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for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

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MP demands probe into high-profile graft cases

Lawmaker says grilling against premier still stands



KUWAIT: Abdulmajeed Al-Bannai, Chairman of Kuwait Football Federation's Medical Committee, undergoes a COVID-19 PCR test at the tuberculosis control unit (TBCU) yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmaker Saleh Al-Mutairi said yesterday he has submitted a proposal asking the National Assembly public funds protection committee to investigate a string of high-profile alleged corruption cases. He said the proposal demands that the committee should be given two months to complete its investigation into alleged corruption and money laundering cases, in addition to suspected illegal bank deposits and foreign transfers.

The alleged cases of corruption and money laundering mentioned by the lawmaker involve several billions of dollars. Some of the cases have either been investigated or are under investigation by the public prosecution. High-ranking figures are among many officials who have been interrogated for having suspected links to those cases.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Muhannad Al-Sayer yesterday said that a grilling he filed along with two other lawmakers against the prime minister is still valid and must be added to the agenda of the next Assembly session. Sayer said the vote taken by the Assembly last week to postpone all grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022 is illegal because it did not fulfil the required



Saleh Al-Mutairi



Muhannad Al-Sayer

constitutional procedures.

Opposition lawmakers claim the decision did not secure the necessary majority to be legal, although Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem insisted that the decision is legitimate and effective. MP Sayer also called on the speaker to step down voluntarily because a large number of lawmakers are against him. Former three-time Assembly speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun said on Twitter yesterday that even if the vote fulfilled all procedural requirements, it is null and void because it breaches the constitution.

News in brief

Only 'immunized' can do umrah

RIYADH: Saudi authorities said Monday only people immunized against COVID-19 will be allowed to perform umrah as well as attend prayers in the Grand Mosque in Makkah from the start of Ramadan. The hajj and umrah ministry said three categories of people would be considered "immunized" - those who have received two doses of the vaccine, those administered a single dose at least 14 days prior, and people who have recovered from the infection. The condition also applies for entry into the Prophet's (PBUH) Mosque in Madinah. — AFP

Barakah plant starts operations

ABU DHABI: The UAE announced yesterday that its Barakah nuclear power plant started commercial operations in a first for the Arab world. "The first megawatt from the first Arab nuclear plant has entered the national power grid," tweeted Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the Emirates' vice president and prime minister and ruler of Dubai. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan too lauded the "historic milestone". — AFP

Six dead in US murder-suicide

WASHINGTON: Police in Texas found the bodies of six members of a Bangladeshi family who died in an apparent murder-suicide carried out by two brothers, US media reported yesterday. The bodies were found Monday in a home in Allen, a suburb of Dallas, according to the reports. The dead were the parents of the family, a grandparent, twins aged 19 and another brother, Sergeant Jon Felty, an Allen police spokesman, told media. — AFP

Iran notches new record cases

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday announced a new record number of daily coronavirus cases, as authorities warned of a "major increase" in infections to come as the country faces its fourth wave. Over the past 24 hours, the Islamic republic officially recorded 17,430 cases, bringing Iran's total number of cases to 1,963,394. Iran also recorded 174 additional virus deaths, bringing the total to 63,506. — AFP

Jordan labels palace feud a family affair

AMMAN: Jordan sought to throw a veil yesterday over its public palace feud by ordering its media to stop reporting on an alleged plot the government says involves the half-brother of King Abdullah II. Prince Hamzah had on Saturday harshly criticized Jordan's leaders from what he said was house arrest - but in a dramatic about-turn on Monday pledged his loyalty to the royal family.

The palace released a signed statement in which the 41-year-old prince had changed his tone and pledged to "always be ready to help and support

His Majesty the King and his Crown Prince". The monarchy ruling Jordan - a country long regarded as a pro-Western anchor of stability in a turbulent region - declared it was settling the matter "within the framework of the Hashemite family".

Amman's prosecutor general yesterday banned the publication of any information about the investigation into what the government has called a "wicked" plot against Jordan involving unnamed foreign entities. The government has accused Hamzah - a former crown prince who was sidelined as heir to the throne in 2004 - of involvement in a conspiracy to "destabilize the kingdom's security" and also arrested at least 16 people.

"In order to keep the security services' investigation into Prince Hamzah and the others secret, (it is decided) to

Continued on Page 2

IMF projects stronger growth amid rebound

WASHINGTON: Accelerated vaccinations and a flood of government spending, especially in the United States, have boosted the outlook for the global economy, but more must be done to prevent permanent scars, the IMF said yesterday. The International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook now sees global growth of 6.0 percent this year after the contraction of 3.3 percent in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic - the worst

peacetime downturn since the Great Depression a century before.

Rapid government responses, including \$16 trillion in public funds, prevented a much worse outcome, a collapse that could have been "at least three times as large", IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said. The United States, which deployed another \$1.9 trillion last month, is expected to grow by 6.4 percent, among the fastest expansions in the world and 1.3 points higher than the January forecast.

Meanwhile, China's economy, one of few that grew last year, will expand 8.4 percent in 2021, the IMF said. The euro area too will see GDP expand 4.4 percent, slightly better than the prior forecast. Gopinath said "even with high uncertainty about the path of the pandemic, a way out of this health and economic crisis is increasingly visible."

Continued on Page 2

Dutch cargo ship adrift off Norway

OSLO: A Dutch cargo ship was adrift in the Norwegian Sea yesterday after all of its crewmembers were airlifted, with some having to jump into the rough waters to be rescued. The "Eemslift Hendrika", which was carrying several

smaller ships from Bremerhaven in Germany to Kolvereid in Norway, made a distress call Monday, reporting a heavy list after stormy weather displaced some of its cargo.

The 12 crewmembers were evacuated in two stages later the same day by Norwegian rescue services. The first eight were airlifted by helicopter from the deck of the cargo ship. But the last four had to jump into the water to be plucked out of the sea because the waves were rocking

Continued on Page 2



AMMAN: A car drives past a billboard bearing portraits of King Abdullah II, Queen Rania and their son Crown Prince Hussein on a street in the capital yesterday. — AFP



WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Gita Gopinath speaks at a virtual press briefing during the World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings yesterday. — Xinhua



An aerial view shows the Dutch cargo ship Eemslift Hendrika Monday in the Norwegian Sea about 60 nautical miles west of Alesund. — AFP

Local

Amir praises Kuwaiti youth's efforts in voluntary work

Sheikh Nawaf briefed on voluntary work's national strategy



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a copy of the national strategy for voluntary work. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Head of the Voluntary Work Center Sheikhha Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Rawan Yarub Al-Fawzan and Mohammad Nasser Al-Atwan, where they briefed His Highness on the national strategy for voluntary work prepared by youth cadres, aims to organize and support voluntary work in the country. His Highness the Amir praised efforts and contributions in the field of voluntary work, stressing his support to strengthen the joint work between the volunteer teams and the various authorities of the state.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received minister Mutairi, Sheikhha Amthal, Fawzan and Atwan, who presented to him a similar briefing. His Highness the Crown Prince praised during the meeting the efforts of Kuwait youth in spreading the cul-

ture of humanitarian initiatives around the world, as he stressed the political leadership attention to voluntary charitable work, calling to show the world the bright image of Kuwait that enjoys a human culture stemming from the values of the Islamic religion.

Minister Mutairi and the high-level delegation members also made a similar presentation to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who praised efforts and contributions in the field of volunteer work, stressing his support to strengthen the joint work between the volunteer teams and the various authorities of the state. In other news, His Highness the Amir received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace. His Highness the Amir also received Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel. His Highness the Crown Prince also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad and Dr Hashel at Bayan Palace. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



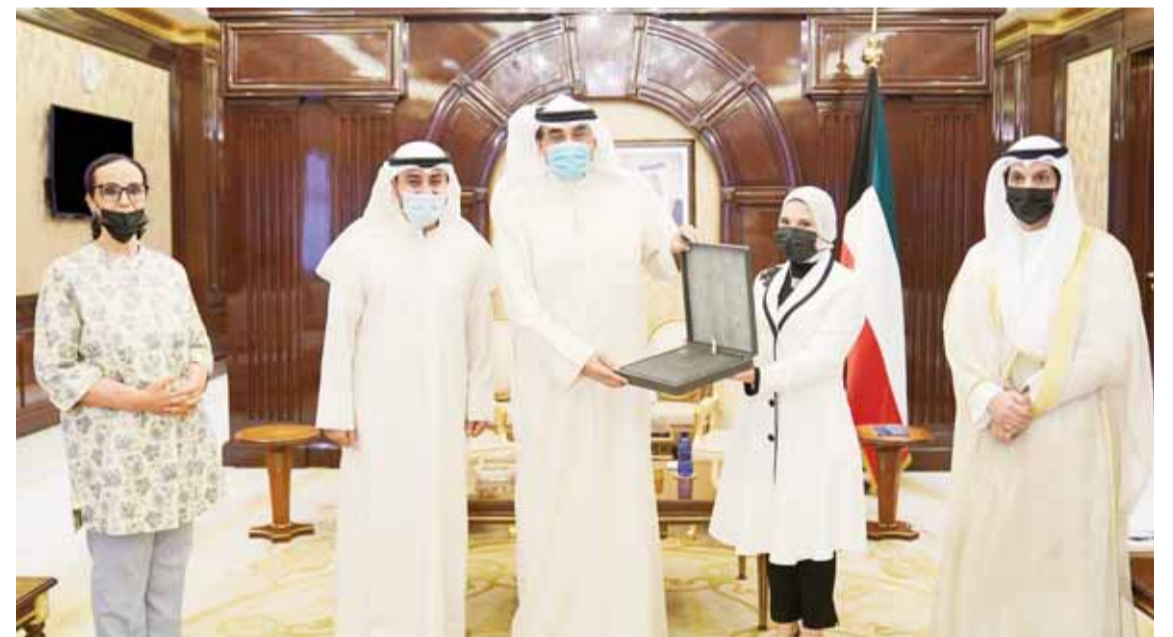
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a copy of the national strategy for voluntary work.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a copy of the national strategy for voluntary work.

Jordan labels palace feud a...

Continued from Page 1

ban the publication of anything related to this inquiry at this stage," prosecutor Hassan Al-Abdallat said in a statement. "The ban on publication involves all audiovisual media and social networks, as well as the publication of all images or video clips relating to this subject on pain of legal action."

Hamzah has made extensive use of the media to lash out against his situation, accusing Jordan's rulers of corruption, nepotism and ineptitude in a video message he sent to the BBC on Saturday. He sharply criticized the "incompetence that has been prevalent in our governing structure for the last 15 to 20 years and has been getting worse." "No-one is able to speak or express opinion on anything without being bullied, arrested, harassed and threatened," he charged.

He said he had been placed under house arrest in his Amman palace and that his phone and Internet were cut off, but that he was able to send his message using a satellite link. He also vowed he would not be silenced or stay confined at home. But Hamzah's tone changed after Abdullah sent another royal to speak with him Monday. The job of mediator was handed to Hamzah's uncle, Prince Hassan, 71, himself a former heir to the throne who was sidelined.

After their talk, the palace released a state-

ment in which the prince did not step away from all his criticism, but loyally pledged: "I will remain... faithful to the legacy of my ancestors, walking on their path, loyal to their path and their message and to His Majesty." Analyst Ahmed Awad, who heads the Phoenix Center for Economic Studies and Informatics, said "there has been a solution within the royal family, but not a solution to the political crisis in the country. "The real political crisis is not over ... as long as there are not more democratic reforms."

The crisis has laid bare divisions in a country usually seen as a bulwark of stability in the Middle East. Jordan borders Israel and the occupied West Bank, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It hosts US troops and is home to millions of exiled Palestinians and more than half a million Syrian refugees. The Washington Post - which broke news of the crisis Saturday - wrote that speculation about an alleged "foreign connection" in the plot intensified after an unscheduled visit by a Saudi delegation.

The Saudis requested the release from arrest of Jordanian former royal advisor Bassem Awadallah, a Saudi passport holder, the newspaper said, quoting a senior Middle Eastern intelligence official. The group Human Rights Watch meanwhile said the crisis comes against the backdrop of a "diminishing space for freedom of expression and political dialogue" in Jordan.

Hamzah's comments reflect "public angst and frustration over the economic situation as well as the perceived increase of authoritarianism", its Middle East and North Africa deputy director Adam Coodle told AFP. "There's been just a creeping securitization of all the government agencies," he added. — AFP

IMF projects stronger growth...

Continued from Page 1

However, she stressed that the health crisis remains the critical factor in the economic recovery, and the slow rollout of vaccinations in many developing countries risks not just a worsening COVID-19 outbreak, but also a more troubling future for those nations. "The outlook presents daunting challenges... and the potential for persistent economic damage from the crisis," she said in the forward to the report, again warning against withdrawing support too soon.

"Without additional efforts to give all people a fair shot, cross-country gaps in living standards could widen significantly, and decades-long trends

of global poverty reduction could reverse," Gopinath said. She told reporters that governments must be mindful of rising debt and deficits, and use a "tailored approach which is specific to where they are in terms of the speed of their recovery."

And because the pandemic "has gone on for much longer than one might have expected" governments should target their scarce resources. In order to capture more revenues for their coffers, the IMF is "very much in favor of a global minimum corporate tax," Gopinath said.

A day after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called on G20 countries to adopt a minimum tax, Gopinath noted the "large amount" of tax avoidance with "countries sending money to tax havens". "That's reducing the tax base on which governments can collect revenues and do the necessary social and economic spending that's required," she said. "It is a big concern of ours." G20 finance ministers are expected to discuss the issue when they meet, virtually, today. — AFP

Dutch cargo ship adrift...

Continued from Page 1

the boat and the list was too severe. Footage from the Norwegian authorities shows a man in an orange survival suit throwing himself into the rough sea off the stern of the ship. The ship also suffered an engine failure and then began drifting towards the Norwegian coastline. Yesterday morning it was about 130 km northwest of the port city of Alesund.

One of the boats it was carrying on deck fell into

the sea, potentially helping to reduce its list, which is now estimated to be around 30 degrees after hovering between 40 and 50 degrees. "The situation seems to be more stable but there is still a risk that it could capsize," Hans-Petter Mortensholm with the Norwegian Coastal Administration (Kystverket), told AFP. "We want to put someone on board to arrange for a tow as soon as the weather conditions allow," he added.

The cargo ship contains 350 cu m of heavy fuel oil, 75 cu m of diesel and 10 cu m of lubricating oil. A Norwegian Coast Guard vessel arrived at the ship yesterday. The operator of the vessel has also called in the Dutch company Smit Salvage, which was involved in the refloating of the Ever Given in Egypt's Suez Canal last week. — 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 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

Prime Minister receives Egypt general intelligence chief



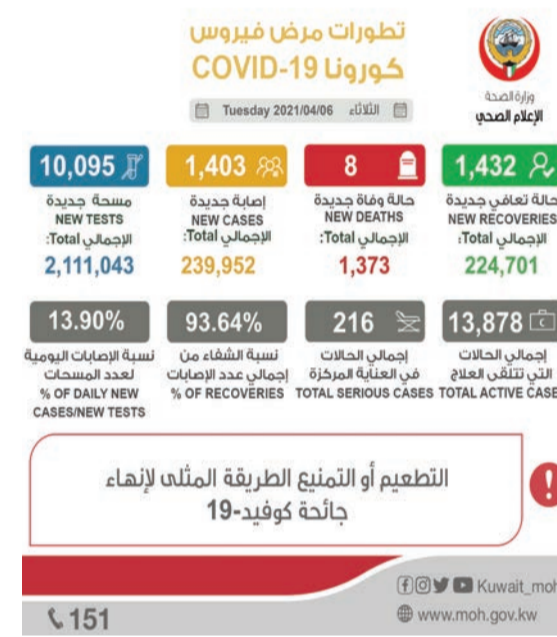
KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Director of Egypt's General Intelligence Service Abbas Kamel. — KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the Director of Egypt's General Intelligence Service Abbas Kamel at Bayan Palace yesterday. The encounter was held in

the presence of Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and National Security Bureau Director Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Kuwait lists 1,403 new COVID-19 cases, eight deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait said yesterday that 1,403 people tested positive for coronavirus while eight related deaths were reported over the previous 24 hours, taking the total up to 239,952 and 1,373, respectively. Another 1,432 people were cured of the virus, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 224,701, health ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 13,878 as of yesterday, with 216 of them in intensive care units, he added, revealing that some 10,095 swab tests were conducted over the same period taking the total to 2,111,043. He went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing, in order to halt the spread of the virus. — KUNA



Crimes

Man arrested in Khaitan murder

KUWAIT: Police and paramedics rushed to a call about a fight between two Egyptian in Khaitan that involved a stabbing. There they found one person in a pool of blood, who was pronounced dead on the scene. The suspect was arrested, who said "I did not mean to do it". The body was recovered by the coroner, while the suspect was taken to concerned authorities. He said there was a dispute between him and the victim while in the kitchen.

Suicide

The coroner recovered the body of an Indian who committed suicide at a Wafra farm, according to preliminary investigations. A Kuwaiti told interior ministry operations that after heading to his farm, he was surprised to find the Indian had hanged himself. Investigations continue.

Contractor falls to death

The body of a Syrian contractor was recovered by the coroner after he died after falling at a house under construction. Police received a call about someone who had fallen from a height at a house under construction in Surra. The case is being investigated.

Fatal accident

A Pakistani lost his life after his vehicle flipped over on Abdaly Road. The coroner was called in to recover the body. A case was filed for investigations.

Drug possession

Two Kuwaitis were sent to criminal detectives after four packs of narcotics were found on them. In a separate case, a Hawally police patrol approached a vehicle that raised suspicions and found two men, apparently under the influence. — Al-Rai



KUWAIT: Mubarak Al-Fanani, who plays as a striker for the Kuwait national football team (left), and Husain Kankuni, goalkeeper for the Kuwait national football team, undergo a COVID-19 PCR test at the Tuberculosis control unit (TBCU) in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Discussion explores implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative for global economy

Hosted by US Embassy in Kuwait and Reconnaissance Research



Sami Al-Nesf, former information minister and current deputy editor-in-chief of Annahar newspaper, asks a question.



A general view of the audience.

News in brief

SMEs' workers can transfer in one year

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Abdullah Al-Salman gave orders to allow workers to transfer from one small or medium enterprise to another after one year instead of three years, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Professor encourages vaccination

KUWAIT: Kuwait University Sociology Professor and former education minister Dr Bader Al-Essa announced that he's giving five marks for each of his students who takes their COVID-19 vaccine, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Kuwait oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil was up 6 cents to reach \$62.91 per barrel on Monday from \$63.85 pb since last Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Elsewhere, the price of Brent Crude grew by \$1.94 to reach \$64.68 pb as did West Texas Intermediate, which saw a \$2.10 rise to \$61.26 pb.

US Dollar at KD 0.302

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US Dollar was stable at KD 0.302 while Euro rose at KD 0.356, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) yesterday. CBK added in its daily bulletin that the British Pound Sterling went up at KD 0.419, same as Swiss Franc up at 0.321. The Japanese Yen remained unchanged at KD 0.003. Currencies' exchange rates as declared by the CBK reflect average rates and do not actual trades.

KUWAIT: To provide a forum for informed debate about global economic issues that affect Kuwaiti policymakers, investors, and businesses, the US Embassy and Reconnaissance Research hosted a discussion about China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday.

Peter Raymond, a prominent American advisor on infrastructure projects, presented an analysis of Belt and Road Initiative projects in the Middle East and Asia. He described both the benefits and the issues these projects have encountered, such as high operating costs, poor construction quality, debt burdens, and corruption scandals. He also discussed China's Digital Silk Road, the technological extension of Belt and Road that has raised concerns about technology dependency and surveillance.

"Discussions like this increase transparency and knowledge as Kuwaiti government and business leaders make important decisions," US Embassy Charge d'Affaires Larry Memmott said. "Mr Raymond has decades of experience advising governments and

companies, and we hope that his analysis will help decision makers evaluate offers for infrastructure projects and protect Kuwaiti interests. While there could be benefits for countries interested in the Belt and Road Initiative, governments and investors should be aware that China's infrastructure projects have a troublesome record of financial unsustainability, threats to national sovereignty, and environmental degradation."

Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research Abdulaziz Al-Anjari commented, "In our newly-established China Affairs Desk at Reconnaissance Research, we are working to understand how the Chinese government works and the means through which it achieves its goals so that we can anticipate potential Chinese influence in the Gulf. We thank Mr Peter Raymond for his fact-based and insightful presentation."

US Embassy Cultural Attache Nelson Wen concluded: "The event was attended by many high-level guests at the Chamber of Commerce and over 150 that joined remotely. The US Embassy plans to con-



KUWAIT: US Embassy Charge d'Affaires Larry Memmott speaks during the event.

tinue to collaborate with Reconnaissance Research as a strategic partner to hold discussions on international issues that could affect Kuwait's trade, investment outlook, and future."

Kuwait stands in full solidarity with Jordan: Cabinet

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet stressed on Monday that its leadership and people stand in full solidarity with Jordan, affirming that the Hashemite Kingdom's security and stability is an integral part of its own security and stability. This came after the ministers, in their weekly session at Seif Palace led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamd Al-Sabah, were briefed on the discussions that earlier took place between His

Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, and the King of Jordan. During the call, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had both insisted that the country stands by the brotherly Kingdom of Jordan. They wished Jordan continued stability and prosperity, under the wise leadership of King Abdullah II, praying that the Kingdom and its people be protected from any harm.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah briefed the ministers on the latest developments on the COVID-19 pandemic, warning that infections and virus-induced deaths in Kuwait are witnessing an "unprecedentedly large increase," due to a laxness in adhering to government-imposed measures. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health was tasked with

providing the Ministry of Education with preventative equipment (face masks, sterilizers, disinfectants, thermometers and other protective gear) ahead of secondary school 2020/21 final examinations.

Furthermore, the Cabinet referred an Economic Affairs Committee recommendation regarding the annual 2020/21 third quarter plan follow-up report to the National Assembly. It also approved a draft law regarding the Economic Affairs Committee recommendation for the 2020/21-2024/25 development plan, raising the matter to His Highness the Amir ahead of its final approval by the National Assembly. The Committee's recommendation on the annual 2021/22 development plan, the policies of which are based on the seven-pillar 'New Kuwait' development plan, were also raised to the National Assembly. — KUNA



NBK concludes participation in 'Innovation Challenge' program

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has concluded its participation in the sixth edition of "Innovation Challenge" program organized by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), in collaboration with the Executive Education Center at Wharton School - University of Pennsylvania.

NBK's participating team presented the bank's project, which included new and innovative banking solutions and services. This project was discussed with the bank's executive management led by Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager-Group Human Resources, and Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group. The project presented by NBK team was approved by the management after a series of presentations and discussions, and is going into the implementation in the coming period.

The teams participating in this unique program consist of two to four members representing the participating institution. These teams engage in a real-world applied innovation journey that combines innovative learning and practical application in order to execute innovation initiatives that can provide added value to the participating institutions.

The Innovation Challenge 2020 program, which was postponed last past year due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, aimed to develop innovation capabilities in the private sector institutions, with a view to promote the culture of creativity and knowledge growth that contribute to

transforming Kuwait's economy into a knowledge-based economy.

The program covered various topics and activities including successful execution of innovation initiatives, innovation planning, measuring the impact of innovation, as well as an innovation tournament workshop. However, due to the exceptional circumstances wrought by COVID-19 pandemic, participants' scheduled visit to the Silicon Valley companies in San Francisco, USA, was replaced by remote lectures and workshops.

The Innovation Challenge program, launched by KFAS for the first time in 2015, is one of the most prominent executive training programs held annually, bringing together a small group of selected companies to collaborate with prestigious business schools as they seek to develop new initiatives and projects that foster a culture of innovation within each company. Following the competitive application process, participants spend four months learning and training, as they explore innovative ways to make positive changes in their companies, and add great value to their customer experiences. Each team then tackles a company-specific challenge and tries to solve an issue during the training period.

The KFAS Innovation Challenge has been developed specifically for Kuwait's private sector companies, over the years in collaboration with world-class academic institutions such as University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Anderson School of Management, University of California, Berkeley, Royal College of Art-London and University of Cambridge.

NBK always strives to develop its human capital and enrich their experiences as they are the main pillar for the bank's excellence and leadership. This is accomplished through constantly providing the world's best specialized training programs that meet the highest industry international standards in order to encourage professional development and successfully position our workforce to take charge as future leaders.

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Myanmar's activists splash red paint to protest junta bloodshed

More than 1,800 prisoners escape after gang attack on Nigeria jail

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A boy stands next to a donkey loaded with jerry cans by the Atbarah river near the village of Dukouli within the Quraysha locality, located in the Fashaqa Al-Sughra agricultural region of Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. —AFP

Over 50 dead in fighting in Darfur

US urges de-escalation between Sudan, Ethiopia

KHARTOUM: At least 50 people have been killed in four days of violence in Sudan's Darfur, medics said yesterday in a revised toll. El Geneina, capital of West Darfur and close to the border with Chad, has seen days of fighting including gunfire and shelling, residents said. The West Darfur Doctors' Committee said its latest count "raised the total numbers since the start of the events to 50 dead and 132 wounded." "Despite relative calm since (Monday) night, medical teams continue to find it very difficult to move," it said in a statement. The UN humanitarian coordination office OCHA had on Monday reported 40 dead and 58 wounded in clashes pitting Arab tribes against the non-Arab Massalit ethnic group in El-Geneina.

El-Geneina resident Mohamed Abdel Rahman told AFP over the phone yesterday: "There was calm overnight but this morning we heard gunfire from Hay Al-Jabal district which lasted almost an hour." Another resident three kilometers from Hay Al-Jabal, who asked to remain anonymous, said he had also heard gunfire. Authorities on Monday night declared a state of emergency and deployed troops to West Darfur. The region was the epicenter of years of bloodshed starting in 2003 under then

president Omar Al-Bashir. Ethnic minority groups complaining of marginalization had taken up arms against the central government, which responded by unleashing armed groups largely made up of Arab nomads.

Bashir was wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide over the conflict, which the UN says left 300,000 people dead and displaced more than 2.5 million. Bashir's iron-fisted rule was ended by the army in April 2019 following months of mass protests. Sudan's transitional government in October signed a peace deal with several rebel groups, including in Darfur-but certain factions did not sign the accord. Eyewitnesses said fighting still raged on Monday afternoon, as thick smoke billowed over El Geneina. "We stayed in our homes, but we've been hearing gunfire close by—a shell landed at our neighbor's home," said Adam Issa, another resident.

The West Darfur Doctors' Committee said an ambulance carrying wounded victims was attacked. Clashes often pit nomadic Arab pastoralists against settled farmers from non-Arab ethnic groups. Saleh Issa, another El Geneina resident, said he saw a "cloud of smoke" covering swathes of the city.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday pressed for an easing of tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia as fears grow of a spillover from the bloody Tigray conflict. In a telephone call with Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, Blinken raised "the need to de-escalate tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia over the Al-Fashaqa border area, including recent commitments to engage in dialogue to resolve the issue," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

The fertile area claimed by both countries has seen a rise in skirmishes as Sudan sends in troops, which Ethiopia has described as an invasion. The farmland borders Ethiopia's Tigray region where Addis Ababa launched an offensive against the local leadership in November, sending some 60,000 refugees fleeing into Sudan. The United States has been increasingly critical of Ethiopia, a longstanding ally, with Blinken earlier saying that the Tigray campaign involved "ethnic cleansing."

The State Department welcomed a weekend announcement by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed that troops from neighboring Eritrea, accused of perpetrating atrocities, had begun a promised withdrawal from Tigray. "We are encour-

aged by the prime minister's announcement that the government of the state of Eritrea has agreed to withdraw its forces from Ethiopia," Price told reporters. "The immediate and complete withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray will be an important step forward in de-escalating the conflict and restoring peace and regional stability."

US relations have warmed markedly with Sudan since Hamdok, a civilian, took office in a transitional government following the toppling of Omar Al-Bashir. Sudan last week paid \$335 million in compensation over anti-US attacks from when Bashir welcomed Al-Qaeda as part of an Islamist turn in the 1990s. Blinken separately hailed Sudan's signing of an agreement with a rebel faction, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. Blinken also discussed the latest attempts to jumpstart diplomacy on the massive Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which Addis Ababa is moving ahead on despite protests from Sudan and Egypt which rely heavily on Nile water.

US-led talks under former president Donald Trump failed to reach a resolution. The United Arab Emirates recently became the latest to offer to mediate. —AFP

Israel president taps Netanyahu to try to form govt

JERUSALEM: Israel's president nominated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday to try to form a government after the latest inconclusive election, but voiced doubt that any lawmaker can forge a parliamentary majority. The March 23 election, Israel's fourth in under two years, did not produce a clear path for any candidate to form a coalition capable of commanding a majority in the 120-member parliament, prolonging an unprecedented period of political gridlock. On Monday, President Reuven Rivlin held the traditional round of consultations that follow each Israeli election, seeking recommendations from party representatives on who they want to form a government.

Netanyahu secured 52 recommendations, counting 30 from his right-wing Likud party, plus support from Israel's two ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious parties and the far-right Religious Zionism alliance. Centrist opposition leader Yair Lapid earned 45 endorsements. There were 16 abstentions and religious nationalist leader Naftali Bennett claimed the seven votes controlled by his Yamina party. Rivlin said the tally indicates that "Benjamin Netanyahu has a slightly higher chance of forming a government. Accordingly, I have decided to entrust him with the task of doing so." But, echoing the sentiments of many Israeli analysts, he warned a 61-seat absolute majority may not be possible in the deeply divided legislature. Rivlin said his consultations, "lead me to believe that no candidate has a realistic chance of forming a government that will have the confidence of the Knesset."

Turkey jails four over bombing that killed German tourists

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court yesterday sentenced four men to life in jail over a 2016 sui-

'Not an easy decision'

As Rivlin was holding his talks Monday, Netanyahu was on trial across the city at Jerusalem District Court, charged with accepting improper gifts and illegally trading regulatory favors with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage. In the prosecution's opening arguments and testimony from its first witness, Netanyahu was accused of using his influence to ensure the popular Walla site portrayed him favorably while smearing his rivals. Rivlin, whose antipathy for Netanyahu is well known, said giving the mandate to Netanyahu was "not an easy decision on a moral and ethical basis."

"I know the position held by many, that the president should not give the role to a candidate that is facing criminal charges, but according to the law and the decision of the courts, a prime minister can continue in his role even when he is facing charges," the president said. Lapid reacted to the announcement by conceding that "the president fulfilled his duty and had no choice." "But assigning the mandate to Netanyahu is a shameful disgrace that tarnishes Israel and shames our status as a law-abiding state," he added.

Elusive majority

Netanyahu now has 28 days to form a government, which can be extended by a further two weeks. His path to a 61-seat majority is precarious. To raise his tally above 52, he will likely need support from his estranged former protege, religious-nationalist Naftali Bennett, whose Yamina party controls seven seats. According to Monday's court testimony, Bennett was a main target of Netanyahu's media smear campaign. The prime minister will also likely require backing from the Islamic conservative Raam party. Its leader, Mansour Abbas, has said he is open to dealing with Netanyahu if it helps improve living standards for Israel's 20 percent Arab minority, but Religious Zionism has ruled out sitting with Raam, complicating Netanyahu's coalition prospects.

cide bombing in the heart of Istanbul that killed 12 German tourists and was blamed on Islamic State group jihadists. The blast ripped through Istanbul's historic Sultanahmet square in January 2016 — near the iconic Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, among the world's most visited tourist sites.

The government blamed the attack that wounded 16 others on the IS group but the



JERUSALEM: In this file photo, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud party, addresses supporters at the party campaign headquarters in Jerusalem. —AFP

'Tough decisions'

In an address late Monday, Lapid sought to foster unity in the anti-Netanyahu camp, with a direct appeal to Bennett. "We need a government of national agreement... to prevent a government led by a criminal suspect," a reference to Netanyahu, who Lapid called "dangerous." Lapid offered Bennett a revolving premiership in which the Yamina leader would take the first turn, an extraordinary gesture given his 45 prime ministerial endorsements dwarfed Bennett's seven.

"The test for a leader is to take tough decisions in complex situations," Lapid said, arguing that sacrifices would be required to unseat the divisive Netanyahu. If Netanyahu fails to form a majority government within his negotiating window, Rivlin will likely turn to Lapid. If neither Netanyahu nor his rivals manage to form a government, voters could be asked to return to the polls for a fifth election in barely two years. —AFP

jihadists never claimed responsibility and the defendants have denied their involvement. The court in Istanbul sentenced four suspects-whose nationality was not stated-to life in jail, saying that the attack represented "an attempt to violently overthrow the constitutional order," the private DHA news agency reported.

Each was also sentenced to 328 years and four months in prison for premeditated murder,

Palestinian killed by Israeli fire in West Bank

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian motorist was killed and his wife wounded by Israeli fire early yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the Israeli army described as an "attempted car-ramping attack". The man died "after sustaining head wounds from live fire in Bir Nabala (in the occupied West Bank) ... and his wife suffered bullet wounds to her back," the ministry said. The Palestinians' official Wafa news agency said the shooting took place at dawn as the couple were travelling in their car.

The Israeli army said its troops had "thwarted an attempted car-ramping attack against a group of soldiers operating at a checkpoint south of Ramallah". It said the checkpoint was a temporary one, set up during "operational activity" in Bir Nabala. "Soldiers at the checkpoint spotted a vehicle stopping at the checkpoint and suddenly accelerating towards another group of soldiers operating in the area, in a way that endangered the lives of the soldiers. "The soldiers responded with fire in order to thwart the threat," the army said.

Wafa identified the dead man as Osama Sidqi Mansur, 42, citing local sources. The news agency said there had been clashes between Palestinian residents and the Israeli army in the Bir Nabala area on Monday evening. Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. There has been a string of lone wolf attacks on troops in the territory since 2015, most of them stabbings or car-rammings. —AFP

the news agency said. Eighteen other suspects were acquitted, it said. In 2018, Turkish judges sentenced three Syrian nationals to life in prison for their involvement in the bombing but an appeals court overturned that verdict for several reasons, including that the sentences were deemed too lenient. Turkey was shaken by a spate of attacks in 2016 blamed on the IS and Kurdish militants. —AFP

International

More than 1,800 prisoners escape after gang attack on Nigeria jail

Assailants engage prison guards in a gun battle and free inmates

ABUJA: More than 1,800 inmates have escaped after a heavily armed gang attacked a prison in southern Nigeria using explosives, correctional authorities said Monday, in one of the West African country's largest jailbreaks. The attackers blasted their way into the Owerri prison in Imo state, engaging guards in a gun battle and breaking out inmates, the national corrections authority said in a statement.

"I can confirm that the Imo State command of the Nigerian Correctional Service was attacked by unknown gunmen in Owerri," Imo state corrections service spokesman James Madugba told AFP, adding that the number of escaped inmates was yet to be confirmed. "The situation is under control," he said.

The assailants arrived in pickup trucks and buses before storming the facility, the correction authority said. No group claimed responsibility for the assault, though President Muhammadu Buhari called the attack an "act of terrorism" carried out by "anarchists" and urged security forces to capture the assailants and the escaped detainees. Prisons in Africa's most populous country are often overcrowded, and as many as 70 percent of inmates are on remand and can be held awaiting trial for years.

The governor of neighboring Abia state imposed a night curfew on two towns there, a statement said, to protect local residents without direct reference to the prison attack. Imo state is part of a region that has long been a hotbed for Nigerian separatist groups and where tensions between federal authorities and the indigenous Igbo population are often high.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) separatist



More than 1,800 inmates have escaped from a prison in Nigeria after it was attacked by gunmen, officials say. —AFP

movement has recently been posting videos on social media of dozens of its militiamen in training. Authorities imposed a curfew on parts of Imo State earlier this year after clashes between the army and the local militia.

But IPOB spokesman Emmanuel Powerful rejected any involvement in the Imo prison attack in a statement sent to AFP, dismissing any accusations as "lies". Calls for a separate state of Biafra in the south are a sensitive

subject in Nigeria, after a unilateral declaration of independence from British rule in 1967 sparked a brutal 30-month civil war. Buhari is facing several security challenges including a more than decade-long jihadist insurgency in Nigeria's northeast, a spate of mass kidnappings by criminal gangs in the northwest and a surge in piracy on commercial shipping in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast. —AFP

Kneeling on Floyd's neck violated policy, 'values': Police chief

MINNEAPOLIS: Minneapolis police chief Medaria Arradondo testified on Monday that officer Derek Chauvin violated the department's training policies and its "values" by kneeling on George Floyd's neck after he had stopped resisting. Arradondo, called as a prosecution witness at Chauvin's murder trial, said the use of force against Floyd was reasonable during the "first few seconds" of his May 25, 2020 arrest but it should have ended quickly. "It is contrary to our train-

ing to indefinitely place your knee on a prone, handcuffed individual for an indefinite length of time," the police chief of the Minnesota city said.

"That in no way, shape or form is anything that is by policy," he said. "It is not part of our training and it is certainly not part of our ethics or our values." "Once Mr. Floyd had stopped resisting, and certainly once he was in distress and trying to verbalize that, that should have stopped," Arradondo said.

The 45-year-old Chauvin, who is white, was seen in a video taken by a bystander kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed Floyd for more than nine minutes as the 46-year-old African-American man complained repeatedly that he "can't breathe." Arradondo, 54, Minneapolis's first Black police chief, fired Chauvin and the three other officers involved in the arrest that led to Floyd's death the day after the incident. —AFP



This NASA photo shows NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter on the ground behind the Perseverance rover. —AFP

NASA's Ingenuity helicopter survives first night on Mars

WASHINGTON: NASA's Ingenuity mini-helicopter has survived its first night alone on the frigid surface of Mars, the US space agency said, hailing it as "a major milestone" for the tiny craft as it prepares for its first flight. The ultra-light aircraft was dropped on the surface on Saturday after detaching from the belly of the Perseverance rover, which touched down on the Red Planet on February 18.

Detached from the Perseverance, Ingenuity had to rely on its own solar-powered battery to run a vital heater to protect its unshielded electrical components from freezing and cracking during the bitter Martian night, where temperatures can plunge as low as minus 130 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 90 degrees Celsius). Making it through the frigid Martian night was "a major milestone for the small rotorcraft," NASA said in a statement Monday.

"This is the first time that Ingenuity has been on its own on the surface of Mars," said MiMi Aung, Ingenuity project manager at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

"But we now have confirmation that we have the right insulation, the right heaters, and enough energy in its battery to survive the cold night, which is a big win for the team. We're excited to continue to prepare Ingenuity for its first flight test." Over the coming days, Ingenuity will undergo tests of its rotor blades and motors. If all goes well, Ingenuity is expected to make its first flight attempt no earlier than the evening of April 11, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory said. It will be the first aircraft to attempt powered, controlled flight on another planet.

Tribute to Wright brothers

Ingenuity is carrying a small piece of cloth that covered one of the wings of the Wright brothers' first aircraft which achieved the first powered flight on Earth at Kitty Hawk in 1903, to pay tribute to the milestone. Its attempt will also coincide with the 60th anniversary of the first human space flight, by Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin on April 12, 1961, and 40th anniversary of the April 12, 1981 launch of the first space shuttle, Columbia. Ingenuity will be attempting to fly in an atmosphere that is one percent the density of Earth's, which makes achieving lift harder—but will be assisted by gravity that is one-third of our planet's. The first flight will involve climbing at a rate of about three feet (one meter) per second to a height of 10 feet (three meters), hovering there for 30 seconds, then descending back to the surface. Ingenuity will be taking high-resolution photography as it flies from its "airfield" in the Jezero Crater.

A series of flights are planned over its mission lasting 30 Martian sols (31 Earth days). "Our 30-sol test schedule is frontloaded with exciting milestones," said Teddy Tzanetos, Ingenuity deputy operations lead. "Whatever the future holds, we will acquire all the flight data we can within that timeframe."

The four-pound (1.8-kilogram) rotorcraft cost NASA around \$85 million to develop and is considered a proof of concept that could revolutionize space exploration.

Future aircraft could cover ground much quicker than rovers, and explore more rugged terrain. —AFP

Three breakthroughs of the new government: making Vietnam become modern developed nation on the occasion of 100th anniversary State formation

In historic April, after the success of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (held in January 2021), Vietnam steadily implements and applies the Resolution of the XIII Congress Party into daily life. One of the most important and fundamental steps is to consolidate the senior leadership posts of the State apparatus and form a new Government. The Resolution of the 13th Congress Party clearly stated the orientation of major targets on socio-economic developments over the period of 5 years 2021-2025: The country's development orientation in the period of 2021-2030, with the goal achieved in 2025 to be a developing country, with industry in the modernization direction, surpassing the low-average income barrier in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of National Reunification; by 2030 to become a developing country with modernised industry and high-average income in order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Party's establishment; and to be a developed country with high income by 2045, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary formation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The new Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, headed by the new Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, is considered a dynamic, creative government with many new figures who have impressive experiences in several leadership posts at localities as well as at ministries.

New Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, 63, is an Associate Professor, Doctor of Law, comes from the rich traditional land of revolution Thanh Hoa, used to be a Senior specialist in the Government Office and in charge of Economy, Science & Technology Research, former Provincial Party Secretary of Quang Ninh Province (2011 - 2015), home to two of the most dynamic border economic zones in Vietnam (Mong Cai, Van Don), also Ha Long Bay which is recognized by New 7 Wonders (N7W) as one of the 7 new natural wonders of the world.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and the new Government of Vietnam have identified three strategic breakthroughs in this term: Completing and synchronizing institution of development, first and foremost the institutions for the development of Socialist-oriented market economy; Renovating national



governance towards modernity and effectively competition; Focusing on completing and synchronizing, well-organized implementation of the legal system, mechanisms and policies; Creating a favorable, healthy and fair investment and business environment for all business sectors, boosting innovation & renovation; mobilizing, managing and effectively using all resources for development, especially land, finance, public-private cooperation and promoting decentralization; Developing high-quality human resources, prioritizing the development of human resources for leadership and management; Creating a strong, comprehensive, fundamental change in the quality of education and training associated with the institution and development of science - technology, innovation; inspiring aspirations for developing a prosperous country, promoting cultural values as well as Vietnamese human strength, solidarity and national pride in the cause of national construction and defense; Building a synchronous and modern infrastructure system both economically and socially; giving priority to the development of key transport projects to adapt to climate change and attach importance to developing information and telecommunications infrastructure, creating a national digital transformation platform, gradually developing the digital economy and digital society.

In the light of the Resolution of the 13th Congress Party, with the aspiration of building a mighty nation and the spirit of innovation, determination to inspire and develop a prosperous country, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and the new Government of Vietnam will definitely make a breakthrough in the cause of building and defending the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

News in brief

Taiwan imposes water rationing

TAIPEI: More than one million households and businesses in Taiwan's heavily industrialized central regions were put on water rationing yesterday, as the island battles its worst drought in 56 years. The shortage is expected to particularly impact the water-intensive microchip manufacturing sector during a global shortage of semiconductors that power everything from cars to iPhones and computers. The state water company is now cutting supplies in Taichung, Miaoli and northern Changhua county for two days a week, with the government warning it must "prepare for the worst". — AFP

Honduran president faces criticism

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras: Dozens of Honduran civil society organizations on Monday demanded the "immediate" resignation of President Juan Orlando Hernandez and main government officials for having turned the country into a "narco-state." Hernandez's brother was sentenced to life in prison by a New York judge at the end of March for large-scale drug trafficking. During the trial, US prosecutors said the president had been a "co-conspirator" in Tony Hernandez's crimes. The organization leaders said they were "filled with indignation" in a statement released to "unconditionally demand... the immediate departure of Juan Orlando Hernandez from the government (and) the replacement of the high military command" that supports him. —AFP

Florida wastewater emergency crisis

TAMPA, US: Engineers on Monday ruled out a feared second breach in a Florida wastewater reservoir that risks flooding nearby communities with millions of gallons of contaminated water. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) said experts were "on-site today evaluating conditions and determined the site was safe to continue work." Emergency workers, assisted by the Florida National Guard, have been pumping about 33 million gallons daily out of the wastewater reservoir, which has sprung a growing leak in its plastic lining. The water from the Piney Point site is being discharged into Tampa Bay. —AFP

Chile Senate approves vote delay

SANTIAGO: Chile's Senate on Monday agreed to postpone by five weeks an election to choose a commission to rewrite the country's dictatorship-era constitution, due to a surge in coronavirus infections. The election was originally due to take place on Sunday until President Sebastian Pinera proposed the delay a week ago. The Senate's decision must still be approved by the lower house of Congress. If it does, the election to decide the members of a Constituent Assembly that will rewrite the constitution—which has been in effect since the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship (1973-90) — will now take place on May 15 or 16. — AFP

Arkansas governor vetoes disputed bill

WASHINGTON: Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson vetoed controversial legislation Monday that would have banned gender-confirming treatments for transgender youth and has made the state a front in what he called "the cultural war in America." Hutchinson, a conservative Republican, said the bill represented overreach by the state into the private affairs of transgender children, their parents and doctors. "If House Bill 1570 becomes law, then we are creating new standards of legislative interference with physicians and parents as they deal with some of the most complex and sensitive matters involving young people," he said. — AFP

Despite cough, fever, Navalny continues hunger strike

MOSCOW: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Monday said he was suffering from a heavy cough and fever but would continue a hunger strike he launched last week demanding adequate medical treatment. Navalny, 44, announced the hunger strike last Wednesday, complaining a prison doctor had only given him painkillers as treatment for severe back pain and numbness in his legs.

His team the next day said he had already lost eight kilograms (18 pounds) before going on hunger strike-down from the 93 kilograms (205 pounds) he weighed when he arrived at his penal colony-due to sleep deprivation. In a post on his Instagram Monday, Navalny reported new ailments. "I am quoting the official data from today's temperature measurement: 'Navalny A.A., strong cough, temperature 38.1,'" he wrote, referring to degrees Celsius, or 100.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

"PS. I am continuing my hunger strike, of course," Navalny said. Later the pro-Kremlin Izvestia daily said that Navalny had been transferred to a medical unit for observation, with "signs of a respiratory problem, notably a high fever". —AFP

International

Myanmar's activists splash red paint to protest junta bloodshed

'Bleeding dye strike' latest creative method by protestors to voice opposition

YANGON: Myanmar activists daubed roadways with red paint yesterday to protest against the junta's bloody crackdown on protests, as an online fundraising drive to support the movement neared the \$10 million mark. The country has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, rocked by daily clashes between protestors and authorities that have left at least 570 people dead.

Ten of Myanmar's ethnic rebel armies voiced support for the protest movement at the weekend, stoking fears that the country could slide into broader civil conflict, while the United Nations has warned of a looming "bloodbath". Yesterday, in the commercial capital Yangon, people smeared red paint and handprints on bus stops and pavements in protest at the military's violence.

The so-called "bleeding dye strike" is the latest creative method thought up by protestors to voice opposition without risking being shot or arrested by demonstrating in person.

One slogan painted on a bus stop said the military was being misled to protect junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, and urged soldiers not to shoot civilians. In the city of Hpa-an in eastern Karen state, youths sprayed red paint on the road, giving the three-fingered salute borrowed from the "Hunger Games" books and films that has become symbolic of the movement.

Yesterday also saw rallies in the second biggest city Mandalay, as well as in Karen, and Kachin state in the north. In the southern city of Dawei, hundreds of people marched peacefully carrying yellow padauk flowers, normally associated with Myanmar's new year water festival which starts next week.

Fundraising push

In one part of Yangon, locals organized a food sharing drive to help poor families struggling to make ends meet, encouraging people who could afford it to donate spare ingredients. Meanwhile an online fundraising push by a group of ousted MPs from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) is nearing \$10 million. The Committee for Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) — the Burmese word for parliament — says the money will be used to "uproot the military dictatorship" and restore democracy.

More than 2,700 people have been arrested since the coup, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which says at least 570 people have been confirmed killed, including 47 children. The authorities have issued arrest warrants for 80 celebrities including singers, models and social media influencers — most of whom are in hiding — accusing them of spreading information that could cause mutiny in the armed forces.

Local media and the BBC's Burmese service reported that famed satirist and activist Zarganar, jailed four times under previous military regimes, had been arrested.

'Inappropriate interference'

The coup and crackdown have drawn outrage and sanctions from world powers, as well as prompting several international companies to suspend business in Myanmar. But the pressure has yet to tell on the generals, who have shown little sign of stepping back from their efforts to suppress protests. And yesterday, which has sought to build ties with the junta, joined China in publicly rejecting sanctions against Myanmar. News agency Interfax



This handout photo from Eindu Youths taken and received yesterday shows protesters holding up the three finger salute in front of red paint splashed on the road, representing blood spilled during protests against the military coup, in Hpa-an township in Myanmar's Karen state. —AFP

quoted a Russian foreign ministry spokesperson as warning "threats and pressure" could push Myanmar closer to "full-blown civil conflict".

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian restated Beijing's opposition to "inappropriate interference" in Myanmar. But he said China backed

a summit of regional bloc ASEAN to discuss the crisis — mooted by Malaysia and Brunei's leaders after talks on Monday. The Myanmar military has defended seizing power, pointing to fraud allegations around last November's general election, won by the NLD. —AFP

Indonesia, East Timor flood death toll surges past 160

LEMBATA, Indonesia: Rescuers were searching for dozens of people still missing yesterday after floods and landslides swept away villages in Indonesia and East Timor, killing more than 160 people and leaving thousands more homeless. Torrential rains from Tropical Cyclone Seroja turned small communities into wastelands of mud, uprooted trees and sent around 10,000 people fleeing to shelters across the neighboring Southeast Asian nations.

Indonesia's disaster management agency said it had recorded 130 deaths in a cluster of remote islands near East Timor, where another 34 have been officially listed as dead since the disaster struck on Sunday. Search and rescue teams in Indonesia were racing to find more than 70 people still missing and using diggers to clear mountains of debris.

The storm swept buildings in some villages down a mountainside and to the shore of the ocean on Lembata island, where some small communities have been wiped off the map.

"This area will never be inhabited again," said Lembata district official Eliyasur Yentji Sunur, referring to a flattened part of Waimatan village.

"We won't let people live here. Like it or not, they'll have to relocate."

Waimatan resident Onesimus Sili said floods early Sunday destroyed his community before anyone knew what was happening. "Around midnight, we heard a very loud rumbling sound and we thought it was a nearby volcano erupting," he told AFP.

"By the time we realized that it was a flash flood, the houses were already gone." Authorities in both nations were scrambling to shelter evacuees while trying to prevent any spread of COVID-19. Yesterday, East Timor recorded its first virus death — a 44-year-old woman — since the pandemic broke out last year. The tiny half-island nation of 1.3 million sandwiched between Indonesia and Australia, officially known as Timor-Leste, quickly shut down its borders to avoid a widespread outbreak that threatened to overwhelm its creaky health care system.

But the disaster has heightened fears of a spike in cases as thousands cram into shelters across Timor's inundated capital Dili and elsewhere.

'Clothes on their back'

Local officials in Lembata were bracing for its meager health facilities to be overwhelmed as the number of injured coming from isolated villages soars. "These evacuees fled here with just wet clothes on their backs and nothing else," said the area's deputy mayor, Thomas Ola Longaday.

"They need blankets, pillows, mattresses and tents." There was also a dire shortage of trained doctors.



Villagers carry the body of a victim after flash floods in Lembata, East Flores Monday as torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that have killed at least 91 people and left dozens missing in Indonesia and neighboring East Timor. —AFP

"We don't have enough anesthesiologists and surgeons, but we've been promised that help will come," Longaday said. "Many survivors have broken bones because they were hit by rocks, logs and debris." Nearby in East Flores municipality, torrents of mud washed over homes, bridges and roads.

Earlier images from Indonesia's search and rescue agency showed workers digging up mud-covered corpses before placing them in body bags. Hospitals, bridges and thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed by the storm, which is now moving toward the west coast of Australia. —AFP

Bangladesh ferry disaster death toll mounts to 34

NARAYANGANJ, Bangladesh: The death toll from a ferry accident in Bangladesh at the weekend rose to at least 34 after six more bodies were retrieved, officials said yesterday. The ferry packed with around 50 passengers heading home from the central city of Narayanganj ahead of an impending coronavirus lockdown had collided with a larger cargo vessel late on Sunday.

Authorities called off a search-and-rescue mission on Monday after salvaging the ship from the heavily polluted Shitalakshya river and recovering 22 bodies. But under pressure from relatives of people still missing, rescuers late Monday resumed operations with helicopters to scour the murky waters for any more bodies.

"Based on the relatives' account, at least two people are still missing," local official Mustain Billah told AFP. Under Bangladesh's seven-day lockdown in response to surging COVID cases, all domestic travel services were suspended on Monday and shops and malls were shut. Ferry accidents are common in Bangladesh, a delta nation crisscrossed

by hundreds of rivers. 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.

Separately, one protester was killed and at least three others are in critical condition after police in Bangladesh opened fire on a violent protest against coronavirus restrictions, officials said. The incident took place Monday in the central town of Saltha in Faridpur district, where rumors had spread that a man at a market was injured while police were enforcing Covid-19 controls as cases spike nationwide.

Thousands of people took to the streets in anger. One group hurled bricks at a police station, vandalized government offices and torched an officer's home and two government cars, police said.

A police spokesman said officers opened fire "in self-defense" after the station was attacked. A 20-year-old Islamic student was killed and at least seven people injured, including three police, according to Suminur Rahman, Faridpur deputy chief of police. Staff at state-run Faridpur Medical College Hospital said three people with gunshot wounds are in critical condition. "One of them was hit in his buttocks, another in his chest and the third person was shot in



Divers recover a dead body from the capsized boat in Shitalakshya River, in Narayanganj Monday. —AFP

both legs," Abdul Matin, a doctor at the emergency ward, said. Police said supporters of the hardline Hefazat-e-Islam group had joined the attack. Hefazat members were involved in deadly clashes during demonstrations against a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month.

Bangladesh on Monday instituted a seven-day nationwide lockdown after 7,087 people tested positive for coronavirus on Sunday, the highest daily total recorded in the South Asian nation. All domestic buses, ferries, trains and flights have been suspended, and shops and malls have been shut. A nighttime curfew is also in effect. —AFP

Migrants, trade key as Spain PM visits Senegal, Angola

MDRID: Stopping irregular migration and bolstering trade ties will top the agenda when Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez visits Angola and Senegal this week. With Spain's tourism-driven economy shrinking by nearly 11 percent last year as a result of the pandemic, officials are now looking further afield for opportunities.

Sanchez will begin his tour on April 8 in the southwest nation of Angola, taking with him business leaders

from the engineering, energy and logistics sectors as well as from plane-maker Airbus. He is scheduled to meet President Joao Lourenco before flying north to Senegal, the west African nation helping Spain to block irregular immigration to Spain's Canary Islands.

In 2020, the number of migrants reaching the Atlantic archipelago from the African coast was eight times higher than the previous year. Spain has stepped up diplomatic efforts to stop people from leaving their home countries in the first place, while also seeking to expand controversial repatriation agreements. When he lands in Dakar for the first visit by a Spanish leader in six years, Sanchez will meet President Macky Sall as well as some 60 Spanish police officers deployed there to block irregular migrants.

He will also meet Spanish troops that support

France's Operation Barkhane, which has been battling a jihadist insurgency in Mali. "We want to turn this decade... into the decade of Spain in Africa," Sanchez said late last month as he unveiled a plan to become Africa's "strategic partner". Between January and November last year, Africa accounted for 6.0 percent of Spanish exports and 7.0 percent of its imports. Although modest, the figures were higher than those for Latin America, which stood at 4.3 percent and 4.8 percent respectively. Spain is pinning much of its hope on the renewable energy sector, but it is also looking to build its presence in manufacturing, banking, telecoms and agribusiness. Madrid has been courting the backing of Ghana for its renewed interest in Africa, with Accra housing the secretariat of the AfCFTA, a free trade body covering 54 African countries. —AFP

News in brief

US vows 'much more' vaccine aid

WASHINGTON: The United States will soon be able to ramp up vaccine assistance abroad and will not seek "favors in return," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday, putting a veteran aid administrator in charge. Blinken said the top US priority was to fight COVID-19 at home but that the goal would be achieved soon, pointing to President Joe Biden's promise that 90 percent of Americans will be near a vaccination site by April 19. "We are exploring options to share more with other countries going forward. We believe that we'll be in a position to do much more on this front," Blinken said. —AFP

Top Benin judge flees country

COTONOU, Benin: A top Benin judge on Monday said he had quit and fled the West African country, condemning political pressure that he alleged included a demand to detain an opposition figure in the run-up to presidential elections. His denunciation comes as critics accuse President Patrice Talon of cracking down on opponents, including rivals who had sought to contest Sunday's ballot. Essowe Batamoussi said he had stepped down as a justice with the Economic Crime and Terrorism Court (CRET), which oversaw a probe into opposition candidate Reckya Madougou, who was arrested last month. —AFP

Survivors turned back by Tanzania

MAPUTO: The United Nations raised the alarm on Monday over reports that Tanzania forcibly returned hundreds of Mozambicans fleeing jihadist raids last month. Thousands of people fled into surrounding forest when Islamic State-linked militants launched attacks on the northeastern town of Palma on March 24, ransacking buildings and beheading civilians. Stranded in the bush with little access to food or water, some of the escapees headed south but others walked north to the Tanzanian border. —AFP

8 Venezuela soldiers killed

CARACAS: Venezuela said Monday eight of its soldiers have died since an offensive started two weeks ago against armed groups operating on the border with Colombia. Thirty-four have been injured, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino said in an address broadcast on state television, upping the death toll given over the weekend from six soldiers and nine "terrorists." Venezuela's armed forces have engaged in clashes with Colombian armed groups in the western border state of Apure since March 21, displacing thousands of civilians towards Colombia.

Western Sahara demands UN seat

ALGIERS: Western Sahara's foreign minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek on Monday demanded a UN seat for the disputed territory and accused France and Spain of impeding a referendum on self-determination. The status of Western Sahara, which the United Nations classifies as a "non-self-governing territory", has for decades pitted Morocco against the pro-independence Polisario Front. "The Sahrawi state claims its seat at the UN," said Ould Salek, on behalf the republic declared by the Polisario in 1976. The republic, as a founding member of the African Union, "demands its rightful place" among world nations, he told a news conference in Algiers, allies of the Polisario. —AFP

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2021

Business

26 tech startups qualify to pre-final phase of 6th Zain Great Idea program

Zain's entrepreneurs set to meet investors virtually

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the qualification of 26 tech startups to the pre-final phase of its sixth Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program. During this stage, the finalists from 8 GCC and Arab nations will take part in the ZGI Demo Day virtual event, where they are set to present their tech startups to investors and business partners for potential investment opportunities.

From a total of nearly 160 participating startups, 26 finalists qualified to the pre-final phase: TDALAL, DHANA, Amaakin, Punch, BNCHR+, and SNATCHR from Kuwait, Hayi, Shala, Bazaara, Sweench, Askwho, SCARLT, and Connected Community from the United Arab Emirates, Tamarran and Crowded Powered from Lebanon and Bahrain, Paw Arabia from Bahrain, Trenjh, Ketablik, Rehla, and Breez from Saudi Arabia, Tanfees and Loy Club from Oman, OOSTOORA and Branper from Tunisia, and Qurba and Fulltact from Egypt.

Zain recently concluded the program's second stage: the ZGI bootcamp, which was held in a virtual format for four weeks. The bootcamp featured workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and more, facilitated by world-class experts, academics, and trainers from top international educational institutions such as IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more. In addition, one-to-one sessions with top experts in various fields were offered for every finalist.



All of Zain Great Idea's phases came this year in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 26 finalists will now move forward to the pre-final phase, ZGI Demo Day, where they will present their tech startups to representatives from the investment community and business partners for a chance to get promising investment opportunities that will push their startups forward towards growth and profitability.

After ZGI Demo Day, the 26 finalists will advance to

the Zain Co-development and services phase, where they will have the opportunity to benefit from Zain's leading experiences in areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more. This year, Zain received many submissions from local and regional talents to take part in Zain Great Idea 6. Many submissions were accepted, from both those who own startups that have just begun their journey

and those in the process of establishing them. Accepted applications particularly centered around startups working in areas related to tech, digital transformation, and innovation.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout 10 successful years, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets. Zain's program comes in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, a startup Accelerator Service from Kuwait, and Mind the Bridge, a global organization based in Silicon Valley that bridges the world through entrepreneurship education for startups, enterprises, and investors to succeed in global markets. Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Google prevails over Oracle in US copyright case

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Monday handed Google a major win in a long-running copyright battle with Oracle, ruling that the use of the Java programming language for the Android mobile operating system was "fair use." The 6-2 ruling had been closely watched as a key test of copyright in the digital era, and allows Google to avoid paying out billions to its technology rival.

Justice Stephen Breyer wrote in the 39-page majority opinion that even if Google used copyrightable material, "the copying here at issue nonetheless constituted a fair use. Hence, Google's copying did not violate the copyright law." The case revolved around whether copyright protection should be extended to application software interfaces (APIs), the bits of code that allow programs and apps to work together, and if so, whether Google's implementation was a "fair use" of Oracle's copyrighted material.

The decade-old case drew interest across the spectrum of technology firms and creative industries, and sparked heated debate on how much copyright protection should be afforded to bits of computer code. Two separate jury trials ended with a determination that Google's "software interface" did not unfairly use Java code, saving the internet giant from a possible multibillion-dollar verdict.

But an appeals court in 2018 disagreed, saying the software interface is entitled to copyright protection, prompting Google to take the case to the highest US court. Oracle obtained the rights to Java in 2010 when it acquired Sun Microsystems-which had supported Google's use of Java for Android-and sought \$9 billion in damages in its original complaint.



WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court Monday gave Google a major win in a long-running copyright battle with Oracle, ruling that the use of the Java programming language for the Android mobile operating system was "fair use." — AFP

Legal certainty

Google vice president Kent Walker called the ruling "a victory for consumers, interoperability, and computer science" adding in a statement: "The decision gives legal certainty to the next generation of developers whose new products and services will benefit consumers." Oracle contended that the decision legitimizes a theft by Google that enabled its growth. "The Google platform just got bigger and market power greater," Oracle general counsel Dorian Daley said.

"They stole Java and spent a decade litigating as if they were a monopolist. This behavior is exactly why regulatory authorities around the world and in the United States are examining Google's business practices."

Nevertheless, the Dutch government welcomed the approval of additional aid. In a joint statement Le Maire and his Dutch counterpart Wopke Hoekstra said a recapitalization of KLM by the government of the Netherlands was being looked at. The recapitalization of Air France will take place by converting loans it received from the French state last year into perpetual hybrid Air France-KLM bonds that can be converted into equity.

Shares in Air France-KLM fell by 1.4 percent in Amsterdam and 1.6 percent in Paris, while both markets were trading higher.

Ryanair complaints

Independent aviation analyst John Strickland told AFP that "competitors will not be happy and it is important to see that the proposed slot remedy at Orly has real meaning in terms of facilitating additional competing services." Rival airline Ryanair, whose criticism of state subsidy for legacy airlines often finds a sympathetic ear at the European Commission, has lambasted previous French aid for Air France, saying it distorts competition. The Irish-based low-cost carrier has long railed against the support given to national champions, and is often backed by Brussels.

Ryanair-Europe's biggest airline in terms of ridership-is also seeking to challenge Germany's massive bailout of Lufthansa in the EU courts as well as schemes in Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Portugal. The French and Dutch ministers defended their support for their airline group.

"The connectivity of France and the Netherlands is of great importance for both economies and therefore the recovery of the Air France - KLM Group is in the best interest of the two states," they said in their statement. They also noted that the airlines have restruct-

Threatening innovation?

Google and many Silicon Valley allies have argued that extending copyright protection to APIs would threaten innovation in the fast-evolving digital world. According to Google, a win for Oracle would have upended the longstanding expectation of software developers that they are free to use existing computer software interfaces. Oracle backers said Google would walk away with "intellectual property theft" in the court victory, arguing that it would make it hard to protect any digital property from Chinese misappropriation. In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas, joined by Justice Samuel Alito, wrote that the court should have taken a narrower view of copyright in view of Google's copying of 11,500 lines of code. "The court wrongly sidesteps the principal question that we were asked to answer: Is declaring code protected by copyright? I would hold that it is. Computer code occupies a unique space in intellectual property," Thomas wrote.

Breyer wrote that new technologies call for a broader view. "The fact that computer programs are primarily functional makes it difficult to apply traditional copyright concepts in that technological world." Breyer wrote that Google "reimplemented a user interface, taking only what was needed to allow users to put their accrued talents to work in a new and transformative program."

Law professor Steven Vladeck of the University of Texas said on Twitter the ruling was "a win for Google," though he argued that "the big issue got punted" because the justices failed to decide on whether this type of software code may be copyrighted. But Boston University law professor Tiffany Li called it a "huge win for fair use and people who understand how coding works!" John Bergmayer of the consumer group Public Knowledge likewise said the court "came to the right decision," adding: "this opinion bolstering and supporting fair use is great news for consumers and advocates who believe that the technology sector needs more competition-not more legal doctrines expressly designed to limit it." Justice Amy Barrett, who joined the court last year after oral arguments, did not participate in the case. — AFP

ured to shore up their financial positions and made commitments to accelerate their transition towards environmental sustainability.

"It's not surprising to see further government investment in Air France but the key question is whether it will lead to attempts to impose political direction on the group's management beyond their commercial objectives," said Strickland. The ministers said France does not intend to raise its stake in the group any higher and that there are no plans to nationalize the respective airlines.

European airlines are hoping vaccination campaigns will pick up pace to allow for a resumption of travel ahead of the summer vacation season, which is when they traditionally make most of their money, to help them recover financially. — AFP



An aircraft of French airline Air France, the last plane to take off from Tegel 'Otto Lilienthal' Airport, departs for Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), in Berlin. — AFP



NEW YORK: A Credit Suisse sign hangs outside of its Manhattan offices in New York City. — AFP

Credit Suisse takes \$4.7bn hedge fund hit

ZURICH: Credit Suisse said yesterday that it had taken a \$4.7 billion hit from its links to troubled hedge fund Archegos Capital Management, cut dividends and announced the departure of two senior executives. The Swiss bank and Japan's Nomura warned last month that they could face significant losses due to their exposure to a US hedge fund forced to liquidate its holdings.

"The significant loss in our Prime Services business relating to the failure of a US-based hedge fund is unacceptable," CEO Thomas Gottstein said in statement yesterday. Bloomberg News has reported that the fund was little-known Archegos Capital Management, which sold more than \$20 billion in stocks from US media and Chinese companies as it sought to cover its obligations to its lenders.

Credit Suisse said its pre-tax loss of 900 million Swiss francs in the first three months of the year includes 4.4 billion Swiss francs (\$4.7 billion, 3.9 billion euros) related to "the failure by a US-based hedge fund to meet its margin commitments as we announced on March 29". Trading on margin is the practice of using borrowed funds to invest in financial assets such as stocks. It can be very profitable for borrowers as they are often only required to put down a small percentage in cash while the stocks serve as collateral for the lender. But large shifts in share prices can force borrowers to put up more money to meet their margin commitments, or sell the shares and potentially lose more than their investment and default on their loan.

'Significant nightmare'

Credit Suisse also announced the departure of the head of its investment bank and chief risk and compliance officer, pulled bonuses for senior executives and chopped its proposed dividend payment to shareholders. The bank's board of directors opened an investigation into the matter.

It also pulled a traditional resolution for shareholders to discharge the board and executive committee members of responsibility for actions taken during the previous year. "The Board of Directors believes it is in the best interest of the shareholders to consider this proposal when the internal investigations into the recent developments have been completed and the outcome communicated," it said in a statement.

AvaTrade analyst Naem Aslam said "the Archegos fallout ... has become a significant nightmare for Credit Suisse, and the bank has to take the right steps for its survival as losses are just too big to digest." — AFP

Air France gets EU green light for 4bn euro aid

PARIS: The EU authorized the French government yesterday to double its stake in Air France and inject up to four billion euros into the struggling airline after the pandemic hit passenger traffic.

The agreement, worth \$4.7 billion, follows weeks of negotiations with the EU commission, which must ensure that state aid does not give companies an unfair advantage. Air France posted a 7.1 billion euro (\$8.4 billion) loss in 2020 as its business, like that of the rest of the world's airlines, suffered from coronavirus restrictions which all but grounded global air traffic.

In return for its green light, the commission, which is the EU's anti-trust regulator, said Air France would relinquish about 18 slots per day at Orly, Paris' second-largest airport after Charles de Gaulle. "This gives competing carriers the chance to expand their activities at this airport, ensuring fair prices and increased choice for European consumers," EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said the EU had also allowed the French state to raise its stake in Air France-KLM group to 30 percent, up from the current 14.3 percent.

Dutch consider KLM aid

The Netherlands' flag-carrier KLM, which forms an alliance with Air France, will not benefit from the aid.

Business

New Zealand and Australia to open COVID travel bubble

Two-way corridor allows quarantine-free travel between COVID-free neighbors

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: New Zealand has approved quarantine-free travel with Australia, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday, completing a two-way corridor for travel between the largely COVID-free neighbors. "I can confirm that quarantine-free travel will begin in just under two weeks, at 11:59pm on April 18," Ardern announced after the date was confirmed by her cabinet. The travel bubble comes more than a year after New Zealand closed its doors in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and six months after Australia allowed Kiwis to fly into selected states without the need to quarantine. Ardern described it as a world leading move between New Zealand, with just 26 COVID-19 deaths in a population of five million, and Australia with fewer than 1,000 deaths in a population of 25 million. "I cannot see or point to any countries in the world that are maintaining a strategy of keeping their countries COVID-free whilst opening up international travel between each other," she said. "That means in a way we are world leading." "I very much appreciate the arrangement the New Zealand government has come to today," Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison told a press conference. "We welcome them back as indeed Kiwis will be welcoming Aussies."

Last week, the tiny Pacific island nation of Palau, one of the few countries never to have had a Covid-19 case, opened a travel bubble with virus-free Taiwan, which President Surangel Whipps described as a "ray of light" showing the world was slowly emerging from the pandemic. However, just hours before Ardern's announcement, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it would be at least another month before he could allow holidays abroad. New Zealand's beleaguered tourism industry said the long-awaited bubble could inject up to a billion NZ dollars (\$705 million) into the economy this year. The South Pacific nation is a popular holiday destination and its COVID-crippled tourism industry has been pressing for months to have quarantine-free travel for Australians, who make up about 40 percent of international visitors.

"It could be up to NZ\$1.0 billion and maybe even more that flows into our economy for the rest of this calendar year," the head of Tourism New Zealand, Rene de Monchy, told Radio New Zealand.

'Bring your family'

Ardern urged Australians to take advantage of the bubble, with New Zealand's ski season on the horizon.

"We are a safe place to bring your family to come and visit," she said during a press conference. Air New Zealand immediately announced it was ramping up flights to Australia from the current four a week to more than 20 when the bubble takes effect. However, Virgin Australia said while the travel bubble was a step in the right direction it would only be offering a limited schedule for flights to the ski resort town of Queenstown over the next five months. One of the hurdles in setting up the two-way corridor has been sporadic outbreaks of community transmission in both countries, with Australia repeatedly suspending quarantine-free travel from New Zealand due to virus outbreaks in Auckland.

The flare-ups have been successfully contained with snap lockdowns and Ardern said travellers needed to be aware that further outbreaks in either country could impact on travel plans. "People will need to plan for the possibility of having travel disrupted," she said. "Just as we had alert-level settings for managing cases in New Zealand, we will have a framework for managing an outbreak in Australia," she said. "In many ways we will treat Australia as a region of our own when we're making decisions on restrictions." — AFP



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaks during a press conference about COVID-19 coronavirus restrictions, in Wellington. New Zealand approved quarantine-free travel to Australia yesterday with Prime Minister Ardern saying a two-way corridor for trans-Tasman travel will begin on the night of April 18. — AFP



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past a SoftBank mobile shop in the Ginza shopping district in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Softbank to buy \$2.8bn stake in Norway robotics firm

TOKYO: Japanese investment giant SoftBank Group will buy a 40 percent stake in Norwegian robotics company AutoStore in a deal worth \$2.8 billion, the two firms said. The deal is the latest bet by SoftBank, which has spent heavily on some of the tech world's hottest start-ups and biggest names, ranging from artificial intelligence to biotech companies.

The deal values AutoStore, which develops warehouse automation technology, at \$7.7 billion, according to a statement released by the pair on Monday. Known for its cuboid systems that reduce the space needed to store goods, AutoStore says it has deployed 20,000 robots across 35 countries and that its clients

include Puma and Siemens. "We view AutoStore as a foundational technology that enables rapid and cost-effective logistics for companies around the globe," said SoftBank founder Masayoshi Son. The companies will work together to "aggressively expand across end markets and geographies", he added.

Son has in the past battled critics of his commitment to sometimes troubled start-ups, and brushed aside doubts over a massive asset-sale program. The telecoms-firm-turned-investment behemoth has stakes in some of Silicon Valley's hottest start-ups through its \$100 billion Vision Fund. The firm said in February that net profit rocketed to \$11.1 billion in its fiscal third quarter, with Son dubbing the Fund a "goose that produces golden eggs". Karl Johan Lier, Autostore's president and CEO, said his company hoped to grow in the Asia-Pacific market with Softbank's support.

US investment firm Thomas H. Lee Partners will remain the majority shareholder in Autostore even after the Softbank deal, which is expected to be finalized in April. — AFP

Unemployment remains stable In eurozone

BRUSSELS: The level of unemployment in the eurozone did not change in February, official data showed yesterday, as national schemes to keep companies afloat held off the worst effects of the pandemic. Eurostat, the EU's statistics agency, said unemployment was at 8.3 percent in the 19 countries that use the euro single currency, the same as a revised figure for January.

Youth unemployment in the eurozone, which has risen more sharply during the COVID crisis, edged lower to 17.3 percent, Eurostat said. That still remained higher than a year before, just before a wave of lockdowns crushed the economy, when unemployment in the eurozone had stood at 7.4 percent, with youth unemployment at 15.4 percent.

Joblessness in Europe exploded in the spring of 2020, the result of a landmark recession as restrictions on movement kept people at home in many countries across the globe. However, many national governments implemented EU-backed job guarantee schemes and other programs that have so far averted a long-term shock on employment that many had feared. The unemployment rate in the 27 countries of the European Union followed the same trend, standing at 7.5 percent in February, stable compared to January, but one percentage point higher than a year ago.

The Czech Republic and Poland had the lowest unemployment rates in the bloc, at just above three percent. Germany, the EU's biggest economy and an industrial powerhouse, had an unemployment rate of 4.5 percent. The highest rates were recorded in economies highly dependent on tourism such as Spain, at 16.1 percent, and Greece, where the latest data showed an unemployment rate of 15.8 percent in December. — AFP

Greenland votes in election focused on mining debate

NUUK, Denmark: The autonomous Danish territory of Greenland voted yesterday in legislative elections, after a campaign focused on a disputed mining project, as the Arctic island confronts first-hand the effects of global warming. Greenland's two main parties are divided on whether to authorize a giant rare earth and uranium mining project.

Supporters, including the ruling social democratic Siumut party, say the mine would yield an economic windfall. Opponents, such as the opposition left-green IA party, argue it could harm the vast island's unspoiled environment. Greenland's geostrategic location and massive mineral reserves have raised international interest, as evidenced by former US president Donald Trump's swiftly rebuffed offer to buy it in 2019.

The election campaign for parliament's 31 seats has also centered on fishing—the main driver of Greenland's economy. And at a time when young Greenlanders are reconnecting with their Inuit roots and questioning their Danish colonial heritage, social issues and cultural identity have also been part of the debate. Polling stations opened for the island's 35,000 voters at 1100 GMT and closed at 2200 GMT, with the final results expected early today.

IA seeks uranium moratorium

IA is leading in the latest opinion polls with around 36 percent of voter support, while Siumut, which has been in power almost uninterrupted since Greenland gained autonomy in 1979, is trailing with 23 percent. Experts however have warned that the outcome is nevertheless uncertain.

US pushing G20 for global minimum corporate tax: Yellen

WASHINGTON: The United States is pushing in the G20 to adopt a global minimum corporate tax to stem the erosion of government revenues, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Monday.

Just days after President Joe Biden announced plans to raise corporate taxes to finance a massive \$2 trillion infrastructure and jobs program, Yellen said a collective international effort would end the "race to the bottom" on taxation. Biden expressed outrage at multinationals-like Amazon that have moved to tax havens or used loopholes and pay little to no tax, far less than some individuals, and said he would put a stop to the practice.

His plan would raise the US corporate tax rate to 28 percent and the minimum for multinationals to 21 percent. He dismissed concerns the higher rate would drive companies overseas, telling reporters on Monday that "there's no evidence of that."

"We're talking about a 28 percent tax that everybody thought was fair enough for everybody," he said.

"I'm going to push as hard as I can (to) change the circumstances so we can compete with the rest of the world," Yellen said the practice of seeking tax havens erodes government revenues and undermines an economy's competitiveness. "Together we can use a global minimum tax to make sure the global economy thrives based on a more level playing field in the taxation of multinational corporations," she said in a speech to The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

The interconnected global economy has led to "a 30-year race to the bottom on corporate tax rates."

But for companies and economies to remain competitive, governments must make sure they "have stable tax systems that raise sufficient revenue to invest in essential public goods and respond to crises, and that all citizens fairly share the burden of financing government." Biden's proposal recognizes "it is important to work with other countries to end the pressures of tax competition and corporate tax base erosion," Yellen said. G20 finance ministers are expected to discuss the proposal during a virtual meeting on Wednesday, hosted by Italy.

A Treasury official told reporters the G20 goal is to have a proposal on the global minimum tax by July, and the Biden administration could if needed change its legislation to bring the US minimum tax into line with the international plan.

Not going it alone

A G20 agreement would give a push to ongoing negotiations in the broader Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on a global minimum tax as a way to protect all members from erosion of tax revenues. "Taxes matter to development and it's important that the world get it right," World Bank President David Malpass said on CNBC.

He declined to comment on the US proposal, which will be a topic for the G20 officials on Wednesday.



Treasury secretary Janet Yellen speaks after US President-elect Joe Biden announced his economic team at The Queen Theater in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

Yellen's speech, ahead of the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, as well as the G20 meeting, all virtual, also outlined the Biden administration push to resume the multilateral cooperation halted under former president Donald Trump. "Over the last four years, we have seen firsthand what happens when America steps back from the global stage. America first must never mean America alone," Yellen said.

In fact a strong US presence is necessary to ensure a level playing field in the global economy she said. "Over time, a lack of global leadership and engagement makes our institutions and economy vulnerable." The Biden administration already announced it is rejoining the Paris climate accord, and removed obstacles in the World Trade Organization that allowed the global body to name a new leader.

In the trade arena, she said Washington will work with partners to "enforce a rules-based order." With China—the world's other dominant economy—the relationship "will be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, and adversarial where it must be." — AFP



NUUK, Greenland: Candidates greet each other before a debate at KNR (Greenlandic Broadcasting Corporation), Monday. — AFP

Opinion polls "often put IA way too high in the polls," University of Greenland political scientist Leander Nielsen said. "A third of voters don't make up their minds until the last minute."

Nor was it likely that either of the two biggest parties would get a majority of the 16 seats: the most likely scenario, he said, was "that IA forms a coalition with one or two smaller parties". IA has called for a moratorium on uranium mining, which would effectively put a halt to the mining project. The Kuannersuit deposit, in the south of the island, is considered one of the world's richest in uranium and rare earth minerals—a group of 17 metals used as components in high-tech devices such as smart phones, flat screen displays, electric cars and weapons. Local authorities have to give their stamp of approval before Australian group Greenland Mining can get an operating license.

Dreams of independence

Siumut party leader Erik Jensen has said the mine would be "hugely important for Greenland's economy", helping diversify revenues. That is crucial if the island

wants to gain full independence from Copenhagen someday. Denmark, which is not opposed to Nuuk's independence, gives the island annual subsidies of around 526 million euros (\$638 million), accounting for about a third of its budget. Greenland plans to grow its economy by developing its fishing, mining and tourism sectors, as well as agriculture in the southern part of the island which is ice-free year-round.

"To harvest sustainably the living natural resources, like fish stocks, is going to be the most long-term (solution) for Greenland," Minik Rosing, a geobiology professor at the University of Copenhagen, said. The island's mineral potential "has only been investigated to some extent, but not in depth", he added.

For Cambridge University Arctic specialist Marc Jacobsen, keeping the option of large-scale mining open is the reason why Greenland has not signed the Paris climate accord. The treaty lets states decide their own measures to meet the common goal of keeping global warming under two degrees Celsius. "Signing the Paris Agreement would not allow them to develop any big mining project," Jacobsen noted.—AFP

Business

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait economy slowly emerging from pandemic-linked contraction

Fiscal sustainability in focus amid record deficit in FY20/21

KUWAIT: Kuwait's economy is slowly emerging from the economic dislocation caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. GDP fell by an estimated 8 percent last year—the steepest decline in output since the 2009 financial crisis—as businesses were shuttered, staffing levels cut, projects halted and incomes pressured amid a precipitous drop in oil prices. Pandemic-related policy support, especially for SMEs, was also limited and centered mainly on debt repayment.

Growth prospects have improved with the lifting (until recently) of most restrictions. Consumer sentiment is more upbeat, and pent-up demand has boosted consumer spending growth, which stood at 20 percent y/y in February (KNet data). Bank credit to households is increasing at the fastest pace since mid-2018. After a lackluster 2020, the projects market should gain a little more traction over the forecast period, helped by greater private-sector buy-in. Though the re-imposition of a partial curfew in March and the uncertain pace of vaccinations will be worth watching, non-oil growth should recover to about 4 percent this year before normalizing at 2.5 percent in 2022.

Oil GDP (in its broadest definition) should rise by 1 percent this year and by 7 percent in 2022 as crude oil production increases in line with the easing of OPEC+ cuts and the full commissioning of the Clean Fuels and New Refinery Projects, which should double Kuwait's refining capacity. Gains in both Jurassic light and Lower Fars heavy crude output will help offset some of the decline in production capacity due to the ageing Burgan field.

Fiscal sustainability

Last year's twin COVID-19 and oil price shocks led to a record and sixth consecutive fiscal deficit of KD 8.9 billion (28 percent of GDP). Financing the deficit and achieving fiscal sustainability has taken on greater urgency following the near depletion of the General Reserve Fund (GRF), the inaccessibility of the Reserve Fund for Future Generations (RFFG), Kuwait's sover-

Table 1: Key economic indicators

	2019	2020e	2021f	2022f	2023f	
Nominal GDP	\$ bn	136	104	124	132	140
Real GDP	% y/y	-0.7	-8.0	1.2	5.0	3.9
- Oil sector*	% y/y	-2.0	-8.0	1.0	7.0	5.0
- Non-oil sector	% y/y	1.0	-8.0	4.0	2.5	2.5
Budget balance (FY)	% of GDP	-9.5	-28.0	-17.0	-12.0	-10.0
Current acct. balance	% of GDP	16.3	4.0	13.0	13.0	13.0
Inflation	% y/y	1.1	2.1	2.5	3.0	3.0

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates * Includes refining

eign wealth fund (SWF), and the absence of parliamentary approval for a new debt law. While the authorities have been able to buy themselves some time through cuts in Capex, asset swaps between the GRF and the RFFG and moves to reschedule more than \$20 billion in accrued dividends with state oil company KPC, systemic fiscal reforms are imperative.

The government unveiled an expansionary budget for FY2021-22 that sees spending rising by 7 percent y/y (budget-on-budget), revenues by 45 percent and the deficit widening to KD 12.1 billion. We see the deficit narrowing, however, to KD 6-7 billion (17 percent of GDP) this year and further to 10 percent of GDP by 2023 due to a combination of spending restraint and greater oil revenues thanks to higher oil prices. Tapping new non-oil revenue sources, however, appears limited to possible excise duties and the VAT.

We do believe that the debt law will pass this year, which should alleviate some of the liquidity pressures. There is also an economic case for deficit financing via debt issuance rather than reserve draw-downs in the current low interest rate environment. Moreover, public debt, at KD 3.8 billion (12 percent of GDP) at end-2020, is the lowest in the region so there is ample scope.

Economic growth is slowly returning following last year's pandemic-linked contraction, with private and government consumption as well a higher oil prices driving the rebound. Fiscal sustainability is in the spotlight amid a sixth consecutive and record fiscal deficit in FY20/21 and liquidity constraints made more acute by the absence of a debt law. Higher oil prices could provide fiscal space with which to enact macroeconomic and structural reforms, though this will require closer executive-legislative cooperation.

Chart 1: Real GDP



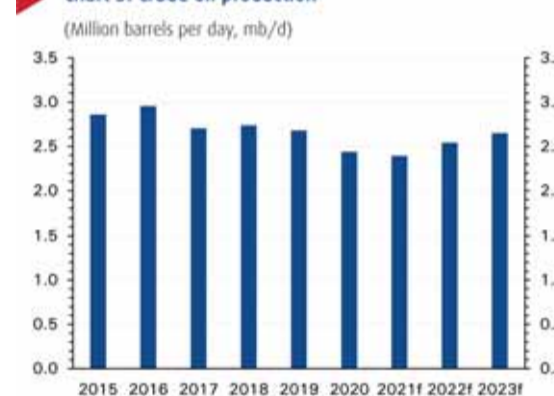
Source: Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), NBK forecasts

Chart 2: Private credit to residents



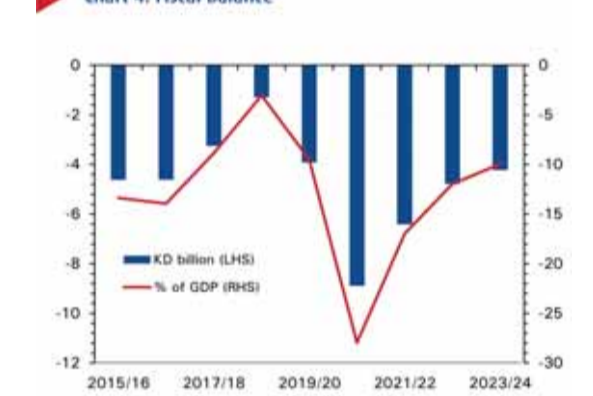
Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Chart 3: Crude oil production



Source: Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI), OPEC, NBK forecasts

Chart 4: Fiscal balance



Source: Kuwait Ministry of Finance (MOF), NBK forecasts

The current account looks to have performed better than expected in 2020, benefitting from higher investment income and a rebound in oil export revenues to register a surplus of 4 percent of GDP. Foreign reserve assets at CBK were stable at \$47.5 billion (42 percent of GDP) at end-2020, providing more than 12 months of import cover. Financial buffers are substantial with more than \$550bn of assets held by the aforementioned SWF.

Inflation rising

Inflation almost doubled in 2020 to 2.1 percent due to pandemic-linked supply-chain issues, higher international food prices and pent-up consumer demand after lockdown measures were eased last summer. Expatriate departures and income impairments during the pandemic have not materially affected residential rents in the CPI index. Inflation will remain low, but could reach 3 percent in 2022 as the econ-

omy recovers and assuming a possible rollout of a 5 percent VAT in 2022-23. Monetary policy is likely to remain accommodative over the forecast period (the discount rate was cut by 1.25 percent, to 1.5 percent last year in March) in line with a dovish US Fed policy stance.

Oil dependence

Acute sensitivity to oil prices (almost 90 percent of export and fiscal revenues are oil-derived) and the absence of systemic economic reforms due to legislative impasse are the primary risks weighing on the outlook. A medium-term fiscal framework in the context of a comprehensive economic plan is needed to attain fiscal sustainability and maintain Kuwait's good standing with credit rating agencies and investors. While relations between the new parliament and the government are currently strained, stronger collaboration can expedite Kuwait's diversification agenda.

H&M to lay off more than 1,000 staff in Spain

MADRID: Swedish fashion giant H&M is to lay off more than 1,000 staff in Spain who are currently on furlough due to the pandemic, the Workers' Commission (CCOO) union said yesterday.

The fashion chain was not immediately available to confirm the information. A CCOO statement said the fashion brand had indicated it was "going to begin redundancy proceedings which would affect more than 1,000 people and involve the closure of 30 shops." It called the shop closures "absolutely disproportionate" and the layoffs of furloughed staff unjustified.

"While it is true there may have been a change in consumer habits which could justify a change in the workforce, this in no way justifies such a large number of redundancies, especially considering that H&M has benefitted from the government's furlough scheme during the pandemic." The funding of such temporary unemployment schemes was one of the key measures put in place by Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government to bolster an economy battered by months of lockdown.

That and other emergency measures to ease the crisis have cost the Spanish treasury a dizzying 40 billion euros (more than \$47 billion) since the start of the pandemic. In return, companies are banned



BEIJING: People walk past an H&M store in Beijing. —AFP

from laying off staff for six months after the end of the scheme which is currently set to run until May 31, but is likely to be extended. H&M's net profit tumbled tenfold in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, with the fashion retailer saying it would shutter 350

of its 5,000 shops across the globe while opening another 100. Despite the drop, the firm saw its online sales leap in 2020, up more than 40 percent on the figures for a year earlier, and accounting for almost a third of its overall turnover. —AFP

European markets rally in Wall Street catch-up

LONDON: European equities rallied yesterday as investors played catch-up with record Wall Street gains, cheering strong US data showing the world's top economy was well on the recovery track.

Frankfurt, London and Paris firmed higher as dealers returned to their desks following a long four-day Easter holiday weekend, and after a mixed performance in Asia.

"Today is the first chance for European markets to react to this fresh wave of optimism after an extended weekend, and indeed to the possibility that global economies will be lifted by a recovery which is expected to be led by the US in the first instance," said Interactive Investor analyst Richard Hunter. Wall Street nailed record gains after pre-weekend data showed far more US jobs than expected were created last month, reinforcing the view of a strong recovery.

The S&P 500 and Dow scaled new heights, while the Nasdaq also saw big gains, after data Friday showed the US economy regained 916,000 jobs in

March. And the good news kept coming on Monday with figures showing activity in the crucial services sector hit an all-time high in March, as orders surged thanks to a jolt of pent-up demand. That came after a gauge of manufacturing came in at a 37-year high.

"Taking their cues from the Dow Jones (index), the European markets had a proverbial spring in their step as they returned from the Easter break," said Spreadex analyst Connor Campbell. "In the peace and quiet of a Europe-free Good Friday and Easter Monday, the Dow made strides, climbing above 33,500 (points) for the first time in history following a blockbuster 916,000 non-farm employment change reading.

"This has helped the European indices bound out of the gates this Tuesday." The strong economic readings came as traders take heart from good progress in vaccination rollouts in the United States and Britain, which are allowing governments to ease containment measures. In Asia, Sydney, Seoul, Mumbai, Jakarta, Taipei and Manila stock markets all rose.

On the downside, Tokyo sank more than one percent on profit-taking after recent gains, while Singapore and Wellington also fell. Oil prices rallied as observers said the chances of a breakthrough in Iran nuclear talks were slim. Both contracts tumbled last week on the prospects that the country's crude could return to markets if negotiations on the accord progressed smoothly and sanctions on the country were eased. —AFP

Germany hails US move on corp tax as 'great step forward'

BERLIN: German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz yesterday welcomed Washington's backing for a global minimum corporate tax, calling it a "great step forward" in the battle to stem the erosion of government revenues. "The support of the USA gives this initiative a strong tailwind," Scholz told reporters, saying he hoped a deal could be reached this year. The optimism comes a day after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Washington was pushing in the G20 for a global minimum corporate tax, saying the world's interconnected economy had led to "a 30-year race to the bottom on corporate tax rates."

"Together we can use a global minimum tax to make sure the global economy thrives based on a more level playing field in the taxation of multinational corporations," she said in a speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Finance ministers of the G20 club of large economies are expected to discuss the proposal during a virtual meeting on Wednesday, hosted by Italy. —AFP

KFH announces winners of 'Win with Hesabi' draw

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the 3rd and 4th draws of "Win with Hesabi" campaign that offers 3 Jeep Wrangler Sport cars and cash prizes worth KD250 for 10 winners each month. KFH has also announced Rawan Al-Shubaiki as the winner of the Jeep Wrangler Sport, which is the first car of the 3 cars offered in the campaign.

The draw was held at KFH Headquarters under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The winners are: Yousif Al-Rashidi, Mariam Al-Jemaz, Mohammed Al-Mutairi, Rawan Yousif, Noor Al-Hashash, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Noorah Al-Enzi, Mariam Al-Azmi, Nawal Hussain, Abdullah Al-Sahli, Hessa Al-Otaibi, Sumew Al-Saeedi, Najat Al-Saqer, Sarah Al-Azmi, Farah Al-Hussaini, Yousif Al-Onaizi, Fatima Al-Bannaw, Hoor Al-Fawaz, Dhari Al-Hajri and Manar Al-Dhefiri.

This campaign comes as part of KFH continuing efforts to add value to Hesabi customers including advantages, discounts, prizes, and exclusive rewards. Once the social allowance is transferred to Hesabi program, customers enter the monthly draw on 10 prizes of KD 250 each, in addition to three special draws on Jeep Wrangler Sport cars.

KFH offers "Hesabi for Youth" with a variety of privileges as part of its continued endeavor to provide adequate customer care, innovate new products and services and fulfill the needs of all customers of various age categories and interests. Services and products are tailored to suit customers' needs and provide distinguished service as per global standards regarding quality, accuracy and speed.

Hesabi program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active lifestyle. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts etc. KFH continues to launch marketing campaigns to reward youth customers. Hesabi for Youth represents the ambitions and expectations of youth category and copes with KFH aspirations to attract the largest portion of youth who represents the major part of Kuwaiti society. Also, the account represents KFH initiative to diversify banking services and products.

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Painter Julius Agbaje points to a painting of police officer with dog head that he titled 'Mad Dog' at his studio residence in Ipaja, Lagos. — AFP photos



Painter Julius Agbaje paints on canvass at his studio residence.

NIGERIA'S 'SOCIAL SATIRIST' FIGHTS INJUSTICE WITH ART

When in 2019 Nigerian painter Julius Agbaje depicted President Muhammadu Buhari as the Joker, he never imagined that a year later his portrait would become a symbol of youth protest. His image, "Joke's on You," showing Buhari with a red nose, white makeup and a terrifying smile, was the emblem of demonstrations against police brutality that rocked the country last October. "At first it was a joke, just a provocation," the 28-year-old artist said in his tiny studio in a rundown district of Lagos. "Months after, this piece went viral, and resonated with a lot of youth."

Even before the Joker image, Agbaje had already earned a place on Nigeria's vibrant cultural scene. He is also one of its most committed artists. "I always dare to challenge things, especially wherever there is injustice. I love to be provocative, and art gives me a channel though (which) I could express that vexation, to fight those injustices."

'Social satirist'

Nigeria, with its 200 million inhabitants, may well be considered Africa's largest democracy, but it has barely turned the page on its history of military dictatorships. More than 20 years after its democratic transition, the country remains plagued by corrupt politics, rampant poverty and violations of basic rights.



Painter Julius Agbaje poses for a photograph at his studio.

Between acrylic pots and worn brushes, Agbaje rolls out his canvases on the tiled floor of his studio for a visitor. The "social satirist", as he likes to call himself, Agbaje knows few taboos. Take his portrait of a nun painted as a chimpanzee, with a nose piercing, tattoo, and plunging neckline-risky content in a country where religious beliefs are strong and where blasphemy is often branded the worst of sins.

"I wanted to denounce the hypocrisy of religion in Nigeria," says Agbaje, himself the son of a pastor and a teacher. But the strength of his caricatures, which are as funny as they are shocking, is also thanks to their technical skill. He learned his craft at the oldest art school in Lagos, the Yaba College of Technology, from where he

graduated in 2017. His dexterity comes to the fore in a portrait made with knives of two monkeys—the figures, wearing police helmets, are seen in mugshots, with signs around their necks saying "murder" and "duplicitous & theft".

The diptych, entitled "Good cop, Bad cop", was produced long before last year's #EndSARS protests erupted over police brutality, and forced the government to disband the SARS special police brigade. The image is now on display at his art school's museum. "Strangely enough so many people have reacted to this piece. It has drawn a lot of attention and discussion, and also got its own nickname—'The Monkey Piece'," says his former teacher Odun Orimolade.

Trauma and art

The young artist picked up his brushes again when last year's youth protest movement was brutally suppressed. Amnesty International said the army opened fire and killed at least 10 people, a charge the military has denied. From this "trauma" and "this anger" three paintings were born. Far from his caricatures, they are perhaps his most successful, at least his most poignant. With a blood-red background, one of them shows a shirtless black man raising his fist. In place of his face, the artist painted a shooting range target riddled with bullets. On the



Painter Julius Agbaje paints on canvass at his studio residence.

ground, upturned barricades recall those of the Lagos tollgate booth where the army allegedly opened fire on peaceful demonstrators. "It is an account of what happened on the day as the government came out to deny any hand in the matter," he said.

"I felt it is important to document the event with my art, for the sake of posterity." These are the "evils of his society" that the young painter wants to fight with his art. In Nigeria, there is an abundance of artists who criticize the political system, but many use only abstract images, few

do so in such a confrontational way. Among his influences, Agbaje cites the Nigerian performer Jelili Atiku, who denounced extrajudicial executions for years, leading to his arrest in 2016. "It's scary to be honest... it must be said, because I realize that some people sacrificed before I came," Agbaje said. "And because of those sacrifices... I can even enjoy some of this semblance of freedom that I enjoyed today, I feel that is my duty." — AFP

FAMILY, SUPPORTERS HOLD VIGIL FOR HOSPITALIZED RAPPER DMX

Hundreds of fans along with family gathered Monday outside the New York hospital where DMX is in critical condition, holding a prayer vigil for the rapper whose status remains extremely fragile. The acclaimed artist born Earl Simmons was rushed to the hospital in White Plains, a suburb north of New York City, following a heart attack on

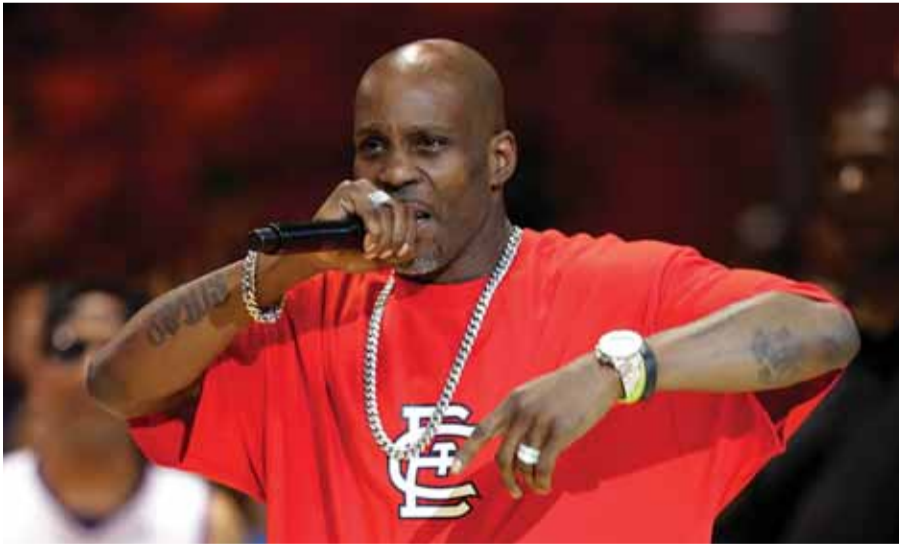
Friday. Publicist Angelo Ellerbee told AFP that DMX remains on life support. His fiancée and ex-wife were in tears at the vigil as a prayer was read for the rapper, whose fans chanted "DMX," holding their fists to the sky in honor of the 50-year-old star.

A motorcycle procession later paraded down the street in front of the facility

as DMX hits including "Ruff Ryders' Anthem" rang out. Saying he was "heartbroken," a friend of the family, AB Butler, told AFP that "you can't ask for a better artist." Fan Beverly Bailey echoed those comments, saying, "He's come a long way in life, and he has a hard life, and just to see where he is today, it's very important." "We keep our prayers for him and his entire family."

DMX has long suffered from drug addiction. In 2019, he cancelled several shows and checked himself into a rehabilitation facility. The Grammy nominee known for his distinctive gravelly delivery and dark lyricism soared into the public consciousness in the late 1990s, releasing hit after hit including "X Gon' Give It To Ya" and "Party Up." He continues to boast a strong fan following. His virtual rap battle with Snoop Dogg, a segment of the Verzuz series, attracted more than 500,000 viewers. — AFP

In this file photo rapper DMX performs during week five of the BIG3 three on three basketball league at UIC Pavilion in Chicago, Illinois.



Fans of hospitalized rapper Earl Simmons, aka DMX, hold balloons.



Ex-wife Tashera Simmons (center) and fiancée Desiree Lindstrom (right) surrounded by friends of hospitalized rapper Earl Simmons, aka DMX, attend a prayer vigil hosted by the Ruff Ryders to the Rescue Foundation at White Plains Hospital.



Fans of hospitalized rapper Earl Simmons, aka DMX, attend a prayer vigil hosted by the Ruff Ryders to the Rescue Foundation at White Plains Hospital in White Plains, New York. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



This photograph shows Luo Yifei, PhD student at Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) School of Materials Science and Engineering, attaching an electrode on the surface of a Venus flytrap plant at a laboratory in Singapore, as scientists develop a high-tech system for communicating with vegetation.



Luo Yifei attaching an electrode on the surface of a tobacco plant at a laboratory in Singapore, as scientists develop a high-tech system for communicating with vegetation.



A test of electrodes attached on the surface of a tobacco plant at a laboratory in Singapore, as scientists develop a high-tech system for communicating with vegetation. — AFP photos

Rise of the 'robo-plants', as scientists fuse nature with tech

Remote-controlled Venus flytrap "robo-plants" and crops that tell farmers when they are hit by disease could become reality after scientists developed a high-tech system for communicating with vegetation. Researchers in Singapore linked up plants to electrodes capable of monitoring the weak electrical pulses naturally emitted by the greenery. The scientists used the technology to trigger a Venus flytrap to snap its jaws shut at the push of a button on a smartphone app.

They then attached one of its jaws to a robotic arm and got the contraption to

pick up a piece of wire half a millimeter thick, and catch a small falling object. The technology is in its early stages, but researchers believe it could eventually be used to build advanced "plant-based robots" that can pick up a host of fragile objects which are too delicate for rigid, robotic arms.

"These kinds of nature robots can be interfaced with other artificial robots (to make) hybrid systems," Chen Xiaodong, the lead author of a study on the research at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), told AFP. There are still challenges to be overcome. Scientists

can stimulate the flytrap's jaws to slam shut but can't yet reopen them—a process that takes 10 or more hours to happen naturally.

Crop defense

The system can also pick up signals emitted by plants, raising the possibility that farmers will be able to detect problems with their crops at an early stage. "By monitoring the plants' electrical signals, we may be able to detect possible distress signals and abnormalities," said Chen. "Farmers may find out when a disease is in progress, even before full-

blown symptoms appear on the crops." Researchers believe such technology could be particularly useful as crops face increasing threats from climate change.

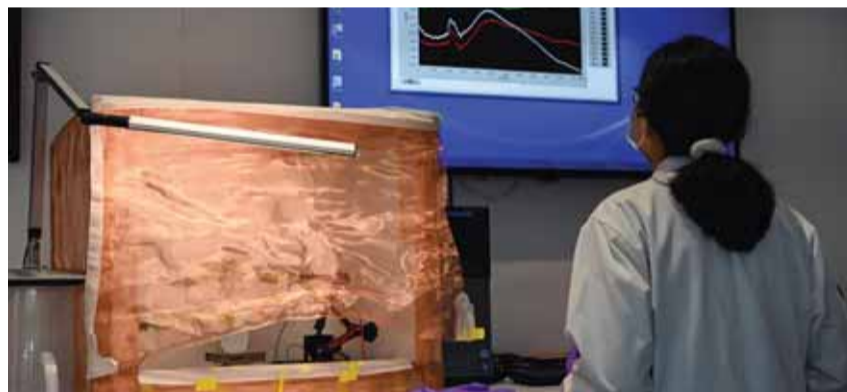
Scientists have long known that plants emit very weak electrical signals but their uneven and waxy surfaces makes it difficult to effectively mount sensors. The NTU researchers developed film-like, soft electrodes that fit tightly to the plant's surface and can detect signals more accurately. They are attached using a "thermogel", which is liquid at low temperatures but turns into a gel at room temperature. They are the latest to conduct

research communicating with plants.

In 2016, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology team turned spinach leaves into sensors that can send an email alert to scientists when they detect explosive materials in groundwater. The team embedded carbon nanotubes that emit a signal when plant roots detect nitroaromatics-compounds often found in explosives. The signal is then read by an infrared camera that sends out a message to the scientists. — AFP



Luo Yifei testing an electrode on the surface of a Venus flytrap plant at a laboratory in Singapore.



Luo Yifei monitoring an application on the computer during a test of an electrode attached on the surface of a tobacco plant at a laboratory in Singapore.



A dead fly trapped inside a Venus flytrap plant, used to test an electrode attached on the surface of the plant at a laboratory in Singapore.

Climate change driving marine species poleward

Warming waters have driven thousands of ocean species poleward from the equator, threatening marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of people who depend on them, researchers reported Monday. Comparison of data on nearly 50,000 species over three 20-year periods up to 2015 revealed that the exodus from tropical waters is accelerating, they reported in the journal PNAS.

The tropics have long harbored an outsized proportion of marine life, but could see that diversity disappear if climate change is not brought to heel, the authors warned. "Global warming has been changing life in the ocean for at least 60 years," senior author Mark Costello, a professor of marine biology at the University of Auckland, said.

"Our findings show a drop of about 1,500 species at the equator," he added. "This will continue throughout the centu-

ry, but the pace will depend on how we reduce-or not-greenhouse gas emissions." Poleward migration was more pronounced north of the equator, where oceans have warmed more quickly than in the southern hemisphere.

It was also more prevalent among open water fish than so-called benthic species living on the ocean floor. "Benthic species can only move during their floating life-stage, and thus their shift (poleward) is between generations," Costello explained. By contrast, species living in the high seas "can move with the water masses in their lifetime." Marine life in tropical waters declines when annual average sea temperature rises above 20 to 25 degrees Celsius, depending on the species, the study found.

40 percent drop by mid-century

"The 'missing' tropical species are likely following their thermal habitat as subtropical waters warm," noted co-author David Schoeman, a professor of ecology at Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Fossil records show that the same thing happened 140,000 years ago, the last time global surface temperatures were as hot as they are now.

Based on data in the open-access Ocean Biodiversity Information System, the statistical study does not look at how

individual species will adapt to new environments. In general, open-water species are likely to fare better, earlier research has found. The impact on commercial fish stocks in the tropics is not addressed either, though it is clear which parts of the world will be hit the hardest.

"Indonesia and other nations near the equator, such as in West Africa, have the most to lose because their stocks can only decrease," as no new species will replace those leaving, Costello said.

Worldwide, about 1.3 billion people live in coastal tropical areas, many of which rely on fisheries for food. A recent review article in Nature estimated that the maximum catch potential of tropical fish stocks in so-called exclusive economic zones — 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from the coast—would decline 40 percent by mid-century if global warming continues unabated. In most Pacific island nations, combined catch of skipjack and yellowfin tuna—the two most exported fish—would drop up to 40 percent under the same scenario, while coral reef fish consumed locally could decline even more. The study in PNAS began with the University of Auckland doctoral dissertation of Chhaya Chaudhary. — AFP

LEGENDARY MOSCOW MOVIE HALL TO REOPEN AFTER EXTENSIVE RENOVATION

Moscow's oldest cinema hall, built over a century ago, will reopen next week after an extensive years-long renovation, the management said Friday. The Khudozhestvenny, an Art Nouveau one-storey cinema designed by architect Nikolai Blagoveshchensky, is located in the Russian capital's historic Arbat quarter and once drew such luminaries as Leo Tolstoy. It closed for an extensive renovation in 2014 to restore the bas-reliefs on its facade. The interiors were also completely redone.

The management said it would reopen to the public next Friday. During the Soviet era it hosted up to a 1,000 spectators. The world premiere of the iconic film "Battleship Potemkin" by Sergei Eisenstein

was held here in 1926. The foyer was lit by intricate chandeliers and even had a fountain and an orchestra that played for the public before the film show, according to Russian media reports. It was the only cinema with a home delivery ticket service. The renovations began when the theatre was owned by the Rambler group of Russian billionaire Alexander Mamut. The Rambler group has now been bought by Sberbank, Russia's largest bank. "Sberbank has completely restored the legendary cinema," Sberbank said, without saying how much the renovations cost. — AFP

Thandie Newton reverts to original name spelling, 'Thandiwe'



In this file photo British actress Thandie Newton arrives for the Los Angeles season three premiere of the HBO series "Westworld" at the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood, California.

British actress Thandie Newton says she is reverting to the original Zimbabwean spelling of her name, Thandiwe, after decades in Hollywood. Newton, the daughter of a British lab technician and a Zimbabwean princess, told Vogue magazine the spelling—which means "beloved" in the African country's Shona language and is pronounced "tan-DEE-way"—was changed in the credits for her first acting role, in 1991's "Flirting," when she was just 16. Now, the 48-year-old "Westworld" star said, she is changing it back.

"That's my name. It's always been my name. I'm taking back what's mine," she was quoted as telling the British magazine in her May 2021 cover interview. Newton, who has long been an advocate for women who have been sexually assaulted, has been outspoken about racist and sexual abuse in Hollywood. In the Vogue interview Newton said "Flirting" director John Duigan asked her to "be a

bit darker" for the role, and repeated allegations that the then-39-year-old embarked on what she has previously described as a "coerced" sexual relationship with her.

She recalled other derogatory incidents of racism and sexual abuse, including a director who abused her and then showed footage of the incident to others. "I was traumatized," she told the magazine. And she spoke frankly about her battles with an eating disorder, calling it "the most horrific dance with something that's supposed to bring you life." "Black women are truly the nexus where all of this overlaps," she said. "Think of what else has the potential to heal if we support and care for Black women." — AFP



Sports

North Korea says will not go to Olympics over COVID fears

IOC yet to receive official application

SEOUL: North Korea will not attend this year's Tokyo Olympics because of the coronavirus pandemic, Pyongyang's sports ministry said, dashing Seoul's hopes of using the Games to restart talks with its nuclear-armed neighbor. The isolated North's participation in the last Winter Games, hosted by the South in Pyeongchang, was a catalyst in the diplomatic rapprochement of 2018.

Leader Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong attended as his envoy in a blaze of publicity, and the South's President Moon Jae-in seized the opportunity to broker talks between Pyongyang and Washington that led to a series of high-profile meetings between Kim and then US president Donald Trump.

But Pyongyang's announcement extinguishes the possibility that the postponed Tokyo Games, due to begin in July, could kick off a reset in the now deadlocked talks process. North Korea's Olympic Committee "decided not to participate in the 32nd Olympic Games in order to protect players from the world public health crisis caused by COVID-19", said the Sports in the DPR Korea website, run by the sports ministry in Pyongyang.

But analysts said other factors may have been at play. The announcement — dated Monday — reported a meeting of the national Olympic committee on March 25. The North's official KCNA news agency had previously carried a dispatch on the committee meeting, without mentioning the Olympic decision.

All International Olympic Committee member countries are required to take part in each Games under the Olympic charter. An IOC spokesperson told AFP that it had "not received any official application from the NOC of DPRK to be released from their obligation". The spokesperson added that "despite several requests" the North's Olympic Committee had been unable to hold a conference

call to discuss the coronavirus situation.

Border lockdown

Pyongyang is more isolated than ever after imposing a strict border closure more than a year ago to protect itself from the virus that first emerged in neighboring China. While the North insists it has had no coronavirus cases — although experts doubt the assertion — the lockdown has exacerbated the economic pain from multiple international sanctions over its banned weapons programs. The new US administration of Joe Biden is in the final stages of a review of North Korea policy, with officials widely expected to support a resumption of lower-level talks rather than high-stakes, high-drama summits.

On the campaign trail, Biden characterized Kim as a "thug" and has sharply criticized Trump's meetings, saying he legitimized one of the world's most ruthless leaders, but has also said he is open to diplomacy. Biden recently warned North Korea of consequences for violations of UN Security Council resolutions after Pyongyang tested what US officials judged to be ballistic missiles.

'Shameless distortion'

Inter-Korean relations are also at a standstill, with the North repeatedly saying it has no interest in talking to Seoul, and last year blowing up a liaison office on its side of the border. Even so, Moon in his Independence Day speech on March 1 said: "This year's Tokyo Olympics could be an opportunity for dialogues between South Korea and Japan, the North and the South, North Korea and Japan, and North Korea and the US."

The day commemorates mass protests that took place in 1919 across the Korean peninsula against Tokyo's colonial rule. Seoul's unification ministry said



SEOUL: People watch a television screen showing a news report about North Korea's decision not to participate in the Tokyo Olympics due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday. — AFP

it was "sorry that the COVID situation" had prevented the Games from serving as "an opportunity to advance peace on the Korean peninsula".

Japan's chief government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said it was monitoring the reports and authorities were seeking to improve the environment, "including infection countermeasures, so that many countries and regions can participate in the

Tokyo Games".

Analysts said the virus may not be the only reason behind Pyongyang's decision. "Pyongyang seems to be protesting against Japan's policies on North Korea, as sensitive issues such as human rights and sanctions have been raised by Tokyo, along with the US," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP. — AFP

Baylor Bears dominate Gonzaga to win NCAA crown

LOS ANGELES: The Baylor Bears ended the Gonzaga Bulldogs' quest for an unbeaten NCAA championship season on Monday, clinching the US college basketball title with a 86-70 victory. The Waco, Texas-based Baylor University team sealed their first ever "March Madness" title with a dominant performance against the Bulldogs, who were aiming to crown an undefeated season with a championship.

Monday's defeat at Indianapolis's Lucas Oil Stadium came just two days after Gonzaga's exhilarating semi-final victory over UCLA on Saturday, when Jalen Suggs' buzzer-beater sealed a 93-90 win. For long periods on Monday, it looked as if Gonzaga were still nursing a hangover from that win, with Baylor dominating in all departments to build a comfortable lead well before the end.

Jared Butler led the Baylor scoring with 22 points, seven assists and three rebounds, while MaCio Teague had 19 points with two rebounds. Baylor laid the foundations for success with a blistering start, jumping into a 9-0 lead that they never relinquished. The Bears had surged into a 19-point lead midway through the first half and also led by 20 points at one stage in the second. Baylor Bears coach Scott Drew said the fast start reflected his team's "culture of joy."

"They came out and fed off of each other and got off to a great start, and defensively we're pretty good," Drew said. "Our guys have been motivated



INDIANAPOLIS: The Baylor Bears celebrate with the trophy after defeating the Gonzaga Bulldogs 86-70 in the National Championship game of the 2021 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament at Lucas Oil Stadium on Monday in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

all year. It's a player-led team. We're so blessed to have unbelievable leadership. We play with a culture of joy. If you're going to war and I'm coaching, then I'm taking these guys."

Gonzaga, meanwhile, were left shattered in defeat, with Saturday's hero Suggs — who led the Bulldogs' scoring with 22 points — in tears. "We just couldn't get anything going, you have to give credit to Baylor," said Gonzaga coach Mark Few. "They were just so aggressive defensively we

couldn't get anything going on the offensive end. Hats off to them. They dominated both ends of the ball all night." Few had words of solace for his players, who had won 31 straight games this season by an average of 22.4 points. "You can't go 31-0 and get to the last night and get beat and feel bad about it," Few said. "It was an unbelievable run we've been on. I just said to them this will pass, and they've got to remember what an amazing accomplishment it was just getting to this point." — AFP

MLB: Full house for Rangers opener after restrictions lifted

HOUSTON: The Texas Rangers played out their home opener to a packed house on Monday, the largest crowd at a US sporting event since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A near-capacity crowd of around 40,000 fans crammed into the baseball club's Globe Life Field for the game against the Toronto Blue Jays.

The decision to allow a capacity crowd at the game followed Texas Governor Greg Abbott's order last month to fully reopen the state. US President Joe Biden last week criticized the decision to allow a full house at Monday's game saying the Rangers were not being "responsible."

"That's a decision they made. I think it's a mistake," Biden said in an interview with ESPN. "They should listen to Dr [Anthony] Fauci, the scientists and the experts. But I think it's not responsible." Although the coronavirus situation is improving across the United States with steep declines in infection rates and millions being vaccinated every day, most sporting venues are still operating at reduced capacity.

The 40,300-capacity Globe Life Field staged last year's World Series between the Los Angeles Dodgers and Tampa Bay Rays, allowing around 11,400 fans into the stadium. In announcing plans to welcome a capacity crowd last month, Rangers

officials detailed a series of safety protocols which included fans being required to wear masks at all times except when eating and drinking.

However photos and footage from

Monday's game in Arlington showed swathes of fans ignoring the mask mandate, either by wearing a mask incorrectly or in many cases, not at all. Texas leader Abbott meanwhile snubbed an invitation to throw the first ceremonial pitch at Monday's game in protest against Major League Baseball's decision last week to withdraw this year's All Star Game from Atlanta over Georgia's new vot-

ing rights legislation.

"It is shameful that America's pastime is not only being influenced by partisan political politics, but also perpetuating false political narratives," Abbott said. Critics of the Georgia law say it will make voting harder for minorities in the state, which delivered a stunning victory to US President Biden in the 2020 election. — AFP



ARLINGTON: A view as the Texas Rangers take on the Toronto Blue Jays in the top of the fourth inning on Opening Day at Globe Life Field on Monday in Arlington, Texas. — AFP



DALLAS: Luka Dončić of the Dallas Mavericks shoots a fadeaway jump shot in the first quarter against the Utah Jazz at American Airlines Center on Monday in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

Doncic leads Mavs over Jazz

LOS ANGELES: Luka Dončić scored 31 points as the Dallas Mavericks shrugged off the injury absence of Kristaps Porziņģis to snap Utah's nine-game winning streak on Monday. Slovenian star Dončić spearheaded a superb offensive performance for the Mavs in a dominant 111-103 victory over the Western Conference leaders, who had been chasing a 10th straight win.

Dončić's tally included six three-pointers, while the 22-year-old prodigy also hauled down nine rebounds with eight assists. It was a hugely impressive fifth consecutive victory for the Mavs, who improved to 28-21 to remain in seventh place in the West.

Dallas had been jolted by confirmation just hours before tip-off that Porziņģis would miss Monday's game with a sprained right wrist. But the Mavs made light of the reshuffle with Dorian Finney-Smith weighing in with 23 points — including five from outside the arc — and Jalen Brunson adding 20 off the bench. Josh Richardson finished with 17 points and Tim Hardaway Jr 16 points.

Dallas steadily took control after edging into a 27-25 lead at the end of the first quarter, and pulled away decisively by outscoring the Jazz 37-27 in the third period. Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said his team had been determined to ask more questions of Utah after suffering a 120-101 defeat to the Western Conference pace-setters in January. "The difference was we came out and were much more physical than the last time we played them," Carlisle said. "That was light years ago. We knew we had to play with a lot more presence tonight."

Carlisle singled out the performance of Finney-Smith, who is back at full fitness after missing nine games earlier this season after testing positive for COVID-19. "He's such an important part of our team. We needed his defense, his rebounding and his scoring. He did everything tonight," Carlisle said. Utah, who owns the league's best record with 38 wins against 12 defeats, saw star playmaker Donovan Mitchell effectively bottled up for long periods. Mitchell finished with 16 points and four assists. Mike Conley led the Utah scorers with 28 points, while Bojan Bogdanovic and Jordan Clarkson had 16 apiece off the bench. — AFP

Sports

Holders Bayern host embattled PSG without Lewandowski

Bayern's lead scorer out of both quarter-final matches

BERLIN: Holders Bayern Munich face a test of their ability to defend their Champions League crown without top-scoring striker Robert Lewandowski at home to embattled Paris Saint Germain tonight. A knee injury has ruled Lewandowski out of both the quarter-final home leg at the Allianz Arena and the return in Paris next Tuesday.

The timing could not be worse with Lewandowski sidelined for the two-legged repeat of last season's Champions League final when a Kingsley Coman header gave Bayern the title after a 1-0 win over PSG. Of the 103 goals Bayern have scored either in the Bundesliga or Champions League this season, Lewandowski has contributed to 46 of them with either a goal or an assist.

Yet Bayern proved at the weekend that they can win a big game without him. Leon Goretzka hit the winner in Saturday's 1-0 victory at second-placed RB Leipzig to leave Bayern seven points clear at the top of the Bundesliga.

"Obviously, they are better with Lewandowski," Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann said of Bayern. "But they have a world-class team and brilliant players to play in his place." Having already faced Leipzig, Lewandowski's understudy Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting is set to make only his third Champions League start this season against his former club.

'Huge anticipation'

The 32-year-old Cameroon striker left PSG after coming on as a replacement against Bayern in last season's Champions League final. "The anticipation

is huge," Choupo-Moting said of facing his ex-club. "It is the new edition of last year's final. Perhaps nobody would have expected that we would meet again so quickly."

Bayern, who are on a run of 19 games unbeaten in the Champions League, have a score to settle with PSG, against whom they have lost five of their nine previous matches. Yet PSG have their own problems, on and off the pitch.

Brazil superstar Neymar was sent off during Saturday's 1-0 home defeat to Lille, who usurped Mauricio Pochettino's PSG as French league leaders. Kylian Mbappe, who scored four goals over two legs in their last 16 to help knock out Barcelona, is expected to partner Neymar in PSG's star-studded attack.

COVID-19 has cast a shadow over the PSG squad with both defender Alessandro Florenzi and midfielder Marco Verratti having tested positive. Nevertheless, PSG's German defender Thilo Kehrer, who could replace Florenzi at right-back against Bayern, says the Parisian club is eager to avenge last season's final defeat.

"The frustration was huge, but in the meantime we've turned it into motivation — and that has become even greater to win the Champions League now," Kehrer told Sport Bild. Bayern have the strength in depth to cope without Lewandowski.

Saturday's match-winner Goretzka has been involved in seven goals in Bayern's last five league matches. The burly 26-year-old showed great finishing with a superb shot after being set up in Leipzig by Thomas Mueller, who has nicknamed his team-mate 'SCOREtzka'.



LEIPZIG: Bayern Munich's German midfielder Leon Goretzka (right) celebrates scoring the first goal with an assist from Bayern Munich's German forward Thomas Mueller (center) during the German first division Bundesliga football match between RB Leipzig and FC Bayern Munich in Leipzig, eastern Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

"I guess Thomas was bored during the international break. I had to score to prove 'Mull' (Mueller) right," quipped Goretzka when asked about his new nickname. Bayern's defense will also

be boosted by the return of fleet-footed left-back Alphonso Davies and center-back Jerome Boateng, who were both suspended for the game against Leipzig. — AFP

Barca edge closer to Atletico after late Dembele winner

MADRID: Ousmane Dembele volleyed in a 90th-minute winner against Real Valladolid on Monday to fire Barcelona to within a point of Atletico Madrid ahead of next weekend's Clasico in La Liga. Barca looked set for a damaging stalemate at Camp Nou after Atletico's defeat by Sevilla on Saturday but Valladolid had Oscar Plano harshly sent off with 12 minutes left and Dembele snatched a 1-0 victory.

His strike could prove a crucial moment in the Spanish title race, with Barca now breathing down Atletico's necks ahead of Saturday's meeting with Real Madrid, who are three points off the top. If Ronald Koeman's men win at Valdebebas, they will claim first place for 24 hours at least, before a depleted and deflated Atletico play away at Real Betis on Sunday.

They will have to play better after being frustrated by a determined Valladolid side, with Lionel Messi delivering some firm words to his team-mates in the tunnel at half-time. "We have to step it up a gear, we have to play with more rhythm," Messi said. "If not it's going to get complicated for us."

It might have been more complicated had Plano not been shown a red card in the 78th minute, his hack on Dembele from behind giving Barca a crucial advantage for the final stages. "We struggled in the first half, to create scoring opportunities in attack, and also at the back, our pressing was not very good," said Koeman. "I saw a Barca that was a little slow, tired, we did not have control of the game. In the second half we have improved. We have shown that without playing well, we are capable of winning games."

Victory makes it six in a row for them in La Liga, another win - particularly after an unconvincing performance - enhancing the sense that momentum



BARCELONA: Barcelona's French forward Ousmane Dembele (center) celebrates after scoring during the Spanish League football match between FC Barcelona and Real Valladolid FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Monday. — AFP

now lies with Atletico's rivals. Defeat also compounded what Valladolid coach Sergio admitted on Sunday had already been a "sh**ty week" after five of his players tested positive for COVID-19, leaving him without 12 players, with six others injured and one more suspended.

To mark Messi breaking Xavi Hernandez's appearance record for the club, he was presented with a framed shirt before kick-off, which he accepted with his family on the pitch. Messi passed Xavi's previous record of 767 appearances last month, with this his 769th. Valladolid were not just able to compete in the first half, they were probably the better side and could have led when Kenan Kodro's early header struck the bar. Dembele broke through and dragged back for Messi, whose shot

was blocked, while Pedri's long-range effort fizzed through and came back off the post.

But Barcelona were flat, their passing predictable and there was concern in Messi's voice when he told his team-mates to find a different gear in the second half. Valladolid were almost undone by a Messi through ball for Dembele, who held his run but could not finish before the leaping Antoine Griezmann headed the rebound wide.

Barcelona looked more dangerous on the break than in possession and they were lucky to escape a penalty when Oscar Plano poked the ball onto the outstretched hand of Jordi Alba. Koeman made three changes shortly after, Martin Braithwaite, Francisco Trincao and Ronald Araujo replacing Griezmann, Sergio Busquets and Oscar Mingueza. — AFP

Lingard lifts West Ham into fourth

LONDON: Jesse Lingard inspired West Ham to a thrilling 3-2 win at Wolves to move fourth in the Premier League on Monday, as Everton's hopes of a top-four finish were dented in a 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace.

Lingard's stunning form since joining the Hammers on loan from Manchester United in January saw him earn a recall by England manager Gareth Southgate last month. The midfielder further bolstered his case for inclusion in Southgate's squad for Euro 2020 as he ran from inside his own half to slot home his sixth goal in eight West Ham appearances after just six minutes.

Lingard then turned creator for his side's other two goals as the visitors surged into a 3-0 lead inside 38 minutes. His cute flick when penned in at the corner flag teed up Arthur Masuaku to cross for Pablo Fornals to double the Hammers' lead.

Lingard then surged beyond four weak Wolves challenges to free Jarrod Bowen, who fired in at Rui Patricio's near post. "He's playing terrifically well," said West Ham boss David Moyes. "Tonight he looked like a real top player."

West Ham move a point ahead of Chelsea in a tight battle for a place in the Champions League next season. Tottenham and Liverpool are just three points behind Moyes's men with eight games to play. "We have to take it on. I'm hearing people talking about West Ham with a chance of playing in the Champions League," added Moyes. "Nobody would have envisaged that last season. All those big teams up there going for fourth, we are going to try



WOLVERHAMPTON: West Ham United's English midfielder Jesse Lingard runs past Wolverhampton Wanderers' Belgian midfielder Leander Dendoncker on his way to scoring the first goal during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Ham United at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, central England on Monday. — AFP

to compete with them all the way to the end."

West Ham let a three-goal lead slip in their last outing as Arsenal battled back to draw 3-3 at the London Stadium two weeks ago and they nearly made the same mistake. Leander Dendoncker kick-started the Wolves fightback with a towering header from Adama Traore's cross just before half-time.

Substitute Fabio Silva then found the far corner

22 minutes from time to set up a grandstand finish. This time the Hammers held out, but their top-four challenge could be impacted by a couple of significant injuries. Declan Rice missed his first Premier League game of the season with a knee injury that is expected to keep the England midfielder out for a month and Michail Antonio limped off in the first-half with a hamstring problem. — AFP

Can PSG avenge last year's Champions League final loss?

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain are seeking revenge for their defeat in last season's final when they renew acquaintances with Bayern Munich in the Champions League last night. This week, but the French giants appear to have gone backwards since then despite the arrival of Mauricio Pochettino as coach.

News of Robert Lewandowski's absence for the quarter-final first leg at the Allianz Arena tonight has understandably been met with some delight in Paris, especially with Neymar recovering fitness following his latest lay-off.

Nevertheless, PSG did not need Neymar when they delivered their signature performance of the campaign so far to beat Barcelona 4-1 away in the last round. Marco Verratti did play then, and the Italian playmaker's absence in Munich following a positive COVID-19 test could be a major problem for Pochettino.

The Argentine, a former PSG captain, was appointed by the Qatar-owned club in January with the difficult brief of doing better than his



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe warms up prior to the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain (PSG) and Lille (LOSC) at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris, on Saturday. — AFP

sacked predecessor, Thomas Tuchel. Under Tuchel, the Parisians won every domestic trophy in France last season before reaching the Champions League final for the first time.

In some ways there is more pressure on PSG now than there was for that 1-0 loss to Bayern in Lisbon last August. Getting to the final of Europe's elite club competition was a big step forwards, but going out in the quarter-finals now would be a major setback for PSG and Pochettino, especially as they are trailing in Ligue 1.

The former Tottenham Hotspur coach told AFP in an interview last month that he would need time to make his mark at the Parc des Princes and that he would be unable to make the changes he wants until the next pre-season.

The 49-year-old, who oversaw a 7-2 home defeat by Bayern in one of his last games with Spurs, sought to emphasize the point last weekend, telling Le Parisien: "You can judge me from next season." In the meantime, he added: "If we win the Champions League, or the French Cup, or Ligue 1, our influence will have been minimal. As will be the case if we win nothing. It will mainly be down to the players." — AFP

France chases medals from 1904 Olympics

Corey considered American after competing as part of Chicago club

MEURSAULT: It has taken 117 years, but long-distance runner Albert Corey may finally be nearing home, bringing his two Olympic silver medals with him. Corey was declared an American by the organizers when he won silver in the marathon at the 1904 Olympics in St Louis, Missouri. But now the French want him, and his medals, back.

A local councillor in his home town of Meursault is seeking to correct the record, asking the French Olympic Committee to press the issue with the International Olympic Committee. Clement Genty, a councillor, engineer and amateur historian holds up a faded black and white photo, in which Corey looks like the archetypal amateur in his oversized sleeveless vest, crumpled shorts and laced leather shoes.

Yet this penniless son of Burgundian winegrowers collected what should have been France's only Olympic medals of the 1904 Games. "A beautiful story," says Genty. "I learned of his existence in a newspaper and did some research."

Absent without leave

Corey was born in Meursault in 1878, the year that the village became the first in the Cote d'Or area to be hit by phylloxera, which ravaged the vines. Etienne Corey, Albert's winemaker father moved to the Paris suburbs and in 1896, Albert enlisted in the French army.

There he discovered a talent for endurance running. He broke the 160km record in 1899 but on January 2, 1903, he went absent without leave. A year later, he turned up as a strike-breaker in the huge Chicago slaughterhouses. Getting into local athletics was not easy for a man with broken English who had arrived in Chicago, The Washington Times wrote in 1905, "practically a tramp".

When he learned that the Olympics were going to be held on American soil, he said he had run the "Paris Marathon" in 1900. This was true, but he played on the confusion with the Olympic Marathon

of the same year to make people believe that he had participated in a much more prestigious event.

Strychnine

The ploy worked and he went to St Louis representing the First Regiment Athletic Association of Chicago. Because the St Louis Games were so hard and expensive to reach from outside North America, they attracted few international entrants. Corey would have been the only Frenchman.

"But he belonged to an American club. He was therefore considered American, according to the rules of the time," Genty told to AFP. These were the first Olympics at which gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded.

The marathon was run in the hottest part of a sweltering late August day over a hilly, dusty course that, because the race distance had not yet been standardized, was 40km long. With only one water stop along the course, more than half of the 32 participants dropped out. Corey, on the other hand, boasted "I could have done one more lap". He crossed the line third but the 'winner', Fred Lorz, was disqualified for hitching a lift in a car.

Gold instead went to British-born American Thomas Hicks who, fuelled by strychnine mixed with brandy, completed the course in 3hrs 28min 53 sec to beat Corey by six minutes. Corey was almost 13 minutes ahead of the bronze medalist. Corey also won a silver with four Americans in a team that won a 20-mile relay — although he is not referred to as American in the records for this one and the medal was assigned to a 'mixed' team.

'Funny story'

The US media was under no illusion that Corey was anything other than French. They hailed the "success story" of this "Frenchman", a "slaughterhouse worker", who became the "New Star for Marathon".

In October, 1908, the Buffalo Evening Times wrote: "It must be nice to train like Corey. The



ABZAC: Clement Genty, associate researcher at the National School of Arts and Crafts (Ensam) points at copies of a picture of Albert Corey, double medalist at the 1904 Olympics, in Abzac, Southwestern France, on March 31, 2021. — AFP

Frenchman who won the Marathon race declared that he owed his success to having trained on champagne (sic). Olympic historians have long classified Corey as French but his marathon medal is credited to the United States and the IOC appears unwilling to change that.

"There is no question of changing the country to which these medals are awarded," its press office told AFP. Corey's bid to win another medal at the 1908 Olympics in London failed, however, when he declined France's invitation to represent them in favor of opting to run for the US, who then proceeded not to invite him.

He won the 1908 Chicago Marathon but the following year, Corey was hit by a car and never regained his former level of performance. He returned to France in the summer of 1910 and resumed a military career. He died in 1926 in Paris, probably of tuberculosis.

His great-grandson Serge Canaud, 69, learned of Corey's unknown past, thanks to a phone call from Genty. "I was stunned," he told AFP from the small Jura village of Moirans-en-Montagne, where he is living in retirement. "I've never heard of this in our family: America and the Games. We knew nothing about it. It's a funny story." — AFP



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