



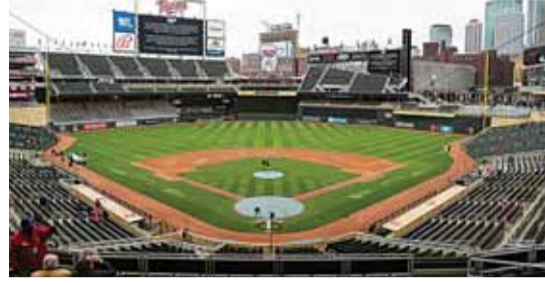
4 We pray pandemic will end this year: Palestinian envoy



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RAMADAN QUIZ 2021

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Assembly drama continues as guards called in chamber

Opposition MPs insist Premier must be grilled



KUWAIT: MPs react during the session in the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly guards were yesterday ordered to enter the chamber to prevent possible clashes between lawmakers as political drama continued in the National Assembly forcing Speaker Marzouk Al-Ghanem to adjourn yet another session.

Almost all opposition MPs went up to the podium to prevent taking a vote ordered by the Speaker on a motion regarding a decision to suspend grillings against the Prime Minister until the end of 2022. As the Assembly secretary general began taking the votes, opposition MPs went to the podium to stop him saying the motion is illegal and should not continue. The Speaker then called the guards to protect the secretary general who continued taking the votes.

Despite heated protests by the opposition, Ghanem said the voting was completed and that 33 MPs voted for the motion and the rest were considered as having objected because they refused to vote. The trouble began as the Assembly started to debate grillings. Ghanem asked MPs to proceed with the grilling against the health minister but the opposition objected saying there are three grillings against the Prime Minister before that.

The Speaker however told MPs that two weeks ago the Assembly decided to suspend grillings against the premier

for 18 months. Opposition MPs insisted that the decision was illegal and should be considered null and void. He then ordered voting on a resolution stating that the decision was illegal but the opposition MPs said the resolution itself is illegal. Ghanem at this point adjourned the session for the day. During the session, opposition MPs demanded that the Speaker should add to the agenda a motion that calls on his dismissal from the post for violating the constitution and other laws.

Justice Minister Abdullah Al-Roumi insisted that the motion breaches the constitution which clearly states that the speaker's duration is for four years and there are no clauses for his removal. Ghanem then asked the Assembly to vote on whether to add the motion to the agenda and 32 MPs rejected against 28 who approved it. Opposition MP Saleh Al-Mutairi said that opposition MPs will re-submit the motion to dismiss the Speaker for breaching the constitution.

MPs were engaged in tense exchanges over what happened in the previous session which was boycotted by over 30 opposition MPs to prevent the new Cabinet from taking the oath. But the session was held and the Assembly passed a decision to stop grillings against the Prime Minister for over 18 months. Opposition MPs said the decision was not taken in accordance with legal procedures and as a result should be considered null and void.

Ramadan Kareem

Ramadan, month of the Quran

By Dr Teresa Leshner

One of the distinguishing features of Islam is its Holy Book, the first verses of which were revealed in the month of Ramadan, 1455 lunar years ago (610 AD). During the course of 23 years, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received Quranic verses as spoken addresses from the Creator - the Quran is considered the speech of God in the Arabic language. Prophet Muhammad then recited the verses so that they could be memorized verbatim, and they were also recorded in writing. Before he died, Prophet Muhammad specified the order of verses and the division of chapters, according to divine instruction. The original Quran is still preserved until today with precise pronunciation, with the Arabic language developing to represent it phonetically. It is the only revelation or divine book that contains the pure words of God without being rephrased by His messengers or any other human being.

The Quran is addressed to all mankind. Sometimes Muhammad is specifically addressed with instructions such as "They ask you about... Say [to them]..." Muhammad is also encouraged and sometimes gently reproached in the Quran. Believers are addressed with specific instructions on how to achieve both temporal and eternal success. And mankind in general is addressed with invitations to believe in God and mold life around that belief, and they are informed of the consequences of accepting or rejecting God's invitation.

The Quran's purpose is to inform people of a reality beyond their five senses and their perceptions of space and time, and to teach moral lessons and develop spirituality. With the additional perspective it offers, the Quran also invites people to adopt a lifestyle that ensures ultimate happiness and success. Finally, through stories and instruction, it describes the beliefs and practices that are essential to achieve that state.

The verses of the Quran were revealed to address particular situations, to relate historical
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Muslims start Ramadan under shadow of virus

JAKARTA: Surging coronavirus cases in many parts of the world overshadowed the start of the holy month of Ramadan yesterday with festivities curtailed by contagion fears.

Europe, the worst-hit continent, passed the threshold of one million coronavirus deaths, while South Asian countries battle a spiraling outbreak of the disease that has crippled the global economy. The total number of virus deaths is approaching 3 million, according to an AFP tally of official data, as the World Health Organization warned infections are rising exponentially despite efforts aimed at stopping them.

From Indonesia to Egypt, many

Muslims around the world started Ramadan after religious leaders confirmed the month of fasting would begin yesterday though restrictions on worshippers varied from country to country.

Jakarta's newly-renovated Istiqlal Mosque-Southeast Asia's largest-welcomed congregants for the first time on Monday night after more than a year of closure because of the pandemic. Mohamad Fathi, a resident of the Indonesian capital, told AFP this year's Ramadan was happier than in 2020, when people were banned from taking part in taraweeh (evening) prayers.

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Dubai drops 'curtain' rule for restaurants

DUBAI: Dubai restaurants are no longer required to shield passersby from the sight of food during Ramadan fasting hours, according to authorities in the Gulf emirate, where the Muslim holy month began yesterday. "Restaurants in the emirate can choose whether or not to

place curtains or cover their facades for serving food during fasting hours," the Department of Economic Development said in a statement.

"The new circular modifies the practice followed previously in the emirate, which required restaurants and other food outlets serving food during fasting hours to place curtains and screens." The emirate depends heavily on tourism and services, which took a severe hit amid the coronavirus pandemic. The new measure, announced Monday, comes as Dubai seeks to re-energize its economy by opening its doors to tourists and accommodating

the 90 percent of its population who are foreigners, many of them non-Muslim. Dubai, which is part of the United Arab Emirates, is known for its palm-shaped islands, decadent luxury hotels and Instagram-friendly party scene. It was one of the first destinations to reopen to tourism last year, becoming a magnet for visitors escaping stringent COVID-19 restrictions abroad. The UAE, considered one of the more open-minded Gulf nations, late last year revamped an array of laws in a social liberalization drive designed to burnish its progressive brand. — AFP

Iran to 'enrich uranium up to 60% purity'

TEHRAN: Iran warned yesterday it will start enriching uranium up to 60 percent purity, two days after an explosion it blamed on Israel damaged its enrichment plant in Natanz. The announcement cast a shadow over ongoing multinational talks in Vienna aimed at salvaging the tattered 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. Tehran has written to the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency to announce "that

Iran will start 60 percent enrichment," the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Such a move would bring Iran closer to the 90 percent purity threshold for military use. Under the nuclear deal, Iran had committed to keep enrichment to 3.67 percent.

The news came two days after an explosion knocked out power at Iran's main nuclear facility of Natanz in central Iran which Iran blamed on its arch-enemy Israel and labeled an act of "terrorism". Israel, which did not claim responsibility for the act of sabotage, is strongly opposed to US President Joe Biden's efforts to revive the nuclear agreement, which Donald Trump abandoned in 2018.

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MOSUL, Iraq: Children pose for a photo in front of a large graffiti depicting cultural elements including mosques, churches, old window lattices of the old town of Iraq's northern city of Mosul on the first night of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan yesterday during a celebration hosted by a local cultural NGO. — AFP



TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (right) and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (left) posing for a photo with exchanged documents during their meeting at the ministry headquarters yesterday. — AFP

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad

Sheikh Nawaf congratulates Saudi King on advent of Ramadan



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir on Monday phoned Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to congratulate him on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. During the call, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf wished the Saudi King everlasting wellbeing and the Saudi Kingdom and its people more progress and welfare under the wise leadership of King Salman. King Salman also congratulated His Highness Sheikh Nawaf on the advent of Ramadan, wishing him everlasting wellness. He also wished Kuwait success to achieve all its aspirations of progress and development under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf.

His Highness the Amir also congratulated, via

phone, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said of Oman on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. In the call, His Highness the Amir wished Sultan Haitham continued good health and further progress and prosperity to Oman under his wise leadership. Sultan Haitham thanked the Kuwaiti Amir on his gesture which embodied the strong bonds between the two brotherly countries and their people. The Sultan wished His Highness the Amir everlasting wellbeing and more progress and welfare for Kuwait under his wise leadership. His Highness the Amir exchanged a similar phone call with Omani Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir congratulated, via phone, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and UAE Deputy Supreme Commander Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. In his call, His Highness the Amir wished Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed abundance of health and further progress and prosperity for UAE

under the wise leadership of UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince thanked His Highness the Amir on the call which reflected the strong bonds linking the two nations. He also wished him everlasting wellbeing and Kuwait more progress and welfare under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf.

His Highness the Crown Prince also received a phone call from Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed, congratulating him on advent of the holy month of Ramadan. The Emirati Crown Prince wished Sheikh Mishal everlasting wellbeing and Kuwait further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Crown Prince thanked Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed for his kind words that embodied the historical and distinguished bonds between the two countries. He wished him abundance of health and more progress and prosperity for the UAE.

Furthermore, His Highness the Crown Prince received a phone call from Bahrain Crown Prince

and Prime Minister Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, congratulating him on advent of the holy month of Ramadan. In his call, the Bahraini Crown Prince wished Sheikh Mishal everlasting wellbeing and Kuwait further progress and prosperity under His Highness the Amir's wise leadership. His Highness the Crown Prince thanked Sheikh Salman for his kind words that embodied the historical and distinguished bonds between the two countries and wished him abundance of health and Bahrain more progress and prosperity.

Separately, His Highness the Amir received a phone call from Governor of the Saudi Tabuk region Prince Fahad bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, greeting on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. Prince Fahad expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes for His Highness the Amir and Kuwait on the occasion. His Highness the Amir thanked Prince Fahad on this call, wishing him everlasting wellness. His Highness the Crown Prince also received a similar phone call from Prince Fahad. — KUNA

27K Kuwaitis work in SMEs

KUWAIT: A report prepared by the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) said small and medium business in Kuwait contribute around 3 percent of the gross domestic product. The report indicated the share of small and medium businesses from

banks' financing in Kuwait reached 4.6 percent. The report titled "For the Sake of Kuwait, Let Us Support Small Projects Cleanly", said less than 7 percent of Kuwaiti manpower (around 27,000 Kuwaitis) work in the small and medium projects sector. It said Kuwait occupied 83rd place out of 190 countries last year for ease of business.

The report showed 40 percent of small and medium projects operate in the wholesale, retail, hotel and restaurant sectors, while 33 percent are in

the construction and industry sectors. It said the average time of evaluating a project and approving it at the national fund is 33 days, compared to 45 stipulated in the law. The report said the importance of the small projects sector is in its close link to sustainable development, its vital role in invigorating the economy, creation of job opportunities and enhancing services, besides the ideal use of local resources and improving the standard of living.

It is not possible to reach an attractive invest-

ment environment for pioneering businessmen without creating a sound investment atmosphere that is free of corruption organizationally, administratively and procedurally. It said there are several good practices to do business, most notably to ease government procedures necessary to start a business, in addition to activating the accountability tool and involving pioneering businessmen in it, in addition to educating the civil society about the risks of corruption in general.

News in brief

Child dies in hit-and-run

KUWAIT: Criminal police were able to solve the case of a hit and run during which a Syrian boy lost his life, as the driver was identified and arrested in his Farwaniya home. The father of the 4-year-old boy told police his son died after he was run over by a motorist, who fled. Eyewitness accounts and surveillance cameras helped identify the Egyptian driver, who was found at his home. He said the child ran in front of him quickly and he could not stop, adding he was scared and confused. Meanwhile, a 34-year-old Kuwaiti was killed in a motorcycle accident on Kabb bridge. — Al-Anbaa

Egg shortage

KUWAIT: The egg shortage crisis continues, two weeks after thousands of chickens were destroyed at Kuwaiti farms due to bird flu. This led to a reduction in egg production that reached around 700,000 eggs daily, while the daily consumption locally is nearly 2 million eggs, with a production rate of over one billion eggs annually. Vendor Abu Ali said he sells Turkish eggs. He imported 800 cartons on Saturday and all were sold for KD 1.200 per tray. Local small eggs are sold for KD 0.900 per tray, while Jordanian eggs are sold for KD 1.200 per tray. Abu Ali said demand is on the rise, while supply covers around only 50 to 60 percent of demand. He said the commerce ministry allows imports from Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and UAE, and subsidies are offered to importers of KD 1 per box. There is a ban on export of eggs to safeguard local production and prevent price rises, but the market has still not recovered. — Al-Rai

Oil gains 17 cents

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil gained 17 cents during Monday's trading sessions to close at \$62.06 per barrel (pb) compared with \$61.89 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent crude also edged 33 cents higher to \$63.28 pb and West Texas Intermediate rose 38 cents to \$59.70 pb. — KUNA

Iran to 'enrich uranium up...

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The accord between Iran and the UN Security Council's permanent members plus Germany promised Iran relief from punishing sanctions in return for agreeing to limits on its nuclear program.

Iran has always denied it is seeking a nuclear bomb, while Israel has vowed it will stop the Islamic republic from ever building an atom bomb, which it considers an existential threat to the Jewish state.

The mysterious blast at Natanz has sharply heightened tensions between the two powers already engaged in a shadow war on lands and seas across the Middle East, with Iran on Monday vowing to take "revenge". "If (Israel) thought that they can

stop Iran from following up on lifting sanctions from the Iranian people, then they made a very bad gamble," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned. Iran would make the enrichment plant "more powerful" by using advanced centrifuges, he added. IRNA added that the Islamic republic will also add "1,000 centrifuges with 50 percent more capacity to the machines present in Natanz, in addition to replacing" the ones damaged during an attack on the nuclear facility. According to Iran's English-language Press TV, the enrichment jump will start today.

After talks with his visiting Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, Zarif also warned Israel's ally the United States it would gain no extra leverage in Vienna through "acts of sabotage" and sanctions. "The Americans should know that neither sanctions nor acts of sabotage will give them negotiation tools and these acts will only make the situation more difficult for them," Zarif told a joint news conference. The White House has denied all US involvement in the Natanz incident. Unsources Israeli media reports attributed it to Israeli security services.

Muslims start Ramadan

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"Last year it was gloomy as we were not allowed to go to the mosque for taraweeh prayers," he said. "But this year, I am so happy finally we can go to the mosque to perform taraweeh prayers at the mosque

Ramadan, month of...

Continued from Page 1

information and to codify Islamic law. Common subjects are descriptions of God, stories of prophets, descriptions of believers and disbelievers, promises of God's rewards, especially Paradise, warnings about consequences for rebellion toward God, including Hellfire, instructions for personal conduct, guidelines for familial and social relations, and a framework for international relations.

Being an oral revelation first and foremost, devout Muslims learn how to recite the holy scripture as it was revealed. Verbatim memorization is common and care

although we are under strict health protocol during the prayer." The government of the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation has imposed limits, with mosques only able to host congregants at a maximum of 50 percent capacity. Worshippers are required to wear masks and bring their own prayer mats. Several regions in Indonesia have banned gathering for fast-breaking and religious leaders have encouraged people to pray at home in certain zones where virus cases are spiking. "This is like happiness in the middle of restrictions," Fathi added. "This year's Ramadan is very meaningful for me after last year we did not feel the joy of

is taken to reproduce the exact pronunciation and vocal duration of each letter. Arabic is a rich language, and words of the Quran have great depth and breadth; therefore, they also study the meaning of the words, verses and chapters, and there are encyclopedic works of this nature. In addition, Muslims study the occasions of revelation, the relation of the holy text to prophetic traditions, and the application of principles by renowned scholars and rulers. The study of the Quran develops moral reasoning and spirituality first and foremost, as well as thought processes of logic, sequencing, deduction, intuition, assimilation and abstraction. Reciting and memorizing it develops memory, enunciation and self-expression.

The printed Quran is revered as a holy book and is treated with respect. It is not considered casual reading or handled like an ordinary book. There is only one version of the Quran, and careful measures are taken that prints and reprints of the Quran in Arabic

The New York Times, quoting unnamed US and Israeli intelligence officials, also said there had been "an Israeli role" in the attack in which an explosion had "completely destroyed" the power system that fed the plant's "underground centrifuges". Quoting another unnamed intelligence source on Tuesday, the NYT added an "explosive device had been smuggled" into the site and "detonated remotely," taking out primary and backup power.

Lavrov, during his Tehran visit, stressed Russian support for Iran's position. He said Moscow still expected Washington to return to the nuclear deal with Tehran, but criticized moves he said complicated the Vienna talks. "We are counting on the fact that we will be able to save the agreement and that Washington will finally return to full and complete implementation of the corresponding UN resolution," Lavrov told the joint press conference. Europe's "inability to implement" its nuclear deal commitments and "bowing to America's pressure" shows it is "slowly losing its relevance in international relations", Zarif said. — AFP

Ramadan at all."

Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest shrines, announced that the holy fasting month was to start yesterday, though authorities said only people immunized against COVID-19 will be allowed to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage from the start of Ramadan.

In Egypt, restrictions were much less stringent than last year as people took to the streets to mark the start of the fasting month. Pakistanis will only begin fasting today after rival moon-sighting committees agreed to a nationally applied start of what is called "Ramazan" in the country. — AFP

are authenticated by authoritative bodies for accuracy. Since the Quran is an Arabic-language literary masterpiece both technically and aesthetically, it is impossible to portray its rhythm, rhyme, depth of denotation and subtlety of connotation in another language. There are many translations of the Quran, but we cannot call a translation "the Quran" but only an approximation of the meaning of the Quran. The best English translations have the accompanying original text in Arabic so that it can be consulted.

Since Ramadan is the month of the Quran, everyone should have their copy handy and complete reading it in this holy month.

Courtesy of the TIES Center: the TIES Center aims at empowering Kuwait's experts through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and inter-faith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

Local

Zain's annual Ramadan campaign spreads messages of sharing, giving

Company kick-started campaign in partnership with many entities

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of its annual campaign for the holy month of Ramadan, which kick-started this year in partnership with many social and charitable organizations in the country. The campaign features a wide range of charitable, entertainment, esports, and cultural programs throughout the holy month.

As the pandemic situation continues, Zain was not able to pursue its aspirations of sharing the joys of Ramadan with the community as it usually does every year via an extensive array of social initiatives, programs, and visits. Nevertheless, Zain has sought to select special initiatives that can inspire the values of giving and sharing while abiding by health measures to protect the safety of the community.

Zain's program of various charitable and humanitarian initiatives planned for the holy month comes in line with the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy that closely focuses on giving back to the community. The company carefully selected the activities and programs that most presented an added value to all segments of the society in light of the current circumstances due to the pandemic. In this report, Zain showcases the initiatives and programs it will undertake during Ramadan this year:

Ramadan supplies

Zain already kicked-off its Ramadan campaign before the beginning of the Holy Month by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) in collaboration with its Strategic Partner, the Kuwait Food Bank. The initiative aimed at catering to underprivileged families' needs before the arrival of the Holy Month and during the pandemic. Zain delivered the supplies to the Kuwait Food Bank storage facility at Sulabiya with the presence of Kuwait Food Bank Vice Chairman Meshal Al-Ansari. This year, over 10,000 individuals are set to benefit from the supplies provided by Zain, which were distributed via special drive-thru routes that were built for this purpose in an effort to abide by health measures and protect everyone from the danger of infection.

Zain also offered vouchers in collaboration with Oncost, one of Kuwait's biggest grocery markets, to give each family the opportunity to choose specific supplies as per their different personal needs. The company delivered the vouchers to a number of non-profit organizations, including the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) with the presence of KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers with the presence of the Assistant Undersecretary for Social Care Musalam Al-Subaie. Vouchers were also offered to the Kuwait Food Bank and the Patients Support Fund Society.

Zain Quran App

As it does every year, Zain offers its free Quran App, which the company gifts to its customers during the holy month of Ramadan. The app offers the best Quran reading experience on iOS, Apple Watch, and Android devices. The app features a user-friendly interface and many great features, including reading all pages of the Holy Quran, downloading and listening to the Holy Quran in the voices of over 20 famous reciters, read Tafseer (interpretations) to understand the meaning of verses, searching the whole text of

the Holy Quran, as well as synchronizing usage between multiple devices.

The app also includes a dark mode feature for easy reading in the dark, prayer times and Athan notifications, Qibla direction, and much more. Customers can download the app for free by searching 'Zain Quran' in the App Store and Google Play Store.

Partnership with Give

This year, Zain continues its fruitful partnership with Give, which started last Ramadan to encourage the spirit of giving during the Holy Month. Give is the only online platform of its kind for donations in Kuwait, and the non-profit aims at facilitating donations and encouraging giving by connecting donors with registered and certified charities in Kuwait. The platform also helps donors look for charity projects and opportunities in one place, as well as process their donations safely via a secure payment gateway.

All the charities listed under Give are certified and licensed by the official authorities in Kuwait, and there are currently 162 various charitable projects featured on the platform. The current list of certified charities includes: the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Direct Aid, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society, Rahma International Society, International Islamic Charity Organization, Rohamaa Baynahum Charity, Global Charity Association for Development, Al-Sidra Association for Psychological Care of Cancer Patients, Al-Najat Charity, and more.

Give includes many features that can benefit donors, including ease of access to charities and their projects through the website or smartphone app, using filters to look for certain projects, comparing projects between different charities, reading full details about each project to make an informed decision, view donation history and receive notifications about project updates or reports, and more.

KUWAIT TV App

As the Holy Month of Ramadan approached, Zain partnered with the Ministry of Information to develop KUWAIT TV, an all-new app that features the latest streaming technologies. Through this partnership, Zain takes Kuwait TV into the digital platforms era by offering live streaming and Video on Demand (VOD) services for 9 TV channels and 11 radio channels.

During the app's development phase, Zain was keen on using the most advanced world-class streaming technologies, enabling users to live-stream the Ministry of Information's TV and radio channels with a single tap and in ultra-high quality. In addition, the app features a Video on demand (VOD) service that allows them to choose and enjoy their favorite selected shows instantly from anywhere and at any time, including the most-viewed Ramadan shows.

Users can now download the KUWAIT TV app from the App Store for iOS devices and the Play Store for Android devices. The app features 9 TV channels: Kuwait, KTV2, Al-Arabi, Ethraa, Al-Qurain, Stay Home, Sports, Sports 2, and Al-Majlis. The app also features 11 radio channels: Holy Quran, Kuwait FM, Public Program, OFM, Super Station, Al-Shabiya, Program 2, EASY 92.5, and Retro Arabic Music.

'Stories with Hamad'

Every Ramadan, Zain is keen on diversifying the content of its campaign to include cultural and recre-



Zain's Ramadan campaign centers around sharing and giving during the holy month.

ational programs. This year, Zain sponsors 'Stories with Hamad', a talk-show hosted by Kuwaiti media personality Hamad Al-Ali on atv. Ali redefines the talk-show genre with a refreshed perspective by addressing many humanitarian, historical, and art topics that meet the interests of all age groups.

Zain's sponsorship of this show comes as part of its keenness on supporting and encouraging the creative ideas of Kuwait's youth in all areas, including art and entertainment on social and traditional media channels. Such programs receive great interactivity from audiences during the holy month of Ramadan, especially that this show aims at highlighting a number of issues that are of great interest to the Kuwaiti community.

Esports championships

With the increase of interest in esports recently, especially with lockdown measures imposed by the pandemic, Zain saw the importance of launching a number of esports championships via its new platform Zain esports during the holy month of Ramadan. This year, the biggest titles in gaming are set to feature in Zain's competitive championships, including PUBG, Fortnite, and FIFA21.

The championships will give amateur and profes-

sional gamers the opportunity to win various prizes in a fair and competitive environment, as Zain ensures that all its esports tournaments must be held in accordance with UNICEF's guidelines to ensure Child Online Safety and prevent cyberbullying, hence creating a safe space for all interactions between the players.

Zain also sponsors Duwaween, an app for playing cards tournaments, which is set to feature a tournament where Zain will offer many valuable prizes during the holy month. The app was developed by Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and is considered the first of its kind in the GCC and Arab region. The app reached its climax with more than 350,000 users competing in the paper games of Kout, Balot, and Hand. The app is available on all main smartphone operating systems: iOS, Android, and Huawei.

Nutrition tips with Diet Ninja

During the Holy Month of every year, Zain is keen on supporting health and sports programs to encourage adopting a healthy diet and exercising during the Holy Month. This year, Zain partners with Kuwaiti social media personality Fahad Al-Yahya, known as Diet Ninja, to broadcast recorded messages on the most important nutrition tips during Ramadan.

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am until April 22, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed to deliver food from 7:00 pm to 3:00 am every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day 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 7:00 pm to 12:00 am 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

Salmyia 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

Rumaithiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045

Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500

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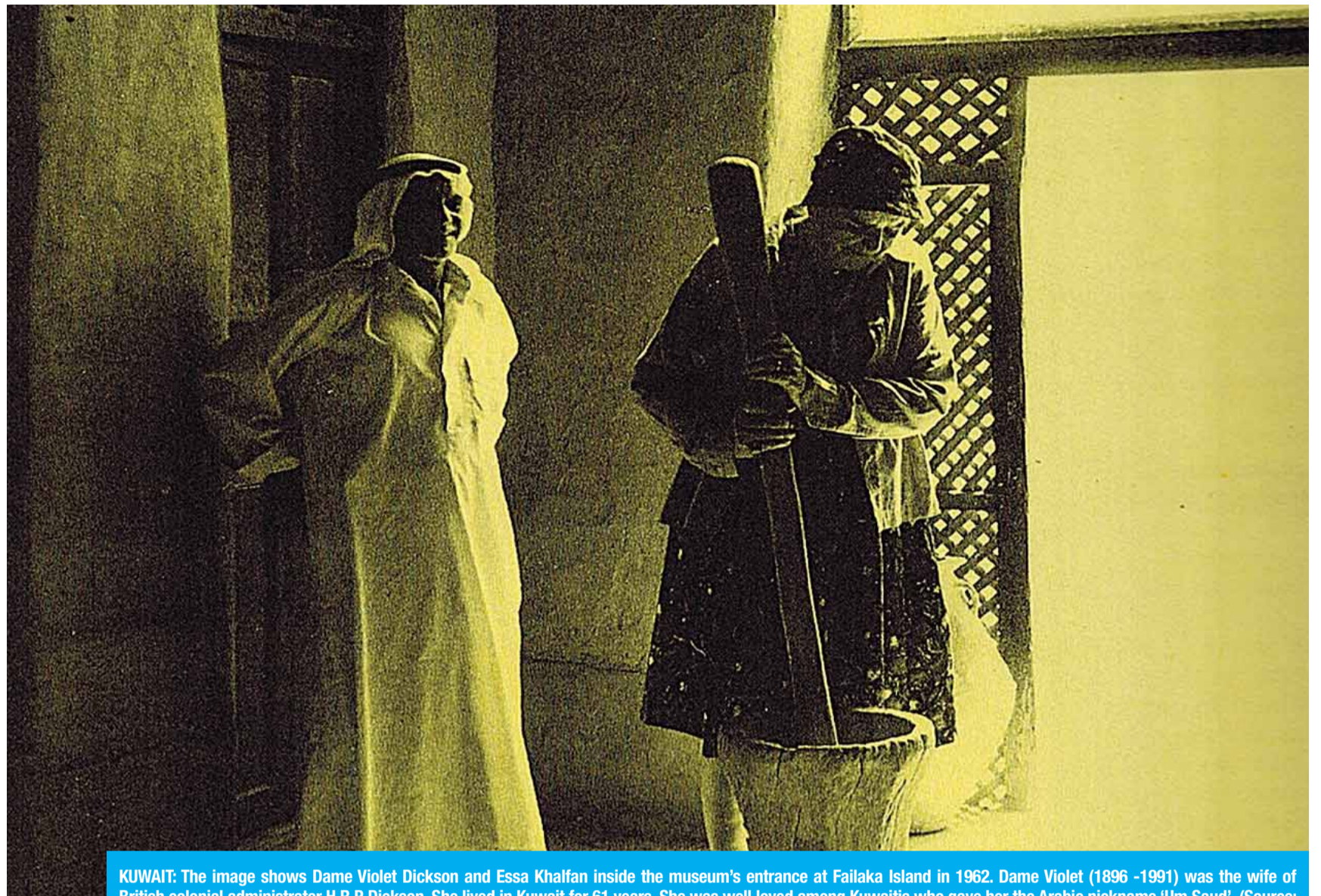
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Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: The image shows Dame Violet Dickson and Essa Khalfan inside the museum's entrance at Failaka Island in 1962. Dame Violet (1896 -1991) was the wife of British colonial administrator H R P Dickson. She lived in Kuwait for 61 years. She was well loved among Kuwaitis who gave her the Arabic nickname 'Um Saud'. (Source: 'The Voice of Oud: A Story of Kuwait' by Jehan S Rajab, 1995, London. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakarja Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

COVID infections, deaths still high: Health Minister

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah lamented that the number of coronavirus infections and fatalities in Kuwait are still high. In his briefing during the Cabinet's weekly meeting Monday chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the minister warned that the situation is delicate and urged all the public to register to get the vaccine to rein in the virus. The cabinet called on citizens and residents to adhere to social distancing rules and other coronavirus precautionary measures, particularly avoiding crowds, to stop the spread of coronavirus and maintain the safety of all. The Cabinet also approved the Health Ministry's request to hire a fourth batch of Pakistani doctors, nurses and medical workers.



Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah

The Ministry of Health had Monday announced 1,635 new coronavirus infections and five related deaths in the past 24 hours, taking the total cases up to 248,729 and deaths to 1,412 respectively. Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad pointed out that 1,316 people had been cured of the virus over the same period, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 232,556. He added that the number of people hospitalized with the virus stood then at 14,761, with 228 of them in intensive care units. He renewed calls for the public to abide by health precautions to curb the spread of the virus. —KUNA

Ramadan Diwaniya

We pray this year will be end of pandemic: Palestinian Ambassador

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Various ambassadors in Kuwait were interviewed by Kuwait Times to learn more about their local traditions and culture during Ramadan. We also asked about the current coronavirus situa-

tions in their respective countries and how they are handling and reacting to this pandemic. The following are excerpts from Kuwait Times interview with Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub:

Caught by surprise

Kuwait Times: What are your thoughts and views about this pandemic, seeing the current situation of both countries - Kuwait and Palestine?

Rami Tahboub: We were all caught by surprise by this plague? No one! But individual approach per country varies. In Kuwait, they are decisive and serious about the coronavirus and I congratulate Kuwait for being so protective of its population. They implemented lockdowns and curfews to protect the entire country and they should be praised for doing so. Kuwait in general has been leading the fight in the region. Here they started vaccinations in December last year. They will vaccinate everyone and for free.

As for our country, we have been devastated by this virus. Vaccines arrived only a few days back, but we were already counting the deaths. By March 22, we have around 2,400 deaths and around 224,000 infected. This is a very sad part of the history of mankind and we will never forget it. Hopefully by summer, most Palestinians will be vaccinated to return to normal.

Kuwait Times: How will Ramadan celebrations differ this year?

Tahboub: Last year the pandemic was beginning when we celebrated Ramadan. Last Ramadan was difficult for everyone because people had no idea of this virus. We were all anxious and afraid. Last year we did not celebrate anything. It was strange for everyone. Kuwait has been celebrating Ramadan in a very unique way - it is festive with so much celebration. Kuwaitis meet people in diwanis, but this did not happen last year.

Kuwait has a warm and cozy atmosphere in Ramadan. I don't know what's in store for us this Ramadan, but maybe it will be the same as last year. The virus is still there and there is no indication yet that it will subside anytime soon. Maybe we will end up again watching TV and enjoying soap operas, but we all pray that this year will be the end of the pandemic.

Kuwait Times: Is your family with you?

Tahboub: Yes, they are all with me - my wife and two daughters. Thanks to Allah for His blessings and keeping us all safe. It is good that in a time like this we are all in one place. Kuwait has been a very good host country for the embassy of Palestine. The population is happy and contented here. This is the most important thing, that we are all satisfied and happy.

Kuwait Times: Usually ambassadors go back to Palestine for Eid - will you celebrate the end of fasting here?

Tahboub: If Ramadan falls in summer, I normally spend the first two weeks here in Kuwait and the rest in Palestine to wish and greet everyone there. Summer is also our vacation time, normally in June or July. If Ramadan falls in winter, I stay here, because children have classes, so I need to be with them. Also in the diplomatic community, we have a regular audience with HH the Amir on the third or fourth day of Ramadan, so I need to be here.

Kuwait Times: When was the first year of your

assignment as ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait?

Tahboub: I came in 2013; I am now in my ninth year as Palestinian ambassador to Kuwait.

Kuwait Times: Do you organize activities for Ramadan for your community in Kuwait?

Tahboub: In normal times, we host several ghabqas for the Palestinian community. We also distribute awards and recognitions to the top 10 Palestinian students in Kuwait. We invite their families and friends and community leaders to celebrate their success with them. This will be the second year that we are not holding this event because of the pandemic.

We also organize charity events for the Palestinian people every year, especially members of the community who do not have enough money or face financial challenges to celebrate Ramadan. So we provide food and financial assistance to them. Normally, we support 150 to 200 Palestinian families. We have celebrations and parties, but they are all suspended now.

Before the pandemic

Kuwait Times: Can you take us back to how you spent Ramadan before the pandemic?

Tahboub: During those years, the work timings of everyone were shortened. At the embassy, we started work at 9 am and ended at 2 pm to give time to prepare for iftar. After that, if I was not invited to any events, I used to go home to my family. I treasure the time during this period to talk to them heart to heart. It's a time for family bonding and rest. I make sure to break the fast at home. After iftar, I normally visit diwanis. Wherever I go, I wish everyone a happy Ramadan. Then I used to go to ghabqas. Traffic during Ramadan is very heavy, but we all accept it.

Kuwait Times: What is special or unique that you see here during Ramadan?

Tahboub: I am fascinated with the Girgian tradition here in Kuwait, where kids visit your home and sing. It is special, as we don't have a similar activity for kids in Palestine. I miss this, as I like seeing kids happy and in a festive mood. I want to see kids coming and singing and asking for candies and nuts.

Kuwait Times: Do you cook? What is your favorite food?

Tahboub: No, I don't cook, but I eat (laughs). My wife cooks for the family - she is the best cook ever. My favorites among Palestinian foods are hummus and falafel. These are daily appetizers. I like lentil soup and zucchini stuffed with rice or meat. I like the chicken and sauces made by my wife, like chicken stuffed with rice and meat. I also like mutabbaq with cheese and nuts with syrup. I like almond juice or tamarind for drinks after consuming all these delicious dishes.

Kuwait Times: Do you pray five times a day?

Tahboub: Yes! If I am in Palestine, I normally visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem for prayers - it has a special place in my heart. I am always blessed whenever I pray there. In Kuwait, I always pray at the mosque near our home. I also visit the Grand Mosque.



Palestinian Ambassador
Rami Tahboub

ISSUE NO: 18409 RAMADAN 2, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

2- Ramadan is observed for how many days?

- A. 33 - 35 Days
 B. 29 - 30 Days
 C. 30 - 31 Days
 D. 28- 29 Days

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date:

Name:

Civil ID:

Tel:

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Merkel govt agrees 'overdue' law on curfews, tougher virus curbs

Myanmar heading towards 'full-blown conflict': UN chief



TOKYO: Protestors hold slogans as they take part in a rally against the Japanese government's decision to release treated water from the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the sea, outside of the prime minister's office in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Japan to release Fukushima water into sea

Move triggers furious regional reaction, fierce opposition from fishing communities

TOKYO: Japan will release more than a million tons of treated water from the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean, the government said yesterday, triggering a furious regional reaction and fierce opposition from local fishing communities. The process is not likely to begin for several years and could take decades to complete, but China quickly slammed the decision as "extremely irresponsible" and South Korea summoned the Japanese ambassador.

Japan's government argues the release is safe because the water is processed to remove almost all radioactive elements and will be diluted. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has endorsed the release, which it says is similar to the disposal of wastewater at nuclear plants elsewhere. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told a ministerial meeting that disposing of the water was an "inevitable task" in the decades-long process of decommissioning the nuclear plant.

He said the release would happen only "after

ensuring the safety levels of the water" and alongside measures to "prevent reputational damage". Around 1.25 million tons of water have accumulated in tanks at the nuclear plant, which was crippled after going into meltdown following the 2011 tsunami. It includes water used to cool the plant, as well as rain and groundwater that seeps in daily.

An extensive pumping and filtration system extracts tons of newly contaminated water each day and filters out most radioactive elements. But local fishing communities fear releasing the water will undermine years of work to restore confidence in their seafood. "They told us that they wouldn't release the water into the sea without the support of fishermen," Kanji Tachiya, who heads a local fisheries cooperative in Fukushima, told NHK ahead of the announcement. "We can't back this move to break that promise and release the water into the sea unilaterally." Plant operator TEPCO will "take thorough measures to prevent bad rumors", said its president Tomoaki Kobayakawa.

'Unique and complex'

China's foreign ministry slammed Japan's decision, saying it had been taken "without regard for domestic and foreign doubts and opposition". "This approach is extremely irresponsible and will seriously damage international public health and safety," it said.

South Korea's foreign ministry also called it "a risk to the maritime environment" and later announced it had summoned Japan's ambassador. The US State Department, however, said Japan had been "transparent about its decision, and appears to have adopted an approach in accordance with globally accepted nuclear safety standards". Debate over how to handle the water has dragged on for years, as space to store it at the site runs out.

A government panel earlier endorsed either diluting the treated water and releasing it into the ocean or releasing it as vapor, and the IAEA says either option is acceptable. "The Japanese government's decision is in line with practice globally, even though

the large amount of water at the Fukushima plant makes it a unique and complex case," IAEA director-general Rafael Mariano Grossi said yesterday, promising to work with Japan throughout the process. Anti-nuclear activist group Greenpeace hit out at Japan's government for having "once again failed the people of Fukushima". "The cabinet's decision failed to protect the environment and neglected the large-scale opposition and concerns of the local Fukushima residents, as well as the neighboring citizens around Japan," said climate and energy campaigner Kazue Suzuki.

The filtration process removes most radioactive elements from the water, but some remains, including tritium. Government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said Tuesday that the water would be diluted to contain tritium at levels far below either domestic or WHO standards, with the IAEA monitoring the process. Experts say the element is only harmful to humans in large doses and with dilution the treated water poses no scientifically detectable risk. — AFP

Going home or staying safe in NE Nigeria, an impossible choice

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: "Boko Haram was in my house!" three-year-old Aisha said with a frown, sat next to her mother Hadiza in a run-down camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Nigeria's northeastern city of Maiduguri. The little girl froze with fear on seeing the jihadists last month before her mother grabbed her and ran. It wasn't even the first time 25-year-old Hadiza fled her hometown of Dikwa to Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. She had already escaped years ago after a Boko Haram attack, joining the more than two million people forced to flee their homes, often more than once, by Nigeria's grinding conflict.

"I never want to go back," said Amina, a 22-year-old woman also from Dikwa. She and Hadiza had only recently returned to the town, where they farm beans and other vegetables, after being told it was safe. But on March 2, heavily armed fighters of the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) overran Dikwa's fortifications.

For little Aisha, who wears a bright pink veil, rivals ISWAP and Boko Haram are the same. Both groups kill, kidnap and rape, forcing people to live in tents far away from their homes. Many of the displaced lack access to the most basic necessities. At



MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: A woman stands between structures Yawuri informal camp on the outskirts of Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. The makeshift camp hosts nearly 2,000 people internally displaced by a decade-long jihadist insurgency in northeast Nigeria. — AFP

Yawuri, a makeshift camp outside Maiduguri home to nearly 2,000 people, "there is no food. Sometimes no food for 24 hours," said a 50-year-old woman, Balu Modu, explaining their daily diet consists of ground millet and green leaves. Outside of Maiduguri, many more live in congested camps in areas that aid workers struggle to reach as they themselves are targeted by the insurgents.

In an effort to help people leave camps and rebuild their lives, Borno state governor Babagana Umara Zulum in 2018 initiated a policy of "voluntary return, resettlement and reintegration" of IDPs to their "homelands". The government has already returned thousands of people and hopes to resettle

"at least 50 percent of IDPs by 2022 and no IDP camps by 2026," according to an official document seen by AFP. But many doubt whether it is safe for people to return home.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, three senior aid workers with international organizations in the country said that they did not believe appropriate conditions for returns were currently in place.

Despite security measures, insurgents have launched repeated assaults on a dozen fortified towns where people had returned. "They're forcing people to towns they have shown they cannot protect," said one aid worker. "It's insane. They are literally pushing them to die." — AFP

Duterte says he will 'waive' COVID vaccine

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said he will "waive" his chance to get a COVID-19 vaccine, arguing elderly people like him should not be prioritized. Just over one million people in the Philippines have received their first shot since the beginning of March—a fraction of the number needed to reach herd immunity in the country of 110 million.

The slow rollout and limited supply have fuelled criticism of the government's handling of the pandemic as a record surge in infections threatens to overwhelm hospitals in the locked-down capital and surrounding provinces. The vaccination campaign initially targeted health-care workers and soldiers, but it has since widened to include the elderly and those with co-morbidities. While many world leaders received their jab in public to encourage others to get inoculated, Duterte said he would forgo the opportunity.

"I will waive. Whoever wants to get my slot, I will give (it to them)," he said in a pre-recorded speech released Monday. "Let's prioritize those who, once they get a vaccine, there's a chance that he would live and live productively," said the 76-year-old, after a two-week absence from the public eye that fuelled speculation he had COVID-19.

"Most of the senior citizens are no longer that productive." Vaccines have been a frequent topic in Duterte's often rambling speeches. His spokesman Harry Roque has previously walked back on his comments. In the past, Duterte has suggested he would be willing to be inoculated in public—after saying he would get it in private. In August, Duterte offered himself up as a guinea pig for the very first jab of the Russian-made vaccine after the Philippines emerged as a frontrunner for overseas clinical trials. Roque said later Duterte would not receive the inoculation until regulators had guaranteed its safety.

Roque said yesterday he hoped the president would change his mind about not getting the vaccine. "Supply is limited. Once supplies come in, maybe that's the time he will get vaccinated," Roque told reporters. Vaccine hesitancy is a significant issue in the Philippines, with a recent survey showing around 60 percent of people unwilling to get vaccinated against COVID-19. — AFP

Ramadan starts in Iran today

TEHRAN: The Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan will begin today in Iran, the office of the Islamic republic's supreme leader announced as the country fights the region's deadliest coronavirus outbreak. "The Ramadan month's crescent was not viewed at dusk on Monday," state news agency IRNA reported yesterday, referring to the search for a crescent moon that heralds the start of the holy month. Therefore "Wednesday, the 25th of Farvardin, will be the first day of the blessed month of Ramadan," it added, quoting a statement from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's office.

The start of Ramadan is set by both lunar calculations and physical

sightings that determine when one month ends and another begins. During Ramadan, observant Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, and traditionally gather with family and friends to break their fast in the evening.

The holy month approaches as Iran is struggling to contain its "fourth wave" of COVID-19 infections and deaths, blamed by officials on a surge in trips made during last month's Persian New Year holidays.

Total cases have spiked above two million with overall fatalities at almost 65,000. On Monday, the health ministry announced 23,311 new cases in 24 hours, a new daily infection record. Health Minister Saeed Namaki on Monday urged the population to stay at home to pray. Group prayers should be held only once a day, "with a minimum number of people, in the



TEHRAN: An Iranian woman wearing a protective mask adjusts her head scarf as she walks on a street in the capital Tehran. The holy month of Ramadan will begin today in Iran, the office of the Islamic republic's supreme leader announced yesterday. — AFP

open air, while observing maximum distance and using masks," he said. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, faced with a deep economic crisis, on

Saturday announced "aid packages" for the month of Ramadan intended for "60 million people" out of Iran's estimated 83 million. — AFP

International

Merkel govt agrees 'overdue' law on curfews, tougher virus curbs

Move aims to end a political tug-of-war between federal govt, regions

BERLIN: The German government agreed yesterday on controversial changes to a national infections control law, handing Berlin more power to impose tougher measures such as night-time curfews to halt the raging coronavirus pandemic. The adjusted law, which still needs to be approved by parliament, would allow Chancellor Angela Merkel's government to impose curfews from 9pm to 5am and close schools and businesses in areas with high infection rates.

Private gatherings and sports will also be subject to tighter restrictions as Germany remains gripped by a dangerous third wave of the pandemic which is putting increased strain on the country's health system. "Our fight against the pandemic has to be more stringent and more decisive," said Merkel yesterday.

The move aims to end a political tug-of-war between the federal government and powerful regions over coronavirus measures, with manoeuvring ahead of September elections adding to the tensions. Currently restrictions are decided on in consultation with Berlin and — in theory — implemented by the federal states. Yet in many cases, regional leaders have failed to put in place shutdown measures which they agreed with Merkel, with some even allowing shops and cinemas to reopen.

Bitter disputes

Regular meetings between Berlin and the regions to set Germany's coronavirus policies have been

marked by bitter disputes and spotty compliance in recent weeks. Most notably, some states have not followed through on an agreement to row back on the easing of measures in areas where the seven-day incidence rate exceeds 100 new infections per 100,000 people. Only one out of Germany's 16 states was reporting an incidence rate below 100 yesterday. The adjusted law agreed by cabinet yesterday would grant Berlin the power to enforce this "emergency brake", which Merkel said was "overdue" given the seriousness of the pandemic.

In hard-hit areas, curfews will be imposed between 9 pm and 5 am, with exceptions for medical emergencies and those leaving their home for professional reasons. Non-essential shops and cultural venues will have to remain closed, while private gatherings will be allowed only between a single household and one other person.

The law would also see Berlin force schools — usually strictly within the remit of the federal states — to revert to virtual teaching if the seven-day incidence rate exceeds 200 cases per 100,000 people. Cabinet also approved a new rule obliging employers to provide a weekly test to people who were unable to work from home.

Yet the changes have been met with skepticism from regional leaders. Lower Saxony's interior minister Boris Pistorius told Die Welt newspaper on Monday that it was a "big mistake to take power from the regions in the middle of a crisis". The



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel leaves after giving a statement in Berlin yesterday amid the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

adjusted law still has to win a two-thirds majority to be fast-tracked through parliament this week, but is expected to pass with support from Merkel's right-left coalition and the opposition Green Party.

Yet the Left Party and liberal FDP have pledged to oppose the law, with FDP leader Christian Lindner telling ARD broadcaster that "you can't shut everyone inside to stop people meeting each other". The controversial move away from Germany's

strict federal structures comes as Europe's biggest economy struggles to contain rising infection rates. Case numbers continue to rise despite cultural venues, restaurants and leisure facilities having been closed for months, with the total number of infections passing the three million mark on Monday. "The third wave has a firm grip on our country. If we wait until all intensive care beds are occupied, it will be too late," said Merkel. — AFP

English variant not linked to more serious infections

PARIS: The English variant of the novel coronavirus does not increase the severity of COVID-19 compared to other strains, according to research published yesterday that also confirmed its increased transmissibility. The variant, known as B117, is now the dominant viral strain across much of Europe, and previous studies had shown it was linked to a higher likelihood of death than normal variants.

But two studies published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases and The Lancet Public Health journals found no evidence that people with B117 experience worse symptoms or a greater risk of developing long COVID than those infected with different variants.

The research found however that the variant was associated with a higher viral load and reproduction rate than normal variants. Authors of the first study looked at data from 341 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 late last year when B117 was running rampant across southeast England.

They found that 58 percent of those patients had B117, while 42 percent had non-B117 COVID-19. Of those infected with B117, 36 percent became severely ill or died, compared with 38 percent of those with non-B117, suggesting that there was no association between B117 and heightened risk of severe infection. — AFP

Pakistan anti-France protests halt COVID oxygen supplies

LAHORE: Thousands of supporters of a Pakistan Islamist party who blocked major roads to protest the arrest of their leader also disrupted critical oxygen supplies for COVID-19 patients, health officials said yesterday. Major intersections remained closed in Lahore, Pakistan's second-biggest city, after the arrest on Monday of Saad Rizvi, the leader of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP).

The party has led calls for the expulsion of the French ambassador, after the government of President Emmanuel Macron expressed support for a magazine's right to republish blasphemous. Yasmin Rashid, a leading health official in Punjab, said the disruption of oxygen supplies during protests Monday night had been a "crisis".

"Please do not block roads for ambulances and for visitors to the hospitals. Some ambulances are carrying oxygen cylinders, which are extremely essential for COVID patients," Rashid said. Punjab pandemic pointman Asad Aslam said several hospitals had faced oxygen shortages Monday night, but the situation had stabilized after roads were cleared by authorities.

Pakistan is in the grip of a deadly third wave of the coronavirus with a shortage of vaccines. The TLP are notorious for days-long road protests which have brought large swathes of Pakistan to a standstill over the years. A party official told AFP that two of their supporters were killed during clashes with security forces on Monday night when police used tear gas and water cannon to break up crowds. Officials have yet to comment on the reported deaths. TLP leader Rizvi was taken into custody hours after calling for an April 20 march on the capital to demand the expulsion of the French ambassador, an ouster the group says the government had already agreed to last year. — AFP

Pacific villagers mull Charles as Prince Philip's successor

YAOHNANEN VILLAGE, Tanna, Vanuatu: Pacific villagers who worship Prince Philip are considering whether his son Charles should be anointed his successor as the remote jungle communities hold a marathon mourning ritual. Chiefs from the villages of Yaohnanen and Yakel on Vanuatu's Tanna island gathered this week to remember Philip, who died last Friday at Windsor Castle at the age of 99.

For the next 100 days, the elders will gather at a clearing shaded by an ancient, massive banyan tree to air thoughts and drink kava—the peppery, mildly intoxicating root drink that is a vital part of important ceremonies in the islands. While most chiefs wear little more than a penis gourd, proceedings unfold with the gravity of a papal conclave, as worshippers mull the future of their spiritual movement without its figurehead Philip. "The connection that we've had with the royal family will endure," chief Jack Malia said. Access to Yaohnanen and Yakel still involves a grueling drive on a pot-holed road running

through lush volcanic jungle, but these days trucks roar along a newly-constructed highway just a few kilometers away.

Such modern developments hold little interest for the villagers though as they proudly maintain a kustom way of life that has changed little in 3,000 years. It is a rich tradition of story-telling and legend, replete with magic and spiritualism, giving rise to the firm belief among the Tanna villagers that Philip is one of them.

While Philip—renowned for his gaffes and hailed as 'legend of banter' by grandson Prince Harry—may seem an unlikely deity to Western eyes, his role is deeply engrained in Tanna's 'kastom', or customary, belief system. Most worshippers favor Charles to take his father's place in their heart, but they fervently want him to do something Philip never achieved—visit the island dwellers that hold him so dear. Chief Malia said that spiritually Philip was always part of the villagers' lives, but "we never got to see him" as the royal consort never set foot on Tanna.

"We never got the chance to meet face to face like you and me right now," he said. "If [Prince Charles] would agree to come someday, then he must come down here so that we can sit together and talk." The so-called Prince Philip movement is believed to have arisen in the 1970s, as a response to



Village chief Albi in Yakel, a remote Pacific village on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu that worships Britain's Prince Philip, following the Duke of Edinburgh's death on April 9. — AFP

the increasing encroachment of the modern world. In appropriating Philip, the man who stood at the right hand of Britain's ruler when it was still a world power, their narrative subverted its power by planting the seed of Tanna kastom in its heart. According to them, Prince Philip was the embodiment of a powerful spirit that brought fertility and wealth to the people of Tanna. — AFP

Fury in Armenia as Baku displays war trophies

YEREVAN: Armenia yesterday accused its historic rival Azerbaijan of fomenting ethnic hatred by displaying helmets of Armenian soldiers killed during their war last year. A decades-long conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region erupted into all-out war in September, killing more than 6,000 people.

Six weeks of fighting ended in November with Armenia's defeat. Yerevan ceded swathes of territories to Baku under a Russian-backed ceasefire, which was seen in Armenia as a national humiliation. On Monday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited a "park of trophies" showcasing

ing military equipment seized from Armenian troops during the war.

Hundreds of helmets of Armenian soldiers who had been killed were displayed in the park as well as wax mannequins of Armenian troops. The park, due to be opened to the public shortly, sparked uproar in Armenia with ombudsman Arman Tatoyan saying it was "proof of genocidal policy".

"The opening of such a 'park' clearly confirms institutional hatred towards Armenians in Azerbaijan." This sentiment was shared by most people in Yerevan, where mass anti-government protests have been held regularly against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's decision to agree on the humiliating truce, leading him to call snap polls in June.

"This is true fascism," 41-year-old historian Mher Barsegyan told AFP. The park "recalls evidence of Hitler's barbarism that is exhibited in muse-



BAKU: Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev tours the Military Trophy Park that showcases military equipment seized from Armenian troops during the last year war over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, in Baku. — AFP

ums around the world." Ethnic Armenian separatists declared independence for Nagorno-Karabakh and seized control of the region in a brutal war in the 1990s that left tens of thousands dead and forced hundreds of

thousands from their homes.

Baku and Yerevan have traded accusations of war crimes after the conflict—which had been largely dormant for decades—re-erupted last September. — AFP

Far-left union leader takes in lead in Peru poll

LIMA: A far-left union leader and teacher has taken a surprise, though slim, lead in Peru's presidential election, and will likely face a rightwing rival in a runoff in June, incomplete results showed Monday.

With nearly 90 percent of ballots counted by Monday evening, leftist Pedro Castillo was in the lead with 18.83 percent—much higher than predicted by opinion polls which had not even placed him in the top five. He will likely square off on June 6 against corruption-accused Keiko Fujimori, a rightwing populist who has 13.21 percent, according to results released by the ONPE electoral office. It will be Fujimori's third shot at the top job.

Sunday's election, held in Peru's worst week of the coronavirus pandemic, saw no single candidate able to fire up crisis-weary voters and muster a decisive 51-percent majority. With the count not yet finalized, economist Hernando de Soto, and

celibate staunch Catholic Rafael Lopez Aliaga—both on the right of the spectrum—remained hot on Fujimori's heels.

"The change and the struggle are just beginning," said 51-year-old Castillo, who was virtually unknown until 2017, when he led thousands of teachers in a protracted national strike that resulted in government compromise.

He represents the small far-left Free Peru party, and has made campaign promises to eject "illegal foreigners" who commit crimes, bring back the death penalty, and have the government take control of Peru's energy and mineral resources. "With Castillo we have an anti-establishment left: socially conservative and anti-free market," political scientist Carlos Melendez told AFP.

'Most fragmented' election

Fujimori, daughter of jailed ex-president Alberto Fujimori, faces charges brought against her by Peruvian prosecutors for allegedly taking money from scandal-tainted Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht to fund her presidential bids in 2011 and 2016. If the leader of



Peruvian presidential candidate for the Peru Libre (Free Peru) Party, Pedro Castillo, waves as he leaves a polling station in Cajamarca, Peru, after casting his vote during general elections. — AFP

the Popular Force beats Castillo in June, the charges will be suspended until after her term as Peruvian law which exempts sitting presidents from prosecution. For Ipsos Peru chief Alfredo Torres the second round will be deeply polarized. "There is an anti-Fujimori sentiment in one section of the population and an anti-communist sentiment in another," he said.

Sunday's election, with some 25 million eligible voters and 18 candidates, was held one day after Peru reported a record 384 deaths from COVID-19 in 24 hours. As some Peruvians lined up to vote—which is mandatory—others queued for oxygen refills for ill relatives battling COVID-19. Almost a third of voters had declared themselves undecided. — AFP

International

Myanmar heading towards Syria-style 'full-blown conflict', warns UN chief

Civilian death toll reaches 710 including 50 children

GENEVA: The UN rights chief warned yesterday of possible crimes against humanity in Myanmar and said it seemed to be heading towards a massive conflict like the one ravaging Syria. In a statement, the UN rights office urged countries to take immediate and decisive action to push the military leaders behind a February 1 coup in Myanmar to stop their "campaign of repression and slaughter of its people." "I fear the situation in Myanmar is heading towards a full-blown conflict," Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in the statement. "States must not allow the deadly mistakes of the past in Syria and elsewhere to be repeated."

Myanmar is in chaos and its economy paralyzed since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. A junta crackdown against dissent has resulted in the civilian death toll reaching at least 710 as of late Monday including 50 children, according to a local monitoring group. Ethnic armed rebel groups have meanwhile stepped up attacks on the military and police in recent weeks, raising fears of Myanmar spiraling into broader civil conflict. And the military has retaliated with air strikes that have reportedly displaced thousands of civilians.

"The military seems intent on intensifying its pitiless policy of violence against the people of Myanmar, using military-grade and indiscriminate weaponry," Bachelet said. "There are clear echoes of Syria in 2011," she warned, referring to the start of a civil war that over the past decade has killed nearly 400,000 people and forced more than six million to flee the country.

"There too, we saw peaceful protests met with unnecessary and clearly disproportionate force," she said. "The state's brutal, persistent repression of its own people led to some individuals taking up arms, followed



MANDALAY: This photo taken and received courtesy of an anonymous source yesterday shows protesters carrying A-tauji pots filled with Thingyan festival flowers while taking part in a demonstration against the military coup in Mandalay. — AFP

by a downward and rapidly expanding spiral of violence all across the country."

'Horrific'

Bachelet pointed out that her predecessor Navanethem Pillay had warned in 2011 "that the failure of the international community to respond with united resolve could be disastrous for Syria and beyond." "The past 10 years have shown just how horrific the consequences have been for millions of civilians," she said. Bachelet pointed to "credible reports" indicating that Myanmar's Tatmadaw military forces opened fire with rocket-propelled grenades, fragmentation grenades and mortar fire in the southern city of Bago late last week.

a government agency. Many of the boats have scattered across the Spratly archipelago. "Come, come, time to go," Locsin tweeted. "While it may well be traditional fishing grounds, tradition yields to law." Beijing has ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its historical claim over most of the South China Sea to be without basis.

The last time the foreign ministry summoned a Chinese ambassador was in June 2019 after a Chinese vessel sank a Filipino fishing boat at Reed Bank and left the crew at sea, the ministry said.

Several countries have expressed concerns over the renewed tension in the region. The United States, a key military ally of the Philippines and its former colonial master, reminded China last week of its treaty obligations to Manila in the event of an attack in the waters. Hundreds of soldiers from US and Philippine forces are currently holding joint military drills in the Southeast Asian country.

Duterte, who has fostered warmer ties with China since taking power in 2016 in exchange for promised trade and investment, has been reluctant to confront Beijing over the vessels. The dispute comes as the Philippines receives millions of doses of COVID-19 jabs from China's Sinovac—many of them donated. They have underpinned the country's inoculation efforts as it waits for the delivery of vaccines from Russia and the West. — AFP

Manila summons Beijing's envoy over China boats

MANILA: The Philippine foreign ministry said yesterday it had confronted Beijing's envoy over the "illegal lingering" of Chinese boats at a contested reef in the South China Sea, stepping up the diplomatic row. Tensions over the resource-rich sea have spiked after hundreds of Chinese boats were spotted last month at the boomerang-shaped Whitsun Reef in the Spratly Islands, where Beijing and Manila have rival claims.

China, which claims almost the entirety of the sea, has refused repeated appeals by the Philippines to withdraw the vessels, which Manila says are maritime militia boats. In a rare move, the Philippine foreign affairs department summoned the Chinese ambassador Huang Xilian on Monday to express its "utmost displeasure" over the issue.

It repeated its demand for the "immediate departure" of all Chinese boats from Philippine waters, the department said in a statement. Nine vessels are still at the reef, Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin said on Twitter, citing



MANILA: US and Philippine soldiers saluting in front of their national flags during the opening ceremony of the annual joint military exercise at the main military base in Manila Monday. — AFP

Epoch Times defiant after HK printing press attacked

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong newspaper linked to a spiritual group banned in China said yesterday it would "never back down" after a gang of sledgehammer-wielding men damaged its printing presses. The assault on the Epoch Times was captured on CCTV and comes as China oversees a sweeping crackdown against critics in Hong Kong following huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019.

Footage released by the paper showed four masked men storming into the printing plant in the early hours of Monday morning and smashing up equipment. They also threw concrete rubble into machinery as terrified staff members looked on. The Epoch Times said the assault knocked out its presses, but vowed to print again soon. "This incident was to suppress Hong Kong's freedom of speech and intended to silence media which tells the truth," Epoch Times spokeswoman Cheryl Ng said in a statement. "We condemn violence and never back down." The Epoch Times is linked to Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that is banned in mainland China and prosecuted by authorities there.

Falun Gong however maintains a presence in semi-autonomous Hong Kong and practitioners give the Epoch Times out at street booths. Globally the paper is printed in eight languages and publishes in 21 languages online, often penning scathing pieces about China's government. The media group also became a staunch supporter of former US president Donald Trump.

But it has something of a controversial reputation with detractors accusing it of employing aggressive social media tactics and right-wing misinformation to create a fervently anti-China, pro-Trump media empire.

Trump loyalist Republican politicians were among those who issued statements over Monday's assault. "The attack on The Epoch Times' Hong Kong printing plant today was an act to silence any and all opposition," Congressman Mike Waltz wrote on Twitter. The Hong Kong Journalists Association and the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong both condemned the attack.

Hong Kong Police confirmed its organized crime unit had taken over the case and that no arrests had been made so far. "Police received a report saying that the suspects claimed the staff from the above company owed loans and used hammers to destroy five computer screens and one printer," the force said. But Ng, the paper's spokeswoman, said that was news to her. — AFP



HONG KONG: This handout photo from the Epoch Times newspaper received yesterday shows a screen grab from CCTV footage of masked men storming into the printing plant in the early hours of the morning and smashing up equipment with sledgehammers. — AFP

At least 82 anti-coup protesters were reportedly killed in the brutal crackdown. Security forces also reportedly prevented medical personnel from helping the wounded and charged relatives a "fine" of around \$90 to claim the bodies of those who were killed, the UN rights office said. At the same time, it said, at least 3,080 people are currently detained across the country, while 23 people have reportedly been sentenced to death following secret trials, including four protesters and 19 others accused of political and criminal offences.

Bachelet urged the international community to take action. "Statements of condemnation, and limited targeted sanctions, are clearly not enough," the former Chilean president said. — AFP



MUMBAI: People crowd at a railway station in Mumbai Monday. — AFP

India authorizes emergency use of Sputnik V

NEW DELHI: India has authorized the emergency use of Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine and will fast-track approval for other shots already passed by other major countries, authorities said Tuesday, as infection rates soared to a new record high. The government has faced mounting calls to approve more vaccines during the surge among the 1.3 billion population and a slower-than-expected mass inoculation drive.

Sputnik V is the third drug to be approved by India after Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield and Covaxin, which was developed by Indian firm Bharat Biotech. The SEC expert panel said the Russian vaccine should be authorized "in emergency situations" and this has been accepted, the health ministry said in a statement.

G V Prasad, co-chair of pharmaceutical company Dr Reddy's Laboratories, said his firm was "very pleased to obtain the emergency use authorization." "With the rising cases in India, vaccination is the most effective tool in our battle against COVID-19," he added.

The health ministry also said it would expedite the approval of vaccines not made in India—unlike the first three—to "expand the basket of vaccines for domestic use and hasten the pace and coverage of vaccination". The jobs will need to have been already been granted emergency-use authorization by regulators, such as the US Food and Drug Administration, the European Medicine Agency and others in Britain and Japan or the World Health Organization, the ministry said. — AFP

HK to outlaw campaigning for poll boycotts

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's government yesterday said it will be illegal for residents to encourage others to boycott or cast blank ballots in the city's already limited local elections as part of China's drive to ensure only "patriots" govern the finance hub. Beijing imposed sweeping changes on Hong Kong's electoral system last month, the latest step in an ongoing crackdown on the city's democracy movement after massive and often violent protests.

The new changes ensure a majority of lawmakers will be selected by a reliably pro-Beijing committee, and every candidate must first be vetted for their political loyalty by national security officers. The radical overhaul was passed without one dissenting vote by China's rubber-stamp parliament.

But Hong Kong's legislature, which was recently scrubbed of any opposition, now has to pass a slew of new laws to meet Beijing's orders. Yesterday, the government announced more than 600 pages of new leg-

News in brief

Reuters names first woman chief

LONDON: Reuters has announced Alessandra Galloni will take over as its new editor-in-chief from next week, becoming the first woman to head the global news agency in its 170-year history. Galloni is taking over from Stephen J. Adler, who is retiring, Thomson Reuters said in a statement. Galloni, 47, said she was "thrilled" at the opportunity to "lead a world-class newsroom full of talented, dedicated and inspiring journalists". A native of Rome who speaks four languages, Galloni began her career at Reuters' Italian-language service and rejoined the agency in 2013 as editor of the Southern Europe bureau and later became global managing editor. — AFP

Austria health minister quits

VIENNA: Austria's health minister announced yesterday he would resign as he was overworked and exhausted managing the coronavirus crisis. Rudolf Anschober became health minister early last year when his Green party formed an unlikely coalition with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's conservatives, just before coronavirus started spreading rapidly in Europe. "I've decided to resign from my job," the 60-year-old told reporters. "I'm overworked and powered out," he said, adding that 15 months on the job had felt like 15 years. He warned the pandemic was still in full swing and should not be "underestimated". "We are not out of the woods yet," he said, becoming emotional as he thanked friends and colleagues. — AFP

Turkey frees 10 ex-commanders

ANKARA: A Turkish court has released 10 retired naval commanders whom President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had accused of eyeing a "political coup", local media reported yesterday. The former admirals were detained after their names appeared on an open letter signed by 104 retired commanders in support of the 1936 Montreux Convention. The treaty is aimed at demilitarising the Black Sea by setting strict rules on warships' passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits leading to the Mediterranean. But Erdogan is planning to build a new canal in Istanbul to the west of the Bosphorus to take the pressure off one of the world's busiest waterways. — AFP

Egypt frees journalist Dawoud

CAIRO: Egypt has freed prominent dissident journalist and politician Khaled Dawoud after more than 18 months in detention, a fellow journalist and a lawyer said yesterday. A former head of the liberal opposition Dostour party and a senior journalist for the English edition of state newspaper Al-Ahram, he had been arrested in September 2019 after rare anti-government protests. "At around 5 pm on Monday, a police official informed us that the prosecutor had decided to release him," said Hisham Younes, a member of Egypt's press club. "He got out at around midnight... no charges were brought against him." — AFP

Priest hangs up cock for love

ROME: Churchgoers in a small town in central Italy assembled for mass as usual were hardly expecting a confession from their own parish priest. But that's what priest Riccardo Ceccobelli, 42, delivered on Sunday inside the San Felice church in Massa Martana, in Perugia, when he revealed that he had fallen in love. "I cannot not continue to be coherent, transparent and correct with regards to her (the Church), as I have always been so far," Ceccobelli told his parishioners, according to a statement published yesterday by the diocese. "My heart is in love although I have never had the opportunity to transcend the promises I made," he explained. — AFP

isolation which will have a first reading today and then be fast-tracked through the legislature.

Among the new provisions are measures making it illegal to encourage others to make protest votes. "We will regulate acts that manipulate and damage the election... and ban anyone from openly inciting others to not vote or cast blank and voided votes," chief executive Carrie Lam told reporters. The law will not stop individual voters from boycotting the polls or voiding their ballots. But campaigning "during the election period" for others to do so will be outlawed.

The maximum penalty will be three years in jail, Justice Secretary Teresa Cheng told reporters. She added that gestures, such as putting up a flag in a window, would also count as an offence.

China's leaders have moved decisively to tighten their control of Hong Kong, dismantling the business hub's limited democratic pillars after massive protests broke out in 2019. They imposed a national security law last year that outlawed much dissent. Dozens of campaigners have been prosecuted or jailed since, smothering protests in a city that had enjoyed greater political freedoms than the authoritarian mainland under the "One Country, Two Systems" arrangement. Hong Kong is not a democracy, although its Beijing approved mini-constitution states that "universal suffrage" is an ultimate goal. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 2021

Zain highlights its '4Sight' strategy and leadership in tower sharing

Zain participates in TowerXchange Meetup MENA event

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, participated in the recently concluded TowerXchange Meetup MENA event where the company showcased best practices in managing Tower Infrastructure in a panel entitled 'Finding value in passive infrastructure and delivering 5G'. Moreover, during the panel, Zain highlighted aspects of its '4Sight' strategy that is focused on creating a Sustainable and Digital Future for the company and the region afar.

Commenting on the state of mobile tower arrangements in the region, Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO said: "Zain is a strong and early advocate for the extraction of value from our digital and passive infrastructure across our portfolio of markets. It makes sense to explore these opportunities as a long-term strategy of value creation, and as a company, it forms one of the strategic pillars - 'Portfolio Optimization' we are actively pursuing under our '4Sight' strategy."

Al-Kharafi also noted that, "Zain Group is at the forefront of mobile tower agreements in the region, having concluded the very first sale and leaseback of telecom towers by a licensed mobile operator in the Middle East region in February 2020." The transaction saw Zain Kuwait transferring its passive physical infrastructure constituting a portfolio of 1,620 mobile towers in Kuwait to IHS Holding Limited for US\$130 million (KD 40 million).

In the TowerXchange Meetup MENA panel discussion, Zain touched upon themes that included the operator's immense success in rolling out 5G infrastructure in markets such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, as well as providing insights on the most impactful strategies to derive the greatest value from a telco's passive infrastructure.

Topics touched upon the progressive role that infrastructure sharing can play in reducing the total cost of network ownership for telcos, and whether the high CAPEX associated with 5G deployment necessitates the development of digital infrastructure companies or network as a service partners for effective rollout. The panel also tackled issues on the progression of 5G rollouts in the region and whether these investments are earning the desired returns:

and how consumers, regulators or private networks will drive the next wave of 5G investment.

Kamil Hilali, Zain Group Chief Strategy Officer said, "Given the pace of digitization and the need for operators to continually reinvent themselves and seek new revenue streams, Zain believes in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve this goal, including partnerships with competitors in certain markets and under certain conditions. We believe there is more to gain working together than in isolation, and we shall continue to seek opportunities to expand the tower ecosystem to every party's benefit, particularly in light of additional 5G infrastructure investment."

The benefits of infrastructure sharing are well understood by Zain Group, with the telco's operation in Saudi Arabia together with fellow Saudi telco, Mobily, having announced plans to establish a consortium to acquire the telecom towers currently owned by the two entities and merge them under a new commercial entity, 'Towers Company Saudi Arabia'.

To exploit the full potential of Zain's infrastructure investments across its footprint, the Group plans to enter strategic partnerships with specialized tower operating entities with a focus on developing markets. With respect to its overarching strategy, Zain introduced '4Sight' in 2019, centered on evolving the company's core telecom business to maximize value and build on its many strengths through digitization, optimization and modernization to free up resources and to selectively invest in growth verticals beyond standard mobile services.

The strategic framework is divided into two inter-related themes (Evolution of Telco and Growth Verticals), each of which encompasses four strategic



pillars that aim to diversify revenues, increase shareholder value, and generate sustainable growth for the communities that Zain serves and beyond. Moreover, the strategy aims to fully maximize Zain's high-speed broadband networks, customer assets, network intelligence and payment and billing infrastructure.

'Evolution of telco' is premised on four pillars: Digital Transformation; Enterprise and Government; Fixed and Convergent Connectivity; and Portfolio Optimization, the last of which refers to Zain's ongoing focus on establishing solutions based on greater

collaboration with players within the industry to leverage shared resources. This encompasses the sale and lease back of its towers, allowing sharing of passive network infrastructure, which optimizes energy consumption.

The 'Growth verticals' aspect of '4Sight' will see Zain go beyond the historical role of providing only telecom services and seek new opportunities in the lucrative ICT, Digital Infrastructure, Fintech and Digital Healthcare space. Innovation is part of Zain's DNA, and historically it can be seen that over the decades, the company has always strived to bring the latest and best technologies to its markets as soon as practicable.

The execution of the '4Sight' strategy in creating a Sustainable and Digital Future is on track and proving successful as evidenced by its resilient financial performances and other operational achievements in recent years, bolstering Zain's vision of becoming a leading ICT and digital lifestyle provider and contributing to the region's economic and technological evolution.

- **Bader Al-Kharafi:** "Zain is a strong advocate for extracting value from its digital and passive infrastructure, a key part of the '4Sight' strategy"
- In 2020, Zain Kuwait became the first telco in the region to conclude a sale and leaseback agreement of its telecom towers
- In KSA, Zain announced plans to establish a consortium with Mobily, to acquire the telecom towers and merge them under new commercial entity

WHO urges halt to sale of live wild mammals

GENEVA: The World Health Organization called yesterday for a halt to the sale of live wild mammals in food markets to prevent the emergence of new diseases such as COVID-19. The WHO said because traditional markets play a central role in providing food and livelihoods for large populations, banning the sale of live wild mammals could protect the health of market workers and customers alike.

The call came in fresh guidance drawn up in conjunction the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The three agencies said wild animals were the source of most emerging infectious diseases in humans and recommended measures to reduce the potential risk.

"COVID-19 has brought new attention to this threat, given the magnitude of its consequences," WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib told reporters. The agencies recalled that some of the earliest known cases of COVID-19 had links to a wholesale traditional food market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, with many of the initial patients stall owners, market employees or regular visitors to the market.

They added that samples from the Wuhan market suggested that it might be the source of the coronavirus pandemic's outbreak and/or that it played a role in the initial amplification of the outbreak. They also said it was likely that SARS-CoV-2 - the virus that causes COVID-19 disease - originated in wild animals, though how the virus made the species jump into humans is not yet known.

70 percent of emerging diseases

"WHO, OIE and UNEP call on all national competent authorities to suspend the trade in live caught wild animals of mammalian species for food or breeding and close sections of food markets selling live caught wild animals of mammalian species as an emergency measure unless demonstrable effective regulations and adequate risk assessment are in place," they said.

The agencies said there was a strong association between sale of live wild animals in markets and the emergence of new viruses in humans. "Animals, particularly wild animals, are the source of more than 70 percent of all emerging infectious diseases in humans, many of which are caused by novel viruses. Wild mammals, in particular, pose a risk for the emergence of new diseases," the guidance said. —AFP

Ramadan breeds dread in crisis-hit Iraq

BAGHDAD: Faced with sharp price rises, a decline in the buying power of the dinar and rising unemployment, Iraqis enter the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan with a feeling of dread. "After a whole day of fasting, we have to eat something," even if the price of a kilo of tomatoes has more than doubled, said Umm Hussein, a single mother of five who has no salary.

She struggles each month to raise the \$45 rent for their modest home. Like 16 million of Iraq's 40-million population living under the poverty line, Umm Hussein relies on her ration card for food. Under the legacy from the 1990s when Iraq's Saddam Hussein was under a stringent international embargo, every Iraqi whose household heads earns less than \$1,000 a month is entitled to certain basic provisions at subsidized prices.

But this year, "we've only received the rations for February", said Abu Seif, 36, who like his father before him has the job of distributing bags of subsidized goods. "We still haven't got the rations for Ramadan," during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, a period that starts this week.

UK economy advances despite lockdown, as trade picture improves

LONDON: Britain's economy rebounded slightly in February despite coronavirus curbs while exports of goods to the European Union recovered a bit more, data showed yesterday, sparking optimism over the outlook. Gross domestic product rose by 0.4 percent in February, after shrinking by 2.2 percent in January, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, noting a boost in industrial output and consumer spending.

"The economy showed some improvement in February after the large falls seen at the start of the year," an ONS spokeswoman remarked. Activity grew despite England's latest COVID-19 lockdown, which was implemented in early January but partially eased this week on the back of a rapid vaccination drive.

'Rapid rebound' ahead

From Monday, pubs were allowed to serve drinks outside - and non-essential retailers and hair-

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi had promised extra rations for the holy month. But "people are coming in or calling every day to ask when they're arriving", said Abu Seif. In Abu Ammar's grocery store, the credit line has been stretched so far that he fears not being able to pay his suppliers any more. With prices rising sharply, "some families owe more than 200,000 dinars" (\$130), the grocer told AFP.

The authorities in energy-rich Iraq, with revenues slashed by the decline in world oil prices, last year devalued the dinar, which has lost 25 percent of its value against the dollar. As a result, for example, the price for a bottle of cooking oil has gone up to 2,500 dinars, from 1,500 dinars.

No joking matter

On top of price hikes, COVID-19 restrictions such as lockdowns and curfews have killed jobs, especially the day jobs on which many Iraqis rely following decades of conflict. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says Iraqis are trapped in a vicious circle. "Over 90 percent of small and medium enterprises in the food and agriculture sector reported being severely to moderately affected by the pandemic. To cope with decreased revenue, more than 50 percent either let staff go or reduced salaries," it says.

A joke doing the rounds on Iraqi social media goes something like: "This year, salaries are in the group of death with COVID-19 and Eid al-Fitr (the feast marking the end of Ramadan). Not sure they will make it through to the next round." Haider, a 32-year-old civil

dressers reopened as well. The phased reopening, in tandem with speedy vaccinations, has sparked hopes for a rebound in economic activity in the current second quarter or three months to June.

"January was probably the low point of the year as vaccinations and the reopening of the economy will combine to trigger a rapid rebound in activity over the next few months," said Capital Economics economist Thomas Pugh. "Given there was no change in the lockdown restrictions in February, GDP was never going to shoot back up."

Pantheon Macro economist Samuel Tombs added that "the economy continued to adapt to lockdown rules in February". The Bank of England has forecast that growth will recover strongly this year towards its pre-COVID level owing to the nation's speedy vaccine program. The economy had tanked by 9.8 percent last year, Britain's biggest slump in three centuries - and the worst G7 performance.

The ONS added yesterday that the economy remains 7.8 percent smaller than its pre-pandemic level in Feb 2020. January's economic decline nevertheless marked an improvement from the previous estimate of a 2.9-percent contraction.

Exports 'recover significantly'

The ONS revealed separately that UK exports to



BAGHDAD: An Iraqi worker prepares food rations to be distributed to people in need at his warehouse in Karrada district on April 7, 2021, ahead of the holy month of Ramadan. —AFP

servant, says it's no laughing matter. "Ramadan fills me with dread. We need a lot of things for the house and new clothes for the children," he said.

Even in normal times, he struggles to pay the rent, for daily expenses and electricity charges with his monthly salary of \$600. Electricity is one of the heaviest financial burdens, in a country with at times 20-hours-a-day power cuts that force Iraqis to turn to private generators that run on pricey fuel. Abu Ahmad, a 32-year-old colleague, says he will skip the traditions this Ramadan. "I'm not going to be giving big dinners at my place, so as not to spread COVID," he said. "But also, because I can't afford it." —AFP

the continent rebounded sharply in February. However, the performance still failed to reverse January's record Brexit-driven slump. The value of British goods exported to the EU jumped by 46.6 percent or £3.7 billion (\$5.1 billion) from the prior month, driven by cars and pharmaceuticals. The nation's EU exports had nosedived by a record 42 percent or £5.7 billion in January.

"Exports to the EU recovered significantly from their January fall, though still remain below 2020 levels," the ONS spokeswoman added. "However, imports from the EU are yet to significantly rebound, with a number of issues hampering trade." February's total British goods exports to the EU stood at £11.6 billion, up from £7.9 billion in January.

Analyst Tombs noted this was "only marginally lower" than last year's £12.0-billion pre-Brexit monthly average. "This indicates that Brexit disruptions to goods trade have been overcome quickly," Tombs remarked. The value of EU goods imported into Britain meanwhile rose by 7.3 percent or £1.2 billion in February, after a record fall of 29.7 percent or £6.7 billion in January. The nation's Brexit divorce took full effect at the end of last year, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson clinched a last-minute trade deal with Brussels. —AFP

Business

Bitcoin hits record as Coinbase brings cryptocurrencies to Wall St

Caution remains the order of the day among observers

LONDON: Bitcoin hit a record high above \$62,000 yesterday as the cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase prepares to launch shares on Wall Street. Bitcoin reached \$62,377, a huge gain of 114 percent since the start of the year. After crashing in 2018, the value of bitcoin rebounded and it has set records since late last year - rocketing from around \$12,000 in October to more than \$60,000 a month ago.

The arrival today of cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase on Nasdaq is one of the most anticipated events of the year on Wall Street, where enthusiasm for record-breaking bitcoin is in full swing, despite questions about the sustainability of the market. The first company devoted entirely to cryptocurrency to enter the US stock exchange, Coinbase - which will be listed under the symbol COIN - is already a heavyweight.

Estimates vary depending on the method of calculation, but its capitalization is expected to range from \$70 to \$100 billion, the largest IPO for a US company since Facebook in 2012. Coinbase chose a direct listing, which does not allow it to raise new funds but does offer current shareholders - founders, employees and historical investors - the opportunity to sell their stocks on the market. Spotify, Slack, Palantir and Roblox had also used this

method for their Wall Street debuts. Nearly 115 million Coinbase shares will be put on the market.

Bitcoin success

Founded in 2012 in San Francisco by Brian Armstrong and Fred Ehrsam, the platform allows users to buy and sell about 50 cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin and ether. Coinbase claims 56 million total users and a little more than six million people making transactions each month, according to estimates from its first-quarter results, released in early April.

The company has benefited from bitcoin's meteoric rise over the past year, with the crypto asset's price rising from \$6,500 last April to a record-high above \$62,000 yesterday. In the wake of the reigning cryptocurrency, other virtual currencies - such as ether, Litecoin or Stellar Lumens - have also surged.

"With bitcoin already having more than doubled in the last six months and cryptocurrencies becoming more popular with more mainstream investors, it can certainly be argued that crypto has become more mainstream in the last 12 months," said Michael Hewson, the chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

As a result of this craze, Coinbase's revenue has increased almost tenfold in the course of a year to \$1.8 billion in the

first quarter, according to group estimates. Its profit increased 25-fold, in the range of \$730 to \$800 million. The success of Coinbase and cryptocurrencies in general has given some rivals ideas: the head of the California-based cryptocurrency exchange platform Kraken told CNBC last week he hopes to take his company public next year, also via a direct listing.

Government concern

If the situation seems favorable to Coinbase, caution remains the order of the day among observers, who recall the company's dependence on the price of virtual currencies, which tend to be volatile. Before its spectacular rise in recent months, bitcoin had experienced setbacks, particularly in 2018 when the currency kept falling.

Some are also drawing attention to the distrust of lawmakers in several countries who are concerned about cryptocurrencies being used for illicit purposes. "Will Coinbase prove popular with retail investors? There is little doubt about that prospect with demand and interest set to be high," said Hewson. "The bigger question is whether any valuation is sustainable, particularly given how many governments aren't particularly enamored of cryptocurrencies," he said. "Future regulation is likely to be a clear and present



DORTMUND: In this file photo taken on Jan 26, 2020, a physical imitation of a bitcoin is pictured. — AFP

danger and a probable headwind" in the long term.

Coinbase was recently charged by the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) of "reporting false, misleading, or inaccurate" information about cryptocurrencies and manipulating the market between 2015 and 2018. Without admitting wrongdoing, Coinbase paid a \$6.5 million fine, and the company was forced to push back its listing date on Wall Street.

Another factor that could put Coinbase at a disadvantage is its commissions, which the company uses to earn money. These levies are higher than some of its competitors, particularly Binance. But that platform, founded in China, seems to alarm regulators even more than Coinbase. According to Bloomberg, the CFTC recently opened an investigation into whether Binance, which is not registered with the agency, had violated US commodities law. — AFP

Russia detains 2 after huge Saint Petersburg fire

SAINT PETERSBURG: Russia yesterday detained two people after a huge fire gutted a historic factory in Saint Petersburg, as firefighters continued putting out the blaze. On Monday, a fire broke out over several floors of the red-brick Nevskaya Manufaktura building in Russia's second city. The inferno killed one firefighter and left two more hospitalized with serious burns.

The fire continued burning into yesterday over an area of 500 sq m, the emergencies ministry said, adding that nearly 40 firefighters were involved in extinguishing the blaze and clearing the debris. The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said that it launched a criminal probe into a death caused by negligence and added that law enforcement had detained the general director of Nevskaya Manufaktura and his deputy.

Investigators cited a "number of violations" regarding fire safety and said that management "knew for a fact" that the premises could not be operated. They estimated the total area of the blaze at some 4,000 sq m, causing a large part of the roof to collapse and even spreading to nearby trees.



SAINT PETERSBURG: Firefighters work to extinguish a fire in a historic factory on Tuesday. — AFP

Listed by the Saint Petersburg city government as a cultural heritage site, the building was home to one of Russia's largest textile companies in the 19th century.

In recent years, parts of the building continued

to operate manufacturing cloth, while others were rented out as office space and some areas had been abandoned. Fires are relatively common in Russia due to dilapidated infrastructure or non-compliance with safety standards. — AFP

Biden meets CEOs over shortage of semiconductors

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden met virtually Monday with leading CEOs for a summit on the semiconductor shortage as he works to build support for his infrastructure bill. Biden, in brief remarks to a group that included the leaders of General Motors, Alphabet/Google, and US semiconductor powerhouse Intel, said the United States must build up its own infrastructure to prevent future supply crises.

"We led the world in the middle of the 20th century," Biden said. "We led the world toward the end of the century, we're going to lead the world again." "I've been saying for some time now, China and the rest of the world is not waiting. And there's no reason why Americans should wait," the president said. "We're investing aggressively in areas like semiconductors and batteries, that's what they're doing and others, so must we."

The gathering, which is being led by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, National Economic Council Director Brian Deese, and the Secretary of Commerce, Gina Raimondo, comes as a shortage of semiconductors wreaks havoc on supply chains in several sectors. The crunch has badly dented US auto manufacturing, with General Motors, Ford and other carmakers temporarily shuttering some factories or reducing production.

The shortage has also raised worries throughout the personal electronics universe, generating potentially higher prices for popular gadgets like game consoles and computer tablets. In all, 19 company bosses are listed as attending, also including Mark Liu, executive chairman of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), one of the lynchpins in the world's supply for the vital electronic components.

The White House said in a readout of the meeting that participants had "discussed the importance of encouraging additional semiconductor manufacturing capacity in the United States to make sure we never again face shortages". The event came on the heels of Biden's February 24 executive order calling for a 100-day review across federal agencies on semiconductors and three other key items: pharmaceuticals, critical minerals and large capacity batteries. — AFP

Swiss watch expo switches to Shanghai after virtual debut

ZURICH: Geneva's international expo of fine watches switches to Shanghai today for a physical version after staging an online edition to keep the prestigious fair going during the pandemic. The Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, now restyled as Watches and Wonders, was cancelled last year due to the coronavirus crisis.

This year, with Europe battling a third wave of the pandemic, the fair - one of the major annual gatherings for luxury watchmakers - opened online on April 7, closing yesterday. But an in-person version will run from today until Sunday in Shanghai, where the coronavirus is under control.

Lovers of beautiful watches have seen several new products unveiled by some of the 38 brands participating on the salon's digital platform. Chanel has produced watches in pop colors inspired by 1990s electro music; Rolex made a dial from a fragment of meteorite, while Cartier has produced a watch strap from 40-percent plant material taken from waste apples. Nineteen brands will be at the physical event in Shanghai.

'Movie set' move

The virtual version is "a great opportunity to learn", Edouard Meylan, the head of luxury watchmaker H. Moser, told AFP. Even once the crisis is over, online events will become more commonplace, he predicted. "It will never replace the salons and making contact in person," he added. "But it is in tune with the times."

The company was founded in 1828 by Swiss watchmaker Heinrich Moser, who made his fortune in Saint Petersburg by joining forces with the Russian tsars' jeweler Gustav Faberge. H Moser produces around 1,500 pieces per year intended for collectors, which cost on average 35,000 Swiss francs (\$37,800). When Meylan realized that the pandemic was not going away any time soon, he invested in digital technology, shifting the brand into a new era.

"We bought cameras, lights and set up a whole studio in the workshop, with decor. It looks like a movie set," he said. That allowed them to produce slick content for Instagram and organize virtual tours of the factory. Unable to travel due to the pandemic, he even set up chic Zoom aperitifs with luxury watch shops. Sending them fine wines, he would then settle down with the same vintage in the studio to talk them through new designs and models.

Hit hard by the pandemic

For Guillaume de Seynes, one of the Hermes brand's directors, the digital salon cannot quite replicate the traditional in-person set-up. "It's inevitably a disappointment, given that there was already no event last year," he told AFP. The Parisian house set itself up in Geneva's Batiment des Forces Motrices, a grand entertainment venue on the River Rhone, and let two young French artists create an installation featuring the flagship H08 model presented at the salon.

Hermes thereby ensured it could have a swish venue in the heart of Geneva "even for virtual meetings" and events, said de Seynes. Jean-Daniel Pasche, president of the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry, is just happy the salon could be held in any format following a tough year for the industry. — AFP



Microsoft bets big on health with \$19.7bn purchase of Nuance

NEW YORK: Microsoft is to acquire artificial intelligence and cloud computing company Nuance for \$19.7 billion, bolstering its healthcare presence with a leader in voice recognition technology. Nuance's technology includes a conversational AI tool versed in specialized medical terms, freeing physicians from note-taking and allowing better patient-physician interactions in person or in the telemedicine appointments that have taken off during the pandemic, executives said.

Nuance's program "has completely redefined clinical documentation by capturing and contextualizing every word of the physician/patient encounter and automatically documenting it," said Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella during a briefing Monday. Nuance's technology is used extensively in medical records and is currently employed in more than three-quarters of US hospitals, Microsoft said in a news release. The transaction is all-cash and the sum includes Nuance's net debt.

Nuance's technology is currently used by more than 55 percent of physicians and 75 percent of radiologists in the United States. Microsoft said the deal would double its potential healthcare

market to nearly \$500 billion. This acquisition builds on the existing partnership between the two companies, which have been collaborating since 2019 in telemedicine, a sector whose growth has been spurred exponentially by COVID-19 lockdowns around the world.

Last year, the Redmond, Washington-based giant integrated Nuance Communication's Dragon Ambient eXperience program into its Teams communications software, which enables remote transcription of medical conversations. Microsoft also sees potential to expand the technology beyond health care. For example, the similar AI transcriptions could be employed by financial advisors, said Scott Guthrie, executive vice president for Microsoft's cloud and AI group.

"Nearly any professional service could benefit from real-time engagement converted into material intelligence that drives actions," Guthrie said during an investor presentation. "Every customer I talk to is looking to make the right decision at the right time for all of their stakeholders."

The deal comes on the heels of Microsoft's 2016 purchase of LinkedIn for \$27 billion and represents "the latest step in Microsoft's industry-specific cloud strategy," the company said. Like other technology heavyweights, Microsoft has been a big beneficiary of the economic dislocations during COVID-19. The company's earnings jumped by 33 percent in the latest quarter to \$15.5 billion and included a boost from cloud computing and personal computing, including its Xbox video games. — AFP

Business

Biden promises flexibility in landmark \$2 infrastructure bill

President holds rare meeting with opposition Republican lawmakers

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden promised flexibility in a rare meeting Monday with opposition Republican lawmakers, as well as Democratic allies, to push his more than \$2 trillion infrastructure bill. The massive project is a daring bid to rebuild the United States and also cement Biden's place in history as a president who restored the role of the central government in shaping the often fragmented country.

The White House meeting between Biden and eight members of Congress was meant to show that the new president has made good on his promise to end the divisiveness that turned Washington into a permanent dog fight under Donald Trump. Four senators and four members of the House of Representatives were invited - half of them from each party. "It's a bipartisan meeting here," Biden told reporters in the Oval Office. "I'm prepared to negotiate."

Biden so far has zero support from Republican lawmakers for his giant spending plan, which would pour money into everything from reconstructing the ragged highway system to bringing broadband internet to farming communities and fixing household water supplies. To pay for this, Biden is proposing a jump in the corporate tax rate from 21 to 28 percent.

What a senior Biden administration official called "a bold once-in-a-generation investment in America" is a must win for a president who has surprised many with his appetite for going big. Consciously modeling himself on Franklin Roosevelt, or FDR, and his 1930s New Deal program to lift the United States out of the Depression, Biden wants to transform post-COVID America.

Rather than a traditional infrastructure package focusing exclusively on the obvious targets like roads and bridges, Biden wants funds to flood into green technology, schools and every other aspect of the wider economy in a bid to "own the future". "America's no longer the leader of the world because we're not investing," Biden said last week, referring to the ever-fiercer competition with China.

Polls show broad support from voters for the idea, even if members of Congress are opposed. Republicans, stung at the way the Democrats forced a \$1.9 trillion economic relief bill through Congress in March, say the corporate tax increase will hamper US competitiveness. Mitch McConnell, the senior Republican senator, said Monday that "less than six percent of this proposal goes to roads and bridges" and would mean "one of the biggest tax hikes in a generation".

Biden listening?

Biden insisted Monday that he is ready to negotiate over both the "extent" of the project, "as well as how we pay for it". However, the White House has made clear there can be no fundamental reduction in the makeup of the package, rejecting Republican complaints that it contains too many leftist pet projects, as opposed to real infrastructure goals. "We will not be open to doing nothing. Inaction is simply not an option," Biden said last week.

The White House warns that if Republicans don't come aboard, the Democrats will try to pass the mega-bill alone, using a special budget process that allows them to get around the fact that they have



WASHINGTON: US Vice President Kamala Harris waits for US President Joe Biden to speak in the Oval Office of the White House after a meeting with members of Congress about the American Jobs Plan on Monday. —AFP

only the thinnest of majorities in Congress. Even this, however, is uncertain. The Democrats would need every one of their senators to hold firm and already at least one - Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia - says he opposes the 28 percent tax rate.

Republicans have characterized Biden as paying only lip service to the idea of bipartisanship, while

planning to ram the package through anyway. But Psaki insisted that Biden had already proven his goodwill. "You don't use the president of the United States' time, multiple times over... if you did not want to authentically hear from the members attending about their ideas about how to move forward this package," she told reporters. —AFP

Gulf Bank to announce Al-Danah account's first quarterly draw winner of KD 100,000 tomorrow

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank will be conducting its first quarterly Al-Danah account draw of the year tomorrow, Thursday, April 15, 2021 to announce the lucky winner of the KD 100,000 prize. The quarterly draw will be held in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and from Ernst & Young.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, commented: "The moment we have all been looking forward to for three months is finally here! We are excited to soon announce the winner of Gulf Bank's Al-Danah quarterly draw: the lucky customer who will receive the KD 100,000 prize. Although this is our first quarterly draw of the year, customers have a chance to win with an Al-Danah account year-round, with draws on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis! I would like to remind and encourage all Gulf Bank customers to save using an Al-Danah account, which they can open and deposit into online through the Gulf Bank app, or by visiting one of our branches. We're wishing everyone the best of luck tomorrow!"

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and its many advantages for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah

account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous Benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

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

Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and

mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

Deposit More for More Chances to Win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

Burgan Bank working hours during Ramadan

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the working hours during the holy month of Ramadan. All of Burgan Bank's branches will commence operations from 10 am till 1:30 pm, ensuring optimal level of customer convenience. The airport branch will operate from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm.

Moreover, customers are encouraged to contact Burgan Bank's call center or WhatsApp at 1804080 at any time during the holy month for information on any products or services. On this occasion, Burgan Bank extends its best wishes to everyone during the holy month of Ramadan.

NBK Economic Update

Pandemic-linked oil demand concerns continue to weigh on oil prices

KUWAIT: Oil prices (Brent) have settled in the \$62-63/bbl range following the OPEC+ decision to unwind production cuts in May-July. Another rally in oil prices will likely hinge on positive oil demand news. The IMF's upgrade to global economic growth augurs well for oil demand in 2021, but gains are not likely until 2H21 and the summer season, after which the drawdown in stocks from still-elevated levels should accelerate.

Oil prices appear to have come off their surprising post-OPEC+ meeting gain last week and look to be settling into an oil demand-sensitive holding pattern, with the international benchmark, ICE Brent, closing on Wednesday up slightly at \$63.2/bbl (+0.7 percent d/d; +21.9 percent ytd). US marker West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was up by the same amount to \$59.8/bbl (+24.5 percent ytd).

The Brent forward curve continues to point to near-term supply tightness, with front month prices higher than later-dated prices (backwardation). However, the curve has flattened considerably since early March as supply looks more accommodating, while expectations for more robust demand growth are pushed back.

This is also reflected in the decline in speculative net length (the difference between the number of 'long' contracts bought on the expectation of the price increasing and the number of 'short' contracts bought on the expectation of the price falling), which has fallen from its late February high of around 348k contracts to 289k contracts.

Concerns over near-term oil demand have increasingly weighed on market sentiment of late, especially after Europe and India re-imposed mobility restrictions to contain rising coronavirus infections. The markets were, however, encouraged on Tuesday by the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) upgrade to global economic growth this year to 6.0 percent (from 5.5 percent). The US Energy Agency's forecast of increased gasoline consumption in the US this summer as more consumers take to the roads also buoyed the markets.

Nevertheless, the market's cautious stance appears to be more in tune with the current reality of somewhat uncertain oil demand. The market's reaction following the announcement of the OPEC+ supply increase on 1 April was surprising, with Brent gaining more than 2 percent on the day. The OPEC+ decision itself was surprising given that only a day before, the group seemed to acknowledge the oil demand uncertainty when it downgraded its own oil demand forecasts for 2021 by 300 kb/d to 5.6 mb/d, with the weakness centered on 2Q21. Markets could therefore have been for-

given for expecting OPEC+ to roll over its output cuts for at least another month, to June. Instead, the group will increase supply, albeit gradually, over the next three months.

OPEC+ production cuts will ease by 350 kb/d in May, 350kb/d in June and 450kb/d in July. Saudi Arabia will also restore its 1 mb/d of output cuts at the rate of 250 kb/d in May, 350 kb/d in June and 400 kb/d in July. By July, total OPEC+ supply will increase by a cumulative 2.1 mb/d to 36.34 mb/d, the production ceiling that was originally supposed to be reached last January. This level will endure until April 2022 as per the original OPEC+ schedule from April 2020, although OPEC+ could opt to either pause or deepen the cuts (by no more than 500 kb/d) when it meets again on 22 April.

The OPEC+ decision to unwind the production cuts was especially good news for the UAE. Futures trading in ADNOC's flagship Murban crude (1.7 mb/d) went live on 30 March on the newly inaugurated ICE Futures Abu Dhabi exchange (IFAD) and ADNOC will be keen to boost volumes to meet demand. The Murban futures contract is a physically deliverable contract, and ADNOC hopes to establish the grade as a regional benchmark for crude oil pricing.

The news that indirect negotiations were about to commence between the US and Iran on a possible reinstatement of some version of the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA) has had a limited impact on oil prices. Ever since President Biden secured the US presidency, markets have been anticipating a potential renegotiation of the JCPOA.

Moreover, in defiance of US sanctions, Iranian barrels have already been a feature of global crude oil supply. Many Chinese refiners, especially the independent refiners ('teapots'), have been avid importers of the heavily discounted Iranian crude, which has increasingly displaced crude bought from conventional sources including Angola, Norway and Brazil.

Were JCPOA negotiations to lead to a lifting of sanctions, perhaps around 2.5 mb/d of Iranian crude exports could be expected, though this is not likely until 2022 at the earliest. Rapid progress is unrealistic with the US and Iran far apart in their demands.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), in its March oil market report, pegged oil demand growth this year at 5.46 mb/d, a massive improvement on 2020's decline of 8.68 mb/d. Despite upwardly revising its 1Q21 oil demand estimates, most of the growth in 2021 will materialize in the second half of the year.

Demand should reach 99.2 mb/d in 4Q21. With the IEA

Table: OPEC+ crude production allocations (kb/d)

Reference	May-21		Jun-21		Jul-21	
	Production	Adjust.	Prod.	Adjust.	Prod.	Adjust.
Algeria	1,057	-170	887	-159	898	-145
Angola	1,528	-245	1,283	-230	1,298	-209
Congo	325	-52	273	-49	276	-44
Eq. Guinea	127	-20	107	-19	108	-17
Gabon	187	-30	157	-28	159	-26
Iraq	4,653	-748	3,905	-699	3,954	-637
Kuwait	2,809	-451	2,358	-422	2,387	-384
Nigeria	1,829	-294	1,535	-275	1,554	-250
Saudi Arabia	11,000	-1,768	9,232	-1,653	9,347	-1,505
UAE	3,168	-509	2,659	-476	2,692	-433
OPEC-10	26,683	-4,287	22,396	-4,010	22,673	-3,650
Russia	11,000	-1,582	9,418	-1,543	9,457	-1,505
Non-OPEC	17,170	-2,263	14,907	-2,190	14,980	-2,109
OPEC+	43,853	-6,550	37,303	-6,200	37,653	-5,759

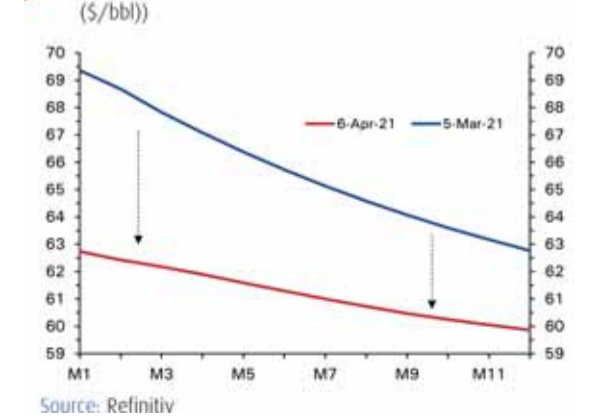
Source: OPEC

Chart 1: ICE Brent crude price (\$/bbl)



Source: Refinitiv

Chart 2: ICE Brent forward curve (\$/bbl)



Source: Refinitiv

taking its cues from the IMF's projections for global economic growth, which were revised up, it is likely that the IEA's forecast for global oil demand growth will also be raised in its next oil market report.

While improved demand projections will come as welcome news for OPEC+, there is still a lot of work for the group to do to bring global stock levels down to the 5-year avg. According to the IEA, inventories in January were still 63.2 mb above target. The IEA's expectation that non-OPEC supply will take longer to recover will, however, offer OPEC producers a window in which to meet rising demand. The 'call on OPEC' is expected to rise to 29.3 mb/d in 4Q21, the highest in more than two years.

The US EIA, in its April Short Term Energy Outlook (STEO), appeared to back up the IEA's assertion of slower than expected non-OPEC supply growth this year; forecasts for the rebound in US crude supply in 2021 were reduced by 0.9 percent (110 kb/d) to 11.04 mb/d. Output fell to 10.9 mb/d in the week-ending 2 April, according to the EIA's weekly figures.

US crude production is little changed so far in 2021, and remains 2.2 mb/d (-16.8 percent) below its high of 13.1 mb/d from early 2020. But future gains in production look increasingly likely even if the timeline has been extended, since US oil rig count increases - which precede crude output increases by several months - have been fairly con-

sistent. 337 rigs were in operation as of 1 April, a gain of 26 percent in 2021.

Looking ahead, notwithstanding near term oil demand uncertainty and the rising OPEC+ supply, oil price risks appear roughly balanced, with a slight upwards bias. The global vaccination drive is expected to accelerate in the coming months, bringing with it gains in economic activity and therefore oil demand. Fiscal stimulus, such as the \$1.3 trillion package approved by US Congress, will also support consumer spending.

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Lifestyle | Features

\$69 million digital art buyer shines light on 'NFT' boom

The blockchain entrepreneur who paid a record \$69.3 million for a digital artwork looks, at first glance, nothing like a wealthy collector. The 32-year-old is casually dressed in a t-shirt and chinos, lives in a regular Singapore apartment, and does not own any property or a car with most of his investments in the virtual world. "My prize possession would be my computer. And maybe my watch," Indian-born Vignesh Sundaresan, also known by his pseudonym MetaKovan, told AFP from his sparsely decorated flat.

His unpretentious demeanor offers no clue that he is a multimillionaire investor financing a fund focused on "non-fungible tokens" (NFTs), which use blockchain technology to turn anything from art to internet memes into virtual collector's items. Last month the programmer bought the world's most expensive NFT-US artist Beeple's "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days"-highlighting how virtual work is establishing itself as a new creative genre. With NFTs, many see an opportunity to monetize digital art of all kinds, offering collectors the bragging rights to ultimate ownership, even if the work can be endlessly copied.

Sundaresan defended the price he paid for the collage of 5,000 pieces of



This picture shows blockchain entrepreneur Vignesh Sundaresan, also known by his pseudonym MetaKovan, showing the digital artwork non-fungible token (NFT) "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days" by artist Beeple in his home in Singapore. — AFP photos



Blockchain entrepreneur Vignesh Sundaresan, also known by his pseudonym MetaKovan, showing the digital artwork non-fungible token (NFT) "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days".

art created on consecutive days, which has transformed its creator, real name Mike Winkelmann, into the third-most valuable living artist. "I thought this piece was that important," he said. "As a piece itself it's awesome. But there is this signaling and symbolic intention also to show the world that... there's this whole thing that's going on underground." The popularity of NFTs has been slowly growing, but only really hit the headlines with the sale of Beeple's latest work.

'Soul connection'

Sundaresan's Metapurse fund bought another set of 20 Beeple works in December and sold partial ownership of the collection as "tokens"-originally priced at \$0.36 per token and now worth around \$5. But he said buying "The First 5,000 Days" was emotionally draining-the sale at Christie's auctioneers lasted two weeks, with the price starting at just \$100 and 22 million people logging on to watch the final dramatic moments.

"I did not think it will be this competitive actually," he said. "Even for me to spend that much money, it's quite hard." He plans to display his digital art in a virtual gallery-and plans to hire an architect to design it. "As an avatar, you will be able to go there and go to different floors and look at this art," he said. Sundaresan said he felt a personal connection to "The First 5,000 Days" as his own story mirrored Beeple's-both men started as relative amateurs in their field but found success after years of hard

work. Beeple began "The First 5,000 Days" in 2007, when he was a bored web designer, and created a work of art each day. "He has grown over every day-he has worked 13 years now to get to this point," said Sundaresan. "I felt this soul connection with him."

'Right place, right time'

As an undergraduate engineering student, Sundaresan said he could not even afford a laptop. He tried to build various web services which failed, but he got his break by founding a cryptocurrency company in 2013. Now, he is chief executive of an IT consulting firm as well as financing the NFT-investing fund Metapurse. However, he denies that his most recent purchase was a stunt to raise the value of his other NFTs, as some critics have suggested, and insists he is trying to help artists.

But not everyone believes the NFT boom offers much support. "I see the occasional artist getting a lot of money because they're lucky, they're in the right place at the right time," said Antonio Fatas, a professor of economics at INSEAD business school. "But for the regular artist trying to make themselves known, I do not see how this is helping." — AFP



A person takes a photo in front of a piece by Mashkow, during a press preview.



A person looks at a piece during a press preview of the grand opening of Superchief Gallery NFT, a physical gallery dedicated exclusively to NFT (non-fungible tokens) artwork in New York. — AFP photos



A person looks at a piece by Hoxhoh during a press preview.

Auction houses
Sotheby's,
Phillips latest to
join NFT craze

Sotheby's and Phillips launched so-called NFT auctions on Monday, a month after Christie's sold a digital artwork for \$69.3 million, as traditional auction houses seek to capitalize on the craze shaking up the art market. Three months ago, barely anyone had heard of a non-fungible token (NFT), a digital object such as a drawing, animation, piece of music, photo, or video with a certificate of authenticity created by blockchain technology. But that changed in March when a digital collage by American artist Beeple sold for \$69.3 million at Christie's, setting a new record for an NFT, and the first message posted on Twitter went for \$2.9 million.

More than \$10 million in NFT transac-

tions are now taking place daily, according to the website DappRadar. The exchanges happen in cryptocurrencies on specialist sites such as Nifty Gateway and OpenSea, on the fringes of the art world. But the phenomenon is now becoming more mainstream with traditional auction houses keen to cash in, lending the craze, and digital artists, even more credibility. "I feel like collectibles are collectible," said Max Moore, contemporary art expert at Sotheby's, which is holding a three-day sale from Monday to Wednesday of NFT works by digital artist Pak.

"I do expect some collectors who maybe have never purchased an NFT to make their first NFT purchase in this sale, given that it is a Sotheby's sale," he added. The sale is also vastly different from a typical Sotheby's auction. Collectors are able to purchase "cubes" for a fixed price of \$500 each, which can then be redeemed for NFTs. In just 15 minutes on Monday, Sotheby's sold nearly \$10 million in "cubes" via the Nifty Gateway platform, a partner for the sale.

Phillips is selling an unique work by Canadian artist Mad Dog Jones during an auction running from Monday until April 23. When the work, called "Replicator," is



A person looks at a piece during a press preview.

sold, it will generate new artworks-which will themselves come with a limited number of NFTs. There will be seven generations of NFTs in total, meaning between 75 and 300 digital objects will be created over approximately a year.

Cryptocurrencies

"We're situating these artists within the canon of great artists that we offer all the time," said Rebekah Bowling, contemporary art expert at Phillips, the third largest

auction house behind Christie's and Sotheby's. The movement into NFTs comes at an opportune time for the auction houses, who have sped up their transition to digital following a year of virtual sales because of the coronavirus pandemic. The sales should help Sotheby's attract new collectors who may not have interacted with the house before, said Moore.

"It's a much younger audience, which I think is quite interesting for Sotheby's as well," he added. Some 91 percent of people who bid for Beeple's "Everydays" had never bid at Christie's before. More than half of them were between 25 and 40 years old. The NFT boom is being fueled by early investors in cryptocurrencies who became millionaires. "My primary focus right now is establishing these roots, these connections, establishing these relationships, understanding what drives their collecting habit, what interests them," said Moore. "Then we'll be able to kind of target them in a way that we would never have done before." — AFP

TOMMY HILFIGER
OPENS FASHION
BUSINESS SCHOOL

A Tommy Hilfiger Fashion Business School has opened at Elmira College. The 70-year-old fashion designer and his siblings, Andy and Betsy, have teamed up to open an educational facility in New York that aims to provide fashion students with business knowledge as part of a bachelor's degree in business administration. Hilfiger told WWD: "The partnership with Elmira College reflects much more than my personal connection to the area. The fashion industry runs on a never-ending influx of new talent, and this program will be instrumental in shaping aspiring designers and entrepreneurs through firsthand knowledge and experience in the business."

The designer and his siblings grew up in Elmira, where he also opened his first local store in 1969 called People's Place, and now Hilfiger wants to "give back" to his hometown. He continued: "I want to give back to my hometown, Elmira, N.Y., and inspire students who are interested in pursuing studies in a career of fashion." — Bang Showbiz



Picture of a new species of marsupial frog found during a research study developed in the moorland and humid forest of the Cordillera de Colan.—AFP

New species of
frog unearthed
in Peruvian
Amazon jungle

A new species of marsupial frog has been discovered in Peru's Amazon jungle, the state service for natural protected areas said on Monday. The new species belongs to the Gastrotheca genus of tailless frogs found in South and Central America. "The Cordillera de Colan National Sanctuary made an important discovery for science: a new species of marsupial frog

registered for the first time in this protected area in the Amazon region," said the SERNANP service.

The discovery was made a few weeks ago during a study in the humid tundra and mountainous woodland area of the Cordilleras de Colan, an Amazon region in the north of Peru close to the Ecuador border that sits at 3,100 meters altitude. "This new species is distinguished by having a thick granular skin on the back, a green dorsal coloration without a pattern, turquoise iris and a belly without spots, specks or dots," said SERNANP.

The Cordillera de Colan National Sanctuary spans more than 39,000 hectares and includes six areas of threatened wildlife. Peruvian authorities say the area is of great biological importance as several unique species live there. It has thus been classified as a priority site for conservation.—AFP

UK police hunt
for thieves who
stole world's
biggest rabbit

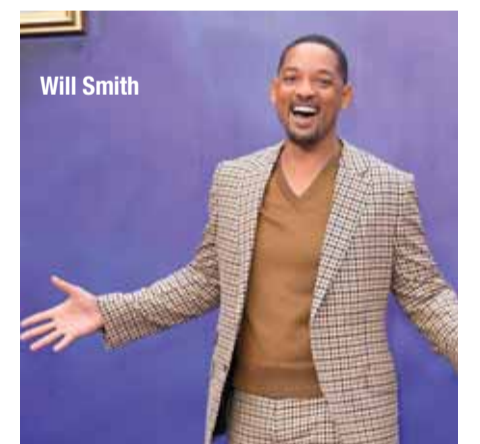
British police are seeking thieves who bagged the world's largest rabbit named Darius from his owner's garden. West Mercia Police said they were appealing for information after the brown-and-white bunny disappeared on Saturday night from his pen in Stoulton in central England. Darius, a Continental Giant rabbit, was recognized by Guinness World Records as the world's longest living rabbit in 2010, measuring a whopping 4ft 3 inches (129 centimeters) in length.

His owner, Annette Edwards, tweeted Sunday that it was "a very sad day" and offered a £1,000 reward for his safe return. "Darius is too old to breed now. So please bring him back," she said. Edwards announced in 2018 that Darius, then eight years old, was retiring and giving up public events and media appearances for a quieter life at home. In a previous tragedy for the owner, Darius's three-foot-long (90-centimetre) son Simon died on a cross-Atlantic flight in 2010 as he was being transported to a new owner. He had been expected to eventually outgrow his father. — AFP

Will Smith slavery
film 'Emancipation'
ditches Georgia
over voting law

Will Smith's slavery drama "Emancipation" will no longer be filmed in Georgia after the southern US state approved a voting rights law that critics say is intended to depress turnout in Black and other underrepresented communities. Georgia has become a major US movie industry production hub in recent years, but the "Emancipation" move follows mounting public criticism and boycotts from corporations, sports and entertainment bodies over last month's controversial measure in the state.

"We cannot in good conscience provide economic support to a government that enacts regressive voting laws that are designed to restrict voter access," Smith and director Antoine Fuqua said in a statement to AFP. "Regrettably, we feel compelled to move our film production work from Georgia to another state." The measure signed into law by Georgia's Republican governor imposes voter identification requirements, limits the number of voting drop boxes and forbids volunteers from giving water bottles to voters who can be forced to wait in line for hours.



Critics have likened it to Jim Crow-era restrictions used to repress the political power of African Americans. "The new Georgia voting laws are reminiscent of voting impediments that were passed at the end of Reconstruction to prevent many Americans from voting," wrote Smith and Fuqua, who is best known for 2001's Oscar-winning "Training Day." President Joe Biden narrowly prevailed over Donald Trump in Georgia, one of the 2020 election's most hotly contested states. Trump claimed falsely that he lost in the state due to voter fraud, after unprecedented turnout sparked by increased use of early voting and vote-by-mail amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Black people in Georgia-which has a long history of slavery and segregation-have faced decades of attempts to inhibit their votes. In protest at the new law, Major League Baseball has moved its 2021 All-Star Game out of Atlanta, while Delta Air Lines and Coca-Cola are among Georgia-based corporations to publicly slam the state. In Hollywood, the response had been more muted prior to Monday's announcement. "Ford v Ferrari" director James Mangold, who will helm the next "Indiana Jones" film, has spoken out against the voting restrictions, tweeting: "I don't want to play there. I'm not telling anyone else what to do." "Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill tweeted his support for Mangold, and used the hashtag #NoMoreFilmingInGeorgia.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Fashion's premiere Met Gala returns with two shows...and two parties

After a remarkably dressed-down year, New York's premiere Met Gala is back-and not one but two shows celebrating American fashion are in the works. The Metropolitan Museum of Art on Monday announced the annual sartorial exhibit would happen in two parts, with the first show entitled "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion" opening September 18 to celebrate The Costume Institute's 75th anniversary. The second exhibit-"In America: An Anthology of Fashion"-will kick off May 5, 2022. Both will run until September 5 of that year.

And with two shows, comes two parties. The Met and Costume Institute Benefit trustee Anna Wintour, the longtime editor-in-chief of Vogue, postponed 2020's normally star-studded bash over the Covid-19 pandemic. The new schedule banks on the notion that restrictions will ease as more Americans get vaccinated-more than 56 million in the United States are fully immunized-and that the glitterati will be hungry for a renewed social scene.

Part one's opening in September will close Fashion Week, which could mark a runway homecoming for many designers forced online. The Met said that fall "benefit" on September 13 would be a more intimate



In this file photo US singer Ciara arrives for the 2019 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 6, 2019, in New York.



In this file photo Kylie Jenner arrives for the 2019 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 6, 2019, in New York.— AFP photos

affair, while the 2022 gala on May 2 could see a return to the over-the-top looks that feature when celebrity and fashion collide. Instagram is the primary financial backer behind the exhibitions, fitting for the annual event that usually sees social media glow with wild outfits and red carpet stunts.

Plans for extravagance as much of the United States and the world is still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic risks criticism, but the primary reason for holding two benefits is likely financial. The Costume

Institute relies on the Met Gala to fund its work including exhibitions and acquisitions, and the cancellation of last year's event created a fiscal gap for the museum branch that must pay for itself. The exhibits themselves will see Costume Institute curator Andrew Bolton continue to explore broad themes-"Camp," Catholicism and China were among the focuses in recent years-rather than offer retrospectives of a specific designer.

The two-part show will assess the state

of American fashion-its contemporary players, the industry's identity, and important figures the rarified world of fashion may have overlooked or left out. Bolton said the exhibit's first stage would focus on modernizing fashion vocabulary in connection with "equity, diversity, and inclusion," as part two would see collaborations with American filmmakers to "further investigate the evolving language of American fashion." — AFP

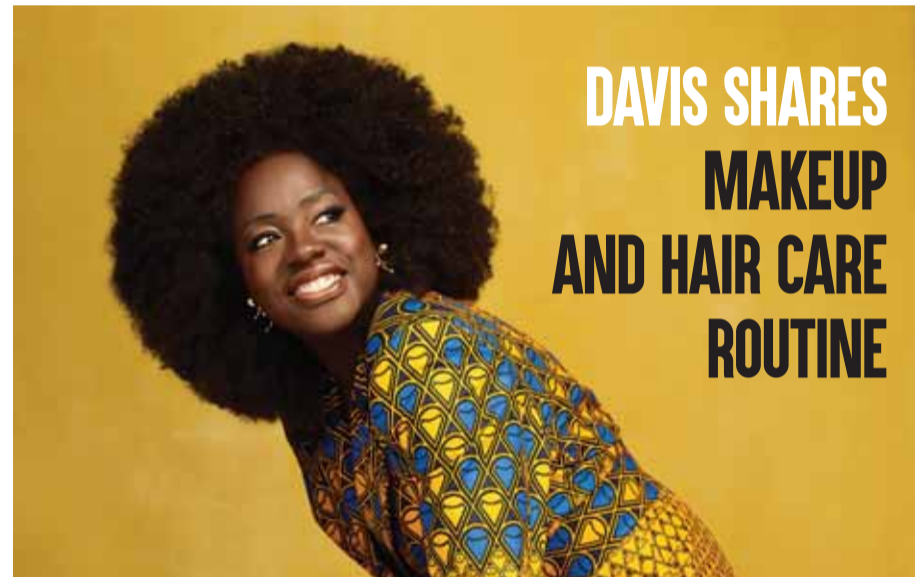
KANYE WEST'S NIKE AIR YEEZY 1 SNEAKERS, VALUED AT OVER \$1 MILLION, TO BE SOLD

A pair of Kanye West's first Nike Yeezy sneakers, which he debuted on stage at the Grammys, are to be sold, with Sotheby's predicting the shoes could fetch in excess of \$1 million. The Nike Air Yeezy 1 sneakers are part of a private sale-which means neither the final price nor the buyer will be released unless the individual comes forward. The sneaker range were the first to be launched by West's Yeezy brand, and caused a fashion furore when he wore them during a 2008 Grammys performance.



In this file photo musician Kanye West performs onstage during the 50th annual Grammy awards held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Previously, Nike had only worked with athletes and West's shoe was a significant break for the US brand. The Air Yeezy 1 launched in a limited series in 2009, followed by the Air Yeezy 2 in 2012. The following year, West ended his partnership with Nike-deeming his share of the revenue insufficient-going on to work with Adidas in 2014. That partnership was a huge commercial success, generating almost \$1.7 billion in revenue in 2020, according to an internal UBS bank note cited by Bloomberg. Although not the sole designer of the shoe, West heavily influenced the look. The sneakers, which are being sold by shoe collector Ryan Chang, will be on display in Hong Kong from April 16. In August last year a pair of Nike Air Jordan 1 were sold for \$615,000 by Christie's. — AFP



DAVIS SHARES MAKEUP AND HAIR CARE ROUTINE

Viola Davis gets a lot of "joy" out of her self-care routine. The ageless actress has shared some of the top products she uses daily and admitted bringing "joy" to herself and her family - including her 10-year-old daughter Genesis, whom she has with husband Julius Tennon - is extremely important, especially in these unprecedented times amid the COVID-19 pandemic. She shared: "The Revitalift Derm Intensives 3.5% Glycolic Acid Cleanser is in my shower - I use that every day, along with the Age Perfect Cell Renewal Midnight Serum. "I will do anything right now to bring me joy, and to bring my family joy. "Joy is in short supply in this life. So if you know where you enjoy lies, even if it's in a pint of coffee chip keto ice cream, and that's where your joy lies."

The 55-year-old Hollywood star is the face of L'Oreal Paris' iconic Voluminous Mascara, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. And the 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' star confessed that she won't allow anyone to borrow the popular product, not even family. She told People: "I'm a little late to the make-up game "I remember [the moment] because from the first time you try it, you don't want to use anything else. And if you somehow can't find [your tube], when you use something else, you're like, 'Oh, no.'" Viola added: "I always want to see my eyelashes, and that just does the job. My niece is always coming [to my house] and there are times when I'm like, 'You can't have my mascara Annabelle.'" — Bang Showbiz

New York's Fashion Week to return in-person in September

New York's Fashion Week is anticipating a return to in-person runway shows in September, after two previous editions that were largely virtual because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Council of Fashion Designers of America announced Monday. The plan for events on September 8-12 depends on local restrictions linked to the ongoing health crisis, said the CFDA, which noted some designers may opt to keep their presentations online.

The vast majority of shows held during the past two Fashion Weeks in February and last September were virtual, with just a few designers including Christian Siriano and Rebecca Minkoff strategizing to show in person. The CFDA encour-

aged online presentations to avoid coronavirus-related risks. Encouraged by New York's ongoing vaccination campaign, the CFDA's CEO, Steven Kolb, said "we look forward to a strong fashion season that celebrates the best of American fashion in both physical and digital presentation formats."

This time, Fashion Week will culminate with the Met Gala-a star-studded benefit that coincides with the Met's Costume Institute exhibit-on September 13. The extravagant event normally held the first Monday in May will take place on a smaller scale in September 2021 before another ball the following spring.— AFP



In this file photo models pose during the Rebecca Minkoff Spring 2021 presentation at Spring Studios during New York Fashion Week: The Shows (NYFW) on February 16, 2021 in New York City. — AFP

CARDI B HAS UNVEILED HER 90s-INSPIRED REEBOK COLLECTION

The 'Up' hitmaker's Summertime Fine line includes "waist-snatching" tights and "curve-hugging silhouettes", designed to make women feel "sexy and confident". She said in a statement: "I'm so proud to announce my first apparel line with Reebok. This collection gives every woman the product they need to feel sexy and confident; the waist-snatching tights and curve-hugging silhouettes make everybody look amazing." In a striking photoshoot for the collection, the 28-year-old rap megastar donned purple leggings and a two-tone blue and purple wig for one snap and retro space buns, a cropped hoodie and a pair of box-fresh white Reebok sneakers in another.

Fans can get their hands on the collection, which is sure to sell out fast, from April 23. Meanwhile, it was previously claimed that the "WAP" hitmaker wants to leave her own "mark in fashion". The music star is known for her bold and vivacious red carpet looks and her long-time stylist, Kollin Carter - who worked with her before she shot to fame in 2017 with hit single 'Bodak Yellow' - revealed his client has "no ego" and will work with her favorite go-to designer's alongside up-and-coming brand's to showcase their work.

He said: "I feel like it's one of those things where we really understand one another. And sometimes I'll push a bit or

she'll push when it comes to ideas, like, she'll be down to do something but maybe a little hesitant or, like, she'll bring something to me, like, I wanna do this and it's like, 'Uh, I don't know, I don't think we should do that.' "And then you know, vice versa. It's one of those things where it's really like a conversation with no ego and it's an honest conversation." And the stylist added how the 'Please Me' hitmaker turns to "history" for inspiration. He continued: "We pull from a lot of things we've been inspired by in the past, the history of fashion."

"The collaboration process is really easy when it comes to her. We have our go-to designers, but we also love working with new designers, big or small, it doesn't matter. Our collaboration processes are really fun and free because she allows everything to happen the way that it needs to, to create some kind of evolution or to leave a mark in fashion." — Bang Showbiz



Cardi B



Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh (left) and Britain's Prince George of Cambridge (right).

Burberry postpones Women's Fall 2021 Show

Burberry has postponed its Women's Fall 2021 Show following Prince Philip's passing. The iconic British fashion house has delayed today's digital showcase out of respect for the late Duke of Edinburgh, who died on April 9, aged 99. Three decades ago, Prince Charles - Philip's eldest child with his wife Queen Elizabeth - presented Burberry with a Royal Warrant, while in 1955, Her Majesty awarded the designer label a Royal Warrant as a Weatherproofer. The Duke will be laid to rest on Saturday at Windsor Castle. A new date for Burberry's presentation is yet to be announced, though it's

expected to take place after the funeral. Meanwhile, Philip was honored at the EE BAFTAs at the weekend.

The late consort's life and long service to the film community and the wider country was remembered by BAFTA as the awards show kicked off. Host Dermot O'Leary said of Philip: "He was the first President of BAFTA, and that goes through all the way to our current President, his grandson, the Duke of Cambridge." Whilst his co-host Edith Bowman added: "It was Prince Philip and Her Majesty, the Queen's support throughout the years that in many ways has allowed BAFTA, a leading charity in the arts, to continue to, in difficult times, still be here today in 2021. The Duke of Edinburgh occupies a special place in BAFTA history and our thoughts are with the royal family."

The Prince passed away "peacefully" at Windsor Castle, just a few weeks after being hospitalized with an infection and heart condition. A statement from Buckingham Palace read: "It is with deep sorrow that Her Majesty The Queen has announced the death of her beloved husband, His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.—AFP

Shahadi Wright Joseph

Shahadi Wright Joseph praised Eilish's style

Shahadi Wright Joseph has hailed Billie Eilish for her "range" when it comes to her "tomboy style and femininity". The 'Them' star has admitted she would love to see inside the 19-year-old megastar's wardrobe as she loves her red carpet looks. Speaking to Page Six Style, she said: "I would love to raid [her] closet. She has the cutest clothes. "I love all of her choices and I always feel like she looks amazing whenever she's on a red carpet or is at an event. She has a lot of range when it comes to tomboy [style] and femininity." Meanwhile, at just 15, the 'Lion King' voice actress has nailed down a skincare routine to look flawless on screen. She shared: "I use [custom skincare brand] Curology. Glossier is my favorite make-up brand."

"I use a lot of ColourPop as well, but I usually only wear concealer and moisturizer with blush and mascara. That's usually my go-to for just going out." The 'Us' star has also loved getting to experiment with her hair and make-up in quarantine. She said: "I was doing a lot of protective styles in quarantine. "I also learned how to do my own box braids. I really did appreciate that time. I got to learn more about what really helps me and my own personal beauty routine, so that was really great."

—Bang Showbiz

Sports

Ice cold Kroos keeps Real Madrid in the hunt for trophies again

Madrid looks to reach Champions League semi-finals

MADRID: When Toni Kroos arrived for his first training session with Real Madrid in 2014, he went the wrong way. Walking out onto the pitch at the club's sprawling Valdebebas training ground, Kroos saw two circles of players kicking the ball between them and jogged over to the one on the left.

In his mind, that circle had fewer players in it. It was logical to bolster the numbers. But generally, the left circle is for the club's Spanish players, the right for foreigners. Nobody minded, some thinking Kroos was looking to assert himself or perhaps just was not aware of the code. The truth was Kroos knew the code but in that moment it made no sense to him.

For a club like Madrid, arguably the biggest in the world, where the fans are among the most demanding and the attention and pressure on players is almost certainly the most heated, Kroos has continued to stand out as a figure of cold, clear thinking. The esteem in which he is now held at the Santiago Bernabeu, or more recently the Alfredo di Stefano, was certainly not automatic. The same suspicions that hung over him at Bayern Munich endured, that here was a midfielder with no major flaws but no obvious strengths, neither destroyer nor creator, hard to define and, at first, difficult to admire. In Germany, there had been a deeper mistrust of character too, that Kroos' lack of outward emotion stemmed from a lack of fortitude, an accusation regularly leveled at the generation that later went on to win the 2014 World Cup.

It remains the case that while Kroos' standing in the world's most successful midfield trio is unquestioned, he rarely enjoys the kind of praise aimed at the likes of Karim Benzema, Sergio Ramos, Casemiro or Luka Modric. Modric and Casemiro have perhaps even contributed to Kroos' devaluation, Modric the featherweight playmaker and Casemiro the Brazilian wrecking-ball, each of them easier to quantify than the surgical German next to them.

'Toni decides'

Inside the club, attitudes are more emphatic. "Toni is incredible, a legend of the club. Whenever he goes out on the pitch he goes out with class. Nobody can play like him," said Vinicius Junior last week. "If Toni wants the team to slow down it slows down, if he wants to speed it up it speeds up," said Casemiro. "Toni decides."

Dortmund skipper Reus revels alongside 'unique' Haaland

BERLIN: Marco Reus is set to rekindle his blossoming partnership with Erling Braut Haaland tonight as Borussia Dortmund bid to hand Manchester City another Champions League quarter-final exit. Dortmund captain Reus, 31, is back to his best after struggling with poor form and injury this season, reveling alongside the 20-year-old Haaland.

Reus has scored in Dortmund's last two games with Haaland, their top scorer this season with 33 goals in 34 games, providing both assists. In nearly a decade at Dortmund, Reus has played as an attacking midfielder behind talented strikers such as Robert Lewandowski, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Paco Alcacer.

Reus is full of praise for his team-mate, who grabbed headlines earlier this season as the youngest player to score 20 Champions League goals. "I've never seen anyone like Haaland at this club," Reus told the 'Kicker meets DAZN' podcast. He's unique and still very young. He's developed massively over the past six to nine months."

Reus scored what could prove to be a crucial away goal in their 2-1 first-leg defeat in Manchester when his effort, from Haaland's brilliant pass, curled past City goalkeeper Ederson. A 1-0 home win, or victory by at least two clear goals, on Wednesday would send Dortmund into the semis to face either holders Bayern Munich or Paris Saint-Germain.

City remain on course for a historic quadruple of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and



MADRID: Real Madrid's German midfielder Toni Kroos dives for the ball during the "El Clasico" Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid on Saturday. — AFP

For coach Zinedine Zidane, he is an instant pick for the team's biggest games. "He has this authority," Zidane said last year. "He doesn't talk a lot, he's a quiet and reserved guy. He expresses himself on the pitch."

Madrid president Florentino Perez handed Kroos a four-year deal in 2019, a show of faith given he had just turned 29 and was at the end of what had been a disappointing year for the side. And while Manchester United almost signed him in 2014, Kroos now hopes to retire where he is. "The idea is to end my career at Real Madrid," he said.

Yet externally there is still a sense that Germany's most successful ever player flies under the radar. It took two laser passes last week, that caused havoc in Liverpool's defense, and a free-kick on Saturday, the

League Cup successes despite a shock defeat against 10-man Leeds on Saturday. Pep Guardiola's City are desperate to reach the last four after exiting at the quarter-final stage in each of the last four seasons.

'He's a legend here'

With Reus in full flow and splitting defences with his smooth passes, Dortmund can throw off their erratic Bundesliga form and play like one of Europe's best teams. "He is a big legend here and we need him at his best," Haaland said of Reus in January. "He has a vision that no one else has." After converting Reus' silky pass to score at home to Sevilla in the last 16, Haaland celebrated by simply lifting his captain clean off his feet. The Norway attacker has not scored in his last five games for club and country after three blanks on international duty last month.

Yet while defenses worry about containing Haaland, Reus has been reveling in the extra space Haaland's runs often provide. "He's become really good with the ball at his feet and with a defender at his back," said Reus. "That wasn't the case when he first joined us, but his achievements and goals give him an unbelievable power that helps us."

Reus picked up a knock following his goal in Saturday's 3-2 win at Stuttgart after Haaland stepped over the ball and let it roll to his unmarked skipper. After Reus limped off midway through the second-half in Stuttgart, Dortmund's caretaker coach Edin Terzic said he is "confident" his captain will face City.

Yet Reus is one of the most injury-prone players in Germany's top-flight. Since 2010, Reus has suffered at least 21 injuries. Despite making his Germany debut a decade ago, fitness issues have limited Reus to just 44 appearances for the national team. Heartbreakingly, Reus missed Germany's 2014 World Cup triumph after tearing ankle ligaments in the final warm-up match before the team flew to Brazil. — AFP

winner against Barcelona, for Kroos' talents to be thrust back into the limelight. Those assists in the 3-1 win over the English club have put Madrid in sight of the Champions League semi-finals, a job they hope to finish tonight in the second leg, against an unsure opponent inside an empty Anfield. Kroos' free-kick has made Madrid favorites to win La Liga too, even if the stumbling Atletico Madrid still have one point left of what in February was a 10-point lead.

It raises the prospect of a Spanish-European double, which seemed unthinkable a few weeks ago, but suddenly feels possible given Madrid's tendency to accelerate down the final straight. As the season reaches its climax, this is a team that has found a confidence in adversity and a calmness under pressure. They begin to think like Kroos. — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp shouts instructions to his players from the touchline during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Aston Villa at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on Saturday. — AFP

Liverpool need Klopp to rediscover magic touch for rescue act

LIVERPOOL: In need of another famous Champions League fightback, Liverpool cannot rely on a wave of passion, color and noise from the stands at Anfield to inspire a comeback from 3-1 down against Real Madrid tonight. If the English champions are to reach the semi-finals for the third time in four years, they will instead need their manager Jurgen Klopp to conjure the motivation and tactical masterplan to once again eliminate one of Spanish football's giants.

Klopp has earned near God-like status on Merseyside for delivering a sixth European Cup and a first league title for 30 years to Liverpool. But the charismatic German has been unable to halt the Reds' fall from grace this season. With seven games to play in the Premier League, it is already mathematically impossible for Liverpool to retain their title as they lie 22 points adrift of Manchester City in fifth. Hopes the Champions League could prove the salvation of a disappointing season were also dashed as Real ran riot in the first 45 minutes in Madrid last week to open up a commanding first-leg lead.

Liverpool's deficit is not as steep as when Barcelona visited two years ago in the semi-finals in what turned out to be arguably the greatest of all the memorable European nights at Anfield. Depleted by injuries, Klopp's men still rolled over Barca's stellar cast of star names 4-0 on their way to winning the trophy.

But Klopp hinted that the task may be even greater now in front of the sterile atmosphere of an empty stadium due to coronavirus restrictions. "If you want to have some emotional memories, then you watch the Barcelona game back and 80 percent of this game was the atmosphere in the stadium, so yes, we have to do it without that," said Klopp after the first leg.

Liverpool can claim to have suffered more than most from an entire season behind closed doors. Prior to January, they were unbeaten in 68 home Premier League games. That club-record run was followed by a less treasured one as for the first time Liverpool then lost six consecutive games at Anfield. A late winner to beat Aston Villa 2-1 on Saturday snapped that streak, but only served to reinforce that Liverpool are not the force of the past two seasons. On top of empty stadiums, injuries have also played a major role. — AFP

News in brief

Perez re-elected unopposed

MADRID: Florentino Perez has been re-elected unopposed as president of Real Madrid for a sixth term, the Spanish champions announced yesterday. The 74-year-old was the only name in the running since the window for potential candidates to apply opened at the start of the month. A club statement said: "A single candidate was validated by the electoral committee...and D. Florentino Perez Rodriguez is proclaimed president". Perez, the head of major construction group ACS, has already twice been re-elected unopposed, in 2013 and 2017. He was the man behind Madrid's star-studded 'Galacticos' era in his first spell in charge of the club between 2000-2006. His latest mandate will see him at the helm until 2025. — AFP

Ramos tests positive

MADRID: Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos, who was already out of this week's Champions League meeting with Liverpool because of a calf injury, has tested positive for COVID-19, the club announced on Tuesday. Ramos is the second case of coronavirus detected in the Real Madrid squad in a week. French defender Raphael Varane tested positive last Tuesday. Varane has not yet been given the green light to rejoin his teammates. Ramos injured his left calf while with Spain during the international window but he has been a vocal presence on the sidelines since. The positive test means he has to stay away from his teammates until he tests negative. — AFP

Huetter to coach Gladbach

BERLIN: Austrian Adi Huetter will quit as Eintracht Frankfurt head coach at the end of the season to take charge of Bundesliga rivals Borussia Moenchengladbach, both clubs confirmed yesterday. After weeks of speculation, Huetter, 51, will sign a three-year contract as head coach of Gladbach, replacing Marco Rose, 44, who is leaving to take over at Borussia Dortmund for the 2021/22 season. With six games left, fourth-placed Frankfurt are on the verge of qualifying for the Champions League next season. They have a five-point lead over fifth-placed Dortmund. In contrast, Gladbach are eighth in Germany's top flight, 13 points from a place in the Champions League. — AFP

Sevilla keeps hopes

MADRID: Sevilla gave themselves an outside chance of rejoining La Liga's title race on Monday by winning a seven-goal thriller away at Celta Vigo. A second-half double from Ivan Rakitic and Papu Gomez snatched a 4-3 victory for Sevilla, who twice had to come from behind at Balaídos. The comeback puts Sevilla six points behind Atletico Madrid, who drew away at Real Betis on Sunday to give further encouragement to Real Madrid and Barcelona. Zinedine Zidane's side beat Barca 2-1 in Saturday's Clasico at the Alfredo di Stefano. For weeks it has looked like only Real Madrid and Barcelona could overhaul struggling Atletico but 13 points from 15 has put Sevilla back in sight of the top three. Fourth place is all-but secure for Julen Lopetegui's side, who have a 14-point advantage over fifth-placed Real Sociedad, who they face next weekend. Celta stay 10th. — AFP

De Bruyne key to breaking Man City's CL complex

LONDON: "Win everything," said Kevin De Bruyne when asked of his ambitions for Manchester City after signing a new four-year contract to reportedly become the Premier League's highest paid player last week. With less than two months of the season to play, City are still on course for a historic quadruple of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup.

Just breaking through the barrier of the Champions League quarter-finals would be a landmark for Pep Guardiola as he tries to reach the last four for the first time in five years in Manchester tonight. City travel to Borussia Dortmund holding a slender 2-1 lead and bearing plenty of scars from quarter-final ties over the past three years. "Different year, same stuff," was how a disappointed De Bruyne summed up a 3-1 defeat by Lyon in Lisbon last season. Defensive mistakes, missed chances and VAR controversy also combined to deny Guardiola's men as they bowed out to Liverpool and Tottenham in contrasting fashion in 2018 and 2019.

Despite the explosive talent of Erling Braut Haaland, a Dortmund side sitting fifth in the Bundesliga should not pose a problem for the runaway Premier League leaders. But De Bruyne has lived through too many City horror shows in Europe's premier club competition to take anything for granted.

The Champions League is the one trophy to have so far eluded the Belgian since he arrived in England in 2015. A determination to end City's wait to conquer Europe was key to both the player and club's motivations for agreeing a new contract worth a reported £20 million (\$27 million) a year. — AFP



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on April 06, 2021 Dortmund's German forward Marco Reus (left) celebrates after scoring the equalizing goal with Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Braut Haaland during the UEFA Champions League first leg quarter-final football match between Manchester City and Borussia Dortmund at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

Sports

Minnesota sports shut down after police shooting

Timberwolves, Twins, Wild postpone games

LOS ANGELES: Sporting fixtures in Minnesota were called off Monday as tensions in the city simmered in the wake of the fatal police shooting of a black man in a Minneapolis suburb. Basketball, baseball and ice hockey games were all postponed following the shooting death of Daunte Wright on Sunday by police in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center.

"The National Basketball Association announced today that in light of the tragic events in the Minneapolis area yesterday, tonight's game between the Brooklyn Nets and the Minnesota Timberwolves at Target Center has been postponed," the NBA said in a statement.

The shooting, which comes with Minneapolis already on edge because of the Derek Chauvin trial for the murder of George Floyd, sparked protests and looting overnight. Authorities in Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs including Brooklyn Center announced a curfew from 7:00 pm (00:00 GMT) Monday until 6:00 am Tuesday.

The Minnesota Twins baseball team had earlier

Monday called off their game against the Boston Red Sox on Monday following the shooting. "Our community's been through a lot, and we have a trial taking place just blocks away from Target Field," Twins president Dave St Peter told reporters. "Emotions across our community, emotions across our organization, are raw... playing a baseball game today felt a little less important."

'How many times'

Later Monday, the Minnesota Wild's game against the St Louis Blues was also postponed, the National Hockey League said in a statement. "The decision was made out of respect for the community, following the tragic shooting that occurred in Brooklyn Center, Sunday afternoon," the statement read.

Outrage over last year's police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis swept across the US sports world, with several NBA players joining nationwide protests. The police shooting of another Black man, Jacob Blake, in Wisconsin in August last year

prompted a wave of sporting boycotts led by the Milwaukee Bucks, with athletes from the NBA, WNBA, Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer all downing tools to protest against systemic racism.

The latest lethal shooting of a Black man by US police drew a strong response from across the NBA on Monday, with the Philadelphia 76ers coach Doc Rivers leading criticism. "I think we've got to stop saying it's frustrating for Black Americans, I think it's frustrating for all Americans," Rivers said in remarks before the Sixers game against the Dallas Mavericks.

"You keep hearing this cancel culture stuff, but we're cancelling Black lives, and to me, that's a little more important in my opinion," Rivers added. "We keep making mistakes and killing Black people. I don't want to get into race, but it's there." San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said the latest death "makes you sick to your stomach."

"How many times does it have to happen?" Popovich asked. "As sick to our stomachs that we might



MINNEAPOLIS: A view of Target Field after a postponement was announced for the game between the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins at Target Field on Monday in Minneapolis, Minnesota. —AFP

feel, that individual is dead. He's dead. And his family is grieving. And his friends are grieving. And we just keep moving on as if nothing is happening." —AFP

Curry scores 53 to pass Chamberlain for Warriors record

SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry erupted with 53 points to pass Wilt Chamberlain's all-time Golden State scoring record on Monday as the Warriors downed the Denver Nuggets 116-107. Curry — who started the game needing only 19 points to overtake Chamberlain's tally of 17,783 points set between 1959 and 1965 — broke the record in a hurry, rattling in 21 points in the first quarter.

The 33-year-old passed Chamberlain's mark with a driving layup towards the end of the first quarter, raising his arms in jubilation to acknowledge the milestone. Curry's final points haul included 10 three-pointers with seven rebounds and four assists.

"This is special man," Curry said afterwards. "Now we've got the win, I can process what just happened. These last 12 years, all the team-mates I've played with, the coaching staff, the ownership, our fans — I've had some amazing experiences here."

Curry, selected by the Warriors with the seventh overall pick in the draft in 2009, acknowledged that it had taken him longer to reach Chamberlain's tally. "With Wilt, any time you hear his name you just assume his records

unreachable," Curry said. "I did play six extra years here I guess, but it still means something to be at the top of that list. I'm forever grateful for everybody supporting me that lets me do what I get to do on the court. I'm not planning on slowing down, but this is one to kind of take a second and appreciate for sure."

'Ridiculous' Curry

Warriors coach Steve Kerr said the team had sensed early on Curry was poised for a big night. "Our team always feeds off Steph's confidence," Kerr said. "You can feel it when he's really got it going, and we could feel it very early tonight. We figured he'd find a way to score 19 points tonight, we just didn't expect it to come in the first quarter."

Curry's performance was the 18th time in his career that he has shot 10 or more three-pointers in a regular season game. "What he's doing is ridiculous," Kerr said. "Nobody has ever shot the ball like this. It's kind of crazy what he does out there."

Curry, a key figure in the Warriors championship-winning seasons in 2015, 2017 and 2018 and a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, said his scoring record was the result of a collective effort. "It's legacy type stuff," Curry said. "It's a special accomplishment and one that anyone who's played with me or coached me has played a part in. I guess if you're around certain players long enough, good things happen. But I don't take any of this for granted, in terms of being healthy. I thank God for the ability to come out here and just play basketball and have



SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors reacts after he made a basket to pass Wilt Chamberlain as the Golden State Warriors all-time leading scorer during the first quarter of their game against the Denver Nuggets at Chase Center on Monday in San Francisco, California. —AFP

fun. This is my happy place."

Meanwhile the joy of Curry's night to remember was tempered by what looked like a serious knee injury to Denver's Jamal Murray in the closing seconds of the game. Murray crumpled to the court in agony as he drove towards the basket, clutching his left knee in obvious pain before limping back to the locker room. Any injury to Murray would be a devastating blow to Denver's hopes of mounting a serious playoff campaign. —AFP

Wizards upset Jazz, Embiid dominates as Sixers rout Mavs

LOS ANGELES: Bradley Beal scored 34 points and Russell Westbrook bagged a triple double as the Washington Wizards ended the Utah Jazz's 24-game home winning streak with a 125-121 victory in Salt Lake City on Monday.

Donovan Mitchell delivered a 42-point gem for Utah but could not prevent the under-strength Western Conference leaders from sliding to a surprise defeat against a Wizards team struggling near the foot of the East.

Utah, with Mike Conley and Jordan Clarkson absent from the line-up, looked to be racing towards a 25th straight home victory after a dazzling opening quarter saw them put up 42 points. Mitchell contributed 17 points in that burst of early scoring, but Washington responded superbly to outscore Utah 37-23 in the second for a 70-65 half-time lead. Washington took control in the third period with a 19-8 run, and with Mitchell's touch suddenly deserting him, Utah were left chasing the game in the fourth. Beal's 34-point display was complemented by Westbrook's triple, with the 2017 NBA MVP finishing with 25 points, 14 rebounds and 14 assists.

Embiid in 'attack mode'

In Dallas, Joel Embiid outgunned Luka Doncic as the Philadelphia 76ers rolled to a 113-95 victory over the Mavericks on Monday. Embiid poured in 36

points in another dominant display that included seven rebounds and two assists in just 26 minutes on court at Dallas's American Airlines Center.

The Cameroon international's points tally included 14 of 15 free throw attempts as the Sixers improved to 37-17 at the top of the Eastern Conference standings. Embiid was backed with 20 points off the bench from Furkan Korkmaz, while Shake Milton and Tobias Harris had 10 points apiece.

Mavs star Doncic, meanwhile, finished with 32 points, while Jalen Brunson had 15 points and Dorian Finney-Smith added 12. Sixers coach Doc Rivers said Embiid had "played in attack mode all night" and showed no sign of being bothered by the knee brace that he had recently said was hindering his performances.

"Obviously, he's getting used to it," Rivers said of the knee brace. "I thought he played in an attack mode all night, didn't settle. He felt like the last couple of games he'd been settling. When you have something on you, you tend to do that. So I thought he was phenomenal in how aggressive he was, and he made the right plays."

Lakers stumble

Rivers was also pleased to see his team finish a four-game road trip with three victories. "It was one of our goals before the year started — if we want to be what we want to be, we have to be a good road team," Rivers said. "We're going out on the road, we're taking care of business and we're very serious about it."

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Julius Randle scored 34 points as the New York Knicks routed the depleted Los Angeles Lakers 111-96. The NBA champions coughed up 25 turnovers as the Knicks romped to victory, with Elfrid Payton adding 20 points and



DALLAS: Joel Embiid #21 of the Philadelphia 76ers looks on during the game against the Dallas Mavericks on Monday at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. —AFP

Derrick Rose 14. Lakers coach Frank Vogel pointed the finger at his team's wayward offensive display, which came just two days after a blowout victory against Brooklyn on Saturday.

"Really poor passing, some bad decisions," Vogel said of the Lakers, who continue to feel the absence of injured stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis. "As good as we were offensively two nights ago, we were just as bad tonight. It's disappointing. Definitely not good enough on the offensive end."

The Lakers face a quick turnaround against the Charlotte Hornets on Tuesday before wrapping up their eight-game road trip in Boston today. "Losing like this doesn't feel good," Vogel said. "All of our guys are eager to get back out there [Thursday]." —AFP

Patriots legend Edelman retires from NFL

LOS ANGELES: New England Patriots star Julian Edelman announced his retirement from the NFL on Monday, bringing the curtain down on a career that spanned 12 seasons and included three Super Bowl victories. The 34-year-old receiver, named MVP in the Patriots most recent Super Bowl victory in 2019, confirmed his retirement after his contract was terminated due to a failed physical. "I've always said I'm going until the wheels come off, and they've finally fallen off," Edelman said in a recorded video posted on Twitter that showed him sitting on the Patriots Gillette Stadium field at Foxboro. "Due to an injury last year, I'll be making my official announcement of my retirement from football. It's been the best 12 years of my life. It's been a hell of a run."

Edelman's former Patriots teammate and close friend Tom Brady led the tributes to the retiring receiver. "On the biggest stage and in the biggest moments, you always came through," the seven-time Super Bowl champion wrote on Twitter. "You never lost that chip on your shoulder and you never let anyone define you as a person or player. I'm proud of you, Jules. Love you," Brady added. Patriots head coach Bill Belichick saluted Edelman as the "ultimate competitor." "By any measure of what constitutes an elite NFL career — wins, championships, production — Julian has it all," Belichick said.

'Throwback player'

"Few players can match Julian's achievements, period, but considering his professional trajectory and longevity, the group is even more select. This is a tribute to his legendary competitiveness, mental and physical toughness and will to excel," Belichick said. The Patriots drafted Edelman in 2009 with the 232nd overall pick, and he would go on to become a key part of the team's success during the last decade, winning Super Bowls in 2015, 2017 and 2019. A ferocious competitor, Edelman had a knack of making big plays in high-pressure situations. In the 2017 Super Bowl, he made a logic-defying fourth-quarter catch that helped the Patriots complete a comeback victory over the Atlanta Falcons after the team had trailed 28-3. His career suffered a setback later that year when a torn cruciate ligament in preseason ruled him out of the 2017-2018 campaign.

In 2018, his comeback from injury was shrouded in controversy after he tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance, leading to a four-game ban at the start of the season. However, his season ended in triumph with a third Super Bowl win and MVP award after Edelman made 10 catches for 141 yards in a hard-fought 13-3 win over the Los Angeles Rams. He is one of only seven wide receivers to win Super Bowl MVP honors. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

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

Clinics

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

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(Dr. Vinod Gaikwad)
First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer.

Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

How the first Tokyo Olympics changed the face of Japan

PARIS: The 1964 summer Olympic Games were Japan's great return to the world stage after its defeat and destruction two decades earlier in World War II. The first Games ever held in Asia were also a chance to trumpet the rebuilding of post-war Tokyo and the country's emergence as a high-tech giant with the infrastructure to match.

That included the first of its high-speed shinkansen "bullet trains" that would come to epitomize modern Japan. "An historic week is beginning for Japan," AFP wrote six days before the opening ceremony. "Never before has it wanted to welcome so many foreigners."

That same desire has been frustrated this time round by the pandemic which first delayed the Games and will now rob them of foreign visitors. In 1964, however, the country opened its arms to 20,000 spectators, 6,348 foreign athletes, 1,500 officials, 2,000 journalists and some 400 pickpockets, according to Interpol.

Architectural gems

To prepare for the influx, Tokyo increased its hotel capacity by half, building a dozen new hotels, including four five-star establishments. In keeping with the "just in time" industrial philosophy that the Japanese would later export to the world, the construction of the 36 major Olympic sites was finished a week before the opening ceremony.

They included the Nippon Budokan, built to host the judo competition — the national sport making its first appearance at the Olympics. The curved roof of the octagonal building, which stands near the Imperial Palace, was meant to resemble Mount Fuji, the country's most iconic landmark.

Among other emblematic sites built for the occasion were the Yoyogi National Gymnasium by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, who would

go on to win the Pritzker Prize, architecture's Nobel. In a poignant symbolic nod to post-war Japan's pacifist credo, the last carrier of the Olympic torch was Yoshinori Sakai, an athlete born on August 6, 1945, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Television spectacle

Beyond pure sport, the 1964 Olympics were a chance for the Japanese to show off their technological know-how via television. The opening and closing ceremonies and several competitions were shown in color, with events transmitted by satellite directly to the United States, and recorded for Europe. Slow motion was also widely used for the first time, with ingenious new microphones cutting out background noise and the marathon broadcast live.

Nine days before the Games opened, Emperor Hirohito inaugurated Japan's first shinkansen train line, which had been under construction for five and a half years. The world's fastest, it linked Tokyo and Osaka at speeds of up to 210 kilometers (130 miles) an hour and was heralded as the beginning of the "bullet train" era.

Tokyo rebuilt

Tokyo, the biggest city in the world at the time with 10.6 million inhabitants, was completely rebuilt for the Games. It was given a vast new road network, often raised or underground, passing under factories and new apartment blocks which had replaced old wooden village houses, AFP explained on October 9, the eve of the opening ceremony.

New metro lines were built, along with a 27-kilometre-long (17-mile) motorway linking the Olympic village and the Haneda airport via the neighborhood of Ginza. "It is the first time a country has made such an effort to organize an



TOKYO: A man sits on a rock in front of the Olympic rings at the Odaiba waterfront in Tokyo on Monday. — AFP

Olympics," AFP wrote. "For a year now the face of Tokyo has been completely changed."

Judo humiliation

But while the country bathed in the reflected glory, on the sporting side it suffered a shocking humiliation when its judo champion Akio Kaminaga lost to Dutchman Anton Geesink. Even

so, Japan came third in the medals table behind the mighty Americans and Soviets.

Ethiopia's Abebe Bikila also entered the record books as the first athlete ever to win two Olympic marathons. The Games also saw the third gold in a row for Australian swimmer Dawn Fraser in the 100 metres freestyle and three gold medals for the Czechoslovak gymnast Vera Caslavská. — AFP



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