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COVID death toll passes 3 million as cases surge

Countries impose new lockdowns to fight spiraling infection numbers



PARIS: Medical interns and families lay flowers below a banner reading 'The hospital is killing his interns, help us live' as they pay homage to colleagues and relatives during a demonstration in front of the French Health Ministry to denounce the heavy workload yesterday. — AFP

PARIS: The global COVID-19 death toll passed three million yesterday as the pandemic continues to speed up despite vaccination campaigns, leading countries like India to impose new lockdowns to fight spiraling infection numbers.

It is the latest grim milestone after the novel coronavirus surfaced in central China in December 2019 and went on to infect more than 139 million people, leaving billions more under crippling lockdowns and ravaging the global economy. An average of more than 12,000 deaths were recorded globally every day in the past week, shooting the overall toll past three million at around 8.30 am yesterday, according to an AFP tally.

For comparison, three million people is more than the population of Jamaica or Armenia, and three times the death toll of the Iran-Iraq war which took place from 1980-1988. And the pandemic is showing no sign of slowing down: the 829,596 new infections reported worldwide on Friday is the highest number yet, according to AFP's tally.

The daily average of 731,000 cases registered over the last week is also close to being a record. India's capital New Delhi went into a weekend lockdown yesterday as the world's second-most populous nation recorded 234,000 new cases and 1,341

deaths. India now has three times the daily cases of the United States, the world's worst-hit nation, and families are clamoring for drugs and hospital beds.

Hopes that South Asian countries might have seen the worst of the pandemic have been dashed, with India recording over two million new cases this month alone and Bangladesh and Pakistan imposing new shutdowns. Udaya Regmi of the international Red Cross said the "truly frightening" South Asian surge was a "wake-up call to the world".

"Vaccines must be available to everyone, everywhere, rich and poor to overcome this terrible pandemic," Regmi added. Richer countries that have waged mass inoculation efforts have seen their virus numbers plummet. Britain, which has given 60 percent of the population at least one vaccination dose, now records around 30 deaths a day-down from 1,200 in late January.

Thailand recorded its fourth consecutive day of more than 1,000 new cases yesterday, with spiraling infections linked to a nightlife district of the capital Bangkok earlier this month. Alcohol sales will be banned in Bangkok restaurants from today, while entertainment venues will be shuttered across the country for two weeks. In Japan, rising virus cases

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Ramadan Kareem

Charity in different forms

By Hassan T Bwambale

Islam teaches us all beautiful and beneficial things through the Noble Quran and Sunnah (sayings, actions and approvals of Prophet Muhammad - PBUH), and giving charity is one of them. Charity is one's way to show compassion towards the needy. It acts as a reminder to try fulfilling the needs of others for the sake of Allah (swt) showing compassion with our fellow human beings.

Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) says what can be translated as: "The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed (of grain) which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies (His reward) for whomever He wills. And Allah is All-Encompassing and Infinitely Knowing. (Al-Baqarah 2:261)

Note that the greater the sincerity, the efficacy with which you give charity, and the intensity of the intention to spend for the sake of God, the greater will be God's reward. It is not difficult at all for God, Who blesses a grain so that out of it seven hundred grains grow, to allow one's charity to grow in like manner so that the unit of money one spends will return seven hundred fold and even more. (Refer to www.quran7m.com)

Charity in Ramadan: The auspicious month of Ramadan is the month when Muslims should give more charity and/or contribute to charity work and donations for the less fortunate.

Abdullah bin Abbas (ra) narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the most generous of all the people, and he used to be more generous in Ramadan when Gabriel met him. Gabriel used to meet him every night during Ramadan to rehearse the Noble Qur'an with him. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) was then more generous than the fast wind. (Al-Bukhari # 3, 554)

Angels supplicate for those who give charity: Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Not a day comes when the people get up

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Prince Philip laid to rest

WINDSOR, UK: Queen Elizabeth II yesterday bid farewell to her late husband, Prince Philip, at a royal funeral like no other, restricted by coronavirus rules but reflecting his long life of military and public service. The Duke of Edinburgh, who died on April 9 at age 99, was interred in the Royal Vault at St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle after a 50-minute service attended by just 30 guests.

The Queen, 94, seen for the first time since his death, was dressed in mourning black, with a white-trimmed, black

face mask. Close family, also masked, sat socially distanced in the historic 15th-century Gothic chapel. Philip — described by royals as "the grandfather of the nation" — was Britain's longest-serving royal consort and was married to the Queen for 73 years.

He was an almost constant presence at her side during her record-breaking reign that began in 1952 as Britain rebuilt from World War II, and as its global empire began to unravel. His death, which the family said had left a "huge void" in the Queen's life, has robbed her of the man she called her "strength and stay" and closes a remarkable chapter for Britain's most famous family, and in the country's history.

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WINDSOR, UK: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (left) watches as pallbearers lay the coffin in St George's Chapel during the funeral of Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in Windsor Castle in Windsor, west of London, yesterday. — AFP

Palestinians hold prayers at Al-Aqsa

JERUSALEM: Thousands of Palestinians streamed to Al-Aqsa mosque in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem on the first Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, in the largest such gathering since the coronavirus pandemic. Sheikh Azzam Al-Khatib, head of the Waqf Islamic affairs council, told AFP an estimated 70,000 worshippers came in from Jerusalem, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and from Arab communities inside Israel.

Last Ramadan, "they (Israeli authorities) did not allow anyone to enter Al-Aqsa except for me", he said. COGAT, Israel's military body that administers the West Bank, said 10,000 vaccinated Palestinians had been issued permits this year to enter Jerusalem for prayers.

Police shut down roads around Jerusalem as busses loaded with pilgrims drove in. Inside Al-Aqsa mosque, Palestinian men and women sat on the carpeted floor, reading the holy Quran. As the prayers ended, worshippers walked out of the holy compound with folded prayer rugs slung over their shoulders.

Daoud Salhab, a 67-year-old from east Jerusalem, called it "a golden day" after last year's Ramadan non-event.

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Palestinians take part in the first Friday prayers of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, in Jerusalem's Old City, Friday. — AFP

Ex-employee kills 8 at US FedEx facility

INDIANAPOLIS, US: A former FedEx employee fatally shot eight people and wounded several others at the delivery company's facility in the US city of Indianapolis before killing himself, authorities said Friday after the latest mass shooting to jolt the country. Four of the dead were followers of the South Asian Sikh religion, a Sikh organization confirmed, raising questions about whether the gun-

man's motivation was in any way racially or ethnically motivated.

The Thursday night slayings came a week after President Joe Biden branded US gun violence an "epidemic" and an "international embarrassment" as he waded into the tense debate over firearms control, a sensitive American political issue.

After this latest tragedy he again ordered flags flown at half staff at the White House and other public buildings. Police in Indiana's capital city identified the gunman as 19-year-old Brandon Hole.

"FedEx officials have confirmed that Mr Hole was a former employee at the facility, and he was last

employed in 2020," deputy police chief Craig McCart told reporters. Authorities searched multiple locations and seized evidence in their effort to learn more about the shooter and a possible motive.

The Sikh Coalition, which announced "that at least four of those killed" were members of the Indianapolis Sikh community, said it expected "authorities will conduct a full investigation-including the possibility of bias as a factor." "While we don't yet know the motive of the shooter, he targeted a facility known to be heavily populated by Sikh employees," said the coalition's executive director Satjeet Kaur.

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Local

Kuwait continues delivering aid to those in need during Ramadan

Humanitarian aid reaches Yemen, Palestine

KUWAIT: The first week of Ramadan witnessed intense Kuwaiti activity in providing aid to the needy, as part of the continuous efforts of Kuwait on the humanitarian level. The Kuwait Food Bank launched a charity campaign, which aims to distribute about 23,000 meals to the needy in Ramadan, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of Awqaf. In a statement, the Food Bank Vice Chairman Mishal Al-Ansari said that this campaign comes within a group of charitable initiatives that will be launched in the holy month, adding that the campaign comes under the framework of the bank's strategy for social responsibility to secure the requirements of needy families in the country.

On the other hand, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced that it will distribute daily iftar meals to about 2,000 workers and security guards. KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi affirmed that this campaign is part of a group of activities that reflect the social responsibility of the association in the holy month of Ramadan. He also stressed the association's keenness to provide the best services to the workers, while observing health requirements in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and also provide them with the necessary meals. Hasawi praised the volunteers' role in this holy month despite the summer heat.

Within the 'Kuwait by Your Side' campaign that has been going on for six years in Yemen, the Yemeni

Ministry of Education and the Kuwait Relief Society signed an agreement to restore, rehabilitate and furnish four schools in the governorates of Lahj in the south of Yemen. In a press statement during the signing ceremony, Yemeni Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education Dr Mohammad Basleem praised the unlimited support of Kuwait for the education sector in Yemen. He also expressed thanks and appreciation to Kuwait leadership, government and people, for this continuous help to the Yemeni people through the 'Kuwait by Your Side' campaign.

In Palestine, the 'Wafa Association for Development and Capacity Building' started the iftar project in Al-Aqsa Mosque, funded by the Kuwaiti General Secretariat of Awqaf and supervised by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Jordan. In a statement, the association said that the distribution of iftar meals at Al-Aqsa Mosque has started and will continue throughout the month of Ramadan, noting that Kuwait is one of the biggest supporters to the Palestinian charitable societies and institutions. Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani said that this work is a fraternal duty that Kuwaitis are keen to perform for their steadfast brothers in Palestine.

Daihani stressed that the leadership in Kuwait attaches "exceptional" care to the Palestinian cause, and one of its aspects is to support the basic needs of the Palestinian people. In a statement to KUNA, the head of



Iftar meals donated by Kuwait to be distributed in Palestine. — KUNA photo

the Voluntary Work Center, Sheikha Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, praised the role of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad

Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in supporting the national strategy for voluntary work in Kuwait. She affirmed that this strategy comes as an affirmation of Kuwait's bright history in voluntary and humanitarian work. — KUNA

COVID death toll passes...

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have stoked speculation that the Olympic Games-postponed last year due to the pandemic-could be cancelled.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, in his first meeting with US President Joe Biden, said his government was listening to experts and doing its "utmost" to prepare for the Tokyo games in July. The virus continues to impact events elsewhere in the world.

In Brazil, the country with the third-highest death toll in the world, night shifts have been added to several cemeteries as diggers work around the clock to bury the dead. One of these is Vila Formosa, the largest cemetery in Latin America and a showcase for the lethal cost of the pandemic in Brazil, where more than 365,000 people have died from COVID-19. "We try not to get upset in our work, but it is sad, it is a lot of people," one of the gravediggers there said after a long shift.

Prince Philip laid to...

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The last high-profile funeral of a senior royal was for the Queen's mother, who died in 2002, aged 101. But unlike then, when more than one million people thronged outside Westminster Abbey in central London to watch the somber pageant, the public was noticeably absent from yesterday's ceremony. The coronavirus pandemic forced hasty revisions to the well-rehearsed plans for the duke's death, code-named "Operation Forth Bridge", stripping back public elements to prevent large crowds from gathering. Government guidelines limited the number of mourners and a quartet performed hymns the duke chose himself in a barren nave stripped of seating.

The ceremonial funeral from behind the stately castle walls was broadcast live on television to millions across Britain and the world. Beforehand, a military gun fired to signal a minute's silence, when his coffin, draped in his standard and topped by a wreath of white roses and lilies from the Queen, his naval cap and ceremonial sword was borne by a bespoke Land Rover hearse he designed himself, arrived at the chapel. Across Britain — on the streets, in shops, railway stations and at sporting events — people bowed their heads with respect.

Flights in an out of nearby Heathrow Airport were stopped for the duration of the ceremony.

Ieuan Jones, 37, travelled to Windsor from his home in the Welsh capital, Cardiff, and called Philip "a strong man, a true hero (who) did so much for this country and the royal family". "It's really a shame that because of the pandemic we can't pay a wider tribute to the exceptional man he was," he

Despite the high infection rate, the government of Brazil's most populous state Sao Paulo announced it will allow businesses and places of worship to reopen from today.

But there was better news in Europe, where some countries are easing their lockdowns in response to not only fatigue, but falling infection numbers and progress with vaccinations. Italy announced Friday it will ease coronavirus restrictions for schools and restaurants from April 26. Expressing "cautious optimism", Prime Minister Mario Draghi said his government was taking a "calculated risk".

Italy will also allow up to a thousand spectators at outdoor events from May 1, when it eases its stadium fan ban in regions less affected by the coronavirus. In more good news for Britons after the partial reopening of society this week, Germany on Friday removed the United Kingdom from the list of risk zones for coronavirus infections, meaning that travellers will no longer need to quarantine upon arrival. Spain meanwhile extended the mandatory quarantine of passengers arriving from 12 countries in South America and Africa, including Brazil and South Africa, over concerns about more transmissible variants. — AFP

told AFP. Despite the restrictions, the stripped-down sendoff for the former Royal Navy commander still combined centuries of royal protocol with pomp, pageantry — and military precision. Members of the British armed forces, in formal dress, lined the procession route, heads bowed, as the cortege passed, as a minute gun rang out across the grounds and a bell tolled. Philip's grandsons William, 38, and Harry, 36, joined the procession, in their first public meeting since a reported falling out about Harry's shock move to California, and his stinging criticism of royal life, including racism in the family.

Harry had to quarantine when he arrived back in Britain for the first time since his move to the United States with his wife, Meghan, last year. The pair, who as young boys walked behind the coffin of their mother, princess Diana, in 1997, were separated by their cousin, Anne's son Peter Phillips, 43.

The religious service was a simple affair, reflecting the wishes of the straight-talking duke, who was known for his aversion to "fuss". In keeping with his wishes, there was no sermon, but the service reflected his love of the sea, and long association with the Royal Navy, including hymns and Bible readings.

The Dean of Windsor, David Conner, paid tribute to his "kindness, humor and humanity", and devotion to the Queen, who turns 95 next week and is in the twilight of her reign. "We have been inspired by his unwavering loyalty to our Queen, by his service to the nation and the Commonwealth, by his courage, fortitude and faith," he said. The Queen, who had been escorted to the chapel by a lady-in-waiting in the royal Bentley, watched from the chapel choir as her husband's was lowered steadily into the Royal Vault by electric motor.

The Pipe Major of the Royal Regiment of Scotland played a lament, and buglers of the Royal Marines sounded The Last Post. — AFP

The Muslim prayers on the first Friday of this year's Ramadan followed tensions in the city. Israeli police spokesman Shimon Cohen said seven people were arrested overnight in Palestinian neighborhoods near east Jerusalem's Old City, home of the mosque.

Those arrested had attacked a police officer, who required medical attention for a head injury, and thrown stones and glass bottles, he said. Video posted online showed assailants kicking in the windows of a police vehicle in east Jerusalem, and officers firing stun grenades.

Earlier this week, Palestinians accused Israel of breaking into four mosque minarets and cutting wires to prevent the call for prayers from being broadcast on loudspeakers. Abu Sway of the Waqf said the action came after Islamic officials refused to turn off loudspeakers Wednesday during a memorial for fallen Israelis at the adjacent Western Wall. Israeli police did not comment on the accusation.

Jordan, custodian of Islamic sites in Jerusalem, condemned what it called Israel's "blatant" violation of the status quo and accused it of provocation. — AFP

Charity in different forms

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except that two angels descend. One says, 'O Allah, give him who spends compensation.' The other says, 'O Allah, give him who withholds destruction.'" (Al-Bukhari # 1, 442 and Muslim # 1, 010)

Various ways of giving charity: Abu Musa Al-Ash'arey (ra) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Every Muslim must give charity." It was said, "What if he cannot find (anything to give)?" He replied, "Let him work with his hands to benefit himself and give charity." It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him help someone who is in desperate need." It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him enjoin good." It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him refrain from evil: for that is an act of charity." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 022 and Muslim # 1, 008)

In another Hadeeth (prophetic tradition), Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said what can be translated as: "For every joint (in the body) there is due charity, for every day the sun rises. To judge fairly between two people is charity, to help a man mount his riding animal or to lift his luggage onto it is charity, a good word is charity, every step one takes to perform a compulsory prayer is charity, and to remove a harmful object from the road is charity." (Al-Bukhari # 2, 989 and Muslim # 1, 009)

Other forms of charity:
a. Picking up a harmful object from the road or path: Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "I saw a person enjoying himself in Paradise because of the tree that he cut from a path (and disposed of it), which was a source of inconvenience to the people." (Muslim # 1, 914)

In another Hadeeth, Abu Dharr narrated that

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Komal Chohan, whose grandmother was killed, described being "heartbroken" over the loss, adding that "our families should not feel unsafe at work, at their place of worship, or anywhere. Enough is enough."

FBI special agent Paul Keenan said Hole was interviewed by the FBI in April 2020 and had a shotgun seized by authorities, the Indianapolis Star reported. It was not immediately clear whether Hole had been fired or left his job voluntarily, or if he knew the victims.

"He got out of his car and pretty quickly started some random shooting outside the facility. There was no confrontation with anyone that was there. There was no disturbance. There was no argument," McCarrt said. The shooting "began in the parking lot and then he did go into the building... for a brief period of time before he took his own life." McCarrt said the gunman was armed with a rifle. "This is a devastating day and words are hard to describe the emotion we feel," said FedEx chairman Frederick Smith in a letter to employees, adding that the company was working with law enforcement.

Four people with gunshot wounds were transported by ambulance, including one in critical condition, while five people suffered other injuries, police said. One man who was working a twilight shift at the FedEx Ground station, which reportedly employs more than 4,000 people, told local broadcaster WISH he saw the gunman start shooting and heard more than 10 shots.

"I saw a man with a sub-machine gun of some sort, an automatic rifle, and he was firing in the open. I immediately ducked down and got scared," Jeremiah Miller said.

The Indianapolis carnage follows a spate of mass

Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Smiling at your brother, enjoining good and forbidding evil, directing someone who has lost his way, helping a blind man, and removing stones, thorns and bones from the road or path, or pouring water from your bucket into your brother's—all of those are acts of charity." (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh At-Tirmidhi # 1, 956)

b. Giving interest free loans: Loans given and then forgiven become a meritorious type of charity. In order for the lender to get a unique reward for charity in this regard, two things must be considered:

- The first is that neither interest nor any other benefit in terms of advantages or gifts, should be expected.

- The second is that at no time should the creditor show any signs of arrogance or pride, disturbing the debtor by his constant reminder of his favor to him. Abu Huraira (ra) narrate that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "A man who used give loans would instruct his servant thus: 'When you come to one who is in straitened circumstances (unable to pay the debt) forgive him, for perhaps God may forgive us.' He (the Prophet) said, 'When he (the lender) met Allah, He forgave him.'" (Al-Bukhari # 3, 480. Al-Albani also rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh At-Targheeb # 905)

Finally, give charity before it is too late. Ha'ritha bin Wahb Al-Khuz'a'ey (ra) said what can be translated as, "I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say, '(O people), give in charity before a time comes when a person will wander about with his object of charity and someone (to whom it is offered) will say, 'If you had brought it yesterday, I would have taken it from you, but today I don't need it.'" (Al-Bukhari # 1, 411, in English translation, it is Hadeeh # 1, 424)

Courtesy of TIES: TIES is among the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue. TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or 94079426 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.



INDIANAPOLIS, IN: Mary Carol Weisert displays a picture of her husband, John Weisert, near his workplace at a FedEx ground facility Friday in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

shootings across the US in recent weeks, including at an office building in southern California, a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado and at several spas in Atlanta, Georgia where eight people, including six women of Asian descent, were killed.

Thursday's rampage was the third mass shooting in Indianapolis this year. Nearly 40,000 people in the United States die each year from guns, more than half of those being suicides. Biden this month announced six executive measures aimed at stemming gun violence.

The move was immediately attacked by Republicans, with House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy warning of "unconstitutional overreach." In a statement Friday after the new shooting Biden said "we must act" to end the scourge of violence killing too many Americans. "It stains our character and pierces the very soul of our nation," Biden said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to bring gun violence prevention legislation to the Senate floor. "We must break this cycle of suffering in America," he tweeted. — AFP

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Another Jerusalem resident, Majd Abu Myyaly, 27, said he had received the vaccine against COVID-19 that has helped drive down infection rates in Israel.

However, his aunt in nearby Ramallah on the West Bank was refused an Israeli permit to enter Jerusalem to pray. "It's been difficult," he said. "Every Ramadan, she gets permission, but not this year." Mustafa Abu Sway of the Waqf council said this year's gathering was the largest since the COVID pandemic, but still far smaller than in previous years. Worshippers were kept apart by social distancing measures on the sprawling plaza of the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. Inside, "we were able to pray shoulder-to-shoulder", said Mohammed, a 34-year-old doctor.

Local

Expats, non-vaccinated have higher ICU numbers in Kuwait

COVID-19 vaccines given to people who received SMS: MOH

KUWAIT: Expatriates and people who haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19 have the highest numbers among hospitalized and ICU patients in Kuwait, head of the higher COVID-19 committee Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah said yesterday. The number of positive results from field swab tests have dropped except in investment residential areas and among expats, he added. The number of people in Kuwait who have received their COVID-19 vaccines is estimated to be nearing 800,000. Meanwhile, health authorities are looking to curb the rise in daily infections through plans to accelerate vaccinations in Ramadan with the hope of reaching one million vaccinated people soon.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Health said that all shots of COVID-19 vaccines were given on Thursday to all people who came to vaccination centers in accordance with a specific time set via short message service (SMS). In a press statement Friday, the ministry stressed the necessity of people's abidance by the timing of their doses set in the SMS they receive for a smooth process. This contributes to receiving vaccines within a high quality and safe manner without any interruption

or delay, it noted. It also helps avoid gatherings and enables people to take their doses as planned, according to the statement.

Kuwait had said Friday it registered eight new COVID-19 fatalities and 1,406 new infections in the past 24 hours. The ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the death toll increased to 1,436 total fatalities, and the infections caseload to 254,472 as of Friday. Kuwait had announced five deaths and 1,391 cases on Thursday. The infections-to-swab ratio was 15.18 percent, down from 16.12 percent the previous day, Dr Sanad noted.

He added that 1,283 patients have recovered from the virus in the same period to reach 237,667 recoveries, which make the ratio of recoveries 93.40 percent from total conducted tests. The spokesman pointed out that ICU patients stood at 247 as of Friday, up from 244 the previous day, while the number of patients who received health care stood at 15,369 patients, up from 15,254 a day before. Dr Sanad called on the public to maintain social distancing, and to abide with all health regulations that would help in stopping the virus spread.



KUWAIT: In this March 1, 2021 file photo, people are seen lined up to enter the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Zain shares Ramadan blessings with MOI frontliners

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, shared the blessings of the holy month of Ramadan with the Ministry of Interior's frontliners at traffic checkpoints by visiting them on the field. The company recognized the efforts of police officers by presenting them with Ramadan gifts as a sign of gratitude for their sacrifices in protecting the health and safety of the nation during the pandemic.

The initiative came as part of Zain's annual Ramadan campaign, which comes in line with the company's Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability strategy. Zain's team visited a number of security

checkpoints operating during the partial curfew with the presence of MOI Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic and Operations Affairs Major-General Jamal Al-Sayegh, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as MOI and Zain officials.

Zain's team presented police officers at the frontlines with Ramadan gifts as a sign of gratitude for their great efforts and selfless sacrifices during the pandemic, especially that they face extreme heat and the danger of infection on a daily basis to save lives and ensure everyone's safety during the holy month of Ramadan.

As the leading telecom operator in Kuwait, Zain tirelessly seeks to serve the community by organizing and supporting unique initiatives during the holy month in an effort to reflect the pivotal role of the private sector in supporting social sustainability projects. The company is proud of the long list of programs and projects it supports in strategic partnership with many non-profits, government institutions, and global entities.



Interior Minister checks several security points

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah made a tour late Friday to check several security checkpoints around the country. The tour aimed to inspect the application of the required precautionary and health measures. In a statement, the General

Department of Public Relations and Media said yesterday that the tour comes within the Ministry's strategy to connect with the security forces at all locations. The Minister stressed the important role played by the security system to maintain law and order in the country and assured that no default will be allowed in keeping security and safety across the country. During the tour, the Interior Minister praised the citizens' cooperation with security members after listening to their notes. He stressed the ministry's efforts to ease and facilitate all obstacles according to the law, directing Security men to take into account the humanitarian situation and the peoples' exceptional circumstances during curfew hours. — KUNA

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

Salmiya Co-op
Tel: 22253225

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

Rawdha & Hawally
WhatsApp 9662-2883

Shaab Co-op
WhatsApp 9090-4455

Wafra Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-0539

Keifan Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-1719

Rehab Co-op
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E: info@kuwaittimes.net

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

News in brief

Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 96 cents to \$66.09 per barrel Friday as opposed to \$65.13 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, globally, went down with the first going down by 17 cents to \$66.77 per barrel, while the latter went down by 33 cents to \$63.13 pb.

Terrorist attack

KUWAIT: Kuwait on Friday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on Irbil International Airport and the terrorist attack on a market in east Baghdad that killed and injured a number of people. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement affirmed Kuwait's full support to any measures taken by Iraq to protect its security and stability.

Continued assaults

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry condemned and denounced, in the strongest terms, Houthi militias' continued assaults on Saudi Arabia's civilians and civil areas. In a press statement, the Ministry said that the continuation and increasing of these attacks stresses the importance for international community to move to put a decisive and deterrent end to these attacks. Such attacks violate international humanitarian law, and pose threats to the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the region's stability, the statement noted.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: The fish market as it appeared in the winter of 1960. The picture shows buyers checking fish before negotiating with the seller on the price at a sidewalk in the market. (Source: 'Pictures of the old markets of Kuwait' by Ali Al-Rais, Center of Research and Studies on Kuwait 2017. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

Health Bank launches diabetes management program

DUBAI: Following a successful pilot program earlier this year, The Health Bank (THB) has announced the launch of Diabetes Connected Care program. The program, available to all individuals in the UAE living with a Type 2 Diabetes diagnosis, supports the day-to-day management of diabetes, and related complications.

Combining innovation with personalized care, the program follows the International Diabetes Federation guidelines, using state-of-the-art technology including Continuous Glucose Monitor by Medtronic and smart glucometer by iHealth and Contour.

Zarina Jafar, THB Co-founder and Strategy Director, said: "Quite often, a diagnosis of diabetes can be overwhelming, and the issue can be compounded when tasked to adhere to a care plan and manage a busy lifestyle. Lack of knowledge, under-

standing and motivation can greatly affect how well the condition is managed and can increase the severity and reduce the overall quality of life. By combining personalised care and using innovative remote monitoring devices, we aim to effectively manage diabetes, and prevent complication."

The Connected Care program manages individuals at every stage of diabetes and, in some cases, program intervention can delay the progression of the disease if the patient successfully engages during prediabetic or early-stage diabetes.

THB also offers lifestyle management programs that encourage a healthy and proactive lifestyle. This involves monitoring health data, assessing nutritional advice and accessing motivational support. THB Clinicians are ideally placed to recognize the trends and patterns through continuous monitoring and can offer nudges, reminders and alerts as and when needed.

THB Global aim to roll the program out across the region to create a meaningful impact on the growing



Zarina Jafar

global epidemic of diabetes. The Connected Care programs complement existing and traditional models of healthcare by combining innovative practices to fill in the gaps and reduce the burden of high treatment costs on the governments. Part of the program includes motivating members, quantifying the progress and engagement, to which THB has created a five-star rating system unique to the program. The system is based on monitoring progress against targets and evaluating the level of engagement.

Commenting on the motivational technique, Zarmina Jafar added: "We believe it is not only important for progress to be quantified but for engagement and efforts to be recognized and celebrated. The information gathered as part of the program greatly supports the specialists and physicians, enabling them to have a full 360 insight into the patient's lifestyle outside of the clinical environment. Building this individual, comprehensive picture is the start of a lifelong approach to prioritizing good health."

The onboarding process to the Connected Care program includes a health assessment and review of family medical history, during which, patients will be asked about their preferred monitoring device as well as their targets and goals.

stc promotes sustainability during Ramadan

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the launch of its multi-layered campaign focusing on achieving sustainable outcomes during the holy month of Ramadan and in the future. Titled "#today_we_can", the campaign aims at spreading awareness on the importance of acting today for a better tomorrow, whether it is supporting the community or taking advantage of a given opportunity.

stc kicked off its campaign by hosting Graish for its employees several days before the holy month began, the Company highlighted in a statement. The event was part of the #today_we_can initiative, which is composed of several segments, including a group level TVC that focuses on sustainability. This year, the concept focused on highlighting the importance of acting today, whether it is to stop hunger, end the pandemic, educate those who are in need, or capitalize on an opportunity that can ultimately change the lives of others. The TVC was shared throughout the group's digital platforms to promote the encouraging and empowering message.

As part of its internal and external communication activities for both employees and the Kuwaiti community, stc will be sharing messages and tips on different aspects of life, such as health, sports, religion, and other topics. The external activities also included one more collaborative project with Tarahom Volunteer Team. The concept was based on interviewing different members of the Kuwaiti community about their unique cases in a series of episodes that will be aired to the public soon. Upon meeting the individuals, stc evaluated their cases

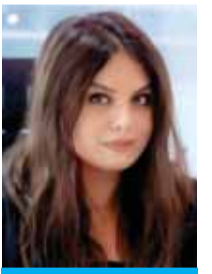
and aims to support them in fulfilling their needs and achieving their goals under the stc's CSR initiative.

Considering that Ramadan is the month of giving, stc organized its annual initiatives in addition to the #today_we_can campaign. Aside from Graish, stc will be hosting some online activities during Gergean. When organizing its internal and external initiatives, stc strictly follows the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health regarding social distancing. stc ensures that all safety measures are implemented throughout its headquarters, across its branches, and at any external initiatives it participates to battle the current pandemic.

Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "We at stc believe that every member of society plays a critical role in building a sustainable and progressive future for the younger generation. By doing our part in supporting our community, protecting our environment, and accomplishing our goals, we are collectively working together to achieve our wider goal in making our planet a better place. It is up to us to take advantage of the opportunities that surround us today, which is the message we are trying to portray through our #today_we_can campaign."

On behalf of stc, Jasem took this opportunity to thank the Tarahom Volunteer Team and those that participated in the interviews. She also wished the people of Kuwait a Ramadan Mubarak filled with prosperity, forgiveness, and guidance.

Jasem added, "stc consistently participates in initiatives that support and empower the community. This comes as an ongoing commitment that stc upholds towards its customers and the people of Kuwait. Despite the circumstances we face today, we will continue to build on our CSR framework by focusing on causes that affect societies both worldwide and in our community."



Danah Al-Jasem

RAMADAN QUIZ 2021

Kuwait Times annual Ramadan competition will publish every day throughout the holy month of Ramadan. All thirty coupons containing the correct answer must be sent to the newspaper to become eligible for the raffle draw. All coupons must be received on or before Monday 17 of May 2021. Winners will be announced in Kuwait Times.

ISSUE NO: 18412 RAMADAN 5, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

5- Fasting is compulsory for all Muslims except?

- A. A Muslim that has sports activities
- B. A Muslim woman that is menstruating
- C. A Muslim that does not pray
- D. None of the above

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :

Name :

Civil ID :

Tel :

Email :

ISSUE NO: 18412 RAMADAN 6, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

6- Which of the following is not included in the Five Pillars of Islam?

- A. Prayer
- B. Fasting
- C. Pilgrimage
- D. Penance

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :

Name :

Civil ID :

Tel :

Email :

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US, Japan show united front on China in Biden's first summit

Videos pile pressure on US police over racism, killings



GAZA STRIP: A picture taken in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday shows an explosion following an airstrike by Israel. The Israeli military said it had conducted airstrikes against targets in the Gaza Strip following a rocket attack from the Palestinian enclave, in the second such exchange in as many days. — AFP

Israel strikes Gaza after rocket attack

High seas the new front in Iran-Israel shadow war

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military said yesterday it had conducted airstrikes against targets in the Gaza Strip following a rocket attack from the Palestinian enclave, in the second such exchange in as many days. The strikes hit what the military described as "terror targets" operated by Gaza's Islamist ruling party Hamas. They included a "training facility, an anti-aircraft missile launcher post, a concrete production plant & terror tunnel infrastructure".

Witnesses and security sources said the strikes hit two militant "training sites" in southern Gaza and another target in central Gaza. A Hamas spokesman said that despite the Israeli action, "Gaza still fights and doesn't break."

The strikes came hours after militants in the Gaza Strip fired a rocket into southern Israel. An Israeli army spokesperson said the rocket hit open ground and caused no casualties or damage. It was the second such exchange in recent days.

Late Thursday, Palestinian militants fired a rocket at southern Israel, prompting the army to launch retaliatory air strikes on Gaza that caused no casualties.

Israel imposed a blockade of Gaza's sea and land borders after Hamas seized control in 2007. The two sides have since fought three wars. A fragile truce has endured in recent years despite occasional flareups, with Palestinians firing rockets at Israel and the Jewish state responding with airstrikes on the coastal enclave. Arch-foes Israel and Iran have long fought an undeclared shadow war across the Middle East, landing blows in Lebanon, Syria and inside the Islamic republic itself. More recently, the battle has moved to the high seas, with a series of mysterious attacks and sabotage incidents mainly in the Red and Arabian Seas.

Analysts now fear the tit-for-tat attacks could

escalate, warning that the protagonists are "playing with fire". Israel has vowed to stop Iran, whose leaders have threatened to "wipe it off the map", from acquiring a nuclear bomb—a goal Tehran denies pursuing. The Islamic republic meanwhile has provided arms, training and money to allied militias in a regional "axis of resistance" against the Jewish state and its ally the United States. In the latest attack Iran blamed on Israel, a blast hit Iran's enrichment facility in Natanz Sunday, complicating diplomatic efforts to salvage a tattered 2015 deal on Tehran's nuclear program.

Then on Tuesday, Israeli-operated ship the Hyperion Ray was attacked near the Emirati port of Fujairah, the latest in a string of off-shore attacks.

Spy missions, assassinations
Israel has often fought Tehran's allies, including

Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, and pro-Iran fighters in Syria. The Jewish state has also launched cyberattacks and spy missions, such as a 2018 Mossad operation that netted a treasure trove of Iranian nuclear documents from a Tehran warehouse. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in recent years relished having a White House ally in Donald Trump, who waged a hardline "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Trump in 2018 ripped up the 2015 agreement that had granted Iran sanctions relief in return for limits on its nuclear activities, a deal Israel always rejected as inadequate. Under Trump, the US also killed revered Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in a Baghdad drone strike early last year, a move that brought Tehran and Washington to the brink of war. — AFP

Cuba changes guard, seeks 'respectful' talks with US

HAVANA: The all-powerful Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) opened a historic congress Friday to rubber-stamp the transfer of power to a new generation as outgoing leader Raul Castro committed it to "respectful" talks with the United States. In an address to a few hundred party delegates, Castro emphasized that Cuba would not renounce "the principles of the revolution and socialism."

But he affirmed a "willingness to conduct a respectful dialogue and build a new kind of relationship with the United States," which has had sanctions against Cuba since 1962. Castro, 89, is stepping down as PCC first secretary—the most powerful position in Cuba—ending a near six-decade family hold on power that started in 1959 under his revolutionary brother, Fidel, who died in 2016.

The reins will now pass to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has already served as Cuba's pres-

ident since 2018, when Castro relinquished that part of his executive portfolio. Ties with the United States, after a historic but temporary easing of tensions under president Barack Obama between 2014 and 2016, worsened under Donald Trump, who reinforced sanctions.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Friday the United States was not planning any immediate change in its policy toward Cuba. "Support for democracy and human rights will be at the core of our efforts," she said.

First civilian leader

Diaz-Canel will become Cuba's first civilian leader since the Castro-led revolution of the 1950s, which happened before he was even born. The official handover of power to the first non-Castro PCC first secretary is expected on the fourth and final day of the congress next Monday. In a tweet Friday, Diaz-Canel said the congress would be a forum where "ideas are entrenched, history recognized and the future discussed" while underlining there would be "continuity."

Diaz-Canel, who will remain Cuban president, takes over as the country battles its worst economic crisis in 30 years, sky-high inflation, biting food short-



HAVANA: Picture released by Cuban News Agency (ACN) of Cuban First Secretary of the Communist Party Raul Castro attending the opening session of the 8th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party at the Convention Palace in Havana Friday. — AFP

ages, long lines for basic necessities and growing disgruntlement over limited freedoms. Cuba's economic crisis has been caused in part by its own management failures, worsened by ramped-up US sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, which dried up tourists—a key income source for the island. — AFP

Heavy fighting near Yemen's Marib leaves 96 dead

DUBAI: Heavy fighting near the Yemeni city of Marib has killed 96 combatants over the past two days as Houthi rebels press their offensive on the government's last northern toehold, loyalist commanders said Friday. "Clashes between the two sides on several fronts in the Marib area on Wednesday and Thursday killed 36 loyalists troops and 60 rebels," one government military source told AFP.

The Iran-backed Shiite rebels rarely disclose their own losses.

Aircraft of a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia provided air support to government ground forces. The Houthis are "keeping up their slow advance on Marib and now constitute a very real threat on the Kassara and Mashjah fronts, northwest of the city," another loyalist military official told AFP.

The loss of Marib would be a heavy blow for the Yemeni government, currently based in the southern city of Aden, and for its Saudi backers. The city of Marib and its surrounding oil fields make up the last significant pocket of government-held territory in the north, the rest of which is under rebel control, including the capital Sanaa. The city's fall could also lead to humanitarian disaster, as vast numbers of civilians displaced from fighting elsewhere have sought refuge in the area.

Around 140 camps have sprung up in the surrounding desert to provide basic shelter for up to two million displaced, according to the Yemeni government. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned that the suffering will only end when a political solution is found between the Houthis and the government. The rebels see Marib as a strategic prize that will give them more bargaining power in peace talks that Washington says must begin soon.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since Saudi Arabia and its allies intervened in 2015.

Millions have been pushed to the brink of famine, in what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

Biden drops promise for quick expansion in refugee admissions

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's administration announced Friday he was scrapping his pledge for a rapid expansion in the number of refugees allowed into the United States, but seemed to backtrack later in the day after fierce blowback from within his Democratic Party.

The outcry came after a senior administration official said Biden would maintain the historically low ceiling of 15,000 people resettled a year, a number set by predecessor Donald Trump who had imposed hardline border policies.

The Biden administration had recently stated it wanted to allow in about 60,000 refugees annually, ramping up to double the following year. That aim had been part of the Democrat's broader promise to end harsh anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment whipped up by Trump.

Instead, the White House will keep the strict 15,000 limit so that it can "rebuild" a broken program and deal with pandemic-related complications, said the official, who asked not to be identified. After a top Democrat and refugee aid groups slammed Biden's target as "appalling low" and "deeply disappointing," the White House issued a statement later Friday saying the number was provisional.



LOS ANGELES: Immigrant families and their supporters attend a rally at Mariachi Plaza in Los Angeles, California, demanding President Joe Biden move forward with his plan to grant legal status to the more than 10 million undocumented immigrants. — AFP

Noting that Biden has green-lighted settlement of refugees from previously blocked regions and signed off on flights from those areas to begin within days, the White House said it expected Biden "to set a final, increased refugee cap for the remainder of this fiscal year by May 15," but added that "his initial goal of 62,500 seems unlikely." The admissions system left by the Trump administration was "even more decimated than we'd thought, requiring a major overhaul in order to build back toward the numbers to which we've committed," the senior official said. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also said the refugee program needs rebuilding. — AFP

At least 41 dead as migrant boat sinks off Tunisia

TUNIS: At least 41 people, including a child, have died after a boat carrying African migrants to Europe sank off Tunisia, the UN refugee agency and International Organization for Migration said on Friday. "According to reports from local UNHCR and IOM teams, three survivors were rescued by the Tunisian National Coast Guard" following Thursday's sinking, they said in a joint statement.

"The bodies of 41 people, including at least one child, have so far been retrieved," the statement said. Earlier, Ali Ayari, spokesman for the Tunisian coast guard in the eastern city of Sfax, had put the death toll at 20. He said the bodies of 11 men, eight women and a child were retrieved. Seventeen other people were missing.

Search operations, halted due to bad weather, would continue yesterday, he added. The joint UNHCR-IOM statement said all those who perished were from sub-Saharan Africa. "This tragic loss of life underscores once again the need to enhance and expand state-led search and rescue operations across the Central Mediterranean, where some 290 people have lost their lives so far this year," it added. — AFP

International

Videos pile pressure on US police over racism, killings

Public trust in US police erodes amid shocking footages, fatal shootings

MINNEAPOLIS, US: More shocking bodycam footage, more fatal shootings by officers, and a murder trial nearing its conclusion — public trust in the US police has seldom been more strained. Video evidence showing apparent wrongful use of deadly force has been piling up, fueling a fierce debate on policing across the United States. “I am a Black man, and I know from experience that the police just aren’t professional and the leadership they get isn’t right,” said Darnell Squire, 46, who sells T-shirts and baseball caps from a street stall in a Minneapolis suburb.

“They aren’t around to protect the community, or to make people feel safe, whatever they say — that has been clear since I was a child. “I don’t trust promises from the government about things changing, and I don’t trust the system or the courts. For me, the problem starts at the top.”

In a court in Minneapolis, former officer Derek Chauvin is on trial for murder over the killing of George Floyd, with closing arguments next week before the jury delivers its verdict. As the trial examined grueling video of Floyd dying while Chauvin knelt on his knee, outside the courtroom, fresh examples of police killings have stoked anger and protests. An officer who stopped young Black man Daunte Wright in a Minneapolis suburb last Sunday shot him dead in his car after mistaking her Taser for a gun — all caught on bodycam.

In another case, Chicago police on Thursday released graphic footage of an officer shooting dead 13-year-old Adam Toledo in a dark alley last month, apparently suspecting he had just dropped a gun.

‘This is a long fight’

“I will feel the same even if Chauvin is convicted — this is a long fight,” said Selena McKnight 46, a local activist in Minneapolis who regularly attends protests against police misconduct. “Just look at the videos that come out every day. We will keep fighting. The trial is just one case, and this battle is not over until justice is always served.”

The images of Floyd, Wright, Toledo and others dying at the hands of police have been contrasted to officers dealing with aggressive white men.

On Wednesday, in a town outside Minneapolis, an officer was assaulted with a hammer and dragged at high-speed by a vehicle driven by a white, 61-year-old man. The suspect, who is accused of attacking shop staff who asked him to wear a COVID-19 mask, rammed a police car and drove off with the officer hanging onto his car.

No shots were fired, and the man was later arrested. “Was that man shot? No, of course not. That tells you all you need to know about police prejudice,” said McKnight. “We might think that all this video footage can make a difference, but it just shows what we all know has been going on for a long time.”

Ahead of the Chauvin trial verdict, the United States is braced for potentially violent protests if he is acquitted of murder. Downtown Minneapolis has been largely boarded up and deserted during the trial, with armed National Guard troops patrolling in armored vehicles.

On Friday night there were new protests in Brooklyn Center, the suburb where Wright was shot, with about 500 people gathering before police moved in to break it up. Officers said some protesters came wielding shields and baseball bats, while glass bottles were thrown. About 100 people were arrested, public safety officials said.



PORTLAND, OR: Protesters march along the Hawthorne Bridge following the police shooting of a homeless man in Lents Park Friday in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

There were also protests over the death of Toledo in Chicago, where several hundred turned out. “I fear the police, not Covid-19,” said Minneapolis resident Tesfaye Habte, who was born in Ethiopia. “If I am driving and I see them, I worry they will shoot me because of my color. It seems to

have got worse in recent years in this city.

“With the protests, both sides are doing bad things. “America is democracy, the constitution and free speech, but the police are very aggressive and inhuman. I follow this trial and I am worried.” —AFP

In Brazil, graveyard shift reveals rising cost of pandemic

SAO PAULO: In almost three decades of working in Sao Paulo’s largest cemetery, the oldest gravediggers can’t remember performing more than 10 night burials. But since the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic swept across Brazil, that exception has become the rule.

The vertiginous rise in deaths in Sao Paulo in recent months has forced the mayor of the country’s richest and most populous city to adapt funeral planning to avoid being overwhelmed. Now, in addition to hiring more personnel and vehicles, night shifts have been added in four of the 22 municipal cemeteries, where 600 graves are dug every day. One of these is Vila Formosa, the largest cemetery in Latin America and a showcase for the lethal cost of the pandemic in Brazil, where more than 360,000 people have already died from COVID-19.

Eritrea admits troops in Tigray, vows pullout

ADDIS ABABA: Eritrea has acknowledged its troops are participating in the war in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region but has vowed to pull them out amid mounting international pressure. The first explicit admission of Eritrea’s role in the fighting came in a letter posted online Friday night by the country’s information minister, written by its UN ambassador and addressed to the Security Council.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in November to disarm and detain leaders of the region’s once dominant political party, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). For months the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments denied Eritreans were involved, contradicting testimony from residents, rights groups, aid workers, diplomats and even some Ethiopian civilian and military officials.

Abiy finally acknowledged the Eritreans’ presence in March while speaking to lawmakers, and

At 6 pm the night shift clocks in. Two huge lamps powered by generators start up, illuminating the graves and filling the air with the smell of diesel. It is the start of autumn here, and in this tree-lined cemetery on the outskirts of Sao Paulo the temperature has dropped to around 16 degrees Celsius (60 degrees Fahrenheit). Eight gravediggers clad in white overalls, face masks and gloves arrive in two vans. They get out and form a circle around the graves, hands behind their backs and heads bowed to observe a minute of silence.

Then, they fetch their shovels and lay to rest the first deceased of the night. “Are there no relatives?” asks one. “No. You can go ahead,” answers another, clutching the deceased’s documents in his hand. In May 2020, during the first onslaught of the pandemic, the cemetery hired three excavators to dig 60 graves a day. Now, there are six machines digging 200 graves a day, say the workers, who labor until 10 pm.

More than 300 burials a day

Fifty rented vans are used to move bodies, due to a lack of hearses to cope with the influx of dead. The mayor’s office has denied local media reports that school buses have been pressed into service.

vowed soon after that they would leave. Friday’s letter from Eritrea said that with the TPLF “largely thwarted”, Asmara and Addis Ababa “have agreed-at the highest levels-to embark on the withdrawal of the Eritrean forces and the simultaneous redeployment of Ethiopian contingents along the international boundary.”

On Thursday UN aid chief Mark Lowcock told the Security Council that despite Abiy’s earlier promise, there had been no evidence of a withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the region. He also said aid workers “continue to report new atrocities which they say are being committed by Eritrean Defense Forces.”

Eritrea’s information minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, said on Twitter Saturday that Asmara had summoned the UN’s resident coordinator in Eritrea and the local head of the UN humanitarian coordination office to protest “wayward practices and fallacious reports... on basis of opaque networks/affiliations with TPLF.” Tigray residents have repeatedly accused Eritreans of mass rape and massacres, including in the towns of Axum and Dengolat.

Both Eritrea and Ethiopia blame the conflict on TPLF-orchestrated attacks on federal army camps in early November and describe it as a campaign to restore law and order.

COVID compared with other deadly viruses

PARIS: The global death toll from COVID-19 passed three million yesterday with the pandemic already having killed more people than most other viral epidemics of the 20th and 21st centuries. But there have been notable exceptions. The post-World War I Spanish Flu wiped out 50 million people, according to some estimates. And over the decades AIDS has killed 33 million.

Here are some comparisons: Flu epidemics

In 2009, the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, caused a global pandemic and left an official death toll of 18,500. This was later revised upwards by The Lancet medical journal to between 151,700 and 575,400 dead. That brings it close to seasonal flu, which accounts for between 290,000 and 650,000 deaths worldwide every year, according to the World Health Organization. In the 20th century, two major non-seasonal flu pandemics—Asian flu in

1957-1958 and Hong Kong flu in 1968-1970 — each killed around one million people, according to counts carried out afterwards. The greatest catastrophe of modern pandemics to date, the flu pandemic of 1918-1919 also known as Spanish flu, wiped out some 50 million people according to research published in the 2000s.

Other viral epidemics

The death toll from COVID-19, which emerged in central China in late 2019, is far higher than that of the hemorrhagic fever Ebola, which was first identified in 1976. In four decades, periodic Ebola outbreaks have killed some 15,000 people, all in Africa.

Ebola has a far higher fatality rate than COVID-19: around 50 percent of people who are infected die from it. But Ebola is less contagious than other viral diseases, namely because it is not airborne but transmitted through direct and close contact. AIDS is by far the most deadly modern epidemic: almost 33 million people around the world have died of the disease, which affects the immune system.

No effective vaccine has been found, but retroviral drugs, when taken regularly, efficiently stop



A patient uses a new non-invasive technology that can reduce the need of intubation at the COVID-19 area of the Centenario Hospital in Sao Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul state, southern Brazil Friday. —AFP

Shortly after, a van arrives with another casket. A large group of relatives surrounds the grave where the 57-year-old man, who died of COVID-19, is to be buried. The dead man’s sons ask if they can place a yellow and green shirt from the Brazilian soccer team on top of the coffin. The gravedigger who is holding the burial documents nods his assent. “It’s the only thing we can do,” he says. —AFP



MEKELE: A woman leans on the wall of a damaged house which was shelled as federal-aligned forces entered the city, in Wukro, north of Mekele. —AFP

Eritrean UN ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam reiterated this position in her letter Friday. “We are indeed appalled by attempts to blame those who were forced to resort to legitimate measures of self-defense that other countries would have done under similar circumstances,” she wrote.

“The allegations of rape and other crimes lodged against Eritrean soldiers is not just outrageous, but also a vicious attack on the culture and history of our people.” —AFP

the illness in its tracks and heavily reduce the risk of contamination. This treatment has helped bring down the death toll from its peak in 2004 of 1.7 million deaths to 690,000 in 2019, according to UNAIDS.

The hepatitis B and C viruses also have a high death toll, killing some 1.3 million people every year, most often in poor countries. In 2002-2003, COVID predecessor SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) that emerged from China was the first coronavirus to spark global fears, but killed just 774 people in the final toll.

Three million equals

As a matter of comparison, the figure of three million people represents a little bit more than the population of Jamaica or Armenia. It is also three times the toll of the Iran-Iraq war which raged from 1980-1988, or 2,000 times more than the 1,500 who died in the sinking of the Titanic. Over the past month, more than 10,000 people have died every day from the coronavirus.

It is as many as the 10,000 children who die every day from hunger around the world, according to the UN. —AFP



LAHORE: Supporters of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) offer Friday prayers along a blocked street before taking part in a protest after their leader was detained following his calls for the expulsion of the French ambassador, in Lahore Friday. —AFP

French nationals in Pakistan refuse call to leave

ISLAMABAD: The French community in Pakistan is torn between disbelief, fear and annoyance in reaction to their embassy’s call for them to leave the country after Francophobic rioting this week by an extremist Islamic party. Most, it seems, have decided to stay put. In a terse three-line email, accompanied by the words “urgent”, the embassy in Islamabad on Thursday recommended its nationals and French companies temporarily leave Pakistan, because of “serious threats”.

Western governments should treat people who insult the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) the same as those who deny the Holocaust, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said yesterday. Speaking after a week of violent protests in Pakistan by a radical Islamist party outraged by French government support for magazines publishing cartoons of Mohammed, Khan said insulting the prophet hurt Muslims around the world. “We Muslims have the greatest love & respect for our Prophet,” he tweeted. “We cannot tolerate any such disrespect & abuse.”

The email, which did not specify the nature of the risks, caused shock and consternation among the few hundred-strong French community. Jean-Michel Quarantotti, who has taught French at the American school in Islamabad for three years, was first alerted to the embassy advisory by a student. “I won’t hide from you that at first I felt a little bit of fear, panic,” he told AFP. “It’s not my first foreign country—I did a lot before arriving in Pakistan—but I was really shocked. I didn’t expect to go through this.”

His first thought was to pack up and leave, but after discussing the situation with colleagues he said reason took over from emotion. “The Pakistanis around me advised me to stay,” he said. “They told me that they would protect me.”

“It was very touching to see the solidarity around me, from people who told me: ‘We are here for you, do not worry, we will defend you.’” The embassy announcement came after days of violent protests orchestrated by the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) after the arrest in Lahore Monday of leader Saad Rizvi, who had called for a march on the capital to demand the expulsion of the French ambassador. Four policemen were killed in the rioting.

Many of the French people contacted by AFP questioned the timing of the embassy’s message as the Pakistani government had just announced the ban on the TLP and seemed to have the situation under control. “Yes, there are a lot of risks to live here,” said Quarantotti, “but we don’t need to panic the French community with words that are badly chosen. —AFP

International

US, Japan show united front on China in Biden's first summit

Washington, Tokyo to step up joint development of 5G internet

WASHINGTON: The United States and Japan vowed Friday to stand firm together against an assertive China and to step up cooperation on climate change and next-generation technology as President Joe Biden made his first summit a show of alliance unity. After waiting nearly three months for his first foreign guest due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Biden told Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that Japan enjoyed the United States' "iron-clad support" on security issues and beyond. "We're going to work together to prove that democracies can still compete and win in the 21st century," Biden, affectionately calling the Japanese leader "Yoshi," told a socially distanced news conference in the White House Rose Garden.

A joint statement called for "candid conversations" with China and did not hold back, raising concerns over Beijing's growing maritime moves, its clampdowns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and growing tension over Taiwan. The statement reiterated that the US-Japan Security Treaty covers the Japanese-administered Senkaku islands—one of several areas in the region where Beijing, which calls them the Diaoyu, has increasingly shown its might.

The United States and Japan "recognize the importance of deterrence to maintain peace and stability in the region," the statement said. "We oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea," read one line highlighted by Suga.

The Chinese embassy in the United States hit back on Saturday, expressing "strong concern and firm opposition" to the comments. "It cannot be more ironic that such an attempt at stoking division and building blocs against other countries is put under the banner of 'free and open,'" a statement by the embassy said, referring to a US pledge to build a "free and open" Indo-Pacific region.

The matters raised "bear on China's fundamental interests and allow no interference," it added. Biden and Suga also emphasized "the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" and encouraged "the peaceful resolution of cross-strait

issues," as Beijing steps up air incursions in Taiwan.

While cautiously worded, it was the first time a Japanese leader has joined a US president in a statement on Taiwan since the allies separately switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing in the 1970s. Taiwan is an especially sensitive issue for Beijing, which claims the self-governing democracy.

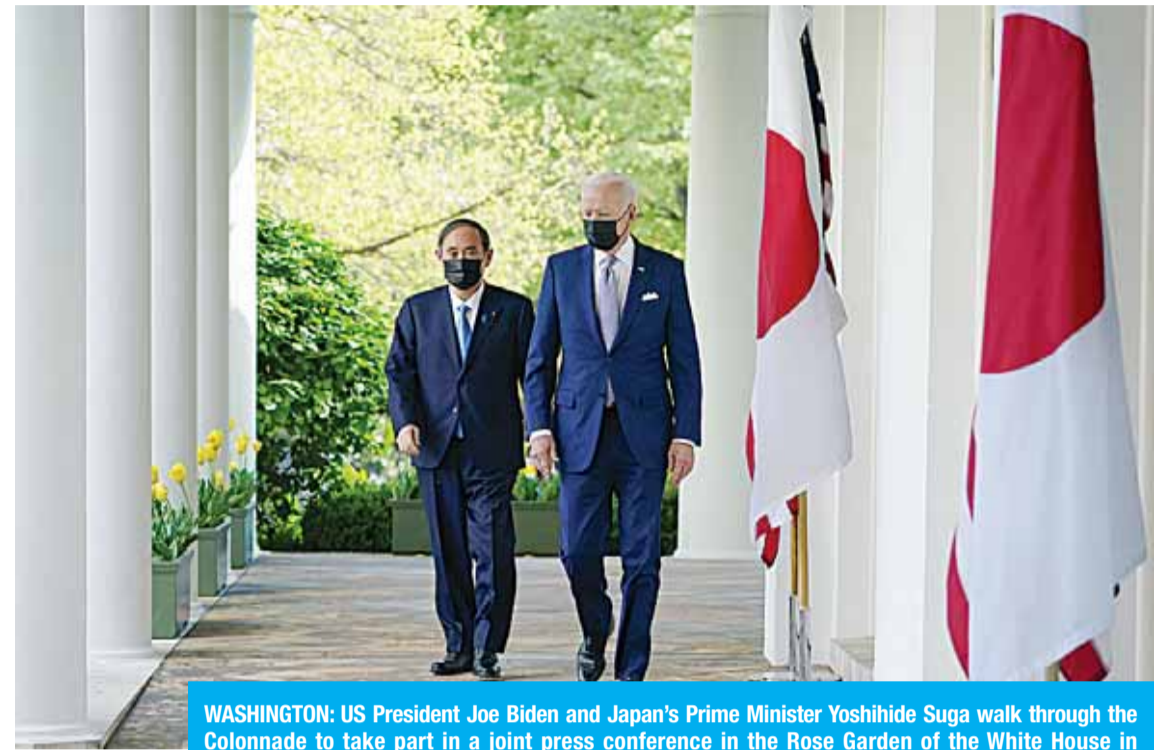
'Universal values'

The forthright statement comes despite Japan's efforts in recent years not to antagonize China, its top trading partner, including by not joining Western nations in sanctions over human rights. Suga echoed Biden's themes as he described the US-Japan alliance as the "foundation of peace and stability" in the region. "Freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the universal values that link our alliance," Suga said. In a highly unusual comment by a Japanese leader on the US domestic scene, Suga also voiced concern over a wave of attacks in the United States against people of Asian descent. Biden's second in-person summit will take place next month with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, part of the new administration's strategy of shoring up alliances as it zeroes in on China as America's most pressing challenge.

On another of his key priorities, Biden said he and Suga agreed on the need for "ambitious" climate commitments and indicated that both nations would soon announce goals by 2030. Biden will lead a virtual summit next week in hopes of rallying climate pledges amid growing evidence of a planetary crisis as average temperatures hit record highs and natural disasters become more frequent. Japan, the world's third-largest economy, promised under the Paris accord to reduce emissions by 26 percent by 2030 but from 2013 levels—a goal that experts say is not bold enough to meet Suga's goal of a carbon-neutral Japan in 2050. "We confirmed that Japan and the US will lead global decarbonization," Suga said.

Alliance on 5G

Biden and Suga said they would step up joint



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga walk through the Colonnade to take part in a joint press conference in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, DC on Friday. —AFP

development and testing of fifth-generation internet-as well as the sixth-generation technologies of the future. The United States and Japan must "maintain and sharpen our competitive edge" and ensure that "those technologies are governed by shared democratic norms that we both share—norms set by democracies, not by autocracies," Biden said.

China's Huawei has taken an early dominant role in 5G, which is becoming a crucial part of the global economy, despite heavy US pressure on the company, which Washington argues poses threats to security and privacy.

A joint statement said the United States had

committed \$2.5 billion and Japan another \$2 billion. Masashi Adachi, a special advisor to Suga, told reporters that the agreement was more about joint development than fresh funding, pointing to several projects underway in Japan on 5G development. Suga in September succeeded Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, who was one of the few democratic allies to manage to preserve stable relations with Biden's volatile predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden and Suga also recommitted to the denuclearization of North Korea and discussed next moves following Trump's unusually personal diplomacy with the totalitarian state. —AFP

Myanmar junta leader set to join ASEAN summit

YANGON: Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will join a special ASEAN summit next week, the Thai foreign ministry said yesterday, his first official trip since masterminding a coup which deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The February 1 putsch triggered a massive uprising, bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets to demand a return to democracy, while civil servants have boycotted work in a bid to shutter the junta's administration. The military has deployed lethal force to quell the anti-coup movement, killing more than 720 people and detaining some 3,100 activists, journalists and dissidents, according to a local monitoring group. The international community has largely condemned the generals for use of force against unarmed civilians—imposing targeted sanctions against top military brass, their families and army-linked businesses.

But regional leaders have sought to open communications with the regime, and yesterday Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that a summit of Southeast Asian leaders in Jakarta on Myanmar's situation will include the senior general. "Several leaders have confirmed their attendance including Myanmar's MAH

(Min Aung Hlaing)," said spokesman Tane Sangrat in a message to reporters.

The meeting of the 10-country bloc of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is expected to address the ongoing crisis in post-coup Myanmar, and will be on April 24 in Jakarta. The announcement drew dismay from activists, who have long beseeched foreign leaders not to recognize the junta. "#ASEAN do not legitimize the Myanmar Military junta as a government by inviting MAH to attend the summit," said prominent activist Wai Wai Nu on Twitter. "(The) Junta is illegitimate and illegal."

The military has consistently justified the putsch by alleging widespread fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide. They claim power will be handed back to a civilian administration after elections are held in about a year—though they recently extended the timeline to a two-year period.

New Year crackdown

Yesterday was the first day of Myanmar's traditional New Year, and hundreds in commercial hub Yangon visited the famed Shwedagon Pagoda to pray as soldiers patrolled the streets. Leading up to the Buddhist New Year, the Thingyan festivities were a somber affair—a far cry from previous years when revellers would take to the streets for city-wide water fights. Instead, activists sloshed crimson paint in Yangon to symbolize the bloodshed, while protesters wore red across the country in nationwide demonstrations. More violence erupted yes-

terday in the central gem-producing city of Mogok, when security forces cracked down on protesters. According to an AFP-verified video filmed by a resident, soldiers crouched on a street as their commanding officer shouted that he wanted "deaths".

A rescue worker told AFP at least one had died. "He was shot in the stomach," he said, adding that six others injured had to be rushed to the hospital. Despite the threat of violence, protesters have continued to gather across the country in defiance of the junta, carrying posters demanding for Suu Kyi to be freed. —AFP



YANGON: Relatives gather around a bus carrying prisoners to be released outside Insein Prison in Yangon yesterday as thousands of inmates were freed nationwide to mark the country's traditional Buddhist New Year holiday. —AFP

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Fugitive Indian jeweler Nirav Modi

intimidation and destroying evidence. In his February ruling Goozee dismissed submissions from his legal team that he would not be treated fairly in India, and said there was not enough evidence from doctors to believe he was a suicide risk. —AFP



NEW DELHI: People are seen on a partially deserted road near the Jama Masjid mosque as a lockdown is in effect wherein only those catering to essential services were allowed to commute as directed by the Delhi state government to curb the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus infections yesterday. —AFP

UK approves extradition of Indian jeweler

LONDON: Britain's interior ministry said Friday it had approved the extradition of fugitive Indian jeweller Nirav Modi to his homeland, where he is accused of defrauding one of the largest banks of \$1.8 billion. Modi, dubbed a jeweller to the stars thanks to celebrity customers in Hollywood and Bollywood, lost his legal bid to avoid extradition from the UK in February. He fled India in February 2018 after being accused of having a central role in defrauding Punjab National Bank, one of India's largest lenders, of \$1.8 billion (1.5 billion euros).

COVID lockdown empties Delhi streets amid surge

NEW DELHI: New Delhi led major cities across India into a weekend lockdown yesterday as the country confronts a fierce new coronavirus wave, with more than 230,000 fresh daily cases and families clamoring for drugs and hospital beds. Hopes that South Asia might have beaten the pandemic have been dashed with India seeing over two million new cases this month alone and Bangladesh and Pakistan also imposing shutdowns.

India added another record 234,000 cases yesterday to pass 14.5 million overall and 1,341 deaths took its pandemic total to 175,649 deaths.

The per-capita rates remain low by international comparison, but the speed at which cases are rising led

the international Red Cross to call the South Asian surge "truly frightening". India now has three times the daily cases of the United States, the world's worst-hit country. After a national lockdown a year ago led to an economic slump, the Indian government is desperate to avoid a second stoppage. But Delhi joined Mumbai in ordering all but essential services to close. Landmarks such as the historic Red Fort where tens of thousands of people would normally gather were deserted. "Not one person has turned up," said security guard Anil Dayan. Police checked many of the cars that strayed onto the streets.

The city of more than 20 million people now has the most daily cases in India and restaurants, malls and gyms were all closed. Weddings can go ahead with guests limited to 50 people, while only 20 can attend funerals.

"Don't panic. All essential services will be available through the weekend," Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said. Maharashtra, which includes Mumbai, Gujarat and IT hub Bangalore's home state Karnataka have also imposed restrictions on movement. —AFP

News in brief

Five shot dead in Bangladesh

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: At least five people were shot dead and dozens injured when Bangladesh police opened fire yesterday on demonstrating workers at the construction site of a Chinese-financed power plant, officials said. Police started shooting after workers became violent, said Saiduazzman Chowdhury, government administrator in the southern coastal town of Banskhali. They were protesting over unpaid wages, working hours and alleged discrimination. Azizul Islam, Banskhali police chief, said about 2,000 protesters threw rocks and bricks at police, who responded with gunfire. The 2.5 billion-dollar, 1,200-megawatt coal power plant, 30 percent owned by Chinese engineering giant SIEPCOIII, has been at the center of other deadly protests in recent years. —AFP

Russia detains Ukraine diplomat

SAINT PETERSBURG: Russia's FSB security service said yesterday it had detained a Ukrainian diplomat, accusing him of receiving sensitive information from a Russian national. In recent years Russia has detained a number of Ukrainian nationals on suspicion of spying but the detention of a diplomat is rare and seen as a sign of sharply rising tensions. "A Ukrainian diplomat, a consul of Ukraine's Consulate General in Saint Petersburg, Alexander Sosonyuk, has been detained by Russia's FSB," the security service said in a statement, using the Russian language spelling of his name. He had been detained on Friday, the security service said. —AFP

Bangkok virus spike fuels actions

BANGKOK: Hundreds waited in grim silence at a Bangkok stadium to get free COVID-19 tests yesterday as a spiraling infection rate gripped Thailand, on a fourth consecutive day of more than 1,000 new cases. The capital appears to be the epicenter of the kingdom's third wave, after infections were traced back to a nightlife district earlier this month. In the past 10 days, the national infection total has jumped from 29,900 to more than 40,500 — the sharp increase probably due to a highly infectious variant of the virus originally found in Britain. —AFP

Member of FIN7 group sentenced

SAN FRANCISCO: A Ukrainian national arrested for his role in a hacking group that compromised millions of financial accounts was sentenced to a decade in prison, US prosecutors said Friday. Fedir Hladkyr, 35, had a high-level role as a manager and systems administrator for a hacking group known as FIN7, authorities said. He was one of three Ukrainians arrested in mid-2018 for hacking more than 100 US companies and stealing millions of credit and debit card numbers, according to the Justice Department. —AFP

Pompeo 'violated ethics rules'

WASHINGTON: Former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and his wife violated ethics rules by asking staff to conduct personal errands including walking their dog and making restaurant reservations, a long-awaited internal review said Friday. Then president Donald Trump last year fired the State Department's inspector general on behalf of Pompeo after the internal watchdog began reviewing the complaint. But the inspector general's office went ahead with the review, which found that Pompeo and his wife, Susan, made more than 100 requests that appeared to be of a personal nature. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2021

Africa cashew farmers not reaping benefits

Less than 15% of continent's nuts de-shelled on African soil

ABIDJAN: The three million African farmers who supply most of the world's cashew nuts aren't cashing in on the booming demand due to a lack of processing facilities, a UN body said on Friday. World production and trade in raw cashew nuts have more than doubled since 2000 with African producers, led by Ivory Coast, accounting for almost two-thirds of the growth.

But the continent's farmers and exporters get only a fraction of the final retail price, according to a new report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). "Countries that grow cashews but don't process them at a significant scale retain only a small share of the value created as the nut travels from the farm to store," said Miho Shirotori, who leads UNCTAD's work on trade negotiations and commercial diplomacy. "African farmers, exporters and workers are missing out on a wealth of opportunities," she added.

Cashews thrive in the tropical climates of 20 western and eastern African nations, where about 90 percent of the raw cashew nuts traded in the global market are grown. Behind Ivory Coast the main producers are Tanzania, Nigeria, Benin,

Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Ghana, according to UNCTAD.

But less than 15 percent of the continent's cashew nuts are even de-shelled on African soil. The rest is exported mainly to Asia, where more value is added. India and Vietnam accounted for about 98 percent of the world's raw cashew imports between 2014 and 2018, according to the report.

More than 60 percent of the traded kernels are then roasted, salted, packaged and consumed as a snack or an ingredient in other products, in Europe and North America. While admitting to difficulties in calculating just how much the Africans are losing, the report estimated that by the time cashews are processed in the EU their price is about 8.5 times higher than when they left the farm in Ivory Coast.

"This shows the potential for value creation in African cashew-growing countries, 14 of which are classified as 'least developed'," Shirotori said. "And value creation can lead to better wages for workers and more money for the local economy." Between 2000 and 2018, world trade in raw cashew nuts more than doubled to 2.1 billion kg, according to UNCTAD. — AFP



ABIDJAN: In this file photograph taken on May 12, 2016, raw cashew nuts are checked at a warehouse ahead of being prepared for sale. — AFP

Chadian women crush gravel to make ends meet in dust and heat

N'DJAMENA, Chad: In one hand Idjele grips a heavy hammer, in the other a block of concrete that she smashes into pieces with heavy blows that narrowly miss her fingers, her gaze towards the horizon. She has been crushing gravel for so long that the gestures of the job have become second nature.

In the heart of N'Djamena dozens of women spend up to 12 hours a day bent over this work, pulverizing concrete, cement or brick chunks while children hover around them in the dust and heat of 45 degrees Celsius. The women work on piles of debris along roads and in vacant lots at the foot of the modern buildings that make up the Chadian capital's business district.

The United Nations ranks Chad as the third least-developed country in the world and these women are at the heart of a side industry re-using building materials. Men buy blocks from demolition sites and sell them to the gravel crushers, who break them down and re-sell them to those who cannot afford concrete. Mixed with mud or a little plaster, the gravel will serve as building material for new homes.

'All I could find'

Idjele is only 38 but like the women around her she bears the marks of grueling work, her face smudged with dust that reddens her eyes, her lips cracked and swollen and fingers raw from constant contact with grit as she sifts sand for even the smallest stone. Her 80-year-old aunt did the same work until she went blind. Now she sits behind Idjele, a mother of six who was widowed three years ago, keeping her niece company and serving her tea.

"I've been doing this since my husband died," Idjele says between hammer strikes, adding that her eldest children work with her. "My husband was a soldier and after his death I wasn't able to receive his pension. I had nothing left so this is all I could find to feed my kids," she says. Nearby, a tiny boy naked from the waist down clammers over a pile of dusty blocks.

Mamadou Youssouf, 42, arrives pushing a



N'DJAMENA: Habiba, a gravel crusher who thinks she is between 50 and 60 years old, and Idjele, 38, choose slabs of stones from a cart near the Cite Internationale des Affaires on April 12, 2021. — AFP

makeshift wheelbarrow heavy with 100 kg of stone he bought for 1,000 CFA francs - €1.50 - and will sell to the stone-crusher women for twice the price. Idjele fills bags with stones she sells for 500-600 CFA francs each to men who come to load their pickup trucks. In one day she may take home 500 to 600 CFA francs - between 70 and 90 euro cents.

Children squeal with delight as Youssouf dumps his load of stone near their mothers sending up a cloud of dust. Their hair has a rusty color, which could come from the powder of broken bricks or be a symptom of malnutrition. One out of five children born in Chad dies before the age of five and 40 percent suffer from delayed growth according to the World Bank, which estimates that 42 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

'I am free'

A quick internet search reveals the dangers of inhaling cement dust, including irritation of the eyes and sinuses, lung problems and even cancer. In Europe workers on construction sites are required to wear FFP2 masks and gloves - but these women barely cover their noses with their shawls. Habiba has been doing this for eight years. "I used to be a

cleaning woman but as I got older I couldn't work as well and my bosses yelled at me, insulted me, fired me," she says, her eyes red. "I could no longer feed my seven children.

She isn't sure how old she is - "between 50 and 60" she guesses. "Now I work 12 hours a day but at least no one gets angry with me and I can feed my kids and send them to public school," she says before adding with a wide smile, "I am free."

Haoua Mahamat says a sense of freedom unites all the women here, transcending differences of tribe, ethnicity or religion that are often the root of conflict in this vast country. They are also united in death, admits the 30-year-old who has been crushing stone for 10 years, explaining that nearly all her colleagues have suffered the loss of a spouse and the income he used to provide.

And while they have no boss to harass them, the women are also without any offers of help. "Free?" scoffs Therese Mekombe, president of the Chadian Women in Law Association, who says neither the state nor the UN or any other charity has showed the gravel crushers any concern. "They may have a mother's pride in being able to feed their children - but at what cost?" — AFP

New Greenland govt vows to level rich-poor gap

COPENHAGEN: A left-wing party opposed to a controversial mining project in Greenland on Friday unveiled the coalition which is going to govern the Danish territory after a snap parliamentary election. Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), which garnered 36.6 percent of the vote giving it 12 seats in the 31-seat Greenlandic national assembly, will govern with the pro-independence Naleraq which has four seats.

Liberal conservative party Atassut, which holds two seats, will support the government in parliament without joining the coalition. IA's biggest rival Siumut, a social democratic party that has dominated politics in the Danish territory since it gained autonomy in 1979, came in second in the election held this month.

The IA and Naleraq have agreed on a program to deal with major social issues, education, fishing and climate change. The chasm between the haves and the have nots in Greenland is one

of the biggest in prosperous northern Europe. "The inequalities have become too big and must be levelled," said IA leader Mute Egede, who at 34 is the world's youngest prime minister.

The Kuannersuit deposit, in the island's south, is considered one of the world's richest in uranium and rare earth minerals - a group of 17 metals used as components in everything from smartphones to electric cars and weapons. IA has called for a moratorium on uranium mining, which would effectively put a halt to the project.

Divisions over Kuannersuit originally triggered the snap election in the territory after one of the smaller parties left the ruling Siumut coalition. Since 2009, the ice-covered territory has managed its own resources but still relies on annual subsidies of around 526 million euros (\$625 million), accounting for about a third of its budget, from Copenhagen.

Denmark, which is not opposed to Nuuk's independence, also controls issues of diplomacy and defense. Nuuk is therefore seeking to diversify its own income, notably through more sustainable fishing, as well as tourism and agriculture. Traditional fishing currently accounts for 90 percent of its exports. — AFP

Suez snarl-up, virus hit UK gnome market

LONDON: High demand during lockdown and supply problems following the Suez Canal blockage have caused a shortage of garden gnomes in Britain, the BBC reported on Thursday. The small bearded characters - often with a trowel or fishing rod in hand or sitting beneath a toadstool - have been beloved by British gardeners since the 19th century.

But in the wake of last month's snarl-up in Suez, caused when a 200,000-tonne megaship got stuck in a sandstorm, supplies of the diminutive garden guardians have dried up. Many of the decorative ornaments, which can be made of plastic, stone or concrete, have been left languishing in shipping containers.

Garden Centre Association chief executive Iain Wylie said supply chains had been under pressure during the pandemic and because of the canal blockage. "With goods arriving from abroad, garden centers were

affected by the ship getting stuck in the canal as much as any other industry," he told the broadcaster. "Garden furniture, ornaments, of which gnomes would be some, being stuck in containers trying to come over here."

Ian Byrne, of Highfield Garden World in Gloucestershire, western England, said there had been a "massive upswing" in gnome sales during the coronavirus lockdown. "We haven't seen a gnome in six months now unfortunately," the assistant manager said, blaming a shortage of raw materials. "Gnomes of any type - plastic, stone or concrete - are in short supply. They've been very popular over the last couple of seasons."

The Swedish furniture giant Ikea said last month that it had similarly experienced supply problems because of high demand and shipping problems. Massive container ship the Ever Given got stuck on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort to dislodge it. Maritime data company Lloyd's List said the blockage by the vessel, longer than four football fields, held up an estimated \$9.6 billion (£7 billion) in cargo between Asia and Europe each day it was stuck. — AFP

Vaccine giant tweets Biden to end US raw materials 'embargo'

MUMBAI: The head of the world's largest vaccine maker directly tweeted US President Joe Biden on Friday urging him to lift an export ban on raw materials desperately needed to make more coronavirus shots. The unusual step by Serum Institute (SII) chief Adar Poonawalla underlined the crisis in providing vaccines to developing nations, many of which rely heavily on the firm for supplies.

"Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the U.S., I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the U.S. so that vaccine production can ramp up," he tweeted. There was no immediate response from the US leader on Twitter.

The world's biggest vaccine producer by volume, SII has struggled to meet demand for the AstraZeneca jab, which it manufactures, after India put the brakes on allowing exports of the shots as it battles a ferocious second wave. Poonawalla said last week that production was "very stressed" and called on the Indian government to provide it with financial assistance.

The company's production of a jab developed by US firm Novavax has also hit roadblocks due to the US restrictions, with Poonawalla telling an Indian newspaper last week that the embargo was "as good as banning vaccines". Developed in record time, the dozen or so COVID-19 vaccines already in use around the world have already triggered an exponential increase in production, meaning raw materials are now running short.

SII, which struck a deal to supply 200 million doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries, has seen its profile soar since the pandemic, with rich nations also clamoring to buy its jab. But the Covax program has been hampered by wealthy nations hogging the supply, with the WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Thursday criticizing the "shocking and expanding disparity in the global distribution of vaccines".

The company recorded annual revenues of more than \$800 million in 2019-20, but the export ban has prompted it to ask India's government for financial help since New Delhi pays it less per shot than it earns from overseas sales. New Delhi on Friday announced that it would provide financial support to Indian vaccine developer Bharat Biotech, so it could scale up its production of the home-grown Covaxin jab.

The government said it aimed to increase production capacity to nearly 100 million doses a month by September. India, which has recorded over 14 million infections since the start of the pandemic, began vaccinating people aged over 45 this month, aiming to inoculate 300 million people by August. So far it has administered around 117 million shots. — AFP

Business

IMF commends Kuwait's swift and well-coordinated COVID response

Banking sector benefits from skillful regulatory oversight by Central Bank of Kuwait

WASHINGTON/KUWAIT: A staff team from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), led by Daniel Kanda, held virtual discussions with the Kuwaiti authorities from April 4-8, 2021. At the conclusion of the mission, Kanda issued the following statement: "The Kuwaiti authorities acted quickly and decisively to address the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, although the challenges posed by the pandemic remain significant."

"As in other GCC countries, the COVID-19 pandemic, together with oil price shock and cuts to oil production under the OPEC+ agreement, weighed heavily on economic activity and fiscal balances in 2020. Growth in 2020 is estimated at -8 percent with a contraction of non-oil growth of -6 percent. The overall fiscal balance significantly deteriorated compared to the previous year."

"Going forward, a gradual recovery is expected in 2021, supported by the

rebound of domestic and external demand as vaccinations proceed. However, considerable uncertainty surrounds the outlook, including from the persistence of the pandemic and related global and domestic containment measures.

"We commend the central bank's sustained proactive monitoring of credit risks and efforts to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory frameworks aimed at bolstering financial stability. The banking sector remains resilient, well-capitalized, and liquid notwithstanding the shocks in 2020."

"Combating the pandemic and mitigating its effects, particularly those on the most vulnerable, should remain a priority until the recovery is firmly underway. As the recovery firms up, strong fiscal consolidation and structural reforms would be needed to preserve fiscal buffers and strengthen growth. The IMF team would like to express its appreciation to the

Kuwaiti authorities for the open and productive discussions."

Meanwhile, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) issued a press statement on the conclusion of the International Monetary Fund's Article IV Consultation to the State of Kuwait. CBK, in coordination with IMF and the relevant national authorities, made the necessary arrangements including information and data compilation, and scheduling meetings with the senior officials of the government and non-government entities to discuss the economic, financial and monetary conditions and the resilience of the banking and financial sector. The concluding statement of the IMF mission commended CBK's efforts in reinforcing the soundness and resilience of the banking and financial sector.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Mohammad Y Al-Hashel, the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait, briefly stated that the IMF mission com-

mended CBK's sustained proactive monitoring of credit risks and efforts to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory frameworks aimed at bolstering financial stability. The report also stated that the banking sector remains resilient, well-capitalized, and liquid benefiting from the skillful regulatory oversight by the Central Bank of Kuwait, notwithstanding the shocks in 2020.

Hashel added that the IMF's concluding statement highlighted the structural challenges faced by the Kuwaiti economy and the ways to address them. It also mentioned Kuwaiti authorities' swift and well-coordinated policy responses to protect public health and limit the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, although the challenges posed by the pandemic remain significant. As in other GCC countries, the COVID-19 pandemic, together with oil price shock and cuts to oil production under the OPEC+ agreement, weighed heavily on economic activ-

ity and fiscal balances in 2020.

At the 2020 economic performance, the real GDP, as per the IMF mission report, is estimated at -8 percent with a contraction of non-oil growth of -6 percent. The overall fiscal balance significantly deteriorated compared to the previous year. Going forward, a gradual recovery is expected in 2021, supported by the rebound of domestic and external demand as vaccinations proceed. However, considerable uncertainty surrounds the outlook, including from the persistence of the pandemic and related global and domestic containment measures.

The mission concluded that combating the pandemic and mitigating its effects, particularly those on the most vulnerable, should remain a priority until the recovery is firmly underway. As the recovery firms up, strong fiscal consolidation and structural reforms would be needed to preserve fiscal buffers and strengthen growth.

KIPCO looks to 2021 as pandemic's impact continues to unfold

KUWAIT: At its Annual Shafafiyah 'Transparency' Investors' Forum, KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - said that it would remain guarded about 2021, as it closely monitors the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on business.

At the company's investors' forum, KIPCO presented a review of its activities in 2020 and its outlook for 2021. In line with the health authorities' guidelines regarding social distancing, the event was broadcast live to an audience of shareholders, financial analysts and institutional investors.

Annual General Assembly

The forum followed the company's General Assembly meeting where KIPCO's shareholders approved a cash dividend of 5 percent (5 fils per share). An Extraordinary General Assembly was also held, during which the shareholders agreed to raise the company's authorized capital from KD 200 million to KD 300 million.

Highlights of 2020

As part of its review of 2020, KIPCO highlighted a growth in revenue to KD 753 million (\$2.5 billion) in 2020, compared to KD 698 million (\$2.3 billion) in 2019. The company's 2019 financials were restated during 2020 due to a change in the classification of OSN after an increase in ownership.

Despite the challenges that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, in July 2020, KIPCO successfully repaid bonds worth US\$ 500 million (KD 153.9 million) under its EMTN Program, using existing resources. The transaction has left KIPCO with no debt maturity until 2023 and is a reflection of the soundness of the company's financial strategy and its proactive management of liabilities.

Performance of Group companies

KIPCO highlighted the performance of its main operating companies in 2020. Borgan Bank reported a net income of KD 34 million (US\$ 112 million). The bank's capital adequacy ratio was at 18 percent, and it enjoyed stable asset quality with non-performing assets at 3.5 percent.

Gulf Insurance Group's (GIG) net profit was up 22 percent and gross written premiums (GWP) increased 13 percent. During the year, the company announced the acquisition of AXA's operations in the Gulf region which, when complete, will place GIG as one of the top three insurance companies in the region.

United Gulf Holding (UGH) completed a rights issue of US\$ 70 million in 2020. Its subsidiary, Kamco Invest, launched its new identity following the completion of its integration with Global Investment House.

KIPCO's real estate arm, United Real Estate (URC), was affected by the closure of hospitality and retail activities due to the pandemic and gave exemptions and lower leasing rates to its tenants. Despite this, the company reported a revenue of KD 97 million (US\$ 320 million). URC also began the construction of Byout Hessa, a residential



component in Hessa Al Mubarak District.

Qurain Petrochemical Industries (QPIC), meanwhile, registered a 12 percent growth in revenue to KD 240 million (US\$ 791 million) for the 12 months of 2020 (its financial year starts in April). Despite lower oil prices, QPIC reported a net profit of KD 22 million (US\$ 72.5 million) for the 12 months of 2020.

Meanwhile, the Saudia Dairy and Foodstuff Company (SADAFCO) registered a 10 percent growth in revenue and 11 percent increase in net profit for the 12 months of 2020 (its financial year starts in April). The company maintains a healthy cash balance of SAR 691 million (US\$ 184 million) with zero leverage.

United Education Company (UEC) reported a revenue of KD 27 million (US\$ 89 million) and a net income of KD 1.8 million (US\$ 6 million) for the financial year ended August 31, 2020. To ensure that its students continued to receive quality education online, the company launched several digital platforms and study aids.

As for OSN, KIPCO said that the hard and long journey of transformation was in progress. The pay-TV and on-demand video operator ranks among the top three streaming players, with OTT subscribers up from 80,000 in April 2020 to 450,000 in February 2021. A best-in-class technology platform is set to be launched in the second quarter of 2021 to further enhance subscriber experience.

OSN's strong content lineup now includes Paramount+, with Discovery+ to be added soon. Three original Arabic content series were released in 2020, with plans to double investments in Arabic content in 2021. Partnerships with all major telecommunication companies are now in place, and OSN has begun engaging non-telecom vendors to strengthen its positioning.

During 2020, OSN registered improved financial performance, following the completion of its operational turnaround. It also downsized costs after negotiating contracts with major studios and controlling operational expenses. A financial turnaround is expected in the second half of 2021.

Focus in 2021

KIPCO highlighted the focus areas of its main operating companies in 2021. Borgan Bank will be enhancing the operations of its Turkey franchise, while fine-tuning its business model overall. The bank will launch and monetize its digital products during the year.

GIG, meanwhile, will focus on the AXA integra-

tion, thereby reinforcing GIG's position in key markets. As for OSN, it will continue to grow its customer base and revenue from the OTT platform, in addition to launching products that meet premium customer needs. The pay-TV and on-demand video company will continue to reduce costs and diversify content supply.

In 2021, URC will focus on returning revenue to pre-COVID levels, as progress continues in its residential projects in Hessa Al Mubarak District. QPIC is expected to benefit from the recovery of oil prices and will continue to evaluate inorganic growth through acquisitions. As for UGH, the company will look to exit non-core assets in 2021 and re-invent its operating model. UEC, which has delivered its learning and programs effectively during the pandemic, will continue its digital transformation journey in 2021.

Outlook for 2021

In its outlook for 2021, KIPCO said that it remained guarded about this year, as it closely monitors the business impact of the pandemic. Whilst there is hope that the vaccine rollout will curb the spread of the virus, the second wave of the pandemic continues to pose a challenge despite efforts to bring economic activities back up to pre-COVID levels. Oil prices, however, are forecast to average US\$ 20 higher than last year, promising a more positive impact on the market at large.

KIPCO said it would continue to monitor the global impact of the pandemic as the year unfolds. Faisal Al-Ayyar, KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive) said: "Throughout 2020, our companies worked hard to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rewards of these efforts are reflected in the results of the past year. Despite the highly conservative requirements of the Central Bank of Kuwait, Borgan Bank fared well in 2020. GIG continues to perform well, and successfully acquired AXA's operations in the Gulf. While the impact of closures on retail and hospitality was significant, URC's projects in Hessa Al Mubarak District continued uninterrupted. Both QPIC and its subsidiary, SADAFCO, recorded growth in revenue during the past year."

He added: "It is evident that the virus will remain with us for some time to come, and though people have begun to adjust their way of life to take precautions against an invisible disease, we remain guarded about 2021. As we face a second wave of the pandemic, we hope that the rollout of the vaccine will bring us closer to the end of the pandemic."

orders he said would "supercharge our administration's ambitious plan to confront the existential threat of climate change."

He announced Washington would rejoin the Paris Agreement and is expected to unveil an ambitious 2030 emissions target. Biden recently announced a massive \$2 trillion infrastructure and jobs plan that focuses on creating employment through expansion of renewable energy and other environmental projects "to reimagine and rebuild a new economy," Tai noted.

But domestic policies are not sufficient, and environmental standards must be a factored into all US policy areas and throughout international supply chains, to ensure reliable access to key technologies, which "will be essential for our transition to net zero by 2050". —AFP



Katherine Tai

Global trade rules can help fight climate change: US trade chief

WASHINGTON: International commerce creates incentives for countries to erode environmental protections to attract investment, and global trade rules are needed to counter that "race to the bottom," US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Thursday. "The view that environmental issues are not an inherent part of trade ignores the reality that the existing rules of globalization incentivize downward pressure on environmental protection," Tai said in her first public speech.

"This puts countries with higher environmental standards at a competitive disadvantage," she said in the address to the Center for American Progress, a progressive Washington think tank. Speaking ahead of

Brexit sparks £1tn UK assets switch to EU

LONDON: UK banks and insurers have shifted more than £10 trillion to the European Union in response to Brexit, a study published Friday found. More than 440 firms operating in the UK banking and finance sector have relocated parts of their business, moved staff or established new EU entities in response to Brexit, according to the study from think-tank New Financial. The total £10 trillion is equivalent to \$1.4 trillion or euro 1.2 trillion.

"While this is the most comprehensive analysis yet of the impact of Brexit on the City, we think it is an underestimate: we are only at the end of the beginning of Brexit," New Financial warned in a report published almost four months after Britain left the EU. British-based banks have shunted in excess of £900 billion in assets into the bloc, or ten percent of total UK bank assets, according to its analysis. And insurers have shifted more than £100 billion.

The nation's departure from the single market ended access to the so-called financial passport, which had allowed UK firms to offer their services across Europe. London and Brussels signed a memorandum of understanding on financial services last month but have yet to address the topic of equivalence, which allows UK-based firms to operate on the European continent.

Britain finalized its divorce from the European Union on Dec 31, after clinching a last-gasp trade deal that did not include the powerhouse financial services sector. "Getting Brexit done is only the end of the beginning of the process: Given the limited equivalence arrangements in place, over time we expect there to be a drip-feed of business and activity from the UK to the EU," the London-based think-tank added on Friday. "As the EU takes a tougher line on the location of activity and individuals we expect these headline numbers to increase in future." Following Brexit, Amsterdam has also overtaken the British capital in European equity trading. —AFP

Potential Boeing MAX issue affects more of plane

NEW YORK: The potential electrical problem that prompted airlines to remove some 737 MAX planes from service has been found in more areas of the plane than initially known, a report said Friday. Boeing said on April 9 that the issue, discovered during the manufacturing process, requires "verification that a sufficient ground path exists for a component of the electrical power system".

But The Wall Street Journal, citing Boeing, reported Friday that the manufacturing issue affects "more areas of the flight deck than previously known". Boeing did not directly comment on The Wall Street Journal report, but said it plans to develop guidelines with Federal Aviation Administration oversight. "Boeing is working with customers on service bulletins that will be submitted to the FAA for approval," a Boeing spokesman said. "The bulletins focus on ensuring a sufficient ground path in the flight deck of affected airplanes," he added.

Southwest Airlines, United Airlines and American Airlines all said last week that they were removing some of their MAX planes from service following the Boeing announcement. Boeing said it notified 16 carriers in all of the issue. Shares of Boeing fell 1.2 percent to \$248.18, losing ground following reports of the problem.

The electrical issue is a setback after the MAX was cleared in November 2020 to return to service after a 20-month grounding following two fatal crashes. "Specific details regarding investigators' latest findings are scarce at the moment, but it's troubling to learn that the electrical defect is being found in other parts of the plane," said Briefing.com. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait wins three awards at 2021 Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has proudly announced that it has won 3 categories at the 2021 Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards. The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programs such as The International Business Awards for 19 years.

Ooredoo Kuwait has won in the following categories: "Innovation in Business Information Apps", "Innovation in Customer Service Management, Planning & Practice", and "Achievement in Growth".

The Gold Stevie Award for "Innovation in Business Information Apps" category was awarded in recognition of the company's My Ooredoo application. My Ooredoo allows customers to fully control their account through their smart devices at any time. Customers can pay their bills or recharge multiple lines at once, check their pack usage and balance, activate their Nojoom account and keep track of their points, activate several digital services and buy e-vouchers and more.

The Silver Stevie Award for "Achievement in Growth" category was in specific recognition of Ooredoo Kuwait's milestones in business, technology and digital services in the telecommunications sector. Ooredoo has won numerous awards for

providing an exceptional customer experience in the past, and today, Ooredoo is definitely thrilled to add this award to its portfolio. For years, Ooredoo Kuwait has maintained its success and even achieved growth by exploring new innovative techniques to conduct business efficiently, allowing it to reach new markets, expand its product and service portfolio, and expand the competencies of its human resources.

Among the most important of these achievements are the launching of eSIM on its network as the first telecom operator to offer this service in Kuwait and one of the first in the region, launching the 5G in mid-2018 providing a superior 5G experience and improving its network capabilities, followed by the first international 5G video call in the MENA region between Ooredoo Kuwait and Ooredoo Qatar. These important steps comes in tandem with the company's digital transformation strategy and affirming its leadership in digitalization in Kuwait, in addition to providing its cus-



Mijbil Al-Ayoub

tomers a full-fledged and unique digital experience.

Ooredoo Kuwait also received a bronze Stevie Award(r) for "Innovation in Customer Service Management, Planning & Practice - Telecommunications Industries" category. The company's most important achievements represented in completing 1,000 days of launching its state of the art data center with zero downtime since its launch in 2017. The data center provides a suite of managed hosting services tailor-made to fit corporate and business needs. These services are ideal for corporates and businesses looking to better manage their data, platforms and applications.

Commenting on this, Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Ooredoo's vision has always been enriching people's digital lives, while becoming the leading integrated communications provider in Kuwait is our mission. Thus, we are honored to have all these efforts come full circle and win many awards ourselves. Of course, it is not about the awards, yet, it truly feels great to be recognized and stand out among the crowd."

The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programs such as The International Business Awards for 19 years.



More than 400 nominations from organizations across the Middle East and North Africa were considered this year in categories such as Award for Excellence in Innovation in Products & Services, Award for Innovative Management, and Award for Innovation in Corporate Websites, among many others.

NBK named Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) received the award of "Best Bank in Kuwait" for 2021, in the 28th annual survey of the reputable international magazine Global Finance, based on the input from a large panel of experts, analysts, corporate financial executives, bankers and banking consultants around the world.



In selection of the Best Banks in the Middle East, Global Finance relied on a set of objective criteria including: growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products. Naming NBK for this prestigious award is a recognition of its continuous efforts to provide an exceptional banking experience to its customers, despite the unprecedented economic circumstances wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The award of Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021, which is for the 10th year in a row, is an addition to NBK's rich record of awards and recognitions, and manifestation of preserving its leading position and dominant share in the local market and across all business sectors. Global Finance said that this year's awards highlight the leaders in restoring growth and mapping a way forward in the economic recovery from the pandemic.

Global Finance, founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, is one of the most reputable magazines specialized in finance and economics. It has a circulation of 50,000 readers in 189 countries around the world, including senior corporate and financial officers responsible for making investment and strategic decisions at multinational companies and financial institutions.

The magazine conducts various surveys annually about innovation and profitability for banks and financial institutions all over the world, based on which it selects top performers on the regional and international levels.

Meanwhile, NBK continues to collectively enjoy one of the highest credit ratings among all banks of the Middle East from the top three international credit rating agencies: Moody's, Fitch Ratings and Standard & Poor's. The Bank's ratings are supported by its strong capitalization, prudent lending policies, disciplined approach to risk management, as well as its highly experienced and very stable management team. In addition, the bank continues to be in Global Finance's list of the World's 50 Safest Banks.

KFH wins World's Best Islamic financial Institution 2021 award

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has won World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2021 Award from Global Finance in its 14th annual awards for the World's Best Islamic Financial Institutions for this year. KFH has also been named as World's Best Islamic Project Finance Provider, while KFH - Turkey as World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2021 in Turkey, KT Bank AG-Germany as World's Best Islamic Financial Institution in Europe, and KFH Takaful as World's Best Islamic Takaful by Global Finance.

All selections were made by the highly professional team of Global Finance, after extensive consultations with bankers, corporate finance executives and analysts throughout the world. The stringent criteria of giving the awards included new business development and product innovation, meeting all customer's requirements, geographic reach and strategic relationships. Also, among the criteria considered were reputation, customer satisfaction and the adherence to ethical standards.

Acting Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) at KFH, Abdulwahab Al-Roshood, said the World's Best Islamic Financial Institution Award is a culmination of KFH's efforts in providing the highest standards of Islamic financial services, especially after the significant success achieved by KFH which contributed to the development of the banking industry. This is in line with the methodological and Shariah support that KFH is keen to provide to spread the Islamic finance industry.

Al-Roshood added in a press release that the awards KFH received were well-deserved in view of the bank's contribution to the growth of the Islamic finance industry in the markets it operated in, its success in meeting the customers' needs of

Sharia-compliant products and establishing sustainable future growth with high efficiency for the Islamic finance industry and keeping up with the latest financial and banking technology.

He pointed out that the excellence of KFH Group is reflected in its keeping pace with the development of digital banking services, adoption of technology, commitment to the highest levels of professionalism, best standards of risk management, and prudent practices.

Al-Roshood emphasized the wide experience of KFH in Islamic finance industry, Sukuk issuance for many banks, corporates and governments and arranging major financing deals for mega infrastructure development projects including vital sectors as well as contributing to driving economic growth and developing many financial products and alternative funding options, which are currently used in international markets. Al-Roshood emphasized that the awards indicate the readiness and capability the Group subsidiaries enjoy, and their consistent performance based on specific rules, clear systems and sound foundations. This reflects the efforts that began years ago to unify work systems, enhance transparency and the coordination and cooperation among the Group subsidiaries.

He mentioned that KFH succeeded in strengthening its roles and expanding its activities locally and globally, represented by Kuwaiti market and Group's markets. Being the first Islamic bank in Kuwait, KFH achieved many successes in several areas, including building solid economic basics depending on developing human resources, and offering products and services that meet the market's requirements. This made KFH deservedly a global model for Islamic banking industry.



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood



Burgan Bank unlocks new experiences through rewards program

KUWAIT: Aimed at elevating customer experiences and delivering enhanced services, Burgan Bank is pleased to announce an all-encompassing loyalty program named "Burgan Rewards" as the latest offering in their portfolio of innovative products. The new loyalty program rewards all Burgan Bank customers for their overall transactions and cards spends, providing them a variety of exclusive redemption options and benefits.

The new "Burgan Rewards" platform enables Burgan Bank customers to earn reward points across their cards spends and offer the flexibility to redeem these points across the widest suite of options including travel, hotel reservations, shopping, gift vouchers, and cashback. Customers can also redeem points to pay for retail purchases using the "Pay with Points" feature. Alternatively, customers could use the points to buy airmiles for specific airlines and redeem their "Burgan Rewards" points for air tickets across 750+ airlines and when making reservations at over 700,000 hotels worldwide. Customers can also redeem their "Burgan Rewards" points from miles exchange partners such as Air Arabia and Etihad Airways and get airline tickets and hotel bookings for friends and family.

Chief Retail Banking Officer at Burgan Bank, Naser Al-

Qaisi said: "Burgan Bank continues to consolidate its leading position in the local and regional markets through new and leading-edge features alongside a safe and distinctive experience. In line with our dynamic customer experience strategy, "Burgan Rewards" reflects our commitment to provide tailored banking experiences to our clients. Our customers deserve to be rewarded every step of the way, and we are able to accomplish this through this program as they will have increased opportunities to earn reward points with every transaction, they make with us in addition to a wide variety of redemption options that are best-in-class and integrated with Burgan Bank's Mobile App and online banking."

All Burgan Bank customers are automatically enrolled for the new Burgan Rewards program wherein they are only required to login to their Burgan online or Burgan mobile App to access the Rewards portal to view and redeem Burgan Rewards.

To learn more about Burgan Bank's latest offers or any of its products and services, customers can visit any of the bank's branches or Burgan Bank's Instagram page on @BurganBankKuwait, contact the call center or via WhatsApp at 1804080.



Naser Al-Qaisi

KFH offers online foreign currency trading with 'competitive' prices

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched, as the first bank in Kuwait, Live FX service, which provides live dynamic foreign exchange prices with favorable margins 24 hours a day, every weekday. The Live FX service is an innovative solution based on technology in the electronic foreign exchange markets, where customers are able to purchase and sell TRY and G7 currencies at favorable margins, day and night, through KFHonline on the website or the mobile app.

"While the banking sector widens the foreign exchange rate margins which it applies in its internet and mobile application during non-working hours, KFH provided the high-end Live FX service to create a solution to the problem of high foreign exchange margins outside of working hours due to lack of live pricing and smart hedging systems," said KFH Treasury General Manager Ahmad Al-Sumait, indicating this unique solution is a reflection of the bank's experience, know-how and expertise on managing currency exposure and fintech solutions in the foreign exchange markets. Al-Sumait pointed out "Our innovative, dynamic and powerful Treasury and information technologies team with global infrastructure solution partners play an important role in realizing all these sophisticated fin-tech products and solutions. We are constantly working to provide better service to our customers, reiterating the bank's innovations will continue". He underlined the importance of this service as a qualitative leap in the method of moving forward in the digital transformation strategy of KFH, illustrating that the Live FX is a pioneering technological service that carries multiple advantages, flexibility and permanent possibilities for development, in a way that serves the interest of customers and enhances their banking experience.



Ahmad Al-Sumait

Gulf Bank announces Abdulaziz Abdullah Ali Bin Ghaith as first quarterly AlDana account draw winner of KD 100,000

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank conducted its first quarterly AlDana account draw of the year on Thursday, April 15, 2021 to announce the lucky winner of the KD 100,000 prize. This quarter, the grand prize went to Abdulaziz Abdullah Ali Bin Ghaith, as part of a draw that was 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: "We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Abdulaziz Abdullah Ali Bin Ghaith on receiving the AlDana account's first quarterly prize of the year, the KD 100,000 prize. Although this is our first quarterly draw of the year, customers have a chance to win with an AlDana 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 AlDana account, which they can open and deposit into online through the Gulf Bank app, or by visiting one of our branches. We are wishing everyone the best of luck in all our upcoming draws!"

The AlDana 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 AlDana account offers monthly opportu-

nities 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 AlDana 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 AlDana 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.

Customers can deposit to win AlDana cash prizes throughout the year. To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their AlDana savings - the higher the balances in an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's AlDana account holders

also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an AlDana Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an AlDana account today with only KD 200. To open an AlDana 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 AlDana account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Deposit More for More Chances to Win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an AlDana 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 AlDana 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 AlDana 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 AlDana draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

To deposit into an AlDana account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated AlDana account website to learn more about the account and its winners.



Mohammad Al-Qattan

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Surgery Department
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- Referee reviewer of International Journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- Laser Treatments.
- Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- Body & Face Contouring.
- Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Allaber st., Building B8, Floor 13.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777
@Drbuhaimed, @Renovabb, @dardonabb
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates - Training

- Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- (IFSO) member.
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- Bariatric surgeries.
- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimeid@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228

Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele: 1802 555

daralshifa



A worker at the Bin Salman farm tosses freshly picked Damascena (Damask) roses in the air, used to produce rose water and oil, in the western Saudi city of Taif. — AFP photos



A worker at the Bin Salman farm sits amidst freshly picked Damascena (Damask) roses.



A worker at the Bin Salman farm tosses freshly picked Damascena (Damask) roses in the air, used to produce rose water and oil.



A worker at the Bin Salman farm, checks bottles as they fill with rose water from distillers.



A worker at the Bin Salman farm picks Damascena (Damask) roses.



A worker at the Bin Salman farm, fills a distiller with freshly picked Damascena (Damask) roses.



A worker at the Bin Salman farm, fills a vial with rose oil in the western Saudi city of Taif.

Saudi Arabia's city of roses blooms in Ramadan

Every spring, roses bloom in the western Saudi city of Taif, turning pockets of the kingdom's vast desert landscape a vivid and fragrant pink. In April, they are harvested for the essential oil used to cleanse the outer walls of the sacred Kaaba, the cubic structure in the holy city of Makkah towards which Muslims around the world pray. This year, the harvest falls during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which observant Muslims devote to prayer and reflection.

Workers at the Bin Salman farm tend rose bushes and pick tens of thousands of flowers each day to

produce rose water and oil, also prized components in the cosmetic and culinary industries. The perfumed oil has become popular among the millions of Muslims who visit the kingdom every year for pilgrimages. Patterns of plants and flowers have long been part of Islamic art. Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms, many of which have opened their doors to visitors. While workers pick flowers in the fields, others labor in sheds, filling and weighing baskets by hand. The flowers are then boiled and distilled.

"We start boiling the roses on high heat until they are almost evaporated, and this takes around 30 to 35 minutes," Khalaf Al-Tuweiri, who owns the Bin Salman farm, told AFP. "After that we lower the heat for around 15 to 30 minutes until the distilling process starts, which lasts for eight hours." Once the oil floats to the top of the glass jars, the extraction process begins. The oil is then extracted with a large syringe to fill different-sized vials, the smallest going for 400 Saudi riyals (\$106). — AFP

'Narcocat' intercepted with drug delivery for Panama prison

Authorities in Panama on Friday intercepted an unlikely smuggler, a fluffy white cat, bearing an assortment of drugs in a pouch tied to its body as it tried to enter a prison. The feline felon was stopped outside the Nueva Esperanza jail, which houses more than 1,700 prisoners, in the Caribbean province of Colon, north of the capital Panama City.



Handout picture shows an assortment of drugs seized in a pouch tied to a cat as it tried to enter a prison in Colon, Panama. — AFP photos

"The animal had a cloth tied around its neck" that contained wrapped packages of white powder, leaves and "vegetable matter", according to Andres Gutierrez, head of the Panama Penitentiary System. They were likely cocaine, crack and marihuana, according to another official. This is not the first such attempted critter crime. Prisoners use food to lure animals to them, once the creatures had been loaded with drugs by people on the outside.

The office of the drugs prosecutor of Colon said on Twitter it had opened an investigation into the use of animals for smuggling illegal substances into the Nueva Esperanza Prison. It posted photographs of the drugs, and of the cat caught in the act. The animal will be taken to a pet adoption center, according to prosecutor Eduardo Rodriguez. Panama has some 18,000 inmates in 23 prisons, most of them overcrowded. On previous occasions, authorities have intercepted attempted drug deliveries using homing pigeons and even drones. — AFP



Handout picture released by Panama's Prosecutor Office, shows a white cat bearing an assortment of drugs in a pouch tied to its body as it tried to enter a prison in Colon.



This handout photo shows coast guard personnel inspecting seized giant clam shells. — AFP

Giant clam shells worth \$24.8 million seized in Philippine raid

Philippine authorities said yesterday they have seized some 200 tons of illegally harvested giant clam shells worth nearly \$25 million in one of the biggest known operations of its kind in the country. Conservationists have expressed alarm over the surging illicit trade in the endangered creatures, which are used as a substitute for ivory following a global crackdown in the trade of elephant tusks. The Philippines is home to most of the world's giant tropical clam species, and Friday's raid took place in the western province of Palawan, considered a poaching hotbed.

The coastguard said four suspects were arrested on the remote Green Island in the Sulu Sea that turned up the largest ever giant clam shell haul by law enforcers in the area. "Taking the giant clams from their natural habitat is a form of inter-generational crime," Jovic Fabello, spokesman for the

Palawan Council for Sustainable Development told AFP. "It will permanently affect the marine ecosystem and future generations will be deprived of the benefits accruing from it," he added.

He said the seized shells included those of the *Tridacna gigas*, the world's largest clam. Growing up to 1.3 meters (4.5 feet) wide and weighing up to 250 kilograms (550 pounds), these host marine algae which are a basic food source for many of the fish species consumed by humans. Conservationists say giant clam shells are used as an alternative material for products ranging from earrings to chandeliers as ivory becomes scarce. Fabello said the illegal trade in giant clams has been growing in Palawan and several other areas of the Philippines in the past three years.

Killing endangered species is punishable by up to 12 years in prison and fines of up to a million pesos under the country's wildlife protection act. "These people are digging up giant clams and killing them," Fabello alleged. The coast guard estimated the value of the latest haul at 1.2 billion pesos (\$24.8 million). It dwarfed the previous Palawan record of 80 tons of giant clam shells worth \$3.3 million that were seized early last month from Johnson Island, also near the venue of Friday's raid. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this picture Hassan Ali Kasi, a qari or professional reciter of the Quran, practices yoga as part of his training regime in Islamabad. — AFP photos



In this picture Hassan Ali Kasi, a qari or professional reciter of the Quran, recites verses from the Muslim holy book in Islamabad.



In this picture Hassan Ali Kasi, a qari or professional reciter of the Quran, gestures during an interview with AFP in Islamabad.

Egyptian architects win Mosul mosque competition

Eight Egyptian architects have won an international competition for the reconstruction of the historic Al-Nouri Mosque complex in Mosul, Iraq, selection organizer UNESCO said Thursday. The complex was severely damaged by conflict in 2017, and the rebuilding of the mosque is part of the organization's project for the rehabilitation of the ancient city. The mosque, built in the 12th century and famous for its leaning minaret, suffered badly in fighting between the Islamic State group and US and Iraqi forces, known as the Battle for Mosul, with IS accused of blowing up the site before it was captured by government forces.

Selected from among 123 entries, the winning design is called "Courtyards Dialogue". The reconstruction "will be a landmark in the process of advancing the war-torn city's reconciliation and social cohesion," said UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. The reconstruction work, to start in the late autumn, aims to rebuild Al-Nouri's historic prayer hall and integrate the complex, the largest public space in the Old City of Mosul, into its urban surrounding through open public spaces.

UNESCO launched the competition in November 2020 in coordination with the Iraqi ministry of culture, the Iraqi Sunni Endowment and with support from the United Arab Emirates. It is part of UNESCO's "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative for the rehabilitation of the city and its cultural life, and the strengthening of its educational system. — AFP



In this picture Hassan Ali Kasi, a qari or professional reciter of the Quran, exercises as part of his training regime in Islamabad.



In this picture Hassan Ali Kasi, a qari or professional reciter of the Quran, practices yoga as part of his training regime in Islamabad.

Living on a prayer: Champion Pakistan Quran reader in full voice

To master the art of Quran recitation, 21-year-old Hassan Ali Kasi had to follow a strict regime of yoga, hours of rehearsing vocal scales and a total ban on biryani. His dedication is paying off, and he was recently named champion of an international online qari competition hosted by Afghanistan, where he was up against men from 25 other countries. Revered in Pakistan, qarīs are professional reciters of the Quran, called upon to lead prayers at mosques and also to teach the Muslim holy book to students.

They are in particularly high demand during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting currently being observed around the world. "It was a job of the prophets," Ali Kasi told AFP in the capital, Islamabad. "One of the very first elements of preaching was recitation. It is as old as Islam." Qaris require

perfect Arabic pronunciation, a difficult feat in Pakistan where Urdu is the national language.

A finesse of rhythm and intonation produces the slow, melodic sound similar to the distinctive azan, or call to prayer, delivered through loudspeakers from the top of mosques five times a day. Recitations during competitions can last for 15 minutes, so Ali Kasi practices yoga to help with breath control, and vocal exercises to strengthen his voice. "A qari should be able to recite for a minimum of 50 seconds without taking a breath," said Ali Kasi, an Islamic Studies student at a university in the capital. "The throat is very sensitive, a qari should avoid cold water and fatty food as it produces too much mucus, which causes abrasion when you touch high notes," he cautioned. He was tutored in the Quran by

his father, and his recitation skills quickly earned him recognition at national level where he won numerous awards before making it onto the international stage.

'The voice is a gift from God'

Many qarīs emerge after being taught at religious schools known as madrassas, where young boys are taught to memorize the Quran — often with little understanding of the Arabic language and also at the expense of other subjects. Education activists say the colossal effort that can often take years to master fails to prepare students for the workforce. But for millions of boys in impoverished and deeply conservative Pakistan, it is the only schooling available, providing free shelter, clothes and food. Very few madrassas are open to girls.

Boys who complete their studies can

go on to become teachers or lead prayers at mosques around the world — even if they earn little money from it. "One has to be meticulously hardworking," said Abdul Qudus, from the Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia, the country's largest group of madrassas. "The voice is a gift from God, but one has to polish it." He said hundreds of prayer leaders in the Middle East are madrasa graduates, while others are now teaching the Quran online to Pakistanis living overseas in Europe or America. Ali Kasi, who spends hours practicing verses ahead of competitions, said quality teachers were the key to his winning voice. "When you follow a good qari, you can spread your voice across the world," he said. — AFP



Iraqi cyclists participate in the Old City marathon in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. — AFP

ABBA's Bjorn Ulvaeus urges reforms to pay songwriters their due

The COVID-19 pandemic's rampage through the music world has laid bare the industry's flaws, shining a bright light on "the plight of songwriters," says ABBA's Bjorn Ulvaeus. The renowned artist behind the disco pop group's megahits like "Dancing Queen" and "Mamma Mia" co-wrote a report released Saturday entitled "Rebalancing The Song Economy," which urges revamping pricing structures to ensure fairness for writers behind the music. Ulvaeus, 75, became president of the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC) — a Paris-headquartered rights network representing some four million creators and publishers across the arts — last year, as the spread of coronavirus began devastating livelihoods worldwide.



In this file photo Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson (ABBA) pose on the red carpet upon arrival for the world premiere of the film "Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again" in London.

tribute it according to their agreements. Artists have long disparaged that dominant model, holding it favors the globe's biggest stars at the expense of music's middle class.

Right now, "80 percent goes to the Drakes, the Swifts. The niche jazz artist gets almost nothing, if anything," Ulvaeus told AFP. "But the niche jazz artist might have 10,000 people out there who love him or her — and if all that money went to him, he could make a living out of that." Apple recently disclosed it pays, on average, a penny per stream, approximately double what Spotify — which has far more users and thus more streams — pays rights-holders. The breakdowns of which players — labels, distributors, streaming services, and the owners of performance and publishing copyrights — receive what fraction of revenues depends on specific record deals that are rarely public. But songwriters, especially if they are not also performers, generally receive the smallest pieces.

Lean back, lean forward

The report authors are proponents of fan-centric models they say could better support music's creators, paying out total revenue based on the actual tracks specific users listen to. Ulvaeus also draws distinctions between "lean-back" and "lean-forward" music — and says it

should be priced accordingly. Lean-back music, the artist says, is music users hear based on curated playlists, while lean-forward songs are those listeners specifically seek out or bookmark. "There's a difference between those two. And there should be a difference in royalties as well," the Swedish songwriter said.

More broadly, Ulvaeus says the current "rat race" songwriting model has creators risk-averse and rushing to push out content-formulating eminently streamable songs with viral potential to the detriment of their art. Streaming "has hugely impacted the kind of songs and their structure," he said. "When (ABBA's) Benny Andersson and I wrote albums, we wrote albums." "You can't do that now because... it takes 30 seconds, 15 seconds before people click another song."

Money is time

Ulvaeus laments that today's songwriters must navigate a system that forces their focus towards charts and entrepreneurialism: "I have a feeling that many songwriters have to part with their song too early." In winning the Eurovision song contest with "Waterloo" in 1974, the musician says he and Andersson also won "artistic freedom." "We learned to recognize garbage, and we learned to recognize when we had something really good," he said. "That takes time and hard work and patience. And how can you have patience if you have people breathing down your neck?" "Money gives you that time."

In addition to fan-centric payment models, Ulvaeus and his report co-writers back songwriter residency programs, where labels could support songwriters with regular salaries and partner them with performers, cultivating long-term working relationships. And key to reform is transparency, which Ulvaeus said is severely lacking in an industry long built on closed-door dealings. "It's a very old-fashioned business, and quite conserva-

likely long, Ulvaeus said many of the changes laid out in his report are overdue — and need to catch up with people's creativity. "People are going to write songs. But why not treat them fairly?" he said. — AFP

Though the road towards equitable payment reforms in the music industry is



In this file photo Executive Producer US rapper Drake attends the Los Angeles premiere of the new HBO series "Euphoria" at the Cinerama Dome Theatre in Hollywood.

Pre-pandemic, performing artists could count on income sources like concerts and merchandise, but "most professional songwriters are just that" — songwriters, he said. Now everyone is relying on streaming, which accounts for 83 percent of US music industry revenue, according to the Recording Industry Association of America. But many artists have long said they aren't reaping the benefits, and the pandemic is exacerbating the issue. Streaming giants pool subscription money and divvy it up based on aggregate play counts to rights-holders or management organizations, who dis-



In this file photo taken on April 6, 1974 Swedish band representing Sweden with the song "Waterloo" (from left to right, up) Bjorn Ulvaeus, music producer, writer and manager Stig Anderson, Swedish record producer, composer Sven-Olof Walldoff and Benny Andersson, (from left to right, down) Anni-Frid Lyngstad (Frida) and Agnetha Faltskog, hold the trophy as they celebrate on stage after winning the final of the Eurovision Song Contest 1974 Grand Final in Brighton. — AFP photos

Sports

Shcherbakova hails Japan virus measures after World Trophy win

Biden backs Japan PM on holding 'safe and secure' Olympics

OSAKA: World figure skating champion Anna Shcherbakova helped Russia win the World Team Trophy in Osaka yesterday - then gave Japan's antivirus measures the thumbs up ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. Shcherbakova topped the women's free program with a score of 160.58 to lead Russia to its first title at the biennial six-nation competition, ahead of the US and Japan. The World Team Trophy is being held in Japan less than 100 days before the start of the coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Games, which were again cast into doubt this week over virus fears.

A senior Japanese politician said Thursday that cancelling the Games remains a possibility, as the country deals with a surge in infections. But Shcherbakova said she was "not scared" during her time in Osaka, and that coming to Japan was "a great joy". "Japan has very stringent antivirus measures in place," said the 17-year-old, who had previously been infected with the virus. "Abiding by the rules is something I've become accustomed to, so there was no problem."

Organizers insist the Games can be held safely, and have released virus rulebooks to allay public fears. Athletes will not be required to quarantine or be vaccinated, but will have to limit movements and be tested regularly. Several test events set to involve overseas athletes and officials have been postponed in Japan in recent months. But American skater Bradie Tennell said she felt the World Team Trophy had "run so smoothly".

"I think Japan has done a wonderful job with this competition," she said. "So, no, I haven't felt anything other than really happy to be here, and really grateful." Around 3,000 fans-half the venue's capacity-were allowed into the event each day, although cheering was strictly forbidden.

'Safe and secure'

US President Joe Biden on Friday gave his backing to Japan's efforts to hold a "safe and secure" Olympic Games this year after talk of cancellation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, meeting Biden as the US president's first foreign guest, said his country was listening to experts and doing its "utmost" to prepare for the Tokyo Games. "They are doing everything possible to contain infection and to realize safe and secure games from scientific and objective perspectives," Suga told a joint news conference.

"I expressed my determination to realize the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games as a symbol of global unity this summer, and President Biden once again expressed his support," the prime minister added. A joint statement afterward said that Biden "supports Prime Minister Suga's efforts to hold a safe and secure Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer."

"Both leaders expressed their pride in the US and Japanese athletes who have trained for these Games and will be competing in the best traditions of the Olympic spirit," the statement said. The Tokyo Games



OSAKA: Russia's Anna Shcherbakova competes in the women's free skating during the ISU World Team Trophy figure skating event in Osaka yesterday. — AFP

are due to open in July, with only Japanese spectators in the stands, after already being postponed by a year due to the pandemic. Uncertainty about their viability has grown amid rising virus cases.

Organizers said Friday that they scrapped another leg of Japan's Olympic torch relay — the third leg to be affected by a surge in infections — and that a BMX

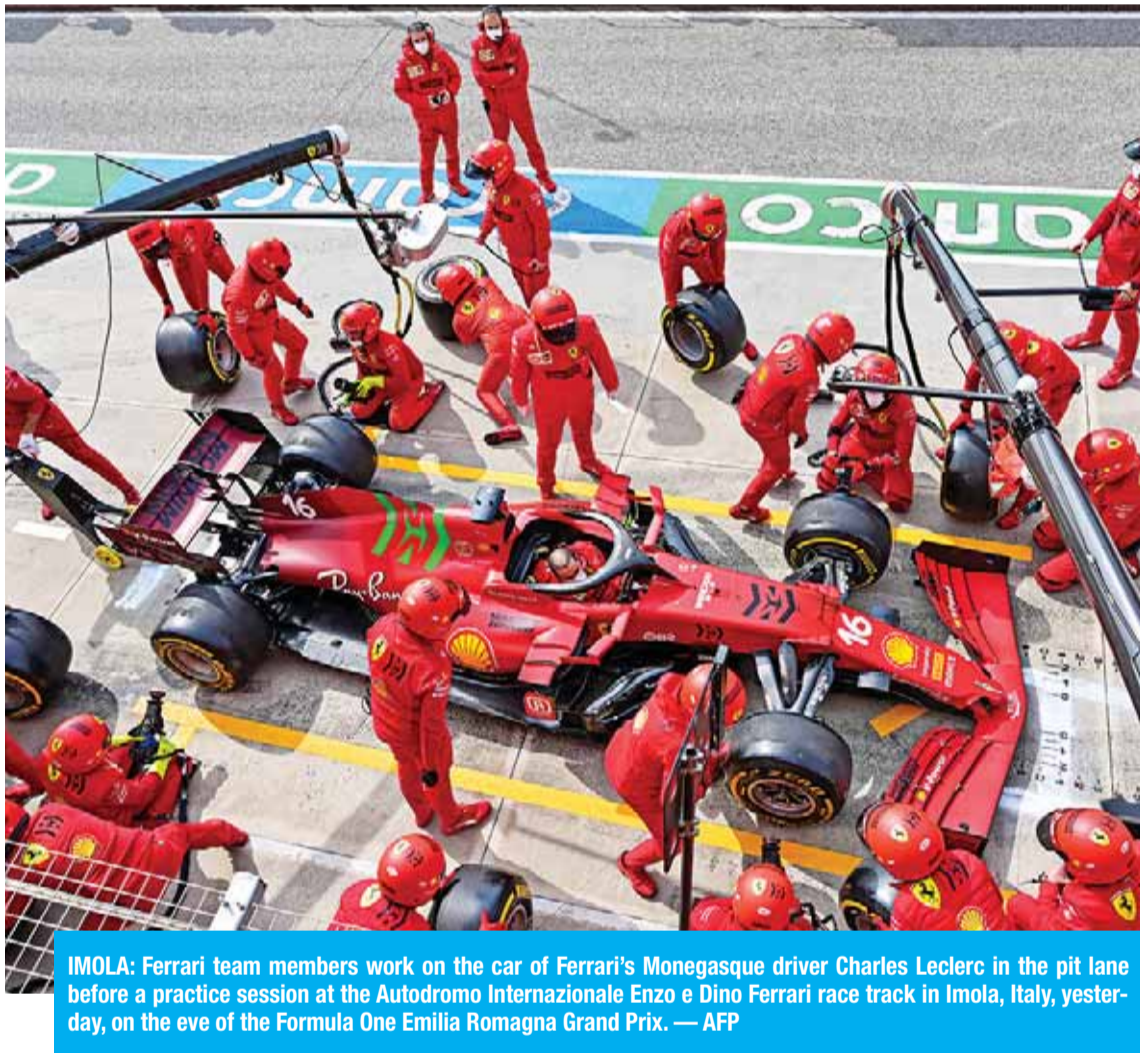
Freestyle test event scheduled for April 24 and 25 would now be postponed.

First time

Russia won the World Team Trophy for the first time, with the title already in the bag by the time Shcherbakova began her free program. Russian skaters were banned from competing under their country's name and flag at the world championships in Sweden last month because of a doping dispute. The ban will also apply at next year's Beijing Olympics. But it was not in place at this week's event, and team captain Elizaveta Tuktamysheva said hearing the national anthem on the podium was "a great moment".

"We were so happy because we had a Russian flag here, and that means a lot," she said. Russia finished on 125 points, ahead of the US on 110 and Japan on 107, with Italy, France and Canada bringing up the rear. Shcherbakova, who also won the women's short program, finished the free program ahead of Japan's Kaori Sakamoto in second on 150.29 and Tuktamysheva in third on 146.23.

Russia's Anastasia Mishina and Aleksandr Galliamov won the pairs free program with a score of 151.59. Mishina and Galliamov, who also won the world title last month in Sweden, finished top in the short program the previous day. "We'll have to prepare a new program, then we'll take a little time off to rest," said Mishina. "Then we'll go into the specifics together with the coach on how to prepare for the Olympic season." — AFP



IMOLA: Ferrari team members work on the car of Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc in the pit lane before a practice session at the Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari race track in Imola, Italy, yesterday, on the eve of the Formula One Emilia Romagna Grand Prix. — AFP

Verstappen fastest, Hamilton third in final Imola practice

IMOLA: Red Bull's Max Verstappen set the pace in final practice in bright sunshine at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola yesterday, almost half a second faster than anyone else on the track. The entire top eight were within a second of each other as McLaren driver Lando Norris came second, while defending champion Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes was a slender 0.1sec behind in third in the final practice ahead of qualifying later Saturday.

Hamilton beat Verstappen on the season opening Bahrain GP in March but Mercedes were wary of the Red Bulls' superior speed ahead of the weekend and Hamilton will need to fall back on all his experience to clinch pole. "We may have won the first round, but we are under no illusions that this is going to be an easy season," Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said. "Our car still lacks speed on a single lap and Red Bull have the edge at the moment." On a bright day at the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari track with the snow-capped Apennines visible in the background Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull was fourth. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Alpha Tauri's Pierre Gasly were on the next row and the second Ferrari of Carlos Sainz was in seventh on the same time as Valtteri Bottas for Mercedes. Rounding out the top 10 were the Alpha Romeo Alpine pair of Fernando Alonso and Esteban Ocon as they impress on the car's return to F1. — AFP

Pakistan complete sweep against South Africa

CENTURION: Pakistan completed a clean sweep of four trophies in four series against South Africa but had anxious moments before scrambling to a three-wicket win with one ball to spare in the fourth and final Twenty20 international at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday.

"It is a big moment for Pakistan. It is not easy winning matches in South Africa," captain Babar Azam said through an interpreter at the post-match presentation. Pakistan, who earlier in the season defeated South Africa in Tests and T20 internationals in Pakistan, followed up a 2-1 one-day series win with a 3-1 victory in the T20s to round off a successful tour.

Medium-pace bowler Faheem Ashraf set up what seemed likely to be an easy win for Pakistan when he took three for 17 as South Africa were bowled out for 144 on what is usually a high-scoring ground. Pakistan were cruising at 92 for one in the tenth over as Babar and Fakhar Zaman shared an impressive second-wicket partnership after Mohammad Rizwan was stumped in the first over.

But Fakhar, who hit five fours and four sixes in a 34-ball 60, went for one big hit too many and sliced a high catch to backward point. Babar, who was named man of the series, was caught at wide third man for 24 three balls later and Pakistan found themselves in a collapse in which six wickets fell for 37 runs.

Two no-balls in the penultimate over by Sisanda

Quartararo tops Portugal MotoGP practice

PORTIMAO: France's Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) topped the field going into yesterday's qualifying at the Portuguese Moto Grand Prix, but a trio of champions including the returning Marc Marquez was left scrambling for places. Quartararo clocked 1min 39.044sec to finish ahead of Italians Franco Morbidelli (Petronas Yamaha SRT) and Friday pacesetter Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati Lenovo Team).

Practice was marred by a sickening crash that saw Jorge Martin (Pramac Racing) stretchered off the track straight to hospital for further medical checks. The Spaniard was conscious, but with contusions to his head, right hand and right ankle.

Spain's Alex Marquez (Honda-LCR) and Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami (Honda-LCR) both also suffered crashes. Three world champions finished outside the top 10: Joan Mir (Team Suzuki Ecstar), Valentino Rossi (Petronas Yamaha SRT) and Marquez (Repsol Honda Team) ended in 12th, 13th and 15th positions respectively.

Six-time MotoGP world champion Marquez made a remarkable comeback Friday in his first competitive ride since crashing nine months ago. The trio will race the first part of qualification, with only the fastest two going on to Q2, the top 10 after the three practice sessions having already booked their slots. — AFP



PORTIMAO: Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP's French rider Fabio Quartararo rides during the third MotoGP free practice session of the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao, yesterday. — AFP

Qatar seeking virus jabs for all World Cup visitors

DOHA: Qatar is in talks with coronavirus vaccine makers to ensure all fans attending the 2022 World Cup in the country have been vaccinated, the foreign minister said Friday. The Gulf nation is facing a resurgence of virus cases and deaths despite progress in its mass vaccination program, forcing authorities to impose a nationwide lockdown. "We have been negotiating and talking to the vaccination providers on how we can make sure that everyone attending the World Cup is vaccinated," Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said.

"Right now there are programs under development to provide vaccination to all the attendees of the World Cup," he added during the Raisina Dialogue, a virtual event hosted by the Observer Research Foundation. "We will be able, hopefully, to host a COVID-free event. We also hope that globally the pandemic will start to go down and disappear."

Globally no one vaccine certification system has yet been universally accepted or recognised, though the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Travel Pass has gained popularity amongst Gulf airlines including Qatar Airways.

As of Friday, 194,930 of Qatar's 2.75 million people have tested positive for the coronavirus since the pandemic began, with 21,965 currently active cases — almost one percent of the population. Over 26,000 vaccine jabs were administered on Friday, bringing the total to 1,209,648 doses, according to official data.

One in five of the 367 deaths Qatar has suffered since the start of the pandemic has been reported this month with officials blaming the more virulent British variant. Last week Qatar announced the reimposition of strict lockdown measures, banning most indoor activities except retail and work in an effort to contain the virus. Qatar has defied soaring coronavirus case numbers to stage several high profile global sporting events in recent months, serving as a test bed for different restrictions but also suffering high-profile infection cases.

The wealthy Gulf nation has bucked the trend of more established sporting nations which have cancelled or postponed a slew of leading events, instead hosting soccer, tennis, motorcycling, judo and beach volleyball since January. FIFA boss Gianni Infantino has previously said that measures to contain the coronavirus will need to be taken during the 2022 tournament but did not give details. "Maybe some precautionary measures have to be taken," he told AFP during the FIFA Club World Cup in Doha in February. — AFP

Temba Bavuma because of injury, batted poorly but clawed their way back into the game despite bowling four no-balls and seven wides.

"I am disappointed but we have young cricketers with great talent and I am proud of them," said stand-in captain Heinrich Klaasen. "We showed we can fight and compete as a young group but we need to get more consistency in our performances."

Faheem earlier started a South African collapse similar to that which later afflicted Pakistan. South Africa had reached 73 for one after the early loss of Aiden Markram when Faheem had Janneman Malan caught at mid-off for 33 in the ninth over.

He followed up with the wickets of Klaasen and George Linde. He bowled his four overs in succession and did not concede a boundary. "My brief was clear from the captain but the tone was set by the new ball bowlers," he said.

Fast bowlers Hasan Ali and Haris Rauf took three for 40 and two for 18 respectively. Rassie van der Dussen top-scored for South Africa with 52 off 36 balls. The series completed a truncated home season for South Africa, who lost a T20 series against England and gained their only series win when they won two Tests against Sri Lanka before taking on Pakistan.

Babar praised the facilities provided for his team in a bio-secure country club between Johannesburg and Centurion, with the matches shared between the two venues. His team will now head to Harare for three T20 internationals and two Tests against Zimbabwe. — AFP



CENTURION: Pakistan players and support staff celebrate their series victory after the fourth Twenty20 international cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday. — AFP

Sports

Atletico Madrid need Eibar win to resuscitate title challenge

MADRID: Time is running out for Atletico Madrid to reboot their La Liga title challenge, even as they still sit top of the table with eight games left to play. Atletico remain in pole position, one point ahead of Real Madrid and two in front of Barcelona, but their poor form means it is the chasing duo now considered favorites to lift the trophy. Four wins in Atletico's last 11 games inspires little confidence they will be able to keep pace with Real and Barca, who have put early-season problems behind them to accelerate down the final straight. But a victory at home to struggling Eibar tonight would go some way to reigniting belief.

It would put Atletico five points ahead of Barcelona, and four clear of Madrid, before Zinedine Zidane's side take on Getafe later tonight. Marcos Llorente will be back, having served his suspension by missing last weekend's draw against Real Betis, but Atleti will still be without Luis Suarez, who is expected to need another fortnight to overcome his leg injury.

With Joao Felix also out, Diego Simeone has a lack of options in attack, Angel Correa the likely partner for Llorente up front, assuming Moussa Dembele is not

suddenly thrust into favor. Zidane said last weekend that Real Madrid are "physically at their limit" and he will be forced to make changes too at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez.

Casemiro is suspended after being sent off in the Clasico, meaning Isco or Fede Valverde could start in midfield while Raphael Varane is still unavailable after testing positive for COVID-19. With Sergio Ramos injured and Nacho Fernandez suspended, it leaves Eder Militao as Madrid's only fit central defender.

Ferland Mendy may have to play centrally or Zidane could turn to youth, with the 21-year-old Victor Chust also an option. Eden Hazard should at least be fresh, after returning to training two weeks ago, while Mariano Diaz and Marcelo could also be handed rare starts.

Sevilla will need to beat fifth-placed Real Sociedad to boost their hopes of joining the title race while at the other end of the table, Huesca take on Alaves in a battle of 16th against 19th. Huesca have transformed their survival chances after back-to-back wins over Levante and Elche, but their reward is only a one-point cushion over the bottom three. — AFP



SEVILLE: Atletico Madrid's Argentine coach Diego Simeone (2L) walks on the sideline during the Spanish League football match between Real Betis and Club Atletico de Madrid at the Benito Villamarin stadium in Seville on April 11, 2021. — AFP

News in brief

PSG given chance

PARIS: French Ligue 1 leaders Lille needed a spectacular late strike from Luis Araujo to rescue a 1-1 draw at home to Montpellier on Friday with Paris Saint-Germain handed the chance to turn the screw in the title race. Lille moved to 70 points but defending champions PSG can close the gap to just a point if they defeat Saint Etienne today. Andy Delort headed Montpellier ahead in the 21st minute on Friday. But Brazil's Luis Araujo grabbed a deserved equalizer with five minutes left with a memorable half-volley. Lille were unlucky not to have taken the lead earlier in the game when a Benjamin Andre drive came back off the post in the 57th minute. Montpellier are a resolute side and have now gone 14 matches in all competitions without defeat. They are eighth and still well-placed to claim a European place next season. — AFP

Leipzig draw

BERLIN: Leipzig had a last-minute goal ruled out and were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Hoffenheim on Friday. Second-placed Leipzig have 61 points. Leipzig thought they had won the game at the death when Yussuf Poulsen headed in but he was penalized for handball after the referee consulted the pitchside monitor. Friday's result was a fair outcome with Julian Nagelsmann's side taking until the 53rd minute to have an attempt on target with Christopher Nkunku failing to trouble the Hoffenheim keeper. Nagelsmann went into the game with speculation linking him as Hansi Flick's successor at Bayern next season. Flick, meanwhile, seen as the man to replace Joachim Loew as national team coach after the European Championship, has yet to confirm he will stay at Munich where he has a contract until 2024. — AFP

Italy to ease ban

ROME: Up to a thousand spectators will be allowed at outdoor events from May 1 when Italy eases its stadium fan ban in regions less affected by the coronavirus, it was announced Friday. Fans will be allowed to attend football, basketball and volleyball games in Italy's 'yellow zones', the government said. It also means fans can attend the Rome Masters tennis event from May 9-16. The country gave a green light this week for up to 17,000 fans to attend football's European Championship quarter-final in Rome on July 3. Stadiums have been closed to fans in Italy since October. — AFP

Injury clouds Kane double as Spurs draw

LIVERPOOL: England forward Harry Kane suffered a worrying ankle injury ahead of next week's League Cup final after scoring twice in Tottenham Hotspur's 2-2 draw away to Everton in the Premier League on Friday. Gylfi Sigurdsson also grabbed two goals for Everton in a result that did little for either side's European hopes. Kane, expected to lead England's attack in this year's coronavirus delayed European Championships, went off in stoppage time towards the end of the match after rolling his ankle when challenged in the box at an Everton corner.

"It is too early to say something," Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho told Sky Sports when asked afterwards about Kane's injury. "For him to leave the pitch with a few minutes to go is obviously because he felt something. Let me be optimistic and believe that he has time to recover. Let's see. It's obvious he's a very important player for us. I cannot say much or speculate."

Kane's 20th league goal of the season put Spurs ahead in the 27th minute at Goodison Park only for Sigurdsson to equalise soon afterwards from the penalty spot. It was the reverse story in the second half, Sigurdsson getting his second in the 62nd minute before Kane leveled six minutes later.

Spurs remain seventh, five points off the top four

having played one game more than West Ham. Mourinho said of Kane's double: "It was great finishing. Two beautiful goals but not a surprise for the ones who see him do it every day in training."

Meanwhile, Mourinho had little time for Paul Pogba's recent criticism of his management style when he was in charge of Manchester United. Pogba accused Mourinho of "going against players" and making them feel like "they don't exist anymore."

But Mourinho, who made France midfielder Pogba the world's most expensive player when he brought him to Old Trafford in 2016, insisted Friday: "I would like to say that I couldn't care less what he says. I am not interested at all."

'Keep fighting'

Everton were left a place and one point further back than Tottenham, but do have a game in hand on Mourinho's side. "It was probably the best we played at home this season," said Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti. "We were unlucky. We did easy mistakes and when you do mistakes against Harry Kane you are condemned. We have more difficulties to reach Europe but we have to keep fighting. We still have (the) possibility, playing like tonight."

After an uninspiring opening, Spurs broke the deadlock with their first effort on target. Everton's Michael Keane missed Tanguy Ndombele's cross and in the process allowed Kane to control the ball and shoot into the bottom corner past England team-mate Jordan Pickford.

This was Kane's 20th goal of the Premier League season — the fifth time in his career he had achieved the feat. Only Alan Shearer (seven) and Sergio Agüero (six) have done so in more Premier League seasons.

But the Londoners' lead lasted barely four minutes, with Everton equalizing after Sergio Reguilon charged into James Rodriguez and Sigurdsson beat Hugo Lloris from the penalty spot. Lloris kept the game all square come half-time, however, by denying both Rodriguez and Richarlison with fine saves.

Spurs then squandered several chances to regain the lead and they were punished for their wastefulness when Iceland's Sigurdsson fired into the far corner following a pull-back from Seamus Coleman. But Kane had his second goal when he pounced from close range after Everton's Mason Holgate and Keane collided in the Merseysiders' box. — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane holds his foot before leaving the pitch injured during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Tottenham Hotspur at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England on Friday. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (center) congratulates Manchester United's Spanish goalkeeper David de Gea (right) after the UEFA Europa league quarter final, second leg football match against Granada at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester England, on April 15, 2021. — AFP

Giving up on title race is not in Man Utd's DNA: Solskjaer

LONDON: Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says giving up on the Premier League title is "not in our DNA" even though their pursuit of runaway leaders Manchester City appears hopeless. United head into tonight's home game against struggling Burnley second in the table, 11 points behind City but with a game in hand.

The Norwegian believes his side are on the right track but admits adding to their 20 league titles is unlikely. "Of course we'll never give up," Solskjaer said after his side wrapped up a 4-0 aggregate victory against Granada in the Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday, setting up a last-four clash with Roma.

"Man United will never, ever give up. This club has had too many setbacks and too many great comebacks to have that in our DNA. (Giving up) is

not in our DNA. But if it's realistic? No, probably not because when you've had a team so consistent as Man City have been, you don't expect them to lose three games out of the last six."

United are on course to finish in the top four in back-to-back seasons for the time since Alex Ferguson retired as a champion in 2013. They are also desperate to claim their first silverware since winning the Europa League under Jose Mourinho in 2017.

"Of course, third last year, second this year if that's what we manage and close to a trophy, it's progress," said Solskjaer. "That's not the end game. "The end game is, of course, winning the league. But we're not in the era of Sir Alex now. We've had a transformation period since he left, which always would happen because there's no one better. There never will be." — AFP

Classifieds

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Amiri Hospital	22450005	Khaldiya	24848075
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Kaifan	24849807
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shamiya	24848913
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shuwaikh	24814507
Farwanliya Hospital	24892010	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Adan Hospital	23940620	Nuzha	22526804
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Qadsiya	22515088
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Dasmah	22532265
Clinics		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
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Embiid dominates as Sixers beat Clippers

Utah rallies without Mitchell • Durant powers Nets past Hornets

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid scored 36 points and grabbed 14 rebounds as the NBA East-leading Philadelphia 76ers snapped the Los Angeles Clippers' seven-game winning streak with a 106-103 win on Friday.

Embiid became the first Philadelphia player since 2006 to score 35-plus points in three straight games as the Cameroonian center has carried the offensive load since returning to the starting lineup two weeks ago.

Over the past half dozen games Embiid is averaging over 30 points and nine-plus rebounds per game with his best performance coming Wednesday when he ran roughshod over the Brooklyn Nets for 39 points and 13 boards.

But it is in the last three that Embiid has really shined. The last Sixer to score more than 35 points in three straight contests was Allen Iverson in 2006. Embiid heard muted chants of "MVP, MVP" on Friday from the crowd of 4,100 at the Wells Fargo Center, the number of spectators limited due to COVID-19 health restrictions in Philadelphia.

"I don't think teams really know what to do when guarding him," teammate Ben Simmons said of Embiid. "I think he's clearly the MVP this season. He's been so dominant. I don't know how to stop him."

Furkan Korkmaz finished with 18 points on five-of-12 shooting from beyond the arc as Philadelphia snapped Los Angeles' seven-game win streak. Simmons added 12 points, nine rebounds and six assists, and Danny Green had 11 points and seven assists in the win.

Paul George paced the Clippers with

37 points, nine rebounds and six assists. Kawhi Leonard missed his fourth straight game for the Clippers with a sore right foot. "I thought we did a good job," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said. "Overall, I like the way we fought and competed."

Philadelphia roared out to a 20-3 lead in the first quarter, but the Clippers clawed their way back in the third to cut the margin to just three points with 2:50 left. Los Angeles then took their first lead of the game in the fourth when Patrick Patterson nailed a three to make it 91-90. But the 76ers dominated the game on the boards and in the paint and shooting guard Shake Milton drained a three pointer with 3:38 remaining to make it 97-94 as they never trailed again.

In Salt Lake City, Utah's two-time All-Star Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points before leaving with a sprained right ankle early in the third quarter, but the Jazz still stormed back to beat the Indiana Pacers 119-111. Bojan Bogdanovic led the Jazz with 24 points, and Jordan Clarkson scored 18 as Utah won for the 13th time in 16 games.

Utah rallied for the win despite Mitchell leaving less than four minutes into the third quarter after landing awkwardly on this right foot while attempting to steal a pass. Mitchell walked gingerly to the dressing room with the help of some of his teammates. The Jazz said that Mitchell would undergo an MRI to determine the severity of the injury.

'Makes us go'

"Donovan is so important to our team," point guard Mike Conley said. "He's what makes us go. I was proud of



PHILADELPHIA: Joel Embiid of the Philadelphia 76ers reacts during a game against the Brooklyn Nets on Friday at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

the way we responded with Donovan going down."

Elsewhere, Norman Powell drained the clutch game winner with 22 seconds remaining as the short-handed Portland Trail Blazers came from behind to beat the host San Antonio Spurs 107-106. CJ McCollum scored 29 points while Powell delivered 22 for Portland, who had lost four of their last five games.

Blazers six-time all-star Damian Lillard sat out Friday's game due to a right hamstring injury. Lillard is having a standout season averaging 28.7 points and 7.7 assists. Anfernee Simons added 16 points for the Blazers, who snapped a two-game losing streak. DeMar DeRozan finished with 26 points and added 10 assists for the Spurs, who have lost two straight.

Also, Joe Harris scored 26 points and Kevin Durant poured in 25 points as the second place Brooklyn Nets defeated the Charlotte Hornets 130-115 to keep pace with the Sixers atop the standings. Josh Jackson scored a team-high 29 points as the Detroit Pistons beat the struggling Oklahoma City 110-104, handing the Thunder their ninth consecutive defeat. — AFP



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