) in December 2020. Medium-term risks to the economy include a slower economic recovery linked to virus pressures, inadequate fiscal adjustment and possible changes in the credit profile rating, making medium-term debt sustainability harder to achieve.



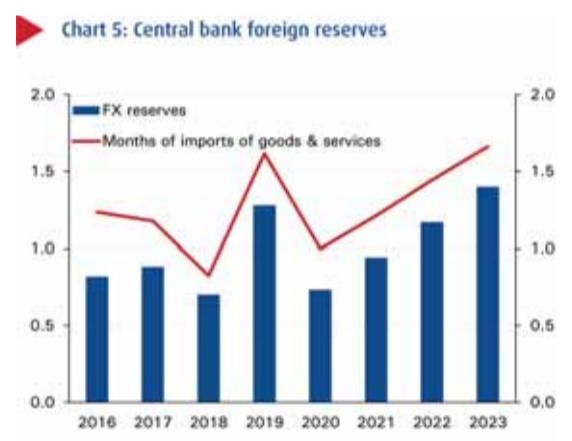
Source: Information & e-government Authority, NBK estimates



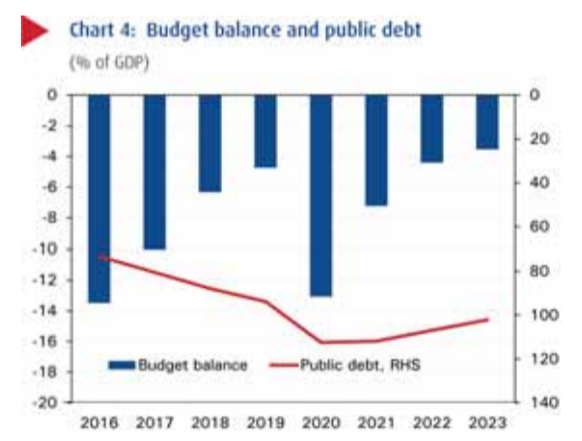
Source: Information & e-government Authority, NBK estimates



Source: Central bank of Bahrain, NBK estimates



Source: Central Bank of Bahrain, NBK estimates



Source: Ministry of Finance, NBK estimates

Bahrain economy will see a return to moderate growth this year at around 2 percent, with the ease in restrictions helped by a rapid vaccination rollout. The fiscal deficit is expected to narrow, reaching 7.2 percent of GDP in 2021 while averaging 4 percent of GDP in 2022-23, down from an estimated 13 percent in 2020. Debt levels will remain above 100 percent of GDP during the forecast period, making fiscal adjustment a priority once the impact of the crisis subsides, including a medium-term goal of balancing the budget which should help put debt on a downward path. Meanwhile, inflation will pick up but only to about 1 percent in 2021 mainly due to sluggish real estate rents.

NBK holds webinar titled 'How to Lead in Turbulent Times'

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a live webinar for its executives and future leaders titled "How to lead in turbulent times and develop high performing teams", which was delivered by Scott Miller, one of the world's leading experts in leadership and development of work teams.

The webinar aimed to shed light on the guidance that leaders need to be successful, including support, strategies and tactics that help in the process of developing themselves as successful leaders, in addition to stimulating the potentials of team members to reach optimal performance.

Miller demonstrated the ways to increase the participation and interaction of team members, as well as effective ways to better understand the problems facing them through individual simulations that effectively contribute to solving these problems. The webinar, which witnessed remarkable interaction of 200 virtual attendees, focused on the need for leaders to learn the skills of creating clarity regarding team goals and desired

results. It also tackled the subject of delegating responsibilities to team members, while providing the appropriate level of support, as well as utilizing good planning to focus on the key priorities that help boost their capabilities to be effective in their organizations.

During the webinar, Miller shed light on how to create the culture of receiving feedback and comments, which contributes to building confidence and efficiency, and, at the same time, boosts the performance of both the leader and the team. Scott Miller is one of the world's leading experts in the areas of leadership and development of business leaders' skills. He is an author of many books, most notably his best-selling book according to The Wall Street Journal, "Everyone Deserves a Great Manager". In addition, Miller writes a weekly column on leadership for the reputable Inc. magazine. He also hosts the largest and fastest podcast in the world about leadership development.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Talent Management Manager in Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Organizing such events comes in line with NBK's commitment to continue developing its human cadres, considering that they are its key asset and most valuable resource."

NBK has been providing the best development and training opportunities for its employees to unlock their innovative potentials, which is reflected

in the bank's leadership in providing top-notch banking services and products, locally and regionally, added Al-Sager. Al-Sager emphasized that NBK considers its human cadres the cornerstone of its excellence, so it is working to develop and train them with a view to prepare talented individuals for key roles in the future, thus ensuring continuous improvement of the bank's service quality and meeting its customers' needs. It is worth mentioning that despite the exceptional circumstances wrought by the pandemic, NBK continued to enhance the efficiency of its employees by providing them with online programs and courses developed in cooperation with the most reputable universities around the world, which cope with the needs of labor market. This was carried out thanks to the relentless efforts of Group Human Resources to upgrade the bank's training and development platforms infrastructure by introducing the latest technological solutions and interactive digital tools, as well as making substantial changes to the methodology of the training programs provided to employees.



Najla Al-Sager

Burgan Bank announces winner of Al-Thuraya Salary Account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday Muneerah Rajeh Al-Dosari as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.

Established in 1977, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base, Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks which include Gulf Bank Algeria - AGB (Algeria), Bank of Baghdad - BOB (Iraq & Lebanon), Tunis International Bank - TIB (Tunisia), and fully owned Burgan Bank - Turkey, (collectively known as the "Burgan Bank Group"). Furthermore, Burgan Bank has a presence in the UAE through its corporate office ("Burgan Financial Services Limited) which had helped the bank to participate in multiple financing opportunities in the UAE.

The bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

X-cite continues with super sale campaign on thousands of products

KUWAIT: X-cite by Alghanim Electronics, Kuwait's largest electronics retailer, is continuing to offer its biggest promotions yet for the year with its Super Sale campaign placing thousands of home appliances, laptops and electronics from leading brands at discounted prices.

The Super Sale enables customers to enjoy competitive offers on brands that comprise Wansa, EQ, Philips, HP, Toshiba, Huawei, Panasonic, Apple, Microsoft, Samsung, Acer, Beko, Nikon and La Germania. Customers can purchase the latest iPhones, including the iPhone 12, Apple's smartwatch, Samsung smartphones, as well as the newest

tablets and laptops.

In addition to these exceptional offers, customers will benefit of valuable cash vouchers valid on their next purchase. These vouchers are applicable when purchasing a TV or from a selected range of large home appliances. The Super Sale is completed by daily promotions that are announced on X-cite's social media pages. Customers can also shop with ease thanks to X-cite's Easy Credit service which gives them access to flexible monthly instalments starting from KD 5. The Easy Credit can be granted through X-cite's website or in-store.

Through its customer-centric concept, X-cite offers customers competitive quality and prices to serve every segment of its customer-base, providing them with the highest level of service, engaging with them, and earning their trust through supporting services and offerings. X-cite also enables customers to shop from the comfort of their homes through its free mobile app and shopping website at www.xcite.com or at one of its 42 showrooms in Kuwait.

X-cite has established itself as a leading brand in providing the latest products to customers as it continues to build strong relations with international brands in the electronics sector. Continuously seeking to satisfy the needs of its customers, X-cite provides them with a wide range of services that enable customers to experience products and interact with them, whether in their showrooms, website or by taking advantage of the pick-up service. X-cite can also be found at hypermarkets, cooperatives as well as in warehouses in Al Rai, Hawalli and Al-Mekhyal. X-cite also offers premium maintenance and purchase services at most of its major showrooms throughout Kuwait and other services such as free delivery and additional warranty with X-care.

To stay updated on the latest events, monthly promotions and offers, customers can subscribe to the daily newsletter through xcite.com, or follow X-cite's social media pages on Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, @xcitealghanim, or on Facebook at XcitebyAlghanim, or by visiting the online store at www.xcite.com

Business

Al-Roshood: COVID-19 has accelerated KFH's strategy of digital transformation

KFH's Acting Group CEO in an interview with The Banker Magazine

KUWAIT: In an interview with The Banker Magazine, Abdulwahab Al-Roshood, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), said that the outlook for Kuwait economy cannot be perceived in isolation from the inherited core issues it usually struggles with such as the heavy reliance on oil, generous social benefits, and undiversified economy.

He added that these issues added stress on Kuwait's financial position and economic activity and limited its ability to move forward with its diversification plans and bold reforms. However, Al-Roshood believed that the current standstill could see some breakthrough given the strengths Kuwait enjoys including strong underlying fundamentals, sound financial and banking



Abdulwahab
Essa Al-Roshood

sectors, high income economy, vast wealth accumulated during times of high oil prices, low external obligations and a young, entrepreneurial population.

He added that these factors can assist the country in diversification plans under Kuwait's 2035 vision, transform its energy resource-driven economy into a knowledge-based as well as create sustainable growth. Al-Roshood confirmed that the local economy and businesses require the government to make a move on diversification plans away from hydrocarbons, taking aggressive measures to prop up the economy and sustaining reforms to boost private sector-led and diversified growth.

Strategic priorities

Commenting on the KFH's key strategic priorities of KFH for 2021/2022, Al-Roshood said: "We are working on minimizing manual work to near zero and moving forward in our digital strategy to keep abreast of the latest developments in the banking industry. In addition, we are relying more on Robotics in all our business operations."

He added: "KFH is also keen on fortifying its cyber security strategy and employing the best practices to keep ahead of any cyberattack threat. This is a priority amid the rapidly evolving digitization landscape. As part of our strategy of digital transformation, we are keen on providing high-quality mobile banking services without interruption and focusing on health and safety of our employees and customers amidst the pandemic."

Gulf Bank reveals 10 winners of Al-Danah draws

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its monthly Al-Danah draw on Sunday to announce the winners for March. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each.

The winners are:

Mousaed Ebrahim Saed Al-Roubayyan
Nabeel Mohammed Roudhan Al-Roudhan
Ahmad Kassem Hammoud
Bashayer Abdullateef Ebrahim Al-Helail
Ibrahim Saad Saleh Al-Marea (minor)
Jassim Mohammad Hussain Ghadhanfar
Amal Ahmad Ali Hasan
Mafarh Ghalab Ghazi Al-Mouteri
Mohammad Gulzar Nawab Khan
Zainab Muhsin Mohammed Hussain

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the

France claims EU green light for more Air France aid

PARIS: The French government said it has reached a deal with the European Commission allowing it to inject fresh money into flagship airline Air France, whose finances are creaking under the impact of coronavirus restrictions. The agreement follows weeks of negotiations with the EU's executive, which must ensure that state aid does not give companies an unfair advantage.

"We have an outline agreement with European Commissioner Margrethe Vestager about new financial aid for Air France," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on the RTL/LCI/Le Figaro political broadcast "Le Grand Jury". Air France, of which the French government owns 14.3 percent, will have to give up "a certain number" of slots at Orly, Paris's second-largest airport after Charles de Gaulle, in return for the green light from Brussels, Le Maire said.

'Tough' negotiations

Air France posted a 7.1 billion euro (\$8.4 billion) loss in 2020 as its business, like that of the rest of the

Credit growth

Al-Roshood said that credit conditions will remain strong as Kuwait's banking system is stable, and the Kuwait economy is supported by strong accumulated assets managed by the country's sovereign wealth fund. He confirmed that Kuwaiti banks enjoy strong capital ratios and high liquidity levels, adding that KFH's predictions for 2021/2022 rely on the recovery of the economy and sentiment of the market which are of course associated with the status of COVID-19. Having said that, the key drivers for credit growth in light of gradual improvement are mainly the retail sector, corporate and SMEs sectors and the government investment spending on the infrastructure under Kuwait Vision 2035.

- The outlook for Kuwait economy is linked to core issues that put pressure on its financial position
- KFH moves forward in its digital strategy to keep abreast of the latest developments in the banking industry
- Stable banking system and strong assets support Kuwait economy and provide strong credit conditions
- Retail, corporate and SME sectors are main growth drivers
- Enhancing cybersecurity strategy and implementing best practices
- KFH is proactive in its business model and in its methodology in embracing change and in dealing with crises

Al-Roshood explained that as a result of lockdowns and dampened economic activity in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti banking sector non-performing financing (NPFs) ratio increased 0.5 percent, from 1.5 percent in 2019 to 2.0 percent in 2020. This figure remains at a historically low level, inspiring even more confidence in the strength of the banking sector. "The NPF coverage ratio dropped from 271 percent to 222 percent, mainly as a result of utilizing provisions to NPFs. This ratio remains at a healthy level, boosting asset quality and serving as an additional buffer to counter any potential worsening in the credit portfolio that may arise if the pandemic persists," he confirmed.

bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

world's airlines, suffered from restrictions which all but grounded global air traffic. Le Maire would not be drawn on the amount of new funds to be given Air France, saying this was part of discussions to be held with the airline, whose board needs to vote on the deal.

Le Maire said the agreement with the Commission was "very good news for Air France and for the whole French aviation sector", adding that negotiations had been "tough". The minister declined to say how many slots at Orly Air France would have to give up, but said it would be fewer than the 24 that the Commission had initially asked for. The French government has already given "a lot of help" to Air France to weather the Covid crisis with an initial sum of 7.0 billion euros and would "not sign a blank cheque" this time around, Le Maire said. "There are tens of thousands of jobs involved. Air France is strategic for our country," he said. But the carrier must become more competitive and continue to reduce CO2 emissions, he said. "The taxpayer is making an effort, and Air France must also make an effort," Le Maire added. A European Commission spokesman told AFP Sunday that the executive was in contact with the French government but could not "predict the timing or outcome of these contacts". According to EU rules, the spokesperson said, any government granting more than 250 million euros in aid to a company with "significant market power" had to propose additional measures to safeguard competition. —AFP



Al-Roshood said that "All the business and economic activities have significantly been resumed. As the pandemic is not yet over and the other side the vaccination is expected to take longer, we are of the opinion that it is not prudent to give a guidance on non-performing financings."

Digital offerings

Al-Roshood said: "We have always been diligent and proactive in our business model and in our

NBK Money Markets report

Biden proposes new fiscal policy

KUWAIT: US dollar held firm last week as markets continued to bet on a faster recovery in the world's largest economy. Sentiment for the dollar has improved in recent weeks as the Biden administration's planned stimulus of over \$2 trillion and a rapid COVID-19 vaccine roll out spurred economic optimism. The dollar index closed the month off with a 2.5 percent rise over February.

President Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan, dubbed The "American Jobs Plan," will create millions of jobs building roads, expanding internet coverage, tackling climate change and boosting human services like care for the elderly. To pay for it, the plan would also increase the corporate tax rate to 28 percent from 21 percent and change the tax code to close loopholes that allow companies to move profits overseas. The cost would be spread over an eight-year period and intends to be completely paid off in 15 years.

This would be Biden's second multitrillion-dollar legislative proposal after only two months in office setting the stage for a partisan clash in Congress. The "American Jobs Plan" plan is very different from the previous \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan in two main ways. First, because the cost is spread over eight years, annual spending associated with the program will be under \$300 billion a year. Second, the program will be mainly financed through new tax revenues rather than debt. Biden explained in a statement that the latter would not only pay for the program, but reduce the debt burden on the US.

The tax inclusion has upset Republican representatives who just recently passed massive tax breaks during the Trump administration. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has already warned the president not to turn the program into "a massive effort to raise taxes on businesses and individuals."

Confidence and jobs surge

The passing of the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package earlier last month helped consumer confidence in the US race in March to its highest level since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting views that economic growth will accelerate in the coming months. The Conference Board's consumer confidence index jumped 19.3 points to a reading of 109.7 this month. The increase was the largest since April 2003.

Further cementing the US recovery was the non-farm payroll employment report released on Friday. 916,000 jobs were added in March against an expected 652,000 increase; more than double February's reading. The unemployment rate also edged down to 6.0 percent from 6.2 percent. The data is consistent with the return to normalcy from increased vaccinations and more pandemic relief money from the government. Economists now expect job growth will average at least 700,000 per month in the second and third quarters. That, combined with the fiscal stimulus and about \$19 trillion in excess savings accumulated

methodology in embracing change and in dealing with crises. During COVID-19, we succeeded in utilizing the crises as an opportunity where KFH presented itself as part of the solution rather than part of the problem, fully utilizing its digital tools to facilitate customer services." He explained that COVID-19 has accelerated KFH's strategy of digital transformation in terms of providing high-quality mobile banking services without interruption and focusing on health and safety.

Al-Roshood added that KFH announced the successful launch of the digital service "opening bank account online" for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch. KFH tremendously demonstrated its CSR strategy of supporting the government in its efforts and measures to face the pandemic. He confirmed the efficiency of KFH's digital services as transactions completed by its customers through KFHonline on the website or the mobile app exceeded 140 million transactions in 2020.

"This emphasizes the successful digital transformation strategy of KFH and its keenness to provide innovative banking solutions via mobile and alternative channels to enable customers to complete their transactions around the clock, from anywhere, easily and safely," Al-Roshood added.

Meanwhile, Al-Roshood emphasized that moving forward in the strategy of digital transformation, KFH increases investments in technology through adopting the latest FinTech innovations, using the artificial intelligence and robotics in the banking transactions as well as achieving excellence in mobile banking and the self-banking station KFH Go services. This could strengthen the digital customer experience, drive the digital development in the banking industry, as well as successfully activate the business continuity plan in emergency cases.

Awareness campaigns

Al-Roshood said that given the increased access to financial services, development of e-banking transactions, accelerated digital activity and higher online penetration, financial literacy becomes a growing challenge. He stressed the importance of cybersecurity and continuous customer awareness of potential risk of e-crimes which can be achieved through dedicated campaigns such as "Be Aware" ("Diraya") recently launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) with the aim of raising public awareness of the role of the banking sector and enhancing the financial literacy of society.

by households during the pandemic, is expected to unleash a powerful wave of pent-up demand.

Euro pressured

Unlike the remarkable vaccination roll-outs in the UK and the US, the EU remains in shambles as it tries to find the proper course of action. Mixed messages and confusion from health officials are dealing heavy blows to their vaccination programs pressuring the EUR/USD lower. At one point last week, the pair fell to a low of 1.1702 extending further below the 200-day moving-average that was breached in the previous week. Poor vaccine roll-outs combined with renewed restrictions have been fuelling the worsening outlook for the bloc and its currency.

UK eases restrictions

The UK vaccination rate now stands at 50.9 percent of the population in contrast to 16.2 percent in the EU. The successful roll-out is reflected in lower infections, hospitalizations and deaths leading to an easing of restrictions. Furthermore, the UK Composite PMI advance reading for March was 56.6, up from 49.6 in February indicating a strong rebound is likely underway in Q2. Nevertheless, there are still downside risks when looking at the pace of recovery. Trade frictions with the EU remain an uncertainty that could drag on growth going forward. Separately, the Biden administration threatened the UK with trade tariffs in retaliation to the UK decision to implement a digital sales tax on tech companies.

Kuroda optimistic

Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda yesterday offered a cautiously optimistic view of the economy, saying global and Japanese growth are picking up from the damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic thanks to aggressive stimulus measures. Kuroda said Japan's economic growth will be "clearly positive" in the country's new fiscal year, beginning in April, thanks to solid global trade and domestic demand for durable goods. During March, the yen weakened versus the US dollar 3.55 percent as the rising US Treasury bond yields fuelled greater speculative yen selling. However, with expectations of a global demand recovery this year, Japan's export driven economy should benefit from a less expensive currency.

OPEC+ to reduce curbs

OPEC and its allies agreed on Thursday to gradually ease oil output cuts starting from May. Production would increase by 350,000 bpd in May, another 350,000 bpd in June and further 400,000 bpd or so in July. In addition, Saudi Arabia said it was phasing out its extra voluntary cuts in similar stages from May to July, adding a further 1 million bpd to the market. In total, production in July should increase by 2.1 million bpd. Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman described the agreement to increase output as a "very conservative measure" and that output levels could still be adjusted at the next meeting on April 28.

Kuwait

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Visitors walk down a hallway at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), in the Fustat district of Old Cairo, during its official reopening on Sunday, a day after the Pharaohs' Golden Parade ceremony. — AFP photos



A golden sarcophagus is exhibited at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).

Main hall of Egypt's NMEC open for visitors

In a magnificent building with a pyramid structure resting on four columns on top, and with a vast yard overlooking a natural lake, the newly-opened National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) in Cairo highlight the Egyptian civilization from the Predynastic period to the modern age.

Passing through the main door, visitors encounter a tube-like shiny hallway leading to the main premises that includes the Main Exhibition Hall, whose entrance has a downward stairway leading to the Royal Mummies Hall located underneath.



A woman wearing a protective mask walks past a golden logo at the Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).

Both halls were inaugurated Saturday evening by Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi, following a majestic festive parade celebrating the relocation of 22 royal mummies of 18 ancient Egyptian kings and 4 queens from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo to the NMEC in Al-Fustat neighborhood a few kilometers away. Ahmed

Ghoneim, executive director of the NMEC, described the museum as "a lighthouse for culture and tourism in Egypt, the Arab world and Africa."

Ghoneim pointed out that the size of the main hall is about 2,000 square meters, while the total area of the museum is approximately 33 feddans (some 138,600 square meters). "We have now 65,000 artifacts but our warehouses can accommodate 100,000 artifacts. Of them, about 1,600 artifacts are displayed here in the Main Exhibition Hall," the director told Xinhua inside the museum. The main hall showcases artifacts from the prehistoric times, the Pharaonic dynasties, the Islamic and Coptic eras until the modern-day Egypt.

Besides Pharaonic statues and objects, the main hall hosts a human skeleton dating back 35,000 years, the oldest artificial limb in history, which shows how ancient Egyptians advanced in medicine, according to the museum's executive director. The royal mummies that were moved to the NMEC belonged to kings and queens of the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th dynasties, dating back some 3,000 years, including the mummies of famous ancient Egyptian King Ramses II and Queen Hatshepsut.

The mummies hall will be opened on April 18 to coincide with the International Day for Monuments and Sites, also known as World Heritage Day. "The Royal Mummies Hall will exhibit about 150 pieces, including the mummies as well as their coffins. For the first time, each mummy will be exhibited near the coffin where it was found," Said Abu el-Fadl, supervisor of the main hall and the mummies hall, explained. With joint efforts of the UNESCO and the Egyptian government, the NMEC's foundation stone was laid in 2002 and its temporary exhibition hall was opened in 2017. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said that at least 800 NMEC tickets were sold on Sunday, the first day of opening the main hall of the museum to visitors.



A picture shows a view of the Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).

Walid Ahmed, an Egyptian civil engineer who was taking a tour inside the main hall, described the architecture and the design of the museum's interior and exterior as "super." "I didn't think it will look that impressive!" "I am happy with the design, the method of exhibition and the technologies used. I believe it will be such an important attraction in Cairo," he added. As for Laetitia Saunier, a Swiss young woman, she said that she decided to visit the

museum after she watched the remarkable Pharaohs' Golden Parade that escorted the 22 mummies during their transfer to the NMEC. "The museum is really amazing," the Swiss tourist told Xinhua. "All the stories of Egypt are amazing but the mummies attract me the most." — xinhuanet.com



People take pictures of a display at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



A view of some of the exhibits at the Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



Keys of the Kaaba (box) and an Egyptian-made Kiswa (wall), the black silk cloth covering it, are displayed at the Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



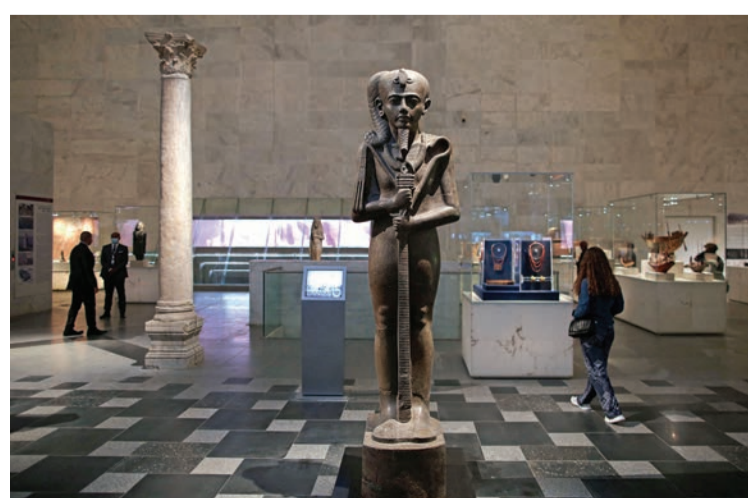
The coffin of Sennedjem the artisan is displayed at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



A girl looks at displayed artifacts at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



A visitor looks at a large statue of the 18th dynasty Pharaoh Akhenaten.



People visit an archaeological exhibit at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



Visitors look at displayed ancient jewelry at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



Historic items are displayed at Egypt's new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC).



A statue of the priest Psamtik Seneb is displayed.



Keys of the Kaaba are displayed.

SORKIN'S 'CHICAGO 7' RALLIES OSCAR BID WITH KEY SAG AWARD

The Trial Of The Chicago 7" was judged the year's best performance at the prestigious Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday-a verdict that strengthens the film's case for the Oscars later this month. Aaron Sorkin's courtroom drama based on 1968 US anti-war riots-and the infamous trial that followed-took top honors at the prize-giving,

Chadwick Boseman, who died of cancer last August, was posthumously voted best actor for 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" by Hollywood's actors guild. The SAG awards are a vital stop on Tinseltown's annual prize-giving circuit, which climaxes this year with the delayed Academy Awards on April 25.

Typically a star-studded ceremony in

year's top Oscar, having already won multiple awards including Golden Globes, it did not even receive a cast nomination from SAG. In the film, several non-actors play fictional versions of themselves. "Nomadland" star Frances McDormand also failed to convert her SAG best actress nomination, losing out to Boseman's "Ma Rainey" co-star Viola Davis.

'Beautiful Chadwick'

Davis thanked "the beautiful Chadwick Boseman," while his widow Taylor Simone Ledward-accepting his prize-quoted Boseman: "If you see the world unbalanced, be a crusader that pushes heavily on the seesaw of the mind." The late "Black Panther" actor was also honored in the annual "in memoriam" segment, along with leading stars who died this year including Sean Connery and Christopher Plummer. In a year that has seen Hollywood boost minority representation on both sides of the camera, Daniel Kaluuya was named best supporting actor for his portrayal of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton in "Judas and the Black Messiah."

And veteran Yuh-jung Youn confirmed SAG's newfound love affair with South Korean cinema. She went one better than "Parasite" by winning an individual SAG prize-supporting actress-for "Minari," an immigrant tale set in 1980s Arkansas. "I don't know how to describe my feelings, being recognized by Westerners... everything is not familiar!" she said, visibly shocked and in slightly broken English. But the film, along with "Ma Rainey," "One Night in Miami" and "Da 5 Bloods"-all featuring Black casts-lost the night's final prize to "Chicago 7," which now has the best shot at unseating "Nomadland" as Oscars voting begins April 15.

Winners at the 2021 SAG Awards

- Cast in a Motion Picture** - 'The Trial of the Chicago 7'
- Female Actor in a Leading Role** - Viola Davis, 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'
- Male Actor in a Leading Role** - Chadwick Boseman, 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'
- Female Actor in a Supporting Role** - Yuh-Jung Youn, 'Minari'
- Male Actor in a Supporting Role** - Daniel Kaluuya, 'Judas and the Black Messiah'
- Ensemble in a Drama Series** - 'The Crown'
- Female Actor in a Drama Series** - Gillian Anderson, 'The Crown'
- Male Actor in a Drama Series** - Jason Bateman, 'Ozark'
- Ensemble in a Comedy Series** - 'Schitt's Creek'
- Female Actor in a Comedy Series** - Catherine O'Hara, 'Schitt's Creek'
- Male Actor in a Comedy Series** - Jason Sudeikis, 'Ted Lasso'
- Female Actor in a Television Movie or Limited Series** - Anya Taylor-Joy, 'The Queen's Gambit'
- Male Actor in a Television Movie or Limited Series** - Mark Ruffalo, 'I Know This Much Is True'
- Stunt Ensemble in a Motion Picture** - 'Wonder Woman 1984'
- Stunt Ensemble in a Comedy or Drama Series** - 'The Mandalorian'.



In this screenshot courtesy of the 27th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards nominees react as Daisy Ridley announces Chadwick Boseman's win for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom") during this year SAG awards ceremony held virtually on Sunday. — AFP photos

which was whittled down to a virtual one-hour broadcast due to the pandemic. "We need leaders to guide us toward hating each other less," said Frank Langella, who plays the civil rights-themed film's racist judge.

"We owe a debt of thanks to the voices of the Chicago 7 — and especially Aaron Sorkin, our leader-whose voice is the soul of this movie," he added, referring to the trial's seven defendants.

their own right, the SAG awards were a pre-taped, hostless and bare-bones affair Sunday-but they remain a key predictor of glory at the Oscars, where actors are the largest voting bloc. Last year, South Korea's "Parasite" began its historic charge to the best picture Oscar by winning SAG's top prize for best performance by a motion picture cast.

While Chloe Zhao's road movie "Nomadland" remains the favorite for this

'Big night'

The ceremony opened with a skit from the British soccer team of "Ted Lasso," with Jason Sudeikis-the comedy's clueless American coach-giving a rallying team talk: "Y'all, let's focus up. We've got a big night ahead of us, the SAG Awards." Sudeikis was named best TV comedy actor, while "Schitt's Creek" took the other comedy prizes, including Catherine O'Hara for best actress. Awards were interspersed with actors reflecting on their careers, and how they spent their pandemic-confined year-Helen Mirren apparently "chased away" a

bear from her home in the western US Sierra Nevada mountains.

British royals saga "The Crown" won best drama, with its star Gillian Anderson earning best actress. Jason Bateman won the male drama prize for "Ozark." In limited series, Mark Ruffalo and Anya Taylor-Joy followed up their Golden Globe wins for "I Know This Much Is True" and "The Queen's Gambit." — AFP



In this screenshot Simone Ledward Boseman accepts the award on behalf of her late husband Chadwick Boseman for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom").



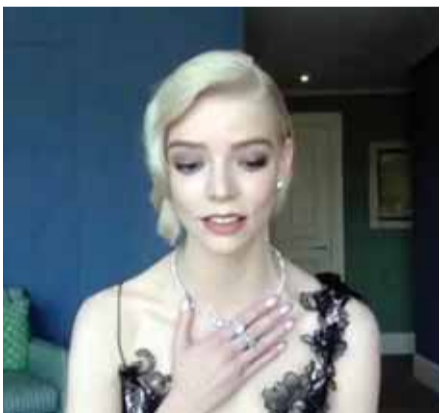
In this file photo US actor Chadwick Boseman poses in the press room during the 2019 American Music Awards at the Microsoft theatre in Los Angeles.



In this screenshot Viola Davis, her husband at her side, accepts the award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom").



In this screengrab Aaron Sorkin accepts the Best Director Award for 'The Trial of the Chicago 7' during the Movies for Grownups Awards with AARP the Magazine broadcast.



In this screenshot Anya Taylor-Joy accepts the award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Television Movie or Miniseries ("The Queen's Gambit").



In this screenshot Youn Yuh-Jung accepts the award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role ("Minari").



In this screenshot (from top left to bottom right) John Carroll Lynch, Sacha Baron Cohen, Alex Sharp, Eddie Redmayne, Michael Keaton, Mark Rylance, Frank Langella and Kevin Harrison Jr. accept the award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture ("The Trial of the Chicago 7").

Sports

Photo of the Day



SAN ANTONIO: Members of the Stanford Cardinal celebrate the team's win against the Arizona Wildcats in the National Championship game of the 2021 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament at the Alamodome on Sunday in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP

Poland's Hurkacz beats Italian teen Sinner to win Miami Open

MIAMI: Poland's Hubert Hurkacz defeated Italian teenager Jannik Sinner in straight sets to win the Miami Open and claim the first ATP Masters title of his career on Sunday. The 26th-seeded Hurkacz, who had eliminated four higher-ranked players en route to the final, held his nerve at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium to win 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in 1hr 43min.

It was a deserved victory for the 24-year-old from Wroclaw, who claimed his second title of the season as Sinner's challenge unraveled with a series of unforced errors. "It feels unreal, so happy that I was able to play a good match today," Hurkacz said. "Jannik is an amazing competitor. I'm so proud of myself that I was able to beat him."

Hurkacz, whose win earned him a message of congratulations from Polish President Andrzej Duda, said he hoped the tournament win would be a launchpad for more victories. "It gives me extra motivation and extra belief in myself, that I've won a really big title," he said. "It motivates me to be a better player so I can win even more."

Sinner meanwhile expressed disappointment that he had been unable to take full advantage of the absence in

Miami of the men's "Big Three" — Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer — by crowning a successful tournament with victory in the final. "Today is a tough day, to be honest, because losing the final here for me is not easy," Sinner said.

"I came here with the mentality to win. We knew that Rafa, Roger, Novak were not playing," he said. "I think it was a big opportunity for many players." Sinner had started slowly, being broken with his first service game to quickly find himself trailing 3-0 in the opening set.

However the talented 19-year-old grew in confidence as the set progressed, working Hurkacz around the court with some pinpoint forehands into the corners. The Italian broke back in the fifth game and then held to make it 3-3, before another break of Hurkacz's serve gave him a 6-5 lead and the chance to serve for the set.

Sinner appeared to tighten on serve, though, and another unforced error, sending a backhand long, allowed Hurkacz to break back at 6-6 and force the tie break. Hurkacz quickly raced into a 6/2 lead in the decider and although Sinner clawed it back to 6/4, another missed forehand



MIAMI GARDENS: Jannik Sinner of Italy and Hubert Hurkacz of Poland pose at the trophy ceremony during the final of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on Sunday in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

handed Hurkacz the first set. Hurkacz carried that momentum into the second set, sprinting into a 4-0 lead with a double break.

With the match slipping away from him, Sinner rallied to pull the score back to 4-3 but was unable to break an increasingly jittery Hurkacz in the eighth game to leave the Pole

5-3 up. After Sinner held for 5-4, Hurkacz once again benefited from unforced errors by his opponent at key times as he served for the championship. An overhit forehand by Sinner set up match point, and on the next point the Italian's attempted forehand down the line drifted wide to seal Hurkacz's win. — AFP

Morris scores 22 as Clippers thrash Lakers

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Clippers didn't have to lean heavily on their superstar duo against the defending NBA champions on Sunday, getting help from their supporting cast in a 104-86 rout of the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers.

The Clippers got a game-high 22 points from Marcus Morris while all-stars Kawhi Leonard and Paul George finished with 19 and 16 points respectively at Staples Center arena. Luke Kennard tallied 15 points off the bench and guard Rajon Rondo made his Clippers' debut, playing 13 minutes in the win which comes in the middle of a nine-game homestand.

"We were great defensively. We set the tone early. We were physical and we got into bodies," said Clippers coach Tyrone Lue. Kennard and Terance Mann have stepped in nicely to fill the void left by an injury to starting guard Patrick Beverley. Mann finished with seven points.

Lue was pleased with what he saw from Rondo who finished with two points and two steals in limited playing time. "He going to be good for us in the long run. He makes the game easier. It is just good to see him out there," Lue said.

Marc Gasol with 11 points was the only starter to finish in double figures Sunday for the Lakers, who are without the injured LeBron James and Anthony Davis. Reserve Montrezl Harrell scored a team high 19 for the Lakers who have lost six of their last 11 games.

Daunting road trip

It doesn't get any easier for the Lakers. Sunday's defeat was their final home game before embarking on a five-game road trip that begins Tuesday against the Toronto Raptors, who crushed Golden State by 53 points, 130-77 on Friday.

"We didn't handle their defensive pressure well at all," said Lakers coach Frank Vogel of the



LOS ANGELES: Marcus Morris Sr #8 of the LA Clippers talks with Markieff Morris #88 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the game on Sunday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Clippers. "We had a tough shooting night. Tough shooting night at the rim, missed nine layups and 21 shots in the paint."

The loss of James and Davis has jolted the Lakers season. James has been out two weeks nursing a right, high-ankle sprain suffered on March 20 against the Atlanta Hawks. Davis has missed over two dozen games this season, the last 22 due to a strained right calf. They tried to fill the void by signing center Andre Drummond, but he has not played since injuring his toe in his Laker debut last Wednesday.

Elsewhere, Zach LaVine scored a game-high 25 points as the Chicago Bulls snapped a six-game losing skid with a 115-107 win over the undermanned Brooklyn Nets in Chicago. Tomas Satoransky finished with 19 points and 11 assists,

center Nikola Vucevic tallied 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Bulls who gave their playoff hopes a much needed boost at United Center arena.

Thaddeus Young had 12 points, Patrick Williams scored 11 and Daniel Theis added 10 for the Bulls, who overcame a slow start with a spirited second quarter in which they outscored the Nets 32-18. Without injured starters Kevin Durant and James Harden, the Nets looked out of sorts in having their four-game win streak halted. They dropped to 34-16 on the season.

The Nets had six players in double figure scoring including Kyrie Irving, who finished with 24 points and a season high 15 assists. Jeff Green came off the bench to score 21 points while LaMarcus Aldridge and Joe Harris scored 11 points apiece and Blake Griffin and Bruce Brown each had 10. — AFP

Arab boxers to make pro debut in July

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Sport Promotion (KSP) said world boxing will see a unique sports event when three Arab boxers will make their professional debut on July 17 in the Spanish city of La Coruna in cooperation with the professional boxers association in the north of Spain, in their first step as professional boxers.

Khalid Al-Fajji, whose company is organizing the event, said 13 boxers from Europe were selected as per their results as professionals, in addition to three boxers from Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, and this will be their first participation as professionals. "We hope the Arab boxers give an outstanding performance and come out winners to be the best ambassadors for their countries in this noble sport," he said.

Fajji said this international event will witness eight bouts in various weight categories, expecting strong competition due to the participation of a number of top boxers from Britain and Spain, which will improve the winners' ranking.



Khalid Al-Fajji

City's Haaland pursuit hangs over Aguero's goodbye

MANCHESTER: A Champions League winner's medal is the only accolade missing from Sergio Aguero's list of honors as a Manchester City legend. But his potential successor at the Etihad next season, Erling Braut Haaland, will pose the biggest threat if Pep Guardiola's men are to stumble at the quarter-final stage once more against Borussia Dortmund.

City have failed to get beyond the last eight in Guardiola's previous four seasons since taking charge in Manchester, but have won 26 of their last 27 games in all competitions to keep hopes of a historic quadruple alive. Aguero is by a distance the club's all-time leading scorer with 257 goals, including the most important in City's history to snatch the Premier League title from Manchester United in 2011/2012. His goals fired City to three more league titles, with his fifth a formality in the coming weeks.

Guardiola labeled Aguero's contribution "irreplaceable", not just in terms of goals and trophies won, but in the hearts and minds of supporters, who lived in United's shadow for so long prior to his arrival. However, in his 10th and final season, the 32-year-old has been reduced to a peripheral figure. Aguero has scored just three times in an injury and coronavirus-disrupted season.

'I know what we want'

By contrast, Haaland's record of 49 goals in 50 games for Dortmund has shot him to the top of City's wish list to replace Aguero. The Norwegian's record in the Champions League is even more impressive, becoming the fastest player ever to 20 goals in just 14 appearances in Europe's premier club competition.

Signed for just 20 million euros (\$24 million) in January 2020, Dortmund are reportedly asking for 180 million euros for their prized asset this summer, with Europe's biggest clubs lining up to do battle for Haaland's signature. His father, Alf-Inge Haaland, himself a former City player, and agent Mino Raiola reportedly travelled to Spain to speak with Barcelona and Real Madrid representatives last Thursday.

Guardiola claimed City may not be able to afford a replacement for Aguero due to the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. But backed by Abu Dhabi state wealth, the reality is City have far greater resources to spend this summer than the heavily indebted Spanish giants. "I am very, very relaxed about this matter because I know what we want," said Dortmund's sporting director Michael Zorc.

Yet, the German giants may find their hand forced by another economic blow. Despite Haaland's prolific form, Saturday's 2-1 defeat by Eintracht Frankfurt left Dortmund seven points adrift of the Bundesliga top four with seven games to play. "If you are realistic, even with six or seven wins it will be difficult to finish fourth," admitted defender Mats Hummels.

A return to the riches and prestige of the Champions League next season by winning this year's competition looks even more unlikely. Even if Dortmund can shock City, a daunting semi-final against Bayern Munich or Paris Saint-Germain awaits. Holding onto Haaland to play in the Europa League next season may prove as difficult a task for Zorc as defenses have found stopping him from finding the net. — AFP

Sports

Fallen giants seek revival as Real Madrid, Liverpool battle again

Teams face off in Champions League quarter-finals tonight

MADRID: Liverpool's last dance with Real Madrid ended in painful defeat, with Mohamed Salah's shoulder dislocated by Sergio Ramos dragging him to the ground and goalkeeper Loris Karius left apologizing to his fans.

Yet Karius's two errors, which handed Madrid a 13th European triumph in the 2018 Champions League final, were also the start of a journey for Liverpool. Karius was ruthlessly cast aside and Alisson Becker signed for a then world record fee for a goalkeeper.

A year later Liverpool were the ones hoisting the Champions League trophy after beating Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid. Last season, an even heavier burden was lifted when they were crowned English champions for the first time in 30 years.

But those highs have been followed by a fall from grace as Liverpool prepare to face Real again in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final in Madrid tonight. Fortress Anfield has turned into a visitors' dream with fans absent because of the coronavirus pandemic.

After nearly four years without a home league defeat, Liverpool have lost six in a row for the first time in the club's history. Jurgen Klopp's men are in a scrap just to make it into next season's Champions League via a top-four finish in the Premier League.

Injuries have taken their toll. Captain Jordan Henderson and center-backs Virgil Van Dijk, Joe Gomez, Joel Matip will all miss both legs of the Real tie and are unlikely to play again this season. The signings of Thiago Alcantara and Diogo Jota last summer were designed to build from a position of strength, but both have also missed a large part of the campaign through injury.

However, there could yet be a happy ending to a

difficult season. Saturday's comprehensive 3-0 win at Arsenal was Liverpool's most complete performance of 2021. Jota is back fit and firing, scoring six times in his last four games for club and country. Thiago is also starting to find his rhythm, helped by the return of Fabinho to midfield after months of deputizing as a makeshift center-back.

Ramos reunion denied

Real Madrid might have taken more comfort from Liverpool's problems were they not confronting their own period of introspection. Since winning a third consecutive Champions League three years ago, the team has stalled, a failure to update and refresh seeing them tumble down the European pecking order.

When Madrid and Liverpool were matched last month with Chelsea and Porto in the semi-finals, many thought Chelsea had a kind draw for the quarters, and the semis too. Madrid have been unfortunate to see their one statement signing since 2018, Eden Hazard, succumb to injury. Hazard could have been the successor to Cristiano Ronaldo and the catalyst for renewal but instead he has become an irrelevance. If Madrid manager Zinedine Zidane was too loyal to an ageing core, the club were also prevented from forcing change, the coronavirus pandemic slashing revenues and making significant signings impossible.

For now, Zidane will turn again to his tried and trusted for the first leg at Valdebebas, with Luka Modric, Casemiro, Toni Kroos and Karim Benzema all three years older than the last time they played Liverpool, and arguably even more important. Ramos will be denied a reunion with Salah because of a calf injury. Madrid will also be buoyed by an



MADRID: Real Madrid's French coach Zinedine Zidane stands in the rain during the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and SD Eibar at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas on the outskirts of Madrid on April 3, 2021. — AFP

upturn in form. The kind of late surge that has seen them deliver when it matters in the Champions League. They have also cut faltering Atletico Madrid's lead in La Liga to three points.

After beating Eibar in La Liga on Saturday, Zidane struck a confident note. "We are alive in two competitions and we are going to be ready," he said. "We know where we have come from this season, that we have suffered a lot to get here, but we haven't achieved anything yet." But Liverpool are

showing signs of a resurgence too, their victory over Arsenal their third in a row and most convincing performance this year.

Crucially, both clubs will believe winning this quarter-final puts them in sight of another European success, that from there they could defy recent trajectories by beating even the loftiest opponents in the competition. In 2018, Real Madrid and Liverpool knew victory would secure them the trophy. This time they will hope it sparks a resurgence. — AFP

Salah can prove loyalty to Liverpool in Real Madrid showdown

LONDON: Mohamed Salah can silence the critics who question his loyalty to Liverpool by avenging the most painful moment of his career when the Egypt star faces Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals tonight.

Salah sparked howls of indignation among Liverpool fans recently when he refused to rule out the possibility of playing for a Spanish club in the future. The fact that Salah was speaking to Madrid-based newspaper Marca at the time only increased speculation that he was laying the groundwork for a move to Real Madrid.

"I hope to be able to play for many more years. Why not? No one knows what's going to happen in the future, so maybe one day, yes. It's not up to me," Salah said when asked if he was keen to try Spanish football. Salah's flirtatious response was similar to the one he gave to another Spanish outlet in December when questioned about a potential La Liga move. "I think Madrid and Barcelona are two top clubs," he told AS.

Whether either Real or Barcelona could afford to buy Salah amid the current financial difficulties caused by the coronavirus pandemic remains to be seen. But for a club whose supporters pride themselves on their passionate and unflinching loyalty to the Liverpool cause, Salah's refusal to rule out a switch to Spain was a careless own goal.

It tapped into the long-standing suspicion among a section of Liverpool's fanbase that Salah, whose contract runs until 2023, is motivated by personal glory rather than team success. The cynics support their claims by highlighting Salah's occasional spats with Liverpool forward Sadio Mane when he shoots rather than passing to a better placed team-mate.

They also point to Salah's sulky response to being substituted during the defeat against Chelsea in March, and his reported frustration at being ignored for the Liverpool captaincy in the absence of the injured Jordan Henderson.



LONDON: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (center) jumps over a challenge from Arsenal's Brazilian defender Gabriel (right) during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium in London on April 3, 2021. — AFP

Real revenge mission

Of course, Salah could rightly mention that Liverpool might well have failed to win either the Champions League in 2019 or the Premier League last season without his goals and sublime skills. Even this season, with Liverpool in the midst of a failed title defense marred by seemingly endless injuries, Salah's haul of 26 goals — including one in Saturday's 3-0 win at Arsenal — shows what a threat he carries.

With 120 goals in 193 appearances in all competitions since joining from Roma in 2017, Salah is rightly ranked among Liverpool's all-time greats. But the 28-year-old's place in the hearts of Kopites might not be so secure.

Michael Owen and Steve McManaman — both local heroes at Liverpool at the time — were never so fondly regarded after swapping Anfield for Real's Bernabeu. Inspiring Liverpool to a revenge victory against Real in a rematch of the 2018 Champions

League final won by the Spanish club would go some way to appeasing the doubters.

That bitter 3-1 loss in Kiev remains a personal nadir for Salah, who was in tears on the pitch after being forced to come off with a first half injury following a clash with Sergio Ramos. Salah had suffered a dislocated shoulder that would hamper him at the World Cup later that year, with some claiming Ramos had deliberately exacerbated the injury with the way he dragged the Egyptian to the turf.

"Let's just say that I have special motivation to win the tie and go through to the semi-finals," Salah told Marca about the Real reunion. Ironically, Real captain Ramos is expected to miss both legs of the quarter-final with a calf injury.

Ramos's absence is a major boost for Liverpool as they seek to salvage a miserable season by winning a seventh European Cup. If Salah can play a leading role in making that dream come true, his commitment might not be questioned quite so often. — AFP

Atletico dealt another title blow after defeat by Sevilla

MADRID: Atletico Madrid stumbled again in La Liga on Sunday as they were beaten 1-0 by Sevilla. Marcos Acuna headed in the winner for Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, with Atletico's grip on first place loosening even further and their in-form rivals primed to take advantage.

The loss means Spain's title race suddenly appears wide open two months after Atletico sat 10 points clear of both Barca and Madrid, with a game in hand. They have managed only four wins in 12 games since then, with defeats to Chelsea costing them their place in the Champions League and regular slips in La Liga potentially squandering their shot at the title. "Honestly I don't think it's about nerves," said Atleti coach Diego Simeone. "It's about having to play better, being a strong block, finding our best version."

After a narrow 1-0 win over bottom-club Alaves two weeks ago, Simeone might have hoped the international break would offer his team a chance to refresh and reset. Instead, they returned to another setback against a determined Sevilla side, who strengthened their own hold on fourth place, even if a push for the top three would seem beyond them.

Sevilla deserved their victory and it might have been more comfortable had Lucas Ocampos not



SEVILLE: Sevilla's Dutch forward Luuk De Jong (center) challenges Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Koke (left) and Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Marcos Llorente during the Spanish League football match between Sevilla FC and Club Atletico de Madrid at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium in Seville on Sunday. — AFP

missed a first-half penalty, Atletico's Jan Oblak again coming to the rescue after Jose Gimenez fouled Ivan Rakitic. But Acuna struck with 20 minutes left, heading in a looping Jesus Navas cross, even as Atletico protested against an Ocampos handball that had occurred almost a minute before.

Mario Hermoso spurned a golden chance from close range and then Luis Suarez did brilliantly to set up Angel Correa late on but Sevilla's Bono, the goalkeeper who scored against Real Valladolid a fortnight ago, this time preserved the points with a crucial save. — AFP

Solskjaer lights half-time fireworks to spark Man United fightback

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted he had to awaken Manchester United from their slumber as the Red Devils came from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday. Danny Welbeck headed the Seagulls in front against his former side as Brighton dominated the first-half at Old Trafford.

However, for the eighth time in the league this season, Solskjaer's men came from behind to close the gap on Premier League leaders Manchester City to 14 points thanks to second-half goals from Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood. "We couldn't find our rhythm. We needed half-time to compose ourselves," said Solskjaer. "Sometimes after the international break it takes time and then maybe the fireworks have to be lit at half-time."

Only an almighty collapse from Manchester City will deny Pep Guardiola's men a third Premier League title in four years with the runaway leaders needing just 11 points from their remaining seven games to become champions. But Solskjaer can match United's best league finish since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 by claiming second place.

Victory opens up a four-point cushion over third-placed Leicester, while United hold a commanding 11-point lead over fifth-placed Tottenham and Liverpool to close in on Champions League qualification next season. "It doesn't really matter what anyone else does, as long as we win and we get our points, we're in second place," added Solskjaer. "It's a long way up (to City) but we want to consolidate second place."

Just like in their previous meeting this season when United snatched a 3-2 win with a penalty awarded after the full-time whistle had been blown, Brighton were left to rue what might have been. "I believe in the players and what we're doing and our performances have been consistently good. It's turning them into results that's the challenge," said Brighton boss Graham Potter. Back-to-back victories prior to the international break had eased their fears of relegation and Potter's men started the more confident side.

Aaron Wan-Bissaka was caught on his heels as Welbeck powered Neal Maupay's cross towards goal on 13 minutes and, after his initial effort was brilliantly saved by Dean Henderson, the former England international headed the rebound into an unguarded net. Henderson was again preferred to David de Gea in goal for United and repaid Solskjaer's faith by tipping Lewis Dunk's header onto the crossbar moments later.

United were a different side after the break as Bruno Fernandes took control of the game. Robert Sanchez was quick off his line to smother the Portuguese's first effort on the hour mark. Just a minute later, Fernandes was the architect for the equalizer as he teed up Rashford to roll his 19th goal of the season into the far corner with an accurate finish.

Rather than build on their momentum, though, Solskjaer's side were lucky to escape not falling behind once more. Welbeck turned a dangerous low cross inches wide under pressure from Harry Maguire, who escaped giving away a penalty after a VAR review. — AFP

Quartararo wins Doha MotoGP

Zarco makes French double; Rossi finishes at 16th

DOHA: Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha won the Doha MotoGP on Sunday with French compatriot Johann Zarco of Ducati-Pramac finishing second. Spanish rookie Jorge Martin, the teammate of Zarco, was third after starting the race on pole position.

It was the first time two French riders had been on the podium in the sport's elite class since 1954 when Pierre Monneret won and Jacques Collot was third on home soil in Reims. Quartararo joked modestly that he "will enjoy the moment with a nice McDonald's tonight" following his win. "It is easy to say I've not won a lot of races — but wow!" he added.

"I came from eighth, the pace and track were totally different from the fourth practice and warm-up. I always dreamed to win in Qatar, unfortunately I was not the first (this season)." Zarco's second-place finish was enough to put him on top of the world championship after two rounds. He has 40 points with Quartararo in second, just four points behind.

'Happy for both of them'

"I was pretty happy that Jorge (Martin) took the pace, after half a race he had the pace — but I was still able to stay behind him," Zarco said. "He was so clean in the style. It was this situation in four laps to the end, Fabio came in the right place to overtake Jorge. I tried to overtake Fabio but I could not pass him. I'm so happy for both of them — victory of a French rider and podium for a teammate."

Spain's Alex Rins, on a Suzuki, and Yamaha's Maverick Vinales, the winner of the season-opening Qatar MotoGP on the same Losail track last week, filled out the top five. Vinales had an eventful race after a poor start and his frustration was visible after the chequered flag fell. Valentino Rossi, the seven-time MotoGP world champion, was 16th on the Yamaha-SRT, after starting in 21st place, the Italian's worst ever qualifying performance.

Italy's Francesco Bagnaia, on a Ducati, defending world champion Joan Mir of Spain on a Suzuki, South Africa's Brad Binder, of KTM, Australia's Jack Miller, on a



LUSAIL: Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP's French rider Fabio Quartararo celebrates after winning the Moto GP Grand Prix of Doha at the Losail International Circuit, in the city of Lusail on Sunday. — AFP

Ducati, and Spanish Aprilia rider Aleix Espargaro completed the top 10.

Miller had a second ninth-place finish in as many weeks despite a strong showing in free practice, with a bump with Mir dominating his race. The two exchanged words heatedly for the duration of the subsequent straight. Martin was visibly delighted with the result, describing it as "a difficult race — I am a rookie!".

"I think I did a really mature race. The passing was

so difficult, if it was another rider (than Zarco) I would have taken him back for sure. I'm happy with third position, my first podium finish." Britain's Sam Lowes won his second Moto2 race in Qatar in as many weeks. Completing 20 laps in 39 minutes 52.702 seconds, Kalex-rider Lowes pipped Australia's Remy Gardner by 0.190 seconds.

Spain's Raul Fernandez finished third, 3.371 seconds off the pace. "The wind was there so it was easy to stay

behind but when I got to the front it was hard to pull away because of the wind." Lowes said. Spanish teenager Pedro Acosta defied the odds to win the Moto3 race after starting in the pit lane following a penalty.

It was the 16-year-old KTM rider's first world championship victory, having finished second in the season-opening Qatar Grand Prix last week. He beat Darryn Binder into second place and leads the South African by nine points in the early riders' standings. — AFP

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