



3 350,000 expat workers still stranded abroad



12 'Nomadland' wins big at pandemic Oscars as Zhao makes history



14 First Arab woman basketball referee to stand tall at Olympics



Fajr 03:45
Shurooq 05:10
Dhuhr 11:46
Asr 15:21
Maghrib 18:21
Isha 19:44

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Assembly to hold crucial session amid challenges

Court jails Bangladeshi MP, Kuwaiti officials for 7 years

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds a crucial session today amid continued confrontation between around 30 opposition MPs on one hand and the government and the Assembly speaker on the other. Opposition MPs have vowed to prevent the session from proceeding unless HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah accepts to be grilled over a variety of accusations.

The Assembly decided on March 30 to postpone grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022, but the opposition insists that the decision is

illegal and not in line with the constitution. Opposition MP Mohammad Al-Mutair said yesterday that the decision to postpone grillings of the prime minister amounts to a coup against the Kuwaiti constitution. He and other MPs have insisted the session will not be allowed to proceed unless the prime minister is grilled.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari yesterday asked Justice Minister Abdullah Al-Roumi if the Anti-Corruption Authority has investigated allegations that some ministers threatened to resign because of blackmail by some pro-government MPs who wanted them to take illegal

actions. Kandari said some pro-government MPs wanted to capitalize on their support of the government by pressuring ministers to pass illegal transactions.

In the meantime, the court of appeals yesterday jailed a Bangladeshi lawmaker for seven years after convicting him of bribery and corruption. The court also sentenced Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, a senior interior ministry official, former MP Salah Khorshid and a former senior official of the Manpower Public Authority for the same period in jail for being parties to the case. The court confirmed the acquittal of MP Saadoun Hammad.

The sentence is not final as it can be challenged at the court of cassation, whose rulings are final. Meanwhile, the criminal court yesterday sentenced leading Islamist activist and leader of the Islamist Ummah Party Hakem Al-Mutairi to life in jail in absentia after convicting him on charges of plotting with a foreign country to overthrow a number of Gulf ruling families.

The sentence is based on a leaked recording of a conversation between Mutairi and former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, in which Mutairi clearly said that Gulf peoples are prepared to overthrow or at least restrict

the powers of their ruling families. Mutairi, who has been living in self-exile in Turkey for some time, described the ruling as "political" against "reformists in Kuwait", adding that such rulings will not help Gulf states resolve their dilemmas. He said on his Twitter account that such verdicts will only "boost our faith in the necessity for change".

The criminal court also sentenced MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa, former MP Sultan Al-Shimmari and six others to two years in jail for taking part in illegal tribal primary elections. The court asked the convicts to pay KD 5,000 each to suspend the jail term.

Ramadan Kareem

Ramadan boot camp

By Shariffa Carlo

Ramadan is upon us once again. It is a time for fasting, praying and getting closer to our Lord. It has been commanded for Muslims to fast in the Noble Quran, where Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) says, what can be translated as: "O Believers, fasting is enjoined upon you, as it was enjoined upon those before you, that you may attain taqwa (God-consciousness)." (Al-Baqarah 2:183)

During Ramadan, we are commanded to fast, to attain taqwa. What does that mean?

Linguistically, in Arabic, sawm literally means "to keep away from something." The verb is (saama, which means to abstain or to restrain from something.

The linguistic meaning of Taqwa is "a shield, or protective barrier". When put it together, Muslims understand that the act of self-control that is necessary for fasting, helps to create a shield for those who fast, from evil and sin. The act of fasting is a form of physical, mental, and spiritual training. Along with fasting, the month of Ramadan brings added chances for blessings and forgiveness. Muslims are encouraged to use this month as an opportunity to achieve maximum fitness of body, mind and spirit, through fasting, adding prayers, increasing the giving of charity, working on patience, and reading, studying and implementing the Quran.

Taqwa in Islam, is understood as a heightened sense of God-Consciousness, a recognition of the fact that while we do not see our Lord, He Sees us. We consider Ramadan as the exercise ground of faith. It is in Ramadan that we find the time and ability, through this deed, fasting, that is both communal and immensely personal.

As a group, as nations, we gather together to pray and fast, but fasting, while it has a visual element, is something which no one, but us and our Lord, truly knows has been committed fully. As such, Muslims believe that it is a deed so loved by Allah (swt), that He sets its value for each of us personally, based on the purity and completeness of the deed.

Ramadan is truly a boot camp, because we don't just fast or abstain from food and drink; we abstain from sins. Allah informs us that He will not accept a fast that is littered with lies, back-biting, harming of others, or other sins. We must guard not just our stomachs but our hearts, tongues and limbs.

Because Ramadan has such a concentrated and increased level of acts of worship within

Continued on Page 2

Man charged with murder for brutal killing of woman

KUWAIT: The public prosecution has charged the suspect in the killing of a woman in Sabah Al-Salem last week with first-degree murder, which is punishable by death. The woman (FA) was abducted by

the Kuwaiti man last Tuesday, who allegedly stabbed her and dumped her outside Adan Hospital in Mubarak Al-Kabeer. The woman later succumbed to her injuries.

According to reports, the suspect wanted to marry the victim, but her family rejected the proposal. The woman's family said they had filed several cases at several police stations and with some public prosecutors, but the man was not kept in custody. The woman's sister - who is a lawyer - said that she repeatedly pleaded with a public prosecutor that the release of the man could endanger her

sister's life, but he was nevertheless freed on bail. She also said police stations did not take their complaints seriously.

Dozens of women gathered last Thursday outside the National Assembly in Irada Square demanding more protection for women and taking their cases more seriously by police stations following the brutal murder. A number of the peaceful protesters said that they came to let authorities know that complaints by women must be dealt with seriously like those by men, complaining that authorities tend to take their cases lightly.

Palestinians fight to survive in COVID unit

GAZA CITY: Slumped in a hospital bed, his face obscured by an oxygen mask in an intensive care unit for coronavirus patients in the Gaza Strip, Hussein Al-Hajj said he wanted to talk. "Vaccinations are essential, but I'm going to have to survive the virus before getting vaccinated," the 71-year-old retired Palestinian teacher told AFP through strained breaths. In Gaza, a Palestinian territory under strict Israeli blockade since 2007, the pandemic has been defined by con-

trast. Through its early months roughly a year ago, the enclave's Hamas Islamist rulers largely succeeded in limiting significant viral spread.

Access to Gaza was already restricted through Israeli and Egyptian controlled crossings, and Hamas imposed strict quarantines on everyone who sought entry. But in August the first cases were recorded outside quarantine centers, raising fears of catastrophe given Gaza's weak health infrastructure.

Now, as Israel broadly re-opens thanks to a world-leading vaccination effort, Gaza's vulnerable health system is overwhelmed. Hajj was admitted to a Turkish funded hospital, built in 2017 on land where polluted stagnant water often pools, which was

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GAZA CITY: Hussein Al-Hajj, a 71-year-old COVID-19 patient, lies in his bed at the intensive care unit for coronavirus patients at the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital. —AFP

In Berlin, virus test before Ramadan prayers

BERLIN: With his head tilted back and his face mask pulled down, Imam Abdallah Hajjir patiently undergoes a nasal swab outside a Berlin mosque to get tested for the coronavirus. "Negative!" he smiles a few minutes later, and heads inside for Friday prayers. The medical team manning a testing station outside the red-bricked "House of Wisdom" mosque is part of a push by authorities in the German capital to raise COVID awareness among Muslims during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, and among migrant populations more generally.

Sitting at a table in the building's parking lot, the staff made up of Libyans, Syrians and Armenians carry out free rapid testing for a steady stream of worshippers lining up with prayer mats rolled up under their arms.

Imam Abdallah Hajjir, wearing a gold-rimmed cap, says encouraging the congregation to get tested is a way "to contribute" in the fight against the pandemic. "By protecting the members of our community,



BERLIN: Imam Sheikh Abdallah Hajjir (left) takes a coronavirus test before attending Friday prayer at the 'Haus der Weisheit' (House of Wisdom) Mosque in Berlin's Moabit district. — AFP

we are protecting those they come into contact with, so society as a whole," he said. Around 35 percent of Berlin residents have a migrant background, and neighborhoods with the highest proportion of migrants have recorded the highest number of coronavirus cases since the pandemic began a year ago.

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Philippines' virus cases top 1 million

MANILA: The number of coronavirus cases logged in the Philippines since the start of the pandemic topped one million yesterday, as a health official warned against easing restrictions, to give hospitals some "breathing room". Nearly 9,000 new infections in the past 24 hours took the country's caseload to 1,006,428 — the second-highest in Southeast Asia-with 16,853 fatalities, government figures show.

Limited testing means the actual number of cases is probably much higher. A lockdown imposed on the national capital region and four surrounding provinces at the end of March to slow a record surge in infections appears to be working. New cases in the capital-the epicenter of the outbreak-fell 20 percent to an average of 3,841 per day last week, data released by independent research group OCTA show.

Continued on Page 2

Local

Kuwait Amir condoles with Chad military leader on president's demise



KUWAIT: Minister of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah offers condolences at the embassy of Chad in Kuwait yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to General Hamamat Idriss Deby, chairman of Chad's Transitional Military Council, over passing

away of former President Idriss Deby Itno, praying to Allah to bestow blessing upon the deceased. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the

Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to General Deby. Meanwhile, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah yesterday visited the embassy of

Chad in Kuwait, where he paid condolences on behalf of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince on the demise of President Idriss Deby Itno. — KUNA

NBK staff exhibit passion for development despite pandemic

KUWAIT: During the first quarter of 2021, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) witnessed high attendance rate exceeding 91 percent in the training programs and courses, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic held. This was achieved by the advanced digital infrastructure developed by Group Human Resources over the previous years.

A total of 500 employees participated in various training programs and workshops, aligning with the bank's vision and commitment towards investing in its most valuable asset - human resources.

NBK organized 32 training programs from the annual training plan for developing its employees through intensive soft skills and specialized program. Such trainings involved building a performance driven culture program as well as fraud investigation. The provided programs were attended by employ-

ees from Kuwait and overseas branches, including Bahrain, Iraq, China, Jordan, Egypt and Singapore.

During Q1 2021, implemented training activities included in-house training programs and specialized workshops for new employees. six "Yalla Watani" programs, were held for 72 trainees targeting NBK branches and Contact Center. In addition, the bank organized four fully virtual workshops for 80 Service officer, Relationship officers and Personal banking officers.

NBK adopted the latest training approach "Blended Learning" for newly recruited staff using NBK's E-Learning Platform, as well as virtual training, programs examinations were held in designated labs, subject to all precautionary measures and social distancing to keep everyone safe.

In addition, 103 trainees attended "Middle Management Development Program" through the e-learning platform as well as virtual to develop their capabilities and enhance their skills across multiple areas, including: Developing Your Management Skills, and Adaptive Leadership in



Ahmad Darweesh

Action, Managing Change, effective communication skills, and Applying Lean Thinking to Enhance Leadership Skills. 53 trainees from the supervisory level participated in the program of building a driven performance culture provided through virtual learning.

As part of the bank's effective strategy to improve the employee's learning experience, Group Human Resources continue to ensure designing and enhancing NBK's E-Learning platform. Significant progress was achieved in improving the quality of training content and interaction level.

On this occasion, Ahmad Darweesh, Head of Training and Development at National Bank of Kuwait quoted: "Years ago, Group Human Resources has been adopting a more holistic approach and vision in line with the bank's plans to implement digital transformation. In this context, it developed a fully virtual approach to practical and theoretical training, which paid off during the pandemic, as it was able to make significant strides in the process of training and developing employees, despite the partial and full lockdown measures."

Both Education and qualification are top priorities for NBK, which act as a key part of the career development strategy and promoting digital culture, thus being known as the best practice among private sector institutions in the region; in terms of

training content, provided by prestigious international universities.

Darweesh emphasized that NBK always strives to provide an attractive and diverse learning experience that is accessible for all employees at all stages of their careers, noting that, due to the changing needs of the bank's employees, the offerings provided by Training Department are constantly evolving in order to contribute in promoting Creativity and innovation in the digital era.

Darweesh elaborated that Training and Development Department is always exploring new ways to provide training programs to the bank's employees according to their career and personal development needs, noting that Group Human Resources has extensively promoted participation in "self-learning" through NBK's E-Learning Platform, where it can be accessed anytime and anywhere.

It is worth mentioning that NBK consistently support its employees in building their careers through diversifying and consciously evolving their talents within the bank. In recent challenging times, efficient workforce proved to make a difference. NBK believes that employees continuously learn in a culture that drives personal growth and truly values long-term careers as a strategic pillar of the Bank's strategy and ambitious plans for the future.

Philippines' virus cases...

Continued from Page 1

The occupancy rate of hospital beds allocated for COVID-19 patients has also eased after capacity was boosted and isolation facilities for mild cases expanded.

But Health Undersecretary Rosario Vergeire said infections would go back up if restrictions were relaxed now. "As a health agency, we in the DOH (Department of Health) see the importance of continuing these kinds of restrictions so there is breathing room and space for decongestion of our healthcare system," Vergeire said ahead of a gov-

ernment task force meeting to decide on the issue.

"This is primarily our major concern." The government has been redeploying healthcare workers from low-transmission regions to the capital to support struggling hospitals. Philippine Red Cross chairman Richard Gordon said more medical volunteers were "urgently" needed. Under current virus rules, indoor dining is banned, non-essential travel curbed, public transport capacity limited and businesses such as gyms and beauty salons closed. Wearing a mask and face shield in public has long been mandatory. There are growing concerns about the impact of the measures on the already devastated economy. President Rodrigo Duterte's economic advisers estimate that the first two weeks of lockdown cost about 252,000 jobs and slashed household income by nearly 30 billion pesos (\$620 million). —AFP

tests a day and the 36 percent positive test rate is among the highest in the world, according to the World Health Organization. "Officially we have about 1,000 (new) cases a day, but it's probably 5,000 or more because people don't go to the hospital or call us to say if they have symptoms," Abadelah said.

Samer Mansour, head nurse at the ICU, said when the unit opened only one of the nine beds was occupied. Now the beds are "always full," with about 40 percent of patients under 50, he added, explaining that medical staff in Gaza have experience treating combat wounds, but Covid-19 has posed unprecedented challenges.

Hamas has tried to contain transmission by imposing a 7:00 pm curfew, an effort to prevent large gatherings for evening meals during the holy month of Ramadan. But relief from mass vaccination remains a distant prospect. The United Nations and rights groups have said that Israel has a legal obligation to ensure vaccine supply to Gaza, as the military power responsible for the crippling blockade.

Israel has balked at such calls, insisting the Palestinian Authority in occupied West Bank is responsible for all Palestinian vaccinations. For Gazans, that means relying on the PA which has faced a series of procurement challenges and on the Covax program set up to support COVID vaccinations among poorer nations.

"We have received 110,000 doses by we need an additional 2.6 million," Abadelah said. — AFP

or her peak, so should the Muslim emerge from Ramadan at our peak.

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.

Palestinians fight to survive...

Continued from Page 1

previously used as a training ground for Hamas's armed wing.

The white-haired Hajj was among a group of mostly elderly, male patients curled up on beds and intubated under the care of an overstretched medical team. "My wife and I contracted corona. She stayed in quarantine at home, but I have lung problems, so first I was brought to the hospital, then here," he said in a whisper, referring to the makeshift ICU. "It's a question of life and death. Things can deteriorate at any moment."

Health authorities in Gaza say the situation turned more dire following the emergence last month of the more contagious British coronavirus variant, which fuelled a surge in cases among younger Palestinians. "The situation is critical," said Rami Al-Abadelah, director of infectious diseases at Gaza's health ministry. Last week the enclave of some two million people registered a pandemic record of 23 deaths in a single day.

Around 850 Gazans have died from COVID, while the territory is expected to cross the 100,000 case threshold within days. The resource-strapped Islamist authorities are conducting about 3,200

Ramadan boot camp...

Continued from Page 1

it, the result of a Ramadan well spent is that, like a soldier who has attended Boot Camp returns at his

KRCS hands 5,000 food parcels to Palestinian refugees



BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society delivered 5,000 food parcels to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon on Sunday during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. "Some 25,000 individuals will benefit from these portions, donated by the people of Kuwait to our Palestinian brethren in

Lebanon," head of the organization's Lebanon mission Musaed Al-Enezi said. Initiatives like these are repeated each year, during the Muslim fasting month, in the aim of lessening the suffering of the refugees in light of tough economic and health conditions, he added. — KUNA

In Berlin, virus test before...

Continued from Page 1

They are often also the areas where population density is above average. Many immigrants live in close quarters in small apartments, or in asylum centers where up to five people sometimes share a single room. Last October, the OECD sounded the alarm and said migrant workers were "on the front-line" of the pandemic in developed countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a club of some 40 mostly rich nations, estimated that the risk of a coronavirus infection was "at least twice as high" as among the rest of the population.

In Germany as elsewhere, people with foreign backgrounds also tend to be employed in work that can't be done remotely, such as cleaning or caring for the elderly, according to the Dezim institute for research on integration and migration. As Germany's COVID vaccination drive picks up speed, city authorities are stepping up efforts to try to overcome "the large reservations" held by some migrants about getting jabbed, said Katarina Niewiedzial, Berlin's

integration officer.

"There's false information circulating" about the vaccines, she said, ranging from "It's going to make me sterile" to "they're going to implant a chip". She said people like the imam "with all the authority they carry" are best placed to "boost people's confidence" in the COVID jabs.

"The impact is completely different when he uses his sermon, like he did today, to stress the need to protect lives," she added. Berlin has also launched coronavirus information podcasts in over a dozen languages, including Arabic, Farsi and Kurdish.

The vaccination of 18,500 refugees living in shared accommodation in Berlin has also got under way.

Outside the mosque in Berlin's diverse Moabit neighborhood, a small group of worshippers have placed their prayer rugs on the asphalt and are listening to the imam's voice carried by loudspeakers from the prayer room. Pandemic restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather inside the building have left them praying on the sidewalk. The cleansing ritual, or ablution, has to be carried out before arriving at the mosque. But Ali, 30, who comes every Friday, says he won't let the virus curbs ruin the holy month of Ramadan for the second year in a row.

"It's a shame we can't have large family gatherings (to break the fast). But luckily we can have video chats with our relatives," he says, smiling. — AFP

Local

350,000 expat workers still struck abroad

KUWAIT: Employers have asked relevant government authorities several times to allow company employees who hold valid residency permits to enter into the country while taking the necessary health measures. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. As the ban on expatriates' flights remains indefinitely, there are 350,000 employees with valid residency permits currently stranded abroad, whose work permits and civil IDs have been renewed, according to official sources quoted in the report.

As the marketplace lost 500,000 workers in 2020 or 31 percent of registered workers in business sectors (350,000 with valid residencies stranded abroad and 150,000 who left for good), it is necessary to take the necessary action to allow the return of stranded employees gradually, the sources said.

Khalid Al-Ashab, a human resources official at a logistics company, said labor shortage has doubled as many companies suffer from a scarcity of heavy duty drivers, in addition to skilled workers in the mechanical, maintenance, cleaning and construction sectors.

Meanwhile, an owner of an agricultural and contracting group Yousuf Al-Shimmari said the shortage in the agricultural sector is huge, as demand for workers has increased along with their salaries - from KD 120 to KD 350.

Officials at the health ministry said issuing a recommendation to allow the return of stranded employees abroad needs more studies and follow-up of coronavirus developments locally and internationally, adding that the infection curve differs from one country to another, so it is difficult to generalize the recommendation on all countries that have workers in Kuwait.

Health officials said the health situation varies between countries, adding that receiving certain doses of vaccines may not guarantee the entry of these nationals into Kuwait due to the appearance of new strains (variants) in countries like India, which registered 349,691 COVID-19 cases on Sunday, apart from 2,767 deaths.

National Guard's Caracal helicopters enter service

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard (KNG) received a number of French-made Caracal helicopters, which entered service as the core of the guard's air fleet. Top KNG officials attended the reception ceremony including Lieutenant-General Hashim Abdul Al-Rifai, Assistant for Operations and Training Major General Faleh Shuja Faleh, Assistant Commander of the Air Force in the Kuwaiti Army Brigadier General Bandar Salem Al-Muzain, and Commander of Ali Al-Salem Air Force Base Brigadier General Mubarak Abdullah Al-Qahtan.

"On behalf of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwait National Guard, and retired Lieutenant-General Sheikh Ahmed Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Vice President of the National Guard, we celebrate today the arrival of the Caracal helicopters from the friendly Republic of France, which join the National Guard air force to allow it to carry out its duties in supporting state departments through troop transportation, search and rescue, and medical evacuation," Lt Gen Rifai said during the ceremony. He added that KNG had enrolled its personnel "in the most prestigious academies to study and gain practical experience so that they are qualified to carry out this task" of operating the new helicopters.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Faleh said that the helicopter division is one of the vital ones in the KNG, which was included in the second strategic plan of

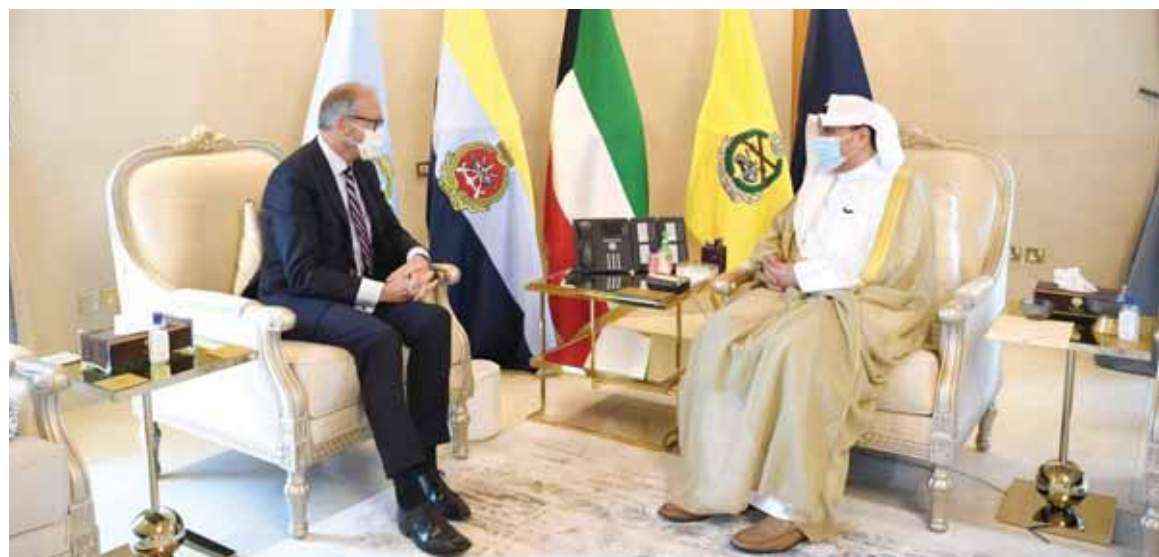


the National Guard (2020). "The idea of the helicopter project coincided with the expansion project of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah camp, and the establishment of the air base that we were honored to name after His Highness Sheikh

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," he said. The air base was named after Sheikh Mishal, the former Vice President of Kuwait National Guard, "in recognition of his contributions and achievements towards the march of the National Guard."

Defense Minister, Dutch envoy discuss cooperation

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah discussed matters of mutual significance, means for cooperation and joint work with Netherlands' Ambassador Laurens Westhoff, Kuwait's military said yesterday. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Northern Ports customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle 150 bags of chewing tobacco, as well as counterfeit perfumes. Customs detectives department learned about the shipment arriving from Jebel Ali Port, so it was searched and the banned substances were found. Legal action was taken.

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am until the end of Ramadan 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
WhatsApp 9222-2358

Mishref Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-9900

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

Rumaihiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045

Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500

Fahaheel Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-9951

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

Salam Co-op
WhatsApp 9788-7832

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E: info@kuwaittimes.net

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ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

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ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

News in brief

Kuwait condemns Israeli violence

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry has expressed Kuwait's condemnation of the acts of violence and provocation carried out by a Jewish extremist group against Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem's old city. In a press statement, the Ministry also denounced the Israeli measures preventing Palestinian worshippers from reaching and praying at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. It urged the international community to take a swift action in this regard and to demand the Israeli occupiers to stop harassments of Palestinians and to abide by relevant international law provisions.

Foreign Minster expresses condolences

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Sunday phoned his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, expressing sincere condolences for the accidental fire that occurred at Ibn Al-Khatib Hospital in Baghdad. Sheikh Ahmad exhibited great sorrow for the lives lost in this accident which took the lives of tens of Iraqi citizens. He also wished quick recovery for the injured.

Co-ops can buy directly from local farmers

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Dr Meshan Al-Otaibi gave orders to allow co-ops to buy directly from local farmers without brokers, in a step to help reduce prices and support Kuwaiti farmers.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: This picture taken circa 1960 shows the khabbazeen (bakers) market, which also sold 'nikhi and bajela'. Made from boiled chickpeas and fava beans respectively, 'nikhi and bajela' remain very popular in Kuwait today. (Source: Collection of Ali Al-Rais, Center of Research and Studies on Kuwait 2017. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

Kuwait Friendship Humanitarian Society calls upon donors

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Friendship Humanitarian Society Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sarraf urged donors, various bodies, citizens and expats to support the newly-established society and help it achieve its goals. Sarraf, as well as other board members, thanked all those who supported the society morally and materially.

Sarraf said the board of directors recently appointed Khalid Mohammad bin Sabt as Director General of the society due to his experience in humanitarian and voluntary work and his exceptional contacts with public and private establishments, in addition to his vast managerial expertise.

Bin Sabt thanked the board of directors for their confidence in him, saying it is his pleasure to be part of the society and an effective element in presenting its various services to the needy, helping in enhancing its work and achieving its noble goals. Bin Sabt said work is ongoing with the chairman and board members to set a strategy to enhance beneficiary services and reach the largest group of needy people.

Bin Sabt said the society's goals include:

1. Presenting social and material care to needy people of any nationality, especially the sick and those facing financial difficulties.
2. Helping prisoners and their families.
3. Helping families in need who do not wish to disclose their destitution.
4. Cooperating with other societies in this regard.
5. Recognizing expats who have exceeded 50 years residing in Kuwait and presenting them with gifts.
6. Honoring law-abiding expats.
7. Working on strengthening friendships with expats through participating in their national holidays.

Bin Sabt said projects licensed by the social affairs ministry include:

- Providing airline tickets to female domestic helpers in shelters.
- Helping sick expats having financial difficulties.
- Supporting expat domestic help shelters.
- Helping needy families.
- Providing those awaiting deportation with airline tickets (both men and women).
- Honoring expats who have been residing for a long time in Kuwait.



Ahmad Al-Sarraf



Khalid bin Sabt

- Aiding inmates in prison and reform establishments.

Bin Sabt said KFHS is distinguished with the following:

- The society's founders and its board are major supporters and donors.
- Board members are volunteers, not receiving salaries or advantages, and are not allowed to hire their relatives.
- The society does not deduct any percentage of money from any donation it receives for its projects.
- The society publishes its annual budget, names of donors and amount of donations periodically on its website.
- All society accounts and activities are under the supervision of the social affairs ministry and audited by Howarth, Al-Muhanna and Partners.

Bin Sabt said the donation procedure is simple and only requires direct contact with the general manager on 55121212, or with PR official Nasser Al-Fadhly on 66759392 to arrange for a visit to donate or get more information. Donations can be made through any of the following banks: National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait International Bank and Kuwait Finance House. Donations can be one-time or monthly.



Ooredoo Kuwait launches its Ramadan initiative

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has announced the launching of its charity campaign as part of their community service projects in association with Al-Najat Charity Society. Ooredoo Kuwait handed over food baskets for the needy families in the country. Ooredoo's designated team together with Al-Najat Charity Society volunteers distributed the food baskets across the country.

Ooredoo's charity campaign is integral to its commitment to enable collective humanitarian work, promote social responsibility, and increase awareness among the local community. This humanitarian initiative is at the forefront of the various charitable initiatives and activities that the company will undertake throughout the month, hence, the tough

times the world is still living with the COVID-19 pandemic continuation, which requires concerted efforts by everyone to work towards one cause - helping those in need and better serve the community, not only during Ramadan, but also beyond that.

The distributed food baskets contain essential food items that is enough for a family consisting of 5-7 members. The company has also distributed SIM cards, with free internet and minutes to keep them in touch with their family and friends. The little ones were also treated uniquely, as Ooredoo was keen on sharing the joy of the holy month of Ramadan and girgean, by distributing candy boxes to them.

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "The Ramadan Initiative is one of Ooredoo's many successful community projects, and the aim is reducing the financial burdens on the low income families, promoting social responsibility and performing our role in supporting the national economy." "Ooredoo Kuwait will continue to invest responsibly during the holy month of Ramadan with a focus on people and community" Alayoub added.



Kuwait Times

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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: 18420 RAMADAN 15, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

15- In which month of the Islamic calendar is Ramadan?

- ☐ A. 8th month
- ☐ B 9th month
- ☐ C. 10th month
- ☐ D. 11th month

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :
Name :
Civil ID :
Tel :
Email :

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IS-aligned jihadists kill 31 soldiers in northeast Nigeria

US, Britain rush supplies to virus-stricken India

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COVID strikes fear in Yemeni hospitals

Long-drawn conflict leaves tens of thousands of people dead

SANAA, Yemen: Sitting by his wife's graveside, Musheer Farhan recalls how she was turned away from three hospitals over fears she had coronavirus, although she was heavily pregnant and suffering from breathing problems. Balqees and her unborn child eventually died in the fourth hospital she had been taken to in the war-torn country's capital Sanaa, leaving behind her husband and an infant son.

The 31-year-old was effectively a victim of a second wave of the pandemic in the country—already on its knees amid a war in its seventh year—that is leading doctors to refuse treatment to those suspected of infection. Along with medics' uncertainty over how to treat suspected COVID-19 cases, hospitals lack critical supplies, including oxygen, and are blighted by frequent power cuts. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who seized the capital from the government in 2014 and control much of the north, do not release data on infections.

But the toll from COVID-19 has become a hot topic in Sanaa, with evidence mounting of a spike in cases in the past month across the country, including the south which is under the control of the internationally recognized government.

Farhan said Balqees arrived at the fourth hospital too late to be saved. "She entered the examination room, I went to buy medication, and I came back to find her lifeless body," he told AFP.

"The obstetrician and anaesthesiologist refused to perform an operation to save the mother, and the baby, over fears she had coronavirus."



SANAA, Yemen: Yemeni children carry new outfits during a charity distribution of clothes at a stadium, as part of actions to help the impoverished during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan Sunday. — AFP

'Emergency'

Yemen's long conflict between the government—supported by a Saudi-led military coalition—and the Iran-backed Houthis has left tens of thousands of people dead and pushed millions to the brink of famine. The United Nations calls it the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with over four million people displaced and two-thirds of Yemen's 30-million population dependent on aid. The country, long the most impoverished in the Arabian Peninsula, is on the brink of total collapse. Schools, factories and hospitals have been destroyed, many children recruited as soldiers, and countless people have lost their livelihoods. Despite the pandemic, outside the overstretched hospitals, life in Sanaa seems normal, with

markets bustling and mosques crowded with worshippers during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

It is rare to see anyone wearing a mask, and precautionary health measures are nonexistent. "There is no official data, no official communication, and the results of tests aren't published," a humanitarian worker familiar with the health situation in Yemen said of the rebel-held areas. Cases reported in the south began escalating in mid-March, prompting a warning from the country's coronavirus committee of a public health "emergency". But there is also mounting evidence of an uptick in infections in the capital, the source said. "Public hospitals are close to being full. At private hospitals, the situation is unclear."

Stigma and rumors

"People are often reluctant to go to hospital when they have COVID-like symptoms," the source added. "People are concerned about the stigma, sometimes they don't believe they will be treated. They are afraid because of rumors and don't trust the medical system." Houthi health authorities did not respond to AFP's request for comment. Officially, Yemen has recorded 6,137 coronavirus cases, including 1,187 deaths, but numbers are likely dramatically higher.

Last month, Yemen received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines via the Covax program, which aims to ensure equitable access to the jabs. The 360,000 AstraZeneca doses arrived in the southern

port city of Aden, Yemen's de facto capital, where the internationally recognized government is based. Ishraq Al-Sibai, spokeswoman for Yemen's national Covid-19 emergency committee, said 10,000 doses were handed over to the World Health Organization to transport to Sanaa for rebel-held areas. But she cast doubt on whether the Houthis would use the jabs to inoculate medical staff, saying: "Perhaps they'll use it to vaccinate Houthi officials."

For Farhan, a 35-year-old who works for a security firm, it is all too late and the death of his wife—who doctors said eventually tested negative for COVID-19 — was all too avoidable. "My wife just needed some quick assistance to help her breathe and save her and our baby," he said. — AFP

Somali opposition fighters cordon off Mogadishu

MOGADISHU, Somalia: Somali opposition fighters took up positions in parts of the tense capital yesterday, a day after clashes with government troops erupted over the president's bid to extend his mandate. Witnesses reported that armed men and vehicles mounted with machine guns were stationed in opposition strongholds, while key roads in Mogadishu were blocked.

"Both the Somali security forces and the pro-opposition fighters have taken positions along some key roads," witness Abdullahi Mire told AFP. Somalia, already fragile after decades of civil war and an Islamist insurgency, is facing its worst political crisis in recent years after the failure to hold planned elections in February. President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, best known by his nickname Farmajo, has faced harsh criticism from foreign allies after signing a law approved by parliament which extended his mandate by two years.

On Sunday night, sporadic bursts of heavy gunfire rang out across the capital after fighting broke out between government forces and soldiers allied-mainly by all-important clan ties—to the various opposition leaders. The clashes-mainly in the northern neighborhoods of Sanca and Marinaya and the busy KM4 crossroads in the center-began after dozens of opposition supporters marched in protest against Farmajo's term extension. There were no immediate reports of casualties.



MOGADISHU: Personnel of the Somali military force supporting anti-government opposition leaders rest along a street Sunday. — AFP

'Stop the fighting'

Tensions remained high yesterday, with some people trying to leave their homes in tense neighborhoods. "People are starting to flee from Bernudo area where the pro-opposition fighters have taken positions last night, the situation is tense and there can be an armed confrontation anytime if the situation remain the same," Fadumo Ali, a resident of one of the tense neighborhoods told AFP.

Mogadishu residents urged both sides to stop fighting, and complained that electricity and water had been cut. "We need both sides to stop the fighting, have sympathy with the children and elderly," said Farah Hassan.

Witnesses elsewhere reported roads blocked by sand and logs. "I saw several pickup trucks mounted with ... weapons

belonging to forces loyal to (former president) Hassan Sheikh Mohamud positioned along the main road leading to Marinaya," said Ali Hassan, who lives in the northern Kaaraan district.

"There is no fighting, but the government forces are also stationed a few blocks away." The former president Mohamud said Sunday that "forces loyal to" Farmajo had attacked his house, which the government denied. "Earlier today, our forces foiled several attempted attacks against the public and shut down the organized militia who entered the capital with an aim of instilling fear and panic among the public," the internal security ministry said in a statement. While schools and universities were closed, life in some of the unaffected neighborhoods proceeded much as usual. —AFP

Police remove east Jerusalem barricades

JERUSALEM: Israeli police on Sunday allowed Palestinians to gather in a flashpoint plaza outside Jerusalem's walled Old City, in a move apparently aimed at easing tensions after days of clashes. The staired plaza outside Damascus Gate in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem is a traditional gathering spot for Palestinians during the holy month. Jerusalem, a perennial powder-keg of religious tension, has seen some of its worst violence in years over recent days, triggered in part by an Israeli decision to block Palestinians from gathering on the Damascus Gate steps following prayers.

But as crowds were building in the plaza on Sunday, police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai ordered the barricades be removed. The decision came "following consultations with local leadership, religious leadership, situation assessments, while taking into consid-

eration the shop owners who need to make a living, and in order to lower the level of violence," a spokesman told AFP.

"Our forces are still deployed on the ground, and we won't let violence resurge," the spokesman said.

Hundreds of Palestinians, including male youths who tossed the barricades to the side, held celebratory rallies in the plaza, watched over by police. Minor scuffles erupted after some of the revelers began waving Palestinian flags, moves which prompted police to storm the plaza.

AFP reporters saw several young Palestinians being detained by police. But the plaza remained open, with police maintaining a heavy presence in the area into the early hours yesterday. Samir Gheith, a 66-year-old Palestinian from Jerusalem, said people had been looking forward to gathering at Damascus Gate during Ramadan after it was closed last year due to coronavirus restrictions. "I think they don't want to see us be happy," he told AFP, referring to the initial decision to barricade the plaza. "But then they came to understand that they needed to put a stop to all these tensions," he said. — AFP

Cyprus to open up doors to vaccinated from 65 countries

NICOSIA: Cyprus said yesterday it will open up to vaccinated tourists from 65 countries starting May 10, with visitors allowed entry without needing a negative COVID test or undergo quarantine.

"We will notify our partners in around 65 countries that from 10 May entry will be facilitated for travellers who have completed their vaccination with no need for negative COVID tests or quarantine," Tourism Minister Savvas Perdios said. He told the Cyprus News Agency countries

included on the list are Armenia, Bahrain, Canada, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Switzerland.

European Union member Cyprus will accept tourists who had completed their vaccination, regardless of when they took the second jab. Perdios said the new move would help revive a flagging tourism sector decimated by the pandemic. Cyprus agreed over a month ago that vaccinated Israeli and British tourists could visit the east Mediterranean holiday destination without entry restrictions.

Britain is the island's largest market for tourists making up a third of nearly four million arrivals in 2019, while nearby Israel is its third-biggest source. Authorities are waiting for the UK government to announce when they will allow Britons to take holidays abroad.

At the moment, Russia—the island's sec-

ond-largest tourist market—has put chartered flights on ice until further notice due to Cyprus' worsened epidemiological data. "We are confident that once our epidemiological picture improves, charter flights will be allowed, something we expect to happen in the coming weeks as the vaccination rollout progresses," said Perdios.

Cyprus went into a two-week lockdown yesterday, following a record surge in coronavirus cases.

The island's key tourism industry has been devastated by the pandemic and travel restrictions, with arrivals slumping by more than 84 percent last year. Tourists must also comply with health protocols such as mandatory mask-wearing and social distancing. Tourism contributes around 15 percent of GDP but earnings plunged 85 percent in 2020. The island has recorded a total of 298 coronavirus deaths and 61,576 infections. — AFP

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International

IS-aligned jihadists kill 31 soldiers in northeast Nigeria

Militants ambush a military convoy escorting weapons

KANO, Nigeria: At least 31 Nigerian soldiers were killed when IS-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy escorting weapons and overran a base in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, military sources said yesterday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked the convoy with rocket-propelled grenades on Sunday in the town of Mainok outside the regional capital Maiduguri before storming the nearby base, the two sources said. The attack was the deadliest this year against Nigeria's army which has been battling a decade-long jihadist insurgency in the region that has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes.

"We lost 31 soldiers, including their commander who was a lieutenant colonel, in the ambush by the terrorists," a military officer said about the attack which happened around 1100 GMT. The convoy was transporting weapons to Maiduguri when it came under attack, said a second military source who gave a similar toll.

"The terrorists came in several trucks, including four MRAPs (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles) and engaged the convoy in a fierce battle," the second source said. The militants overwhelmed soldiers, leading to the "colossal loss" of troops, he said.

"We lost a lot of men in very gruesome way." The jihadists seized weapons and two MRAPs in the attack before overrunning and partially burning the

base outside the town, the two sources said.

Mainok, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Maiduguri, has been repeatedly targeted by the jihadists.

ISWAP has frequently set up bogus checkpoints along the 120-km highway linking Maiduguri and Damaturu in neighboring Yobe state on which Mainok lies, killing and abducting travellers. ISWAP split from mainstream Boko Haram faction in 2016 and rose to become a dominant force in the northeast as Nigeria's conflict has spilt over borders into neighbouring Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

Targeted killing

Around 2,000 residents of Geidam in neighboring Yobe state fled their homes after a separate attack by ISWAP who invaded the town Friday, local officials said. On Sunday residents fled, crossing to the other side of the river to escape militants who have been in control since they attacked the town.

"Our people are fleeing Geidam which is now under the control of the insurgents," Ali Koko Kachalla, Geidam's political administrator, said. Late on Friday ISWAP jihadists took control of Geidam after a gunfight with troops, looting and burning stores in the town.

At least 11 civilians were killed in the fight after a projectile hit two adjoining homes, killing all occupants, according to residents. The exodus was prompted by targeted killings of residents by the



At least 31 Nigerian soldiers were killed when IS-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy escorting weapons and overran a base in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, military sources said yesterday.

insurgents, according to fleeing residents.

"Everybody is running away because the insurgents have started killing people who are Christians and those with western education," resident Babagana Kyari said. "So far they have killed two Christians and two Muslim school teachers. They went to their homes and slaughtered them," said another resident Ari Sanda. The army issued a statement on Saturday, claiming to have taken back

Geidam from the jihadists. But residents and local officials said militants were still around.

Since 2019, soldiers have closed up some smaller bases and moved into larger fortified garrisons known as "super camps" in an attempt to better resist militant attacks. But critics say the "super camp" strategy has also allowed militants more freedom in rural areas and left travellers more vulnerable to kidnapping. — AFP

Chad's junta hunts rebel leader in Niger

N'DJAMENA, Chad: Chad's new ruling junta on Sunday vowed to root out a rebel leader accused of "war crimes", seeking help from neighboring Niger to track him down along with his fighters. The army has "located the enemy spread out in small groups, now regrouping in Niger territory," said junta spokesman Azem Bermandoa Agouna.

He accused the Libya-based Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) of killing several dozen Chadian soldiers and said the rebels' leader Mahamat Mahadi Ali was "sought for war crimes by Tripoli's prosecutor general", adding that his assets had been frozen for "financing terrorism".

According to the army, several columns of heavily armed vehicles rolled in from Libya on April 11 — election day in Chad-attacking a customs post at the border in the province of Tibesti, some 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the capital N'Djamena. Agouna appealed to Niamey "to facilitate the capture and bringing to justice of these war criminals."

FACT, which has a non-aggression pact with Khalifa Haftar, the military strongman of eastern Libya, emerged in April 2016. On Saturday the rebels said they were prepared to observe a ceasefire, but Agouna said the two sides were at war. "They are rebels, which is why we are bombing them. We are waging war, that's all," Agouna said.

"The time is not for mediation, nor for negotiation with outlaws," he said. Reached by telephone, Ali told AFP he was still in Chad, in the northern province of Kanem, adding that his forces had been bombarded. "If they want to make war, we will make war," he said. "If they attack us we will respond."

Battlefield death

Chad's veteran leader Idriss Deby Itno reportedly died in battle early last week after fighting in which hundreds of FACT rebels were killed, according to the army. Northern Chad is a restive region and a breeding ground for rebel groups opposed to the N'Djamena authorities.

Abandoned to illegal gold miners and gangs of traffickers, it is sparsely populated and difficult to control. Numerous Chadian rebel groups have for decades launched incursions from rear bases in Libya. Deby, who himself came to power in 1990 at the head of a rebel force, had gone to the region to lead the fighting. The military council took power last week following his shock death, pledging to hold elections in 18 months. Deby's son Mahamat Idriss Deby, a 37-year-old four-star general commanding the elite Republican Guard, was named president and head of a military council.

The move was branded an "institutional coup" by the opposition, and FACT immediately vowed to pursue its offensive and to march on the capital. Northeastern Chad, which borders Sudan, is also a flashpoint between Chadian rebels and the army.

In 2008, rebels, who had rolled in from support bases in Sudan, crossed into Chad from east to west to reach the capital. They got as far as the presidential palace, but were pushed back with backing from former colonial power France. — AFP

Albania's socialist PM on course for third term

TIRANA: Albania's prime minister looked set for a third term in power yesterday, as preliminary election results gave his Socialist Party a commanding lead. Edi Rama, in power since 2013, has not yet claimed victory following Sunday's poll, which was closely watched in European capitals as Albania pushes to open talks on EU membership.

But the Socialists had captured roughly 50 percent of the vote after ballots were counted from just over one-third of polling stations, the election commission said yesterday morning. An opposition alliance under the Democrat Party-whose leaders continued to claim victory yesterday-were on 39 percent and another party opposed to Rama was polling at 7 percent.

The campaign was marked by

personal insults between candidates and further deteriorated in the final week when a gunfight between rival supporters left one person dead. Despite the febrile atmosphere, voting day itself passed off peacefully, with US and EU ambassadors urging all sides to stay calm and wait for the official result.

'What a dawn'

The early figures showed a "clear trend" in favor of the Socialists, who are heading for a bigger victory than in the 2017 election when they won an overall majority, political analyst Skender Minxhozi told AFP. But he warned that the early data needed to be treated with caution, final results not expected until today. The prime minister—a former basketball player and keen artist—posted a photo of the sunrise on Facebook with the words: "What a dawn in Tirana!"

During his time in office, he has focused on ambitious infrastructure projects and during the election campaign made much of a promise to vaccinate 500,000 people against coron-

usual. "It would be too dangerous for our employees and for our supporters," it said.

The team promised to continue fighting corruption, the ruling United Russia party and President Vladimir Putin "in a personal capacity". "It will not be easy to fight, but we will win absolutely, because there are many of us and we are strong."

Germany condemned the order, with Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert saying that "using the instruments of fighting terror against politically undesirable opinions is in no way compatible with the principles of the rule of law". Prosecutors on Friday said they had requested the extremism label for FBK and its regional offices because they are actively "creating conditions for the destabilization of the social and socio-political situation."

Upcoming elections

It also accused them of working to alter "the foundations of the constitutional order". There are currently 33 organizations on Russia's extremism list, including the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda. The groups are banned from operating in Russia and participating in their activities can result in lengthy prison terms. FBK's members had already faced routine police searches and arrests for their activism, with the pressure ballooning since Navalny returned to Russia in January from Germany where he had been recovering from a poisoning attack.

The 44-year-old was arrested on his return and is

unnamed sources, was "not true" and had been "categorically denied by practically everyone".

"None of this is serious. The prime minister has been utterly focused on delivering, alongside Cabinet colleagues, the response to COVID," he told Sky News.

The main opposition Labour party wants an urgent inquiry into Cummings' claims made in an explosive blog post. But the Scottish National Party (SNP) went further. "These comments are utterly abhorrent. If they are true, @BorisJohnson has a duty to resign," SNP leader in the UK parliament Ian Blackford tweeted. "The Prime Minister must now come to Parliament to give a statement, and face questioning, on these shocking claims and the growing Tory sleaze scandal engulfing Westminster."

Johnson has faced sharp criticism over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic. In Britain, one of the countries' worst hit in the world by the disease, more than 127,000 people have died from Covid.

But increasingly the prime minister is facing questions over his wider judgment and integrity, following weeks of stories about alleged inappropriate lobbying and special favors. Cummings, the strate-



Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama speaks to the press after casting his vote during the Parliamentary elections at a polling station in Tirana. — AFP

avirus by the end of May. But the tiny Balkans country of 2.8 million people remains one of Europe's poorest, and NGOs regard it as one of the continent's most corrupt.

The European Union agreed to open formal membership talks last year in a country overwhelmingly in favor of joining, but no date has yet been set for the first meeting. — AFP

Russia orders Navalny group to suspend activities

MOSCOW: Russian prosecutors yesterday suspended the activities of Alexei Navalny's regional offices, in a move his team said would essentially shut down the jailed opposition figure's movement. The move comes after Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most outspoken critic, ended a hunger strike last week that he had launched to demand proper medical treatment in prison.

A court in Moscow yesterday began proceedings into designating Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and its regional offices "extremist" after prosecutors requested they be added to a list run by Russia's Anti-Terrorism Committee. "The activities of Navalny's offices and FBK were immediately suspended," FBK's director Ivan Zhdanov wrote on Twitter, attaching screenshots of a prosecutor's decision. The Moscow City Court confirmed that the activities of the group's regional network were suspended, but clarified that prosecutors had the power to make the decision and said a final decision designating the group as extremist was due.

Navalny's office in Moscow said in a statement the group will already "no longer be able to work" as

Johnson under pressure over 'let bodies pile high' comment

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a call to resign yesterday after claims he dismissed the prospect of thousands dying from COVID-19, as a row over government "sleaze" escalated. In a front-page headline, the Daily Mail newspaper reported that Johnson had said he would rather see "bodies pile high in their thousands" than impose a third coronavirus lockdown.

Ultimately, Johnson did order a new round of restrictions in January. But he is now locked in a damaging war of words with his former top aide Dominic Cummings over his coronavirus policies last year and financial dealings. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said the Daily Mail report, based on



BERLIN: An activist with painted nails holds a poster from Amnesty International during a demonstration outside the Russian embassy in Berlin calling for the release of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. — AFP

now serving two-and-a-half years in a penal colony for violating parole terms on old fraud charges he says are politically motivated. Most of his top allies have since been placed under house arrest or left the country, with several announcing publicly they were quitting FBK after prosecutors requested the extremism tag. Earlier this month, a Russian court jailed FBK cameraman Pavel Zelensky for two years on charges of inciting extremism online. — AFP



In this file photo, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) and his special advisor Dominic Cummings leave from the rear of Downing Street in central London, before heading to the Houses of Parliament. — AFP

gist behind the 2016 campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, quit Downing Street in December under a cloud of acrimony. — AFP

International

US, Britain rush supplies to virus-stricken India

India records 352,991 new infections and 2,812 deaths

NEW DELHI: The US and Britain rushed ventilators and vaccine materials to India yesterday as the country battles a catastrophic, record-breaking coronavirus wave that has overwhelmed hospitals and set crematoriums working at full capacity. A surge in recent days has seen patients' families taking to social media to beg for oxygen supplies and locations of available hospital beds, and has forced the capital New Delhi to extend a week-long lockdown.

The country of 1.3 billion has become the latest hotspot of a pandemic that has killed more than three million people, even as richer countries take steps towards normality with quickening inoculation programs. Irfan Salmani told AFP he had been going from hospital to hospital around Delhi for the past three days, searching for oxygen for his sister.

"I've never seen anything so terrible," he said. "I've been trying non-stop." "What can I do?... I've just been facing rejection after rejection." France, Germany and Canada have also pledged support to India, which has driven increases in global case numbers in recent days, recording 352,991 new infections and 2,812 deaths yesterday—its highest tolls since the start of the pandemic. Creaking health facilities in poorer countries were exposed Sunday when more than 80 people died as fire ripped through a Baghdad hospital for Covid-19 patients, sparking outrage and the suspension of top Iraqi officials.

Thailand enforced new restrictions yesterday after a record daily death toll over the weekend, while the capital of neighboring Cambodia has been under lockdown for 12 days as cases spike.

Vaccine surplus

The first of nine airline container-loads of supplies from the UK, including ventilators and oxygen concentrators, was set to arrive in India early today, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, pledging

the UK would do "all it can" to help.

The White House said it was making vaccine-production material, therapeutics, tests, ventilators and protective equipment immediately available to India. But it did not mention whether it would send any of the 30 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses it currently holds in surplus, sparking accusations of hoarding.

India government is facing growing criticism for allowing mass gatherings across the country in recent weeks, with millions attending religious festivals and thronging political rallies. The glitzy Indian Premier League is also under pressure, with a leading newspaper suspending coverage and slamming the IPL's decision to keep playing cricket as "commercialism gone crass".

The league suffered further blows yesterday as Australians Adam Zampa and Kane Richardson became the latest players to leave after star India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin withdrew to support his family during the pandemic. On Sunday, Twitter confirmed it withheld dozens of tweets—including from opposition lawmakers—critical of the government's handling crisis after a legal demand from New Delhi.

Fiji funeral

Japan's annual "Golden Week" holiday got under way with new restrictions in Tokyo and Osaka, where shopping malls and department stores were asked to close and residents urged to avoid non-essential travel. Bars and restaurants selling alcohol have also been asked to shut early during the week—usually Japan's busiest travel period—which comes just under three months before the pandemic-postponed Olympics are due to start.

Fiji's capital Suva entered a 14-day lockdown yesterday after detecting the first community transmission cases in 12 months following a funeral. The tourism-dependent islands have recorded

Chinese cinemas abruptly pulled the film's scheduled release.

This year's Oscars were also not aired on Chinese television or streaming channels. Zhao appeared to allude to these difficulties in her Oscars acceptance speech, saying, "I've been thinking a lot lately of how I keep going when things get hard." She also quoted a line from a Classical Chinese poem that translates to "people are fundamentally good at birth"—a move praised by many Chinese social media users, before the posts were deleted. Weibo was initially flooded with posts praising Zhao yesterday morning, while others decried censorship. "Chloe Zhao becomes the first Asian diaspora/Chinese female filmmaker to win the best director Oscar in history," wrote an entertainment blogger with more than 8.9 million followers, in a post that gained thousands of likes before it was deleted.

"China's public opinion control is outrageous. After Chloe Zhao's startling Oscars win, there is not even a fart on Weibo," wrote an outraged user. Despite the censors' efforts, on the streets of Beijing, pride in an Asian director reaching the apogee of US cinema was easy to find.

"She's the pride of Chinese people... it's very rare for a Chinese to get an Oscar award," Yan

outbreak, Thailand had managed to keep infections down, thanks to strict travel restrictions and swift action to isolate confirmed cases.

But there have been complaints about the slow rollout of vaccines, with Thailand lagging behind other countries in the region. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said on Facebook the government was trying to source more doses and ramp up the program to inoculate 300,000 people a day.

In neighboring Cambodia, also in the grip of a new coronavirus wave, the World Health Organization (WHO) urged factory owners in the key garment sector to help protect workers. "The current outbreaks in factories and markets serve as a painful reminder of the importance of investing in mitigation measures before cases occur, to help prevent the virus spreading," Li Ailan, WHO representative in Cambodia, said in a statement. Li urged factory owners to do more temperature screening and rearrange workshops to allow social distancing.

The capital Phnom Penh has been under lockdown for 12 days now and last week the authorities ordered all wet markets in the city to close for 14 days. Prime Minister Hun Sen on Sunday ordered tougher enforcement of lockdown measures. Cambodia has reported 9,975

those gathered around a seaman strumming an acoustic guitar.

"Even though I'm not ready to be missing you, I'm not ready to live without you," the sailors sing.

"I wish all the best for you." The video was recorded as a farewell for the outgoing commander of the navy's submarine corps, whose successor took up his role in early March, Indonesian military spokesman Djawara Whimbo said. The German-built submarine—one of five in Indonesia's fleet—disappeared early Wednesday while it was scheduled to do live torpedo training exercises off Bali. Indonesia's military announced Sunday it had found the vessel in pieces on the seafloor, around 800 meters (2,600 feet) below the surface. —AFP



GHAZIABAD, UP: A patient breathes with the help of oxygen provided by a Gurdwara, a place of worship for Sikhs, under a tent installed along the roadside amid COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in Ghaziabad yesterday. —AFP

fewer than 100 cases and just two deaths in a population of 930,000, and the moves comes as a huge blow for hopes of opening quarantine-free travel bubbles with Australia and New Zealand. But Americans dreaming of Paris or Florence were given some hope when EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said US tourists vaccinated against COVID-19 would be able to visit the European Union in the coming months. She gave no timetable, but told the New York Times that the new rules could be in place by this summer.



LOS ANGELES: Chinese Director/Producer Chloe Zhao, winner of the award for Picture and Director for "Nomadland," poses in the press room at the Oscars yesterday at Union Station in Los Angeles. —AFP

Ying, a female engineer, told AFP yesterday morning. "I think Chinese movies will get better and better and she will set a very good example for Chinese mainland directors," said 38-year-old legal worker Yuan Min. Zhao is also well-known in China as the stepdaughter of famous actress Song Dandan. —AFP



BANGKOK: Nurses tend to patients in a COVID intensive care unit (ICU) at Vibhavadi Hospital in Bangkok yesterday during a surge of coronavirus cases in the country. —AFP

cases in total and 74 deaths including 10 on Saturday—a single-day record for the country.

Neighboring Laos—which appeared to escape the brunt of the pandemic last year—is also undergoing a surge, jumping from 58 cases to 323 in less than a week. Its capital Vientiane was placed under a snap lockdown last week, with authorities prohibiting residents from leaving their homes except for groceries and going to the hospital. —AFP



This screen grab received from the Indonesian Military yesterday shows crew members singing the well-known song "Sampai Jumpa", an Indonesian hit whose title means "Goodbye" and composed by the band Endang Soekamti, at an unknown location at sea. —AFP

News in brief

Papua intelligence chief killed

JAKARTA: An Indonesian regional intelligence chief was killed in an ambush by rebels in restive Papua region, the military confirmed yesterday as the country's president vowed to crush the separatists. General I Gusti Putu Danny Karya Nugraha, who headed Papua's intelligence agency, was shot dead during a shootout after rebels opened fire at a patrolling security forces unit in the Papuan highlands on Sunday. "He was in the area as part of the operation to restore security and to boost the morale of locals in the region following a series of attacks by separatist and terrorist groups," National Intelligence Agency spokesman Wawan Purwanto said.—AFP

Turkey puts 108 on trial

ANKARA: Turkey yesterday put 108 Kurdish politicians on trial for their alleged roles in deadly 2014 protests that erupted as jihadists from the Islamic State group overran the Syrian town of Kobane. The case against current and former members of the pro-Kurdish HDP party—including its two former co-leaders—stems from one of the darker episodes of the decade-long Syria war. Thirty-seven people died in violent demonstrations against the Turkish army's inaction in the face of an IS offensive against the largely Kurdish northern Syrian town. The fighting was visible from the Turkish side of the border and many in the country's Kurdish community view the army as complicit in the humanitarian disaster. —AFP

Kazakhstan rolls out own vaccine

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan yesterday rolled out its homegrown coronavirus vaccine, with the Central Asian country's health minister receiving the jab on live television. QazCovid-in, also known as QazVac, is a two-shot vaccine that is currently in third stage trials. The state broadcaster Khabar said that 50,000 doses of the vaccine developed by the state-backed Research Institute for Biological Safety Problems have been distributed across the vast oil-rich country. Health Minister Alexei Tsoi told Khabar that he felt "well" after receiving his shot and said the government was negotiating with partners in Turkey to produce future batches of the vaccine. —AFP

Fiji capital in lockdown

SUVA: The Fijian capital Suva entered a 14-day lockdown yesterday as the Pacific island nation battled to contain a Covid-19 spike following a "superspreader" funeral event. Around 100,000 people in the city must stay in containment zones and non-essential businesses are shuttered after the first community coronavirus cases in 12 months were detected. A soldier contracted the virus at a quarantine facility and is believed to have transmitted it to a maid, who then exposed up to 500 people at a funeral. —AFP

China censors Oscars success of Chloe Zhao

BEIJING: Beijing-born Chloe Zhao was scrubbed from Chinese social media yesterday as a nationalist backlash airbrushed out her remarkable achievement of becoming the first woman of color to win the best director Oscar. Zhao on Sunday night became the second woman ever to win the coveted award at the Oscars, as her film "Nomadland"—about marginalized Americans roaming the west-bagged best picture and its lead, Frances McDormand, won best actress.

But all recent posts containing her name and "Nomadland" were mysteriously wiped from the Twitter-like site Weibo by yesterday noon Beijing time. Her win was also met with silence by Chinese media.

Initially hailed by state media for her film's success at the Golden Globes in March, Zhao became the target of a nationalist backlash after social media users dug up years-old interviews in which she appeared to criticize her country of birth.

New restrictions in Thailand as virus cases spike

BANGKOK: New COVID-19 restrictions came into force in Thailand yesterday to try to halt a spiralling outbreak that saw deaths hit a record single-day high over the weekend. In Bangkok—where the latest outbreak has been traced back to a nightlife district—as well as 47 other provinces, wearing masks is now compulsory in public spaces, with some locations backing it up with the threat of a 20,000 baht (\$640) fine.

Authorities in the capital have also closed a raft of venues including cinemas, parks, gyms, swimming pools, spas and nurseries. The new restrictions come a week after authorities ordered bars and nightclubs to close and banned restaurants from serving alcohol.

The tightening comes as total infections reached 57,500 yesterday, up from just 29,000 in early April. Some 2,048 new cases were announced yesterday. The day before, Thailand recorded its highest single-day death toll of the pandemic, with 11 fatalities. Until the latest

Video emerges of crew of sunken Indonesia submarine

BALI: A poignant video has emerged showing the crew of a sunken Indonesian submarine singing happily together on board their vessel. The video, filmed a few weeks before the KRI Nanggala 402 went down with all hands lost, shows some of the 53-strong crew singing "Sampai Jumpa", an Indonesian hit whose title means "Goodbye". Submarine commander Heri Oktavian is among

Business

TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 2021

Italy reopens in boost to businesses

Parliament debates €220bn post-COVID recovery plan

ROME: Bars, restaurants, cinemas and concert halls reopened across Italy yesterday in a boost for coronavirus-hit businesses, while parliament was to debate the government's €220-billion (\$266-billion) EU-funded recovery plan. After months of stop-start restrictions imposed to manage second and third waves of COVID-19, Italy hopes this latest easing will mark the start of something like a normal summer.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi has admitted to taking a "calculated risk" with the reopenings, as infection rates and intensive care admissions have fallen but COVID-19 deaths still mount by hundreds every day and now total more than 119,000. Three-quarters of regions dropped yesterday into the lower-risk "yellow" category, with bars and restaurants permitted to restart table service outside - including, for the first time in six months, in the evening, although a 10 pm curfew remains in place.

"Finally!" said Daniele Vespa, the 26-year-old head waiter at Baccano, a restaurant near Rome's Trevi Fountain, as he made preparations for the return of customers. "Hopefully... we can soon reopen inside as well," he told AFP, adding: "It's the start of a return to normality." Cinemas, theatres and concert halls can also open at 50-percent capacity, followed by the staggered opening of swimming pools, gyms, sporting events and theme parks by July 1.

In Milan, the Beltrade cinema claimed the title of being the first to reopen after six months of inaction with a special 06:00 am screening of "Caro Diario," a classic Italian film from the 1990s. The show was sold out, despite people having to wake up before dawn to catch it. "I went with my husband, and it was great to be back together in a cinema and do this crazy thing," Francesca Pierangeli, one of the 82 people

who got a seat, told AFP.

Draghi had been under intense pressure to ease restrictions, including from far-right leader Matteo Salvini and increasingly vocal anti-lock-down street protests, as Italy battles its deepest recession since World War II. The vaccination program is gaining pace with 17.75 million jabs administered so far and 5.2 million people fully vaccinated in a population of around 60 million, but experts doubt this could be enough to stave off a new health crisis.

"Clearly if the gradual reopening is interpreted as a 'free-for-all', a new surge in infections risks compromising the summer season," warned Nino Cartabellotta, head of the GIMBE Foundation health think tank. Already at the weekend, throngs of people took advantage of the warm weather and packed the streets of central Rome and other cities, many not wearing masks. In the capital, police closed off a shopping avenue and a few squares that had become too crowded.

'Necessary reforms'

Italy was the first European country to be hit by the pandemic in early 2020 and remains one of the worst affected, with the EU's highest reported death toll and one of the deepest recessions. The economy contracted by a staggering 8.9 percent last year and a million jobs have been lost.

Italy is pinning its hopes on a €222.1-billion investment and reform plan funded largely by the European Union. Rome is the biggest recipient of the bloc's €750-billion post-pandemic recovery fund. In parliament yesterday, Draghi was to formally present the program he hopes will boost growth by 3.6 percentage points by 2026, ahead of a Friday deadline to submit the package to Brussels.

The government said Sunday the plan was a "historic intervention" that would repair the dam-



VENICE: A couple has coffee in a bar next to the Rialto bridge in downtown Venice yesterday. —AFP

age caused by the pandemic and address "the structural weaknesses" of the economy, while putting it on a greener footing. Priorities include infrastructure, notably high-speed railways; green energy, including hydrogen power projects; investment in internet services and digitalization of public administration.

There will be money to help women and young people, who have disproportionately lost out during the pandemic, while around 40 percent will be targeted at historically under-performing southern

Italy. Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief, has also highlighted the importance of tax reform and speeding up the snail-paced justice system.

Disputes over the spending plan brought down the previous prime minister and his coalition, after which Draghi was parachuted in to lead a national unity government in February. His broad support in parliament "gives him significant room for maneuver to deliver the necessary reforms", noted Natixis economist Jesus Castillo. —AFP

World military spending grows despite pandemic

STOCKHOLM: Military expenditure worldwide rose to nearly \$2 trillion in 2020, defying the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers said yesterday. Global military spending increased by 2.6 percent to \$1,981 billion in 2020, when global GDP shrank 4.4 percent, according to a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Diego Lopes da Silva, one of report's authors, told AFP the development was unexpected. "Because of the pandemic, one would think military spending would decrease," he said. "But it's possible to conclude with some certainty that COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on global military spending, in 2020 at least," Lopes da Silva said.

He cautioned however that due to the nature of military spending, it could take time for countries "to adapt to the shock". The fact that military spending continued to increase in a year with an economic downturn meant the "military burden", or the share of military spending out of total GDP, had increased as well.

The overall share rose from 2.2 percent to 2.4 percent, the largest year-on-year increase since the financial crisis of 2009. As a result, more NATO members hit the Alliance's guideline target of spending at least two percent of GDP on their military, with 12 countries doing so in 2020 compared to nine in 2019.

Some COVID effects

There were however indications the pandemic had affected some countries. Nations such as Chile and South Korea openly decided to reappropriate military funds in response to the pandemic. "Other countries, such as Brazil and Russia, did not explicitly say this was reallocated because of the pandemic, but they have spent considerably less than their original budget for 2020," Lopes da Silva said.

Another response, as in Hungary for example, was to increase military spending "as part of a stimulus package in response to the pandemic". Lopes da Silva noted many countries responded to the 2008-2009 economic crisis by adopting austerity measures, but "this time around it might not be the case".

The world's two biggest spenders by far were the US and China, with Washington accounting for 39 percent of overall expenditure and Beijing for 13 percent. China's military spending has risen in tandem with its growing economy and has seen an increase for 26 consecutive years, reaching an estimated \$252 billion in 2020. —AFP

ExxonMobil investor says its climate strategy an 'existential' risk

NEW YORK: ExxonMobil's strategy in the face of climate change poses an "existential business risk" to the company, according to an activist hedge fund that is a shareholder in the oil giant, a report in the Financial Times said Sunday. The company, which has been criticized over the last year for both its financial performance and its approach to renewable energy investment, "has no credible plan to protect value in an energy transition," hedge fund Engine No. 1 said in an 80-page investor presentation.

ExxonMobil has said its business would focus on carbon capture and storage technology as a means to counter the emissions that cause global warming. However, it also plans to continue pumping oil and expects to spend \$20 to \$25 billion per year between 2022 and 2025 to fuel its growth, mainly through new oil and gas exploration projects.

In the document, which will be distributed to other shareholders, the hedge fund criticized ExxonMobil's "value destruction" and "refusal to accept that fossil fuel demand may decline," according to the Financial Times. Engine No. 1 is campaigning for the oil company to consider alternative energy more seriously. The document also claims that Exxon's total emissions, including those from the products it sells, will

EU chief says vaccinated US tourists to be able to visit

WASHINGTON: US tourists vaccinated against COVID-19 will be able to visit the European Union in the coming months, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said in an interview on Sunday with The New York Times. Signaling a major change in EU policy as vaccinations step up worldwide, von der Leyen gave no timetable, but the Times said that the new rules could be in place by this summer.

"The Americans, as far as I can see, use European Medicines Agency-approved vaccines," she said. "This will enable free movement and the travel to the European Union. "Because one thing is clear: All 27 member states will accept, unconditionally, all those who are vaccinated with vaccines that are approved by EMA."

The EMA, the bloc's drug regulator, has approved the three vaccines being used in the United States - Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. The Times said the US's rapid vaccination program, and progress in talks over how to use vaccine certificates, were behind the plan to allow the return of leisure travel from the US to EU.

Von der Leyen said that the United States was making "huge progress" and noted it was on track to vaccinate 70 percent of adults by the middle of June. Resumption of travel would depend "on the epidemiological situation, but the situation is



HICKSVILLE, New York: An Exxon station is seen in this file photo taken on March 20, 2020. —AFP

improving by 2025.

World leaders came together virtually this week at the request of US President Joe Biden for a 40-leader climate summit. Biden doubled US targets to slash greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change by 2030, with Japan and Canada also raising commitments and the European Union and Britain locking in forceful targets earlier in the week. The US oil giant, which lost \$22 billion in 2020 amid collapsing oil prices, is due to report its first-quarter results on Friday. —AFP

Russia launches new batch of UK telecom satellites into space

MOSCOW: A Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Vostochny cosmodrome in Russia's Far East yesterday carrying 36 UK telecommunications and internet satellites, the Roscosmos space agency said. OneWeb, a London-headquartered company, is working to complete the construction of a constellation of low earth orbit satellites providing enhanced broadband and other services to countries around the world.

The company is competing against billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos in the race to provide fast internet via satellites for the world's remote areas. Images released by Russia's space agency Roscosmos showed the Soyuz rocket taking off against hazy skies yesterday morning at 7:14 am local time (2214 GMT). "All satellites have been successfully placed in target orbits and have been taken under customer control," Roscosmos said in a statement.

"Mission success!" OneWeb wrote on Twitter. The UK company plans for its global commercial internet service to be operational by next year, supported by some 650 satellites. Yesterday's launch was the third batch of its satellites placed into orbit from Russia, with earlier launches from the Vostochny cosmodrome of 36 satellites each taking place last month and in December.

OneWeb's first six satellites were also launched by a Russian-made Soyuz rocket, taking off from the space center in Kourou in French Guiana in Feb 2019. The company launched 68 more from the Baikonour launch site in Kazakhstan last year. —AFP



SAINT-LAURENT-SUR-MER, France: In this file photo taken on June 5, 2019, US WWII veteran KT Robbins, 97, from Olive Branch, Mississippi, poses with a tourist on Omaha Beach as part of D-Day commemorations marking the 75th anniversary of the World War II Allied landings in Normandy. —AFP

improving in the United States, as it is, hopefully, also improving in the European Union," she added.

The pandemic has ravaged tourism on the continent, with many nations shutting borders for non-essential travel. Greece said last week that travelers from the EU and five other countries who are vaccinated or have a recent negative COVID test will no

longer have to quarantine on arrival. The country is eager to reopen its badly hit tourism sector and has ramped up its vaccine rollout in the hopes of building up immunity among residents. The European Union has said it wants to launch a vaccine passport for travelers, though plans have not yet been formalized. —AFP

Business

Zimbabwe street vendors reel under virus curbs

Hawkers banned as part of measures to limit spread of COVID-19

HARARE: For years, Zimbabwean single mother Spiwe Tembo would sell buns on the streets of central Harare, earning enough to feed her three children. But her fortunes have dived. Since authorities banned street hawkers a year ago as part of a raft of measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, she plays cat-and-mouse with the police who comb the streets to rid them of vendors.

"Things are tough," the 34-year-old said, waving a packet of large buns to potential customers on a busy street in a part of Harare that locals call "Third World" because it is always teeming. "We get arrested by municipal and national police," she said. "Almost daily I pay bribes to police officers to avoid getting arrested."

On the days she doesn't have any cash, the inevitable happens and she is arrested and her wares seized. That is when she calls friends or relatives "to come to the police station and pay the fine for me". Yet she never gives up. "The next day I start from scratch after borrowing money from relations or friends," she said. It doesn't get better and on many days she returns home empty-handed. She has been forced to send her children to live with relatives because she cannot afford their upkeep.

Emily Chipwanya, whose husband is a government clerk, has for years been selling cold beverages in central Harare to supplement her husband's meagre income. "Before COVID-19 we sold a lot because many people came into town," she said, carrying a small bucket of ice-cold drinks. But sales have plummeted.

As if that is not enough "now we get arrested. We don't know what to do to earn a living," she said. "It's a gamble." She nostalgically reflects on the past

when "we used to have proper meals" in the morning, afternoon and evening. "Now it's one meal a day". Police spokesman Paul Nyathi did not respond to calls seeking comment on bribery allegations.

'Hand to mouth'

Kenneth Tauro, 26, had a thriving stall selling second hand clothes in Harare's largest township at a market called Mupedzanhamo or "the place where poverty ends" in the local Shona language. It has been closed for a year. He now tries his luck at an informal market in the high-density suburb of Epworth. But business is bad and he says he earns less than 10 percent of his pre-pandemic income. "I can't remember when I last had three meals," said Tauro.

COVID has killed at least 1,500 people and infected 37,875 out of Zimbabwe's 14 million population and sunk millions deeper into poverty in a country that was already in the throes of an economic crisis. The UN World Food Program in a recent report, noted "a sharp decline in the standard of living" among the urban poor, with hunger increasing and leaving 2.4 million people struggling to meet basic needs.

"Lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have dealt a severe blow to poor urban communities, many of whom were daily wage earners living hand to mouth," WFP said. The global food agency pays \$12 a month to 326,000 urban Zimbabweans and aims to increase this number to 550,000.

"We've seen an increase in poverty levels, especially in urban areas, on account of COVID-19 induced socio-economic shocks," said economist

the status of their super-rich founders.

Two weeks ago the regulator warned 34 technology giants - including Baidu, Tencent and Meituan - to "rectify" any anti-competitive measures, prompting a series of public pledges to abide by anti-monopoly guidelines. Regulators told Internet companies to "heed the warning of Alibaba's case". Alibaba too had come under fire for forcing the practice of "choosing one of two" on retailers - where merchants are compelled to work only with one platform and not its rivals.

Companies such as e-commerce platform JD.com have since pledged to avoid such behavior. Alibaba and JD.com, along with messaging and gaming giant Tencent, have become hugely profitable on the back of growing Chinese digital lifestyles and government restrictions on major US competitors in the domestic market. But as the platforms amassed hundreds of millions of regular users, concern has risen over their influence in China, where they are used for a huge array of daily tasks.

Fintech firm Ant Group, an Alibaba affiliate whose planned record-shattering \$35 billion Hong Kong-Shanghai IPO was shelved late last year, also announced this month it would comply with an overhaul outlined by regulators and

this month described it as the biggest purely nutrition-focused company in North America and one of the three biggest in the world.

Founded in 1971, the company makes vitamins, minerals and other nutritional supplements and employs some 4,500 people worldwide. It has been valued by analysts at \$5-7 billion. Nestle has recently pursued a range of acquisitions in health nutrition, considered a growth area.

Last year, the world's largest food and beverage company acquired the Zenpep drug for digestive problems, and took majority control of US firm Vital Proteins. It also concluded its purchase of US allergy treatment company Aimmune Therapeutics, and with it that firm's Aimmune Palforzia treatment to help reduce the frequency and severity of peanut allergies in children.

Nestle's first big acquisition since Mark Schneider took the reins in 2017 was of Canadian vitamin maker Atrium Innovations. Vontobel ana-

"force majeure" situation beyond its control, a legal concept meaning it can suspend fulfilling contractual obligations. The declaration "will remain in effect until the Government of Mozambique has restored security and stability in the province... in a verifiable and sustainable manner," the company added - although it "remains committed to Mozambique and to the development" at Afungi.

A military source told AFP earlier this month that Total evacuated all of its staff after drone surveillance showed insurgents were in areas "very close" to the gas plant. Last week, the Confederation of Economic Associations of Mozambique (CTA) said Total had already suspended contracts with a series of businesses indirectly involved in the gas project.

The National Petroleum Institute (INP), a Mozambique government body that governs energy projects, said yesterday that Total "may not fulfil contractual obligations and could suspend or cancel further contracts, depending how long the halt (to construction) lasts". Nevertheless, "Total hasn't abandoned the project," INP chief Carlos Zacarias told reporters in capital Maputo, adding that "the main contracts between Total and its major contractors remain in force". Gas-rich Cabo Delgado has been battered by a bloody jihadist insurgency since 2017



HARARE: Spiwe Tembo, an informal trader who makes her living selling buns, is handcuffed to another vendor after their arrest by police at a busy shopping complex alongside a commuter bus rank on April 15 2021. —AFP

Prosper Chitambara from the Labor and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe think-tank. He said the cash-strapped government should introduce social security to cushion those working in the informal sector.

But that would be the majority of Zimbabweans as less than 10 percent of employable people have proper jobs. Zimbabwe's economy has been struggling for over a decade with hyperinflation and an economic downturn. —AFP

China food delivery giant Meituan faces anti-trust probe

BEIJING: Regulators have launched an anti-trust probe into Meituan, one of China's biggest food delivery firms, they said yesterday, as Beijing clips the wings of its soaring tech companies. The probe was prompted by reports that Meituan allegedly engaged in forced exclusivity agreements with vendors, the State Administration for Market Regulation said in a statement. Those were among its "suspected monopolistic behaviors", the regulator said.

E-commerce titan Alibaba was hit by a record 18.2 billion yuan (\$2.78 billion) fine this month after facing a similar charge. The woes of Meituan, which counts gaming giant Tencent as a shareholder, is the latest sign that China's assault on big tech is far from over. Beijing has taken the country's tech firms to task in order to curtail the reach of private companies into the public's daily finances and - analysts believe - to rein in their runaway expansion as well as

Nestle eyes vitamin boost in talks to buy Bountiful Company

ZURICH: Nestle said yesterday it was in talks to snap up US vitamin and nutritional supplements maker The Bountiful Company, as the Swiss food giant expands its presence in the health nutrition sector. Nestle said in a statement that "it is in discussions to acquire all or part of The Bountiful Company," without providing more details.

The statement came after the Wall Street Journal reported the acquisition talks Friday, citing unnamed sources close to the discussions. The US firm is majority-owned by private-equity firm KKR, which in a filing to take it public earlier

Total halts Mozambique gas project after attacks

PARIS: French energy giant Total yesterday confirmed it is suspending work on a massive \$20 billion gas project in northern Mozambique following the latest jihadist assault on a nearby town last month. Total removed its remaining staff from the Afungi peninsula natural gas site after a jihadist raid in the nearby town of Palma on March 24 left dozens of people dead.

It had already evacuated some workers and suspended construction in January following a series of jihadist attacks nearby. "In the current environment, Total can no longer operate in the Cabo Delgado province in a safe and efficient manner," a Total spokeswoman told AFP. "All project personnel have been removed from the site and will not return until conditions allow," the spokeswoman added, saying "it is too early to provide an updated project schedule".

Total also said yesterday that it was declaring a



QINGDAO, China: This file photo taken on Feb 20, 2019 shows a Meituan food deliveryman looking at employment postings at a recruitment fair. —AFP

become a financial holding company - meaning it will be supervised more like a bank in the future. —AFP



lyst Jean-Philippe Bertschy said purchasing The Bountiful Company would be "fully in line" with Nestle's strategy. "The Bountiful Company would propel Nestle into a market leader position in the highly attractive VMS (vitamins, minerals, and supplements) segment," he said in a note. —AFP



by a group known locally as Al-Shabab. The violence has killed at least 2,600 people according to NGO Aclad, while Maputo said last week that more than 700,000 have been displaced. Its scale raised doubts over the viability of the biggest single investment in Africa even before the latest raid.

March's attack on Palma took place just 10 km from the gas project's nerve center, despite a government commitment to set up a 25-km security radius around the site. Hundreds of people, including many foreign workers, were evacuated by air and sea while thousands of locals walked to nearby districts. —AFP

Japan's ANA aims for carbon neutrality by 2050

TOKYO: Japan's biggest airline ANA said yesterday it aims to become carbon neutral by 2050 through new technology, emissions trading and other efforts. It comes after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced last week that Japan would target a 46-percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, significantly more than previously pledged.

ANA Holdings said it "plans to reduce carbon emission levels from aircraft operations to net zero by 2050" by using more sustainable fuel, developing more efficient planes and engines, and through carbon trading. Last year, the company set a target to halve carbon emissions by 2050 compared with 2005 levels.

Such initiatives are not new among airlines, with the industry body for America's leading carriers pledging to work towards net-zero emissions by 2050, and British Airways eyeing greener jet fuel. Japanese car giant Honda also said last week it would aim to have electric and fuel cell vehicles account for all sales by 2040 to promote climate goals. —AFP

Philips sees hit from product safety fault

THE HAGUE: Dutch firm Philips said yesterday it anticipates a hit of up to €250 million (\$302 million) from a possible safety risk in some sleep and respiratory care products, even as first quarter profits edged higher. The company, which has diversified into healthcare and last month sold off its domestic appliance business, said net profit was 40 million euros in the three months to March 31, a 2.6-percent rise on a year earlier.

Philips had sales of €3.8 billion in the first quarter, up 3.6 percent from the same period last year. "Regrettably, we have identified a quality issue in a component that is used in certain sleep and respiratory care products, and are initiating all precautionary actions to address this issue, for which we have taken a 250 million-euro provision," Philips CEO Frans van Houten said in a statement.

Philips said there were "possible risks to users" from sound-dampening foam in some sleep and respiratory care devices, which could degrade under conditions including unapproved cleaning methods, plus high humidity and temperature. The firm said it was talking to regulators about the problem, which mainly affects first generation DreamStation products, and "initiating appropriate actions to mitigate these possible risks."

Amsterdam-based Philips started off as a lighting company more than 100 years ago but has undergone major changes in recent years, focusing in particular on remote healthcare. Philips announced in March that it was selling its home appliance business to Asian investment firm Hillhouse Capital for €3.7 billion, and sales from this were now listed under discontinued operations, yesterday's results statement said. The firm said that despite continued "uncertainty" related to the COVID-19 pandemic it had upgraded its sales forecast for 2021 on the back of increased demand for its healthcare products. —AFP

Business

Ahli United Bank reports KD 11.1m net profit for first quarter of 2021

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank K S C P announced its results for the first three months of this year ended March 31, 2021, achieving a net profit of KD 11.1 million compared to KD 15.3 million in net profits recorded for the same period last year, with a decline of 27.5 percent due to higher provisions in 1Q 2021 and a non-recurring capital gains on securities booked during 1Q 2020.

The Bank also recorded total operating income of KD 24.6 million in 1Q 2021 (KD 29.1 million in 1Q 2020). Shareholders' equity increased by 2.5 percent to reach KD 453.7 million at the end of March 2021, higher than KD 442.6 million recorded as on 31 December 2020.

In addition, AUB maintained good capital adequacy ratios of 15.7 percent as of March 31, 2021 which is comfortably higher than the CBK current minimum required ratio, which enhances the opportunities for future expansions in credit facilities and operations. As of March 31, 2021, the Bank's return on average equity (ROAE) recorded 9.9 percent and return on average assets (ROAA) recorded 1 percent. Earnings per share recorded 5.7 fils per share in 1Q 2021 (7.9 fils in 1Q 2020).

Commenting on the results for the first quarter of 2021, Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf, Chairman of Ahli United Bank said, we are continuing the journey of the challenge against repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic with an optimistic outlook, relying on a well-thought-out action plan to manage this crisis and our full readiness to deal with any possible changes in light of the ongoing

impacts of the pandemic worldwide and to return to impose some lockdown measures.

He added: AUB managed to end the first quarter of the fiscal year 2021 with a solid balance sheet and was able to maintain the higher quality of our assets during this critical times. This is attributed to our resilient business strategy, the sound financial footing and the prudent strategy on which we are relying. Undoubtedly, the exceptional efforts that we see from various state institutions to vaccinate against COVID-19 boost our optimism and hope for the approaching return of economic activities to operate at full capacity and the return of normal life.

However, I would like to mention that our keenness to set aside more hedging provisions to support the Bank's financial position and to continue adopting a conservative approach in risk management is not conflicting with our optimistic outlook but adds a realistic basis of work and perseverance. Dr Al-Mudhaf emphasized the AUB's commitment to implementing solid rules of governance and its continued efforts in supporting various segments of society under these circumstances through its ambitious CSR program.

Dr Al-Mudhaf expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Bank's shareholders for their support and backing to the Bank under these exceptional circumstances, and also extended appreciation to the Bank's customers for their lasting loyalty, trust and interaction with the new services provided by the bank that are more

convenient to life variables, especially digital banking services with their capabilities and resilience in meeting their needs and aspirations.

Dr Al-Mudhaf also expressed sincere gratitude to the Central Bank of Kuwait, and all regulatory, health and security authorities for their efforts in facing COVID-19 pandemic and dealing with its repercussions. Dr Al-Mudhaf expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Bank's staff for their sincere efforts, stressing that AUB is greatly proud of its human wealth which is the main pillar for the Bank's continued success and progress.

Commenting on the Bank's financial performance in the first quarter, Jehad Al-Humaidhi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Ahli United Bank said: "We have ended the first quarter of 2021 at a growth in all business lines while tightening control over operating expenses, and at the same time we use caution due to the continuing challenges posed by the current situation on the back of COVID-19 pandemic, so we have taken the necessary steps, including strengthening the provisions, and with all these factors, the bank managed to achieve a net profit of KD 11.1 million.

Al-Humaidhi pointed out that AUB focuses its efforts to accelerate the digital transformation process, being an irreplaceable strategic option, not only to ensure the continuing provision of the best services to the Bank's customers under the pandemic situation, the requirements of social distancing and the necessity of providing services



Anwar Al-Mudhaf



Jehad Al-Humaidhi

to customers by using technological and digital means, but also because it is the future of banking services the world is heading to in light of the digital banking revolution, with its unmatched added value for customers in resilience, convenience, and saving time and effort.

At the same time, AUB is continuing to develop its branches and equip them with the best amenities to receive customers with a commitment to apply the necessary precautionary measures to protect both employees and customers. Al-Humaidhi concluded by extending thanks and appreciation to the Management and the employees of the Bank for their dedication and cooperation which has assisted in overcoming the implication of this pandemic

NBK Economic Update

Global yields extend rally on recovery optimism

KUWAIT: Global sovereign bond yields extended their rally in 1Q20, led by US treasuries with the 10-year note reaching a 15-month high at the end of March. The uptrend in yields was supported by the rollout of vaccines, an improving US macroeconomic backdrop and continued stimulus measures, thereby boosting optimism for an economic recovery and promoting a risk-on stance by investors who continued to pile into riskier asset classes including equities.

The higher yields were also helped by rising inflation expectations as private spending picks up in line with the improved sentiment. Meanwhile, GCC yields tracked their global counterparts higher on recovery optimism and vaccine rollouts. GCC sovereign debt issuance could moderate in 2021 from the elevated offerings of 2020 as the need for financing eases due to higher oil prices and consolidation efforts, though we still expect issuance to remain relatively robust on continued budget deficits and relatively low yields. In 1Q21, GCC debt issuance totaled \$27.7 billion, up 108 percent y/y, led by Saudi sovereign offerings.

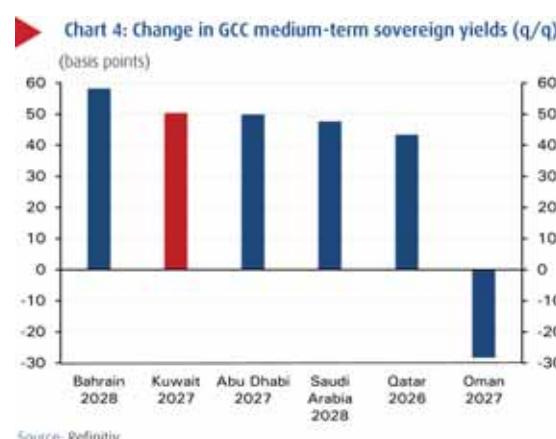
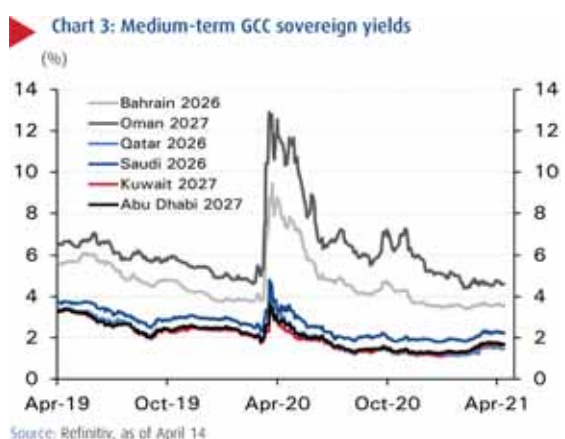
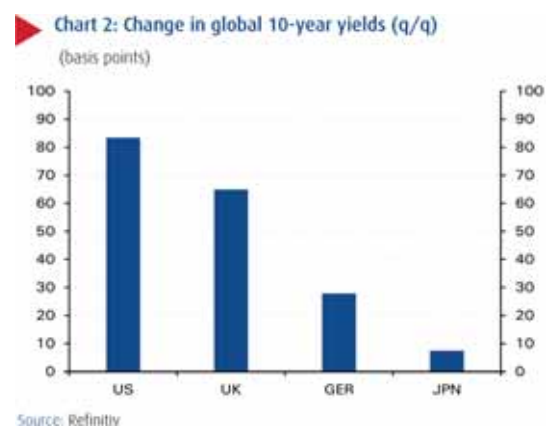
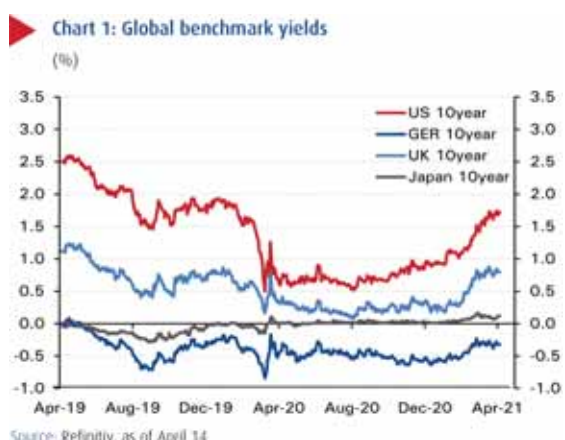
Global yields surge in 1Q21 on improving outlook

An improving virus scene thanks to the rollout of vaccines, coupled with ongoing stimulus support, stronger macroeconomic data and the easing of restrictions, has bolstered sentiment and led to a selloff in bonds, lifting yields in several cases to pre-pandemic levels. This follows the sharp declines seen in 2020 as sentiment weakened in the wake of the coronavirus and its adverse effect on global economic growth.

Gains in benchmark yields during 1Q21 were led by the US 10-year treasury, which reached a 15-month high of 1.75 percent on March 31st (+83 bps q/q) before easing notably in Mid-April on a surge in treasury bond purchasing, coupled with reassurances by the Fed that policy will remain accommodative and that the recent surge in inflation is transitory given the ongoing slack in the labor market.

European yields, previously weighed down by the risk of a double-dip recession due to the spread of a new wave of covid-19, also rose in line with US treasuries, supported by higher inflation and hopes of a strong economic recovery in the second half of the year as the virus is reigned in. German Bunds and UK Gilts gained 65 and 28 bps q/q, respectively, while the Japanese 10-year yield rose by a lower 7 bps q/q, typically remaining near the 0 percent target mandated by the Bank of Japan.

Looking ahead, a sustained rise in yields will depend on the strength of the economic recovery which in turn depends on the extent to which the pandemic is controlled - an uncertain prospect given the emergence of new strains and still high infection rates in various parts of the world. Additional fiscal stimulus measures by the US government will likely drive yields higher as well as the expected easing of travel restric-



tions in 2H21 as vaccine rollouts continue to progress. On the other hand, assurances by the Fed that policy will remain accommodative and their view that the higher inflation will be transitory, will likely help to keep potential yield gains in check.

GCC yields track global peers higher in 1Q21

GCC medium term sovereign bond yields mostly tracked their global counterparts higher as the global economic and virus outlook improved. Though higher GCC yields are usually a characteristic of deteriorating economic conditions and weaker credit worthiness, the surge in yields in this case was largely influenced by higher global bond yields. Macroeconomic conditions in the GCC, in fact, saw a gradual improvement over the quarter, in line with higher oil prices, vaccination campaigns and better overall sentiment, reflected by a broad downtrend in credit default swap rates.

Yield increases, ranging from 44 to 58 bps, were observed in all GCC member states, except for Oman, where yields fell by 28 bps (charts 2 & 4). Oman, typically the highest yielding GCC sovereign due to its much lower sovereign credit rating (B+ "non-investment" grade by S&P) and higher risk profile, had a much greater margin for yield declines in line with the improving economic and virus conditions.

A strong appetite by global investors for higher yields (in a still relatively low global yield environment), likely kept demand for Omani debt high, pressuring yields lower. With that said, further yield declines in Oman will likely be capped by ongoing fiscal challenges and a weak sovereign rating, risks which investors will continue to demand a higher yield for.

Oman and Bahrain increased by 27 percent to US\$230 million in the same period. Oman was followed by Kuwait, which recorded US\$98 million in bilateral trade in Q1 2021.

Discussing the trade figures, Ali Al-Mudaifa, Executive Director of Bahrain's Economic Development Board said: "The fact that Bahrain's trade with the GCC continues to grow strongly reflects the resilience of Bahrain's supply chains. Bahrain offers the region's best value operating costs, great connectivity, and advanced logistics infrastructure. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, Bahrain has been working closely with public and private sector partners to find creative solutions to keep business flowing across our borders."

Some of the biggest exports to the UAE, aside from iron ore and aluminum products, included cheese and biscuits manufactured in Bahrain's state of the art mega factories. Within the region, Bahrain is rapidly emerging as an FMCG leader, with global

FMCG giants like Arla, Mondelez, Kimberly Clark and Reckitt Benckiser selecting the Kingdom as their regional manufacturing base and distribution hub.

The value of global imports increased by 4 percent, reaching US\$3.52 billion during the first quarter of 2021. Exports of nationally produced products from Bahrain increased by 18 percent, reaching US\$1.811 billion. The manufacturing sector is a key driver of the Kingdom's economic diversification and a significant and consistent contributor to Bahrain's economy accounting for 14.5 percent of the GDP.



Ali Al-Mudaifa

Restoring our planet through intelligent digital transformation

By Lisa Johnston

KUWAIT: Last year, global emissions fell by 17 percent and vibrations caused by human activity decreased by 50 percent. Yet within months, activity has returned close to original levels. While the pandemic enforced a temporary pause in activities, the start of 2021 has seen momentum building with renewed will to drive innovation towards a more permanent reset in priorities. This April's Earth Day, President Biden brought world leaders together to galvanize climate change efforts in the inaugural Leaders' Summit on Climate. The G7 meeting in June similarly has the pandemic and climate change top of the agenda. And COP26 in Glasgow is focused on accelerating action towards the Paris Agreement goals. Sustainability has never been higher on the policy and corporate agenda.



Lisa Johnston

Translating principles into action

With solutions spanning the engineering and operations lifecycles, we are well positioned to support sustainable digital transformation. Our software is already helping customers increase energy efficiency, minimize noxious emissions and optimize the use of valuable natural resources and we're proud to be advancing sustainable development across diverse sectors.

We believe that a principled approach to people, the planet and profits go hand-in-hand. We have recently joined the United Nations Global Compact and Business for Social Responsibility. Partnering with them and taking guidance from our customers, we are working to align our strategy and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption. In listening to our customers, there are four recurring areas driving their sustainability efforts where our software has a key role to play: tackling climate change, the need to boost circularity, the energy transition to renewables, and the drive for enhanced transparency and traceability in operations and supply chains. We are committed to helping industries drive sustainability in those areas while also striving to exemplify sustainable business practices within our operations.

Our footprint - and our handprint

We are committed to measuring and reporting on our environmental stewardship efforts for our operations as well as the impact that our technology solutions can have on our customers' environmental performance. We frame these concepts as the "prints" we leave behind on the world - our footprint and our handprint.

We recently conducted a detailed assessment to determine the Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) issues that are most material to our business as a prelude to setting a comprehensive set of goals. We have also conducted a review of our GHG emissions, which we have reported publicly for several years, in order to set a baseline year for company-wide reductions targets in preparation of making a credible net zero commitment. Alongside the steps we are taking to reduce the environmental footprint of our operations, we are accelerating our efforts to grow our handprint, which is how our software can enable and drive sustainability within the industries we serve. In fact, it is through our technology handprint that we believe we have the biggest opportunity to have a truly global impact.

Most sustainability challenges demand collective action, new technology and scalable solutions to help accelerate progress. A PWC survey recently identified that technology like ours can directly impact over 70 of the UN Sustainable Development targets. For example, by providing real-time energy data and predictive analytics that support improved operational efficiency, we can help hundreds if not thousands of our customers to reduce their carbon footprints. We are currently working closely with our customers to demonstrate the value we can bring to their businesses and are proud to be working with some of the world's most sustainable companies - including Danone, Nestle and Schneider Electric.

NOTE: Lisa Johnston is the Chief Marketing and Sustainability Officer, AVEVA

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- Fellow of American College of Surgery
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- Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
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- American Board of Surgical Critical Care



Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon



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Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj

ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

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- Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck surgery.
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Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
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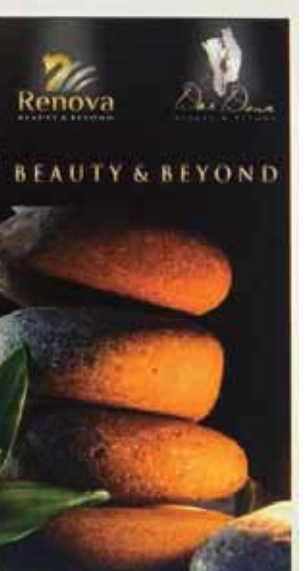
ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

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- Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
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Floor 13.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777
@Drbuhaimeed, @Renovabb, @dardonabb
Email: drbuhaimeed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw



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



Academic Certificates - Training

- Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- (IFSO) member.
- Faculty member of (BEST).
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Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
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(From left) Producers Peter Spears, Frances McDormand, Chloe Zhao, Mollye Asher and Dan Janvey, winners of the award for best picture for "Nomadland," pose in the press room at the Oscars at Union Station in Los Angeles. — AFP photos



Chinese Director/Producer Chloe Zhao, winner of the award for Picture and Director for "Nomadland," poses in the pressroom.



Yuh-Jung Yoon, winner of the award Actress in a Supporting Role for "Minari," poses in the pressroom.

'NOMADLAND' WINS BIG AT PANDEMIC OSCARS AS ZHAO MAKES HISTORY

US road movie "Nomadland" emerged as the big winner at the Oscars on Sunday with three major prizes, including a history-making award for director Chloe Zhao, as Hollywood celebrated its most glamorous night with a unique pandemic-era gala. Zhao's drama about marginalized Americans roaming the West in vans was honored for best picture, director and actress for Frances McDormand, who now is in elite company with her third

reunited Tinseltown A-listers for the first time in more than a year. Zhao, who is the first woman of color ever honored as best director, thanked "all the people we met on the road... for teaching us the power of resilience and hope, and for reminding us what true kindness looks like." She is also only the second woman to win best director after Kathryn Bigelow, who broke the glass ceiling in 2010 when she won the prize for "The Hurt Locker."

"Please watch our movie on the largest screen possible. And one day very, very soon, take everyone you know into a theater, shoulder to shoulder in that dark space, and watch every film that is represented here tonight," said McDormand. Zhao, who has drawn controversy in China after years-old interviews resurfaced in which she appeared to criticize her country of birth, also quoted classical Chinese poetry in her acceptance speech.

But she was scrubbed from Chinese social media on Monday as a nationalist backlash airbrushed out her achievement, with recent posts containing her name and "Nomadland" mysteriously wiped from the Twitter-like site Weibo. Her win was also met with silence by Chinese media. Hopkins' win at 83 for his shattering portrayal of a dementia sufferer in "The Father" makes him the oldest actor to win a competitive Oscar in history. But he did not travel to Los Angeles or a London venue to accept the prize, and his victory, with no speech, made for a strange ending to the night. The film, adapted by French playwright Florian Zeller from his own stage production, also won best adapted screenplay. Zeller accepted his award from Paris.

'Marching boots'

Best supporting actress went to Youn Yuh-jung for the Korean immigrant drama "Minari." "How can I win over Glenn Close?" she said, acknowledging her fellow nominee, who has a joint-record eight acting nominations but no wins in her career.

Close made light of her latest loss for "Hillbilly Elegy" by sportingly joining in an unusual dance and music trivia segment late in a show that consistently tried to upend Oscar norms. Daniel Kaluuya won best supporting actor for his portrayal of slain 1960s Black Panthers leader Fred Hampton in "Judas and the Black Messiah," which also won best song for multiple Grammy winner H.E.R.

References to racism and police violence were threaded throughout the show's speeches, starting with actor-director Regina King's opening monologue, in which she mentioned the conviction of a former police officer for the murder of African-American man George Floyd. "If things had gone differently this past week in Minneapolis, I may have traded in my heels



Producers Frances McDormand and Chloe Zhao, hold the Oscar for Best Picture for "Nomadland".

for marching boots," she said.

"Promising Young Woman" won best original screenplay, the night's first award. Emerald Fennell, who was seven months pregnant when she shot the #MeToo revenge thriller, thanked her son who "did not arrive until a couple of weeks after shooting, thank God, because I was crossing my legs." Netflix's "Mank" began the night with the most nominations — 10 — but ended up with two wins in technical categories, as did "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" and Amazon's "Sound of Metal." "Soul" became Pixar's latest Oscar winner for best animated feature, and also picked up best score, while South African aquatic wildlife feature "My Octopus Teacher" won best documentary.

'In the flesh'

The 93rd Oscars began with a movie-style opening credits sequence, as King strode into the venue clutching a gold statuette. "Live TV, here we go. Welcome to the 93rd Oscars!" she said. "And, yes, we are doing it maskless... people have been vaxxed, tested, re-tested, socially distanced," she added, comparing the show to

a movie set. This year's Oscars arrived at their Union Station venue two months late due to the pandemic-organizers have said it would have been "impossible" without the delay.

Before the show, stars paused briefly for pictures and socially distanced interviews on what organizers called a "teeny-tiny red carpet," where actresses Carey Mulligan and Andra Day dazzled fashion fans in Oscars gold. An honorary award for the Motion Picture and Television Fund, which has supported struggling actors and crew particularly during the pandemic, was awarded at the Oscars' traditional Hollywood theater base. Black entertainment mogul Tyler Perry was also honored.

But the bulk of the awards were handed out at the 1930s-built Union Station, chosen for its grand scale and outdoor courtyards, where white tents sheltering everything from Covid testing booths to catering were installed. "We're here, isn't it crazy?" said best actor nominee and "Sound of Metal" star Riz Ahmed. "Human beings in the flesh! —AFP

Oscar winners in main categories

Road movie "Nomadland" was the big winner of the night, with prizes for best picture, best director and best actress.

Best picture: "Nomadland"

Best director: Chloe Zhao, "Nomadland"

Best actress: Frances McDormand, "Nomadland"

Best actor: Anthony Hopkins, "The Father"

Best supporting actress: Youn Yuh-Jung, "Minari"

Best supporting actor: Daniel Kaluuya, "Judas and the Black Messiah"

Best international feature film: "Another Round" (Denmark)

Best animated feature: "Soul"

Best documentary feature: "My Octopus Teacher"

Best original screenplay: "Promising Young Woman" - Emerald Fennell

Best adapted screenplay: "The Father" - Christopher Hampton, Florian Zeller.

—AFP

Academy Award for performing. No-show Anthony Hopkins pulled an upset to win best actor in the final award of the night, besting sentimental favorite Chadwick Boseman, who died of cancer last year.

The unorthodox Oscars ceremony was moved from a Hollywood theater to a glammed-up downtown train station to abide by strict Covid-19 protocols, and

"It's pretty fabulous to be a woman in 2021," Zhao told journalists as a virtual backstage Q&A, adding: "If this win means more people get to live their dreams, I'm extremely grateful." With movie theaters closed all year, and blockbuster content delayed, Beijing-born Zhao's film captured the pandemic zeitgeist with its stunning portrait of the isolated margins of society.



Welsh actor Anthony Hopkins, winner of the award for best actor for his role in "The Father".



H.E.R., winner of the award for best original song for "Fight For You" from "Judas and the Black Messiah."



Tyler Perry, winner of the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award.



Dana Murray (left) and Pete Docter, winners of the award for animated feature film for "Soul."



French novelist Florian Zeller smiles as he holds his Oscars statuette after winning the Best Adapted Screenplay for the "The Father".



Emerald Fennell, winner of the award for best original screenplay for "Promising Young Woman."



(From left) US musician Jon Batiste, US musician Trent Reznor and English musician Atticus Ross, winners of the award for Original Score for "Soul."



Daniel Kaluuya, winner of the award for best actor in a supporting role for "Judas and the Black Messiah."



Danish director Thomas Vinterberg poses with the award for best international feature film for "Another Round".

Lifestyle | Awards

Tears, howls and blackouts at the train station: Key Oscar moments

An Oscars like no other crowned “Nomadland” best picture, experimented with the ceremony’s traditional format and shone a spotlight on diversity while also honoring more established stars. Here are five takeaways from Hollywood’s biggest night on Sunday:

Train wreck?

Shifting the Oscars from Hollywood’s Dolby Theatre to a train station in downtown Los Angeles provided for more social distancing and outdoor space-but also gave the whole ceremony an odd cabaret lounge vibe. Dim lighting may have improved the ambience in the room, but made it difficult to pick out some of the nominees in attendance. While guests largely without masks sat tucked away in booths and alcoves, DJ Questlove was spinning the decks, including for an unexpected and bizarre music trivia segment that featured a dancing Glenn Close just before the final prizes.

“They didn’t ask me, but if they had, I would say... we should add a karaoke bar,” joked Frances McDormand as she accepted best actress, noting the talented singers in the room such as “Hamilton” star Leslie Odom, Jr. The night then ended on a particularly anti-climactic note that some viewers compared to the infamous 2017 Oscars incident when best picture was accidentally awarded to the wrong film. This time, producers decided to end with the best actor



In this handout photo Yuh-Jung Youn accepts the Oscar for Actress in a Supporting Role during the live ABC Telecast of The 93rd Oscars at Union Station in Los Angeles.

prize-but sadly, 83-year-old winner Anthony Hopkins was 5,000 miles away in Wales, presumably asleep, meaning there was no victory speech and the show ended with a whimper.

Brad and Yuh-jung

A year after South Korea’s “Parasite” broke the Oscars language barrier with its stunning best picture win, it seems some in Hollywood are still struggling with their foreign language phonetics. Joking about the various mispronunciations of her name, “Minari” best supporting actress winner

Youn Yuh-jung told the audience: “Tonight you are all forgiven.” Fortunately one person who did not stumble over Youn’s name was Brad Pitt, whose company produced the Korean immigrant drama.

Pitt presented the award and later helped the slightly starstruck 73-year-old actress off the stage. “He didn’t mispronounce my name... I couldn’t believe that he was speaking to me when he announced my name. So then I... maybe I just blacked out a couple of minutes, a couple of seconds or so,” she said backstage. Asked if she would like to star alongside Pitt one day, Youn added: “That will never happen with my English and age, you know. I don’t think so.”

Racial justice

Racism and police violence were constant themes of the night, beginning with Regina King’s opening monologue expressing relief at the conviction of Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. “I know that a lot of you people at home want to reach for your remote when you feel like Hollywood is preaching to you,” she said. “But as a mother of a black son, I know the fear that so many live with, and no amount of fame or fortune changes that, okay?”

Others felt similarly compelled to speak out-winning short film co-directors Travon Free and Martin Desmond Roe (“Two Distant Strangers”) wore suits lined with the



(From left) Yuh-Jung Youn, winner of Best Actress in a Supporting Role for “Minari,” poses with Brad Pitt in the press room at the Oscars at Union Station in Los Angeles.

—AFP photos

names of those killed by police, and quoted statistics on killings by law enforcement. “As long as I’m standing, I’m going to fight for us,” added singer-songwriter H.E.R. after her song for civil rights drama “Judas and the Black Messiah” won.

Vinterberg’s tears

The night’s most heartfelt moment came early on as Thomas Vinterberg dedicated

his best international film win to his daughter, who was killed in a car crash just days into production of “Another Round.” “We ended up making this movie for her, as her monument,” said the Danish director. She was killed by “someone looking into his cell phone” on a highway, recalled Vinterberg, who said his daughter “felt seen by” and was “supposed to be in” the movie. “So, Ida, this is a miracle that just happened. And you’re a part of this miracle. Maybe you’ve been pulling some strings somewhere, I don’t know. But this one is for you.”

‘Nomadland’ howls explained

“Nomadland” broke a number of Oscars records on Sunday, including Chloe Zhao becoming the second female director and first of color to win. Its star McDormand moved into an elite group as the fourth woman to win at least three acting Oscars, alongside Ingrid Bergman, Meryl Streep and Katharine Hepburn, who has four. McDormand was also a producer on the movie, entitling her to yet another Oscar for the movie’s best picture win-something she celebrated by howling loudly on stage. “The howling is for our production sound mixer Wolf... who we unfortunately lost recently,” explained Zhao backstage, who had also worked with the late Michael Wolf Snyder on her previous films. — AFP

Oscars red carpet: Hollywood stars ditch hoodies, PJs for glamour

For the past year, Hollywood’s brightest stars have either been forced to wear ball gowns in their living rooms to accept awards-or they have worn fancy pajamas. On Sunday, they hit the Oscars red carpet with flair. And although the women were stunning as ever, the men-perhaps inspired by Billy Porter’s show-stopping turn in a tuxedo gown at the Academy Awards two years ago-also brought their top fashion game. Here are a few takeaways from the red carpet, the first big fashion event in Tinseltown since the coronavirus pandemic erupted in early 2020.

And Colman Domingo, who co-stars with nominees Viola Davis and the late Chadwick Boseman in “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” added a pop of color to the proceedings in head-to-toe hot pink. Paul Raci, another best supporting actor nominee for his work in “Sound of Metal,” rocked his black suit with some killer accessories-silver jewelry and dark nail polish.

Golden girls

Odom was not the only one sporting Oscars gold. Carey Mulligan, a nominee for best actress for her searing turn as a medical school dropout avenging her friend’s



Amanda Seyfried



US actress Zendaya



Carey Mulligan

colors. Halle Berry, a best actress Oscar winner in 2002 and a presenter on Sunday, rocked a new short hairdo and a strapless flowing Dolce and Gabbana purple gown.

Actress-director Regina King, who opened the show by striding into Union Station clutching a golden Academy Award, wowed fans with a blue Louis Vuitton gown

with structured butterfly sleeves and sparkly silver details. And presenter Angela Bassett stunned in a bright red Alberta Ferretti gown with a slit up the front and puffed sleeves that came together in the back in a huge bow. “This is Hollywood Christmas,” Bassett said at the Oscars pre-show. — AFP



(From left) Viola Davis and Julius Tennon



(From left) Leslie Odom Jr. and Nicolette Robinson

rape in “Promising Young Woman,” sparkled in a strapless golden gown with a bare midriff and a long train. And singer Andra Day, a nominee in that same category for her portrayal of Billie Holiday in “The United States vs Billie Holiday,” went for a daring gold gown with a huge cutout in the middle and a sky-high slit.

Pretty in white

Along with Mulligan and Day, Viola Davis was in contention for the best actress prize for “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” and

she turned up in a low-cut white sleeveless Alexander McQueen gown with sexy cutouts throughout the bodice. Bulgarian actress Maria Bakalova, a first-time nominee in the best supporting actress category, also went for pristine white, fluttering onto the red carpet in a Louis Vuitton princess gown with a plunging neckline and a cloud of tulle for a skirt.

Blast of color

Despite many gowns in white, basic black or muted hues, some actresses went for big-time Hollywood glamour in bright



Actress Halle Berry



US actress Angela Bassett



US actress Regina King



Australian actress Margot Robbie

Sports

Kevin Durant returns to power Nets, Hawks snap losing streak

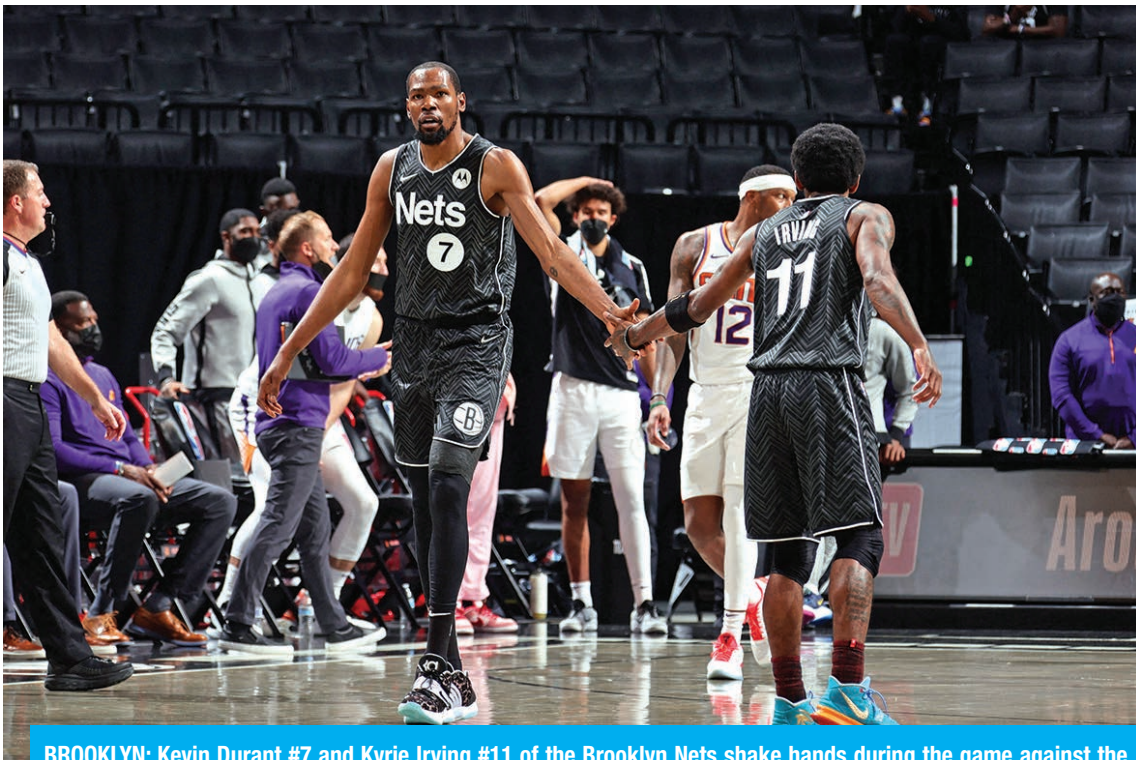
LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored 33 points in his return from a three-game injury absence as the Brooklyn Nets solidified their hold on first place in the NBA Eastern Conference with a 128-119 victory over the Phoenix Suns. Durant came off the bench early in the second quarter and showed little rust after being out with a thigh injury. In 28 minutes of playing time, Durant shot 12-of-21 from the floor in a Sunday afternoon clash between two of the best teams in the NBA. "It was a good start. Hopefully, I'll build on this game and keep going," Durant said.

Kyrie Irving scored a team-high 34 points, going 30-plus for the 15th time this season, and Blake Griffin finished with 16 for Brooklyn, who improved to 41-20 for a one and a half-game lead over the second-place Philadelphia 76ers in the Eastern Conference standings. Jeff Green and Joe Harris scored 10 points each for the Nets, while DeAndre Jordan had 12 rebounds in front of the pandemic-limited crowd of 1,700 at Barclays Center arena. Devin Booker scored 36 points for Phoenix, while Deandre Ayton scored 20 points with 13 rebounds, as the Suns lost two straight for the first time since late January.

"I thought we started off pretty well, they just continued to make shots," Booker said. "I think we had a lot of miscommunications on a lot of our switches and that's that." Torrey Craig tallied 20 points while point guard Chris Paul was held to just 14 points on five of 11 shooting. Phoenix, second in the West behind the Utah Jazz, dropped to 42-18 and are now 2-2 on a five-game East coast road trip with another contest on Monday against the red-hot New York Knicks, who have won nine straight.

Brooklyn, who were without injured James Harden for the 10th straight game, outscored the Suns 31-27 in the final quarter after trailing by as many as 13 in the second period. They have won six of 10 games with Harden out of the lineup.

The Nets led by just five, 97-92, at the end of the third but a three-pointer from Durant stretched the lead to 102-92 early in the fourth and they held off Phoenix the rest of the way. Durant scored 10 points in



BROOKLYN: Kevin Durant #7 and Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets shake hands during the game against the Phoenix Suns on Sunday at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP

the third quarter, then had the first five of the fourth to give Brooklyn its first double-digit lead at 102-92.

"The thing I love the most is that we all know, one of my favorite things about him is how much he just loves to play basketball," Griffin said. "So you know when he's sitting out it's just like killing him, so just to see that joy of just being able to play basketball again is fun for us." In Atlanta, Bogdan Bogdanovic equalled his season-high of 32 points as the Atlanta Hawks came from behind to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 111-104. Lou Williams scored all 15 of his points in the final quarter, including three three-pointers during a 19-6 run by the

Hawks. Bogdanovic was 12-for-21 from the field and six-for-11 on three-point baskets for Atlanta, who snapped a six-game losing skid. Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points and 14 rebounds and Khris Middleton tallied 23 for the Bucks, who dropped to 37-23. The Hawks also got 20 points from Kevin Huerter and 18 points from John Collins. Atlanta was playing without leading scorer Trae Young for the second consecutive game due to an ankle injury. Elsewhere, guard Devonte' Graham poured in 24 points to lead a balanced attack as the Charlotte Hornets beat the Boston Celtics 125-104. — AFP

First Arab woman basketball referee to stand tall at Olympics

CAIRO: When 3-on-3 basketball makes its debut at the Tokyo Olympics, referee Sarah Gamal will also be making a breakthrough, as an Arab and African woman officiating at the Games. Wearing a black veil emblazoned with a sports company's logo, Gamal stands tall among the high-flying male players at Alexandria United Club, a powerhouse of Egyptian basketball with a rowdy fanbase. "From the start of my journey as a referee, I haven't heard one negative comment or faced any obstacles to me being a veiled woman. The veil for me is normal and doesn't cause any problems," the 32-year-old told AFP.

The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) changed its rules in 2017 to allow players to wear the hijab (veil) under certain conditions. To attract a younger international fanbase, FIBA adopted the 3 on 3 competition popular on public courts around the world before the format was added to the Tokyo Olympic program in 2017. Games are played on a half court with one basket, as opposed to the traditional end-to-end full-court play in the five against five game. To win, a team must reach 21 points first or outscore their opponents over two 10-minute halves.

No fear of men

Gamal has had plenty of experience blazing a trail for aspiring women referees and players including at the FIBA World Youth Cup in 2018 in Belarus and at the African Women's Championship in 2017. "The veil hasn't affected my refereeing in any tournament so far and to prove it I'm ready to take on the Tokyo Olympics," she said. "My thinking is focused on training and proper preparation to perform at this important event."

Working in a male-dominated industry as a civil engineer in Alexandria, she is not afraid of officiating male athletes on hardwood courts. "I have refereed men's games in the past and I have had a lot of success running them which garnered the confidence of Egypt's refereeing committee... It's the usual for me."

Gamal fell in love with the game at five years old learning from her older sister. "I was five when I started hooping. That helped me to organize my time between studying and training. It's all thanks to my mother, who ran a tight ship, until I reached university and studied civil engineering," she told to AFP.

"It was difficult, especially since it's a field that requires studying hard and exerting a lot of effort mentally," she said. She is eager to show off her skills and experience at the Olympics. "My family is still beaming with the news of my selection. It's a great reward for all the sweat and tears I've had to go through in recent years," said Gamal. She started as a player and switched to refereeing at 16 "because I had a great passion for a deeper understanding of the rules". "My family has been completely supportive," she added.

'Feeling responsible'

"Being the first Arab and African woman refereeing 3 on 3 games at the Olympics is a positive. There's no pressure on me and I am confident that this step will pave the way for other Arab and African women referees," she said. "There's nothing that really scares me, but I do feel responsible," Gamal added.

She stressed that her family are fine with her traveling during a global pandemic provided she takes precautions. "My family are a bit worried when I travel... but that has not diminished their enthusiastic support to me," Gamal said. As she prepares to hit the court in Tokyo, Gamal has her sights on her next goals. "I want to make it to the men and women's World Cups and to maintain the trust the international body has put in me so far." — AFP



ALEXANDRIA: Egyptian Basketball referee Sarah Gamal gestures while holding a ball during a match between the Al-Ittihad and Al-Geish teams at the Al-Ittihad Al-Sakandari Arena in the country's northern city of Alexandria, on April 17, 2021. — AFP

News in brief

Kuwait SC wins Basketball Cup

KUWAIT: Kuwait SC was crowned on Sunday as the champion of the Kuwait Basketball Association Cup (KBA) for the 14th time in its history, after defeating Al-Yarmouk SC 125-69 in the final match. KBA Chairman Rasheed Al-Enizy congratulated the players of the first three teams, Kuwait SC, Al-Yarmouk SC and Kazma SC on their performances in the tournament. Seven clubs have won this cup: Al-Qadsia SC bagged it 25 times, Kuwait SC 14, Al-Arabi SC nine, Kazma SC three, Al-Jahra SC two, and Al-Sahel SC and Al-Nasser one time each. — KUNA

Henry, Shearer HOFers

LONDON: Thierry Henry and Alan Shearer were yesterday named as the first players inducted into the official Premier League Hall of Fame in recognition of a combined 435 goals and seven Golden Boot awards. Arsenal's all-time top scorer Henry won two Premier League titles under Arsene Wenger and was part of the "Invincibles" team that went unbeaten throughout the 2003/04 title-winning campaign. Shearer, who won the title with Blackburn in 1995, is the Premier League's record goalscorer, netting 260 goals in 14 seasons for Blackburn and Newcastle. — AFP

Lille fights back

PARIS: Burak Yilmaz scored twice and set up another as Lille staged a brilliant comeback to claim a thrilling 3-2 victory at title rivals Lyon on Sunday and reclaim top spot in Ligue 1 from reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain. Monaco are just a point further back in third after Wissam Ben Yedder's late goal grabbed a 1-0 win at Angers, but fourth-placed Lyon's title challenge appears all but over, sitting six points off the pace. Earlier, troubled Bordeaux suffered their fifth straight defeat, losing 4-1 to Lorient. — AFP

Dynamo wins title

KIEV: Mircea Lucescu celebrated guiding Dynamo Kiev to the Ukrainian league title after beating Inguets Petrove 5-0 on Sunday, in his first season as coach at the bitter rivals of Shakhtar Donetsk, the side he managed for 12 years. Such was the level of protests at his appointment of the former Shakhtar stalwart from Dynamo fans the 75-year-old had contemplated quitting. But he weathered the storm and masterminded Dynamo's 16th title but first for five years, sealed with three games of the season remaining. The title ensures Dynamo go straight into next season's Champions League group stage. — AFP

Two Australians join IPL pull-outs as 'grim' COVID crisis grows

NEW DELHI: Two Australian cricketers became the latest to pull out of the IPL yesterday as India's devastating coronavirus surge increases jitters around the glitzy tournament. Adam Zampa and Kane Richardson are returning to Australia for "personal reasons", their Royal Challengers Bangalore team said, joining Rajasthan Royals bowler Andrew Tye who flew back on Sunday.

India star Ravichandran Ashwin also withdrew to support his family on Sunday as India staggers under a daily toll of 350,000 infections and almost 3,000 deaths from the virus. The Indian Premier League has attracted criticism for continuing during the crisis, with a leading newspaper group accusing it of "commercialism gone crass" as it suspended coverage on Sunday.

India's surge in infections has made it the world's latest hotspot for COVID-19 and has overwhelmed health services, with severe shortages of oxygen, medicine and hospital beds. Meanwhile the world's richest Twenty20 cricket league, which attracts top international players, is being played behind closed doors in six Indian cities.

Last year's coronavirus-postponed IPL was moved to the United Arab Emirates to reduce the risk of infections. India is also due to host the T20 World Cup in October-November. Zampa and Richardson are "returning to Australia for personal reasons and will be unavailable for the remainder of #IPL2021", their team tweeted.

Tye, who flew back on Sunday, said other players had asked him about his return home. Flights to Australia are limited, and some countries have banned or restricted arrivals from India as its cases spike. "Some of the guys are very interested in what route I took home and how I approached it," Tye told the SEN WA radio station. "Other guys are just happy to make sure I'm OK and make sure I'm in a good space."

Cricket Australia said it was in contact with IPL players, coaches and commentators and was listening to their "feedback" and advice from the Australian government. "Our thoughts are with the people of India at this difficult time," a statement said.—AFP

Man Utd held by Leeds

LONDON: Manchester United drew 0-0 with Leeds on Sunday to stay on track for a second-place finish in the Premier League. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men are virtually assured of a top-four finish, leading fifth-placed West Ham by 12 points with five games left but both teams looked short of imagination in a lackluster encounter at Elland Road.

United, who are unbeaten in 24 league games on the road, have 67 points after 33 games — they are 10 behind champions-elect Manchester City but eight points clear of third-placed Leicester. Chasing down City already appeared a fruitless task and the stalemate means Pep Guardiola's men will be crowned champions next weekend if they beat Crystal Palace and United lose to Liverpool.

Manchester United's team bus entered Elland Road with minimum fuss, in sharp contrast to Monday, when angry Leeds fans, who had gathered in protest against the ill-fated Super League, hurled invective at Liverpool's squad.

United supporters protested at Old Trafford on Saturday and a banner reading "£2bn stolen #Glazers out" was flown over Leeds' ground before kick-off, in reference to Manchester United's unpopular owners. Solskjaer rested Paul Pogba and Edinson Cavani from his starting line-up with one eye on Thursday's Europa League semi-final first leg against Roma.

The visitors, who won 6-2 in December's reverse fixture at Old Trafford, had the better of the chances in a disappointing game. Leeds goalkeeper Illan Meslier did well to keep out a thunderous Marcus Rashford free-kick shortly before half-time while Bruno Fernandes dragged his shot wide after being set up by Aaron Wan-Bissaka shortly before the hour mark.

Minutes later Helder Costa's shot was deflected onto the roof of the net at the other end after a long diagonal pass. Solskjaer threw on Pogba and Cavani but United could not find a way past stubborn Leeds. "We have to win every single game to put pressure on City," said the Norwegian manager. "This is two points dropped that makes them very safe. But we push on. We have two semis coming up (both legs of the Europa League tie) and Liverpool in the middle. It was a difficult week last week but it is the business end of the season. You work so that every game matters." —AFP

Sports

Failed ESL hangs over Champions League as nouveaux riches take on Real Madrid



PARIS: In this file photo taken on December 7, 2020 shows the UEFA Champions League logo ahead of a training session on the eve of the UEFA Champions League group H football match between Paris Saint Germain (PSG) and Istanbul Basaksehir FK in Paris. — AFP

Gulf derby: Prestige, pride riding on PSG v Man City clash

DOHA: The Champions League semi-final between Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City tomorrow is as much a clash of footballing titans as a proxy battle between competing Gulf nations and visions for European football's future.

It is the first encounter between Qatar-owned PSG and Emirati-backed Man City since the United Arab Emirates and a coalition of Saudi-led countries lifted their boycott of Doha, in place for three years. The UAE along with Saudi, Egypt and Bahrain broke off ties with Qatar in June 2017 over claims it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups, which Qatar has always denied.



RENNES: In this file photo taken on August 18, 2019, Paris Saint-Germain's Qatari president Nasser Al-Khelaifi arrives prior to the French L1 football match between Rennes and Paris Saint-Germain at the Roazhon Park stadium in Rennes, northwestern France. — AFP

Families were divided, students expelled, businesses broken and religious pilgrimages denied when the spat erupted. "Whilst the tie's geopolitical temperature is less than it would have been if the boycott was still ongoing, there's still a lot at stake," said Simon Chadwick, professor of Eurasian Sport at EM Lyon University. Under Gulf ownership the two teams have been propelled into Europe's elite, uncharted territory for both sides, with both nations accused by critics of seeking to "sport wash" their human rights records and attain respectability.

"Financially, both countries have invested a huge amount of money into their clubs hence reaching the Champions League final will be seen as an important return on investment," Chadwick added. "At the same time, there are considerable reputational and image benefits that will be associated with winning. And of course, Gulf bragging rights are at stake. The animosities may have somewhat dissipated, the battle to be the Gulf's leading football nation remains."

The fixture will also serve as a proxy tussle between the clubs that backed a breakaway European Super League (ESL), including Manchester City, and those that didn't, namely PSG. PSG's president Nasser Al-Khelaifi was quickly rewarded for keeping France's highest profile club out of the rebel league. He was last week appointed the new head of the European Club Association (ECA) replacing Andrea Agnelli, one of the key figures in the doomed Super League project.

Khelaifi, who also heads up sports broadcaster beIN, has made no secret of his desire for PSG to win the Champions League, having been pipped by Bayern Munich last year. —AFP

LONDON: The cloud of a collapsed Super League project hangs over this week's Champions League semi-finals with three of the four clubs involved — Real Madrid, Manchester City and Chelsea — among the breakaway 12 that shook European football.

Paris Saint-Germain did not sign up to the proposals, which crumbled within 48 hours of being announced last week after a fierce backlash from fans, players, governments, national leagues, UEFA and FIFA.

However, the clash between PSG and City tomorrow is illustrative of the forces which drove some of European football's more established powers, led by Madrid president Florentino Perez, to seek the financial reassurances of a closed league format.

Under the Super League proposals, 15 founding members would be guaranteed their place in a 20-team competition, split into two leagues of 10 with the top sides in each progressing to the quarter-finals.

News in brief

Inter on brink of title

MILAN: Matteo Darmian scored the only goal to push Inter Milan to the brink of the Serie A title with a 1-0 win over Hellas Verona on Sunday with coach Antonio Conte hailing the victory as worth "nine points". Achraf Hakimi set up Darmian to grab the winner on 76 minutes at the San Siro. Inter are 11 points ahead of Atalanta, who moved second with a 5-0 rout of 10-man Bologna, with five games remaining. AC Milan are a further two points behind in third before they travelled to fellow top-four hopefuls Lazio yesterday. Juventus are level on points with AC Milan but drop to fourth place after being held 1-1 at Fiorentina. Seventh-placed Roma lost 3-2 at Cagliari before their Europa League trip to Manchester United, as the Sardinians, now 17th, boosted their hopes of top-flight survival. — AFP

30 million euros for Nagelsmann?

BERLIN: Bayern Munich are in talks with RB Leipzig to tempt Julian Nagelsmann to take over as coach from Hansi Flick next season, but German media claimed Sunday it could cost them 30 million euros. According to Bild, Leipzig will demand such a sum to release the highly-regarded Nagelsmann as his current contract still runs until 2023. Sport 1 also reported that negotiations have started and said the financial deal will be "significantly greater than 15 million euros". Flick himself is under contract in Munich until 2023 but he has already asked to be released at the end of this season due to disagreements with club management over transfer policy. However, Flick and Bayern have yet to reach an amicable settlement. Flick is considered to be the favorite to replace Joachim Loew as German national coach after this summer's European Championship. — AFP

Leipzig keep Bayern waiting

BERLIN: Second-placed RB Leipzig made Bayern Munich wait to be crowned Bundesliga champions as Emil Forsberg netted a second-half penalty in a 2-0 home win on Sunday against 10-man Stuttgart. Defeat for Leipzig would have confirmed Bayern as German champions for the ninth straight season despite Hansi Flick's side losing 2-1 at Mainz on Saturday. Leipzig hold a seven-point cushion ahead of third-placed Wolfsburg with three games left. The Bundesliga takes a break next weekend, forcing Bayern to wait for another chance to clinch the title when they host Borussia Muenchengladbach on May 8. Gladbach moved into seventh, four points from the European places, after a 5-0 thrashing of Arminia Bielefeld, having raced into a three-goal lead in the opening 18 minutes. — AFP

On top of ensuring revenue from TV rights and sponsorship of more games between the European elite, a key part of the breakaway plan concocted by the 'dirty dozen' was to control costs. A much-criticized statement to launch the league last Sunday said: "The competition will be built on a sustainable financial foundation with all founding clubs signing up to a spending framework."

Hyper-inflated transfer market

Backed by the state wealth of Abu Dhabi and Qatar respectively, City and PSG have played leading roles in the inflated costs of player transfers and wages in recent years and been far less affected by the economic crunch of the coronavirus pandemic over the last 12 months.

City's spending power has blown away the competition even in the lucrative Premier League. Pep

Guardiola's men are closing in on a third league title in four years and on Sunday won a fourth consecutive League Cup.

PSG's 222 million euro (\$269 million) capture of Neymar from Barcelona in 2017 more than doubled the world record transfer fee and sent the entire market into hyper-inflation. Barca's reaction to losing the Brazilian was to spend over 100 million euros on each of Ousmane Dembele, Philippe Coutinho and Antoine Griezmann, while tying down Lionel Messi to a contract worth a reported 555 million euros over four years. As a result, the Catalan giants have become saddled with debt of one billion euros.

Despite their rivalry, Barca and Madrid remain united as the two major forces yet to withdraw from the ESL project. The Spanish giants have been frustrated by UEFA's policing of Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules, designed to limit spending to what clubs earn. —AFP



BILBAO: Athletic Bilbao's Spanish forward Alejandro Berenguer (center) celebrates with teammates after scoring during the Spanish League football match between Athletic Club Bilbao and Club Atletico de Madrid at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on Sunday. — AFP

Atletico defeat hands initiative to Barcelona

MADRID: Atletico Madrid's title hopes suffered a setback on Sunday as a shock 2-1 defeat at Athletic Bilbao handed Barcelona the upper hand in a thrilling race at the top of La Liga. Real Madrid's draw with Real Betis on Saturday gave Atletico the chance to pull further clear but instead they ended the weekend with their lead reduced, a loss at San Mames the latest twist in Europe's most unpredictable domestic chase.

Barca had earlier beaten Villarreal by the same scoreline, with Antoine Griezmann's quick-fire double becoming all the more valuable after another Atletico slip. Sevilla have largely been overlooked as possible champions in Spain but they are right in the mix as well now after a 2-1 win over Granada puts them just three points off the top and one behind Real Madrid.

Yet Barcelona were the biggest winners, with Ronald Koeman's team able to go top of the table if they win their game in hand at home to Granada on Thursday, even if Atletico might have a way back given they are still to play at Camp Nou on May 8. Real Madrid host Sevilla a day later. "There are four of us in that race and now emotionally, those who have the mental strength will be closer to winning," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone. "We still know that we depend on ourselves." Atletico have first place, for now at least, but they might be the least convincing of all the contenders. Losing to Athletic Bilbao means they have won only six of their last 14 league games, with the momentum gained from consecutive wins over Eibar and Huesca proving short-lived.

The way some of Simeone's players dropped to their knees at the final whistle suggested this result, psychologically, could be difficult to recover from. Alex Berenguer had already nodded in Ander Capa's cross in the eighth minute and Athletic should have doubled their advantage in the second half but Oihan

Sancet fired over. Luis Suarez, Joao Felix and Thomas Lemar all came on and Atletico grabbed a lifeline when Stefan Savic's flicked header found its way inside the back post with 13 minutes left. Simeone pumped his fists, urging his players to seek a winner, but instead there was a sucker-punch from Athletic. Inigo Martinez darting free in the box and powering a superb header past Jan Oblak with four minutes remaining.

Griezmann fires Barca

Barcelona are surely now favourites to add a La Liga title to the Copa del Rey they won earlier this month. Villarreal struck first through Samuel Chukwueze but Griezmann equalized with a sumptuous lob before capitalizing on a misplaced backpass to make it two.

Helped by a red card for Villarreal's Manu Trigueros shortly after the hour, Barcelona held on for a crucial win. "The players are hungry to win another trophy," said Koeman. "The league is closer, I don't know how much closer, but it is. We are on a good run and if we win the six games left, we will be champions." Griezmann started on the bench for the defeat by Real Madrid but has been recalled for the last three games in a row, repaying the faith with a goal now in each. It remains to be seen whether Barcelona see the 30-year-old as a chance to raise funds in the summer, and also whether the offers are there, but Griezmann now has 23 goals this season, and 15 since the turn of the year.

Sevilla, meanwhile, pushed their case for the title and guaranteed their place in the top four but their win over Granada will be remembered for the bizarre way it ended. Both teams were made to come back out and play another minute after referee Ricardo de Burgos admitted he blew too early for full-time.

Sevilla's players had already left and some of them had started to take their kit off, with midfielder Fernando pictured without his shirt on in the stands, shaking his head in disbelief. Marcos Acuna had to put his boots, socks and shinpads back on. "The referee stopped it because he thought time was up and then he told us he'd made a mistake," said Sevilla's Lucas Ocampos. "It was finished. I've never seen anything like it. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

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

Clinics

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

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NOTICE
April 22, 2021



Mr. Suresh Bonthu, son of Mr. Bonthu Anandarao, resident of 1 86 Lutukuru PO, Mamedikuduru, East Godavari, AP-533247 and Ms. Eada Merya, daughter of Mr. Eada Raju, resident of 4 17 A Antarvedi Palem, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh-533252 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) /letters/telephonic calls (00965-22550171, 00965-22533125).

K.S. Rathore

(K.S. Rathore)
First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer.

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

EMERGENCY



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Sport | Times

TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 2021

Man City retain League Cup

Guardiola's men outclass Tottenham in front of 8,000 fans

LONDON: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said winning felt much better with fans in attendance after beating Tottenham 1-0 at Wembley to lift the League Cup for the fourth consecutive year in front of 8,000 supporters on Sunday. Aymeric Laporte's header eight minutes from time finally rewarded a dominant performance from City as they extended Spurs' 13-year wait to win a trophy.

For the first time in 13 months, a football match in England had designated fans from both teams inside the stadium in one of a series of test events at the 90,000 capacity Wembley as coronavirus restrictions are eased.

"It's not full, but it is much better," said Guardiola. "To celebrate with them is much better. We played really well. We are incredibly happy to win the first title, four in a row in this competition, but especially because in the last 33 games, we won 30."

Defeat by Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend means City cannot claim an unprecedented quadruple of trophies this season. However, they remain on course for a treble with the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain to come tomorrow before possibly sealing the Premier League title next weekend.

Victory takes Guardiola's personal tally of major trophies to 25 across his spells in charge of Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City, seven of which have come in England. "I was in big clubs: Barcelona, Bayern Munich and here, that's why it is easier to do it," added the Catalan modestly.

By contrast, Tottenham's long wait for just one goes on. Spurs could have no complaints, though, at the end of a chaotic week that saw them sack Jose Mourinho on Monday and, along with City and four other English clubs, pull out of a proposed European Super League amid fan fury.

Son Heung-min was reduced to tears after full-time, but in caretaker boss Ryan Mason's second game in charge, Spurs were completely outclassed by a far superior side. "It's difficult to take for everyone associated with the football club," said former Tottenham midfielder Mason. "It hurts. I know that feeling and it is normal that they are hurting. This group of players care deeply about this football club. We tried, it wasn't enough today and it's tough to take."

After a slight dip in form in recent weeks, City were back to their best as they pinned Tottenham back from the first whistle and should have won by a far more comfortable scoreline. Hugo Lloris's goal lived a charmed life, particularly during the first half.

Raheem Sterling saw a goalbound effort blocked by Toby Alderweireld before Lloris made a stunning save from point-blank range to turn behind Phil Foden's shot. A Sterling dink over Lloris then spun just wide before Riyad Mahrez twice flashed powerful efforts inches off target.

Despite Harry Kane's recovery from an ankle injury to start, Tottenham had offered nothing as an attacking threat until Giovanni Lo Celso forced Zack Steffen into a fine save a minute into the second half. The majority of the chances



LONDON: Manchester City players celebrate with the trophy after winning the English League Cup final football match between Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley Stadium, northwest London on Sunday. — AFP

continued to come at the other end, but the breakthrough came from an unlikely source as Laporte rose highest to head home Kevin De Bruyne's free-kick at the back post.

Spurs' energies were spent after conceding as they failed to muster any response to try and take the game to extra-time. Mahrez had a second goal ruled out for offside in stoppage time.

But one goal was enough to ensure City move level with Liverpool on a record eight League Cup triumphs, six of which have come in the last eight years. — AFP






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