



4 Kuwaiti artists document invasion at art exhibition



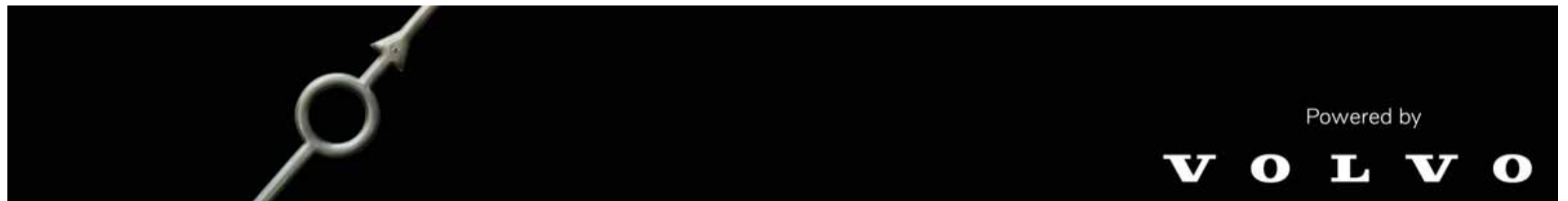
5 Missing Belarus dissident found hanged in Kiev park



12 TED talks seek to inject optimism into gloom



16 Thompson-Herah, Warhol light up track; bronze for Biles



COVID-19 returns to Wuhan as global Delta woes mount

Half of EU vaccinated • US donates 100m doses • Iran infections hit new high



KUWAIT: People queue to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at Kuwait Vaccination Center at the fairgrounds in Mishref yesterday. More than 2.5 million citizens and residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine so far, the health minister said a day earlier. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

PARIS: Half of the European Union's population has now been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, an AFP tally showed yesterday, as China's Wuhan said it would test all 11 million residents after the virus returned to where it first emerged. The highly contagious Delta variant has been driving surging infections across the world, even in places which had long touted their successes in overcoming the worst of the pandemic.

China brought domestic cases down to virtually zero after the coronavirus first emerged in Wuhan in December 2019, allowing the economy to rebound and life to return largely to normal. But a fresh outbreak has thrown that record into jeopardy, as the fast-spreading Delta variant reaches dozens of cities after infections among airport cleaners in Nanjing sparked a chain of cases that have been reported across the country.

After Wuhan reported its first local infections in more than a year, authorities said they were launching a mass-testing program for all 11 million resi-

dents. Mao, a 27-year-old Wuhan resident, told AFP he was "not worried" about the new outbreak because "Wuhan has accumulated rich experience" after enduring a grueling lockdown in the early months of the pandemic. Across China, authorities have confined the residents of entire cities to their homes, cut domestic transport links and rolled out mass testing in recent days.

Hit hard by earlier waves of the pandemic, the European Union has now fully vaccinated more than 50 percent of its population. Spain leads the pack of larger EU countries with 58.3 percent of its population fully vaccinated, followed by Italy with 54.4 percent, France with 52.9 and Germany with 52.2 percent, according to an AFP tally.

The EU has now passed the vaccination rate of the United States - which remains on 49.7 percent - as that country suffers a new wave driven by the Delta variant that has sent hospitalizations soaring to levels not seen since last summer.

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News in brief

Sisi vows to raise bread price

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said yesterday his administration is ready to raise the price of subsidized bread as part of its continued austerity push towards economic recovery. "The time has come for the price of a loaf of bread to increase from 5 piastres (\$0.0032 cents)," Sisi said at a televised conference unveiling a nutrition project for schoolchildren. "It's not realistic that I sell 20 loaves for the same price as a cigarette... This must stop," he added. — AFP

Attacked tanker arrives in UAE

FUJAIRAH: A Zionist-linked vessel that was attacked off Oman last week anchored off the UAE emirate of Fujairah yesterday amid accusations Iran was behind the attack in which two crewmembers were killed. Low visibility due to high humidity made it difficult to see the vessel in its mooring in the Gulf of Oman off the eastern coast of the UAE. — AFP

Protests after girl raped, killed

NEW DELHI: The alleged rape and murder of a nine-year-old, low-caste girl sparked a third day of protests in India's capital yesterday. Hundreds of demonstrators have taken to the streets in New Delhi, holding banners reading "give justice to the little girl" and demanding the death penalty for the four men accused of the crime. — AFP

5m fewer girls to be born

PARIS: An estimated 4.7 million fewer girls are expected to be born globally in the next 10 years because of sex-selective practices in countries with a cultural preference for male offspring, a trend that could undermine social cohesion in the long term, research showed yesterday. The research suggested that the projected shortfall in the number of girls being born will lead to a surplus of young men. — AFP

Iran's Raisi inaugurated as president

TEHRAN: Ultraconservative Ebrahim Raisi was yesterday inaugurated as president of Iran, a country whose hopes of shaking off a dire economic crisis hinge on reviving a nuclear deal with world powers. "Following the people's choice, I task the wise, indefatigable, experienced and popular Hojatoleslam Ebrahim Raisi as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran," the country's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote in a decree read out by his chief of staff.

Raisi replaces moderate president Hassan Rouhani, whose landmark achievement was the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers. From the outset, Raisi will have to tackle negotiations aimed at reviving the nuclear deal from which the US unilaterally withdrew imposing sweeping sanctions. The 60-year-old also faces warnings to Iran from the United States, Britain and Israel over a deadly tanker attack last week for which Tehran denies responsibility.

Raisi, in his inauguration speech, said the new government would seek to lift "oppressive" US sanctions, but would "not tie the nation's standard of living to the will of foreigners". "We believe the people's economic position is unfavorable both because of

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TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei inaugurates Ebrahim Raisi as President yesterday. — AFP

IMF OKs \$650bn new reserves for member nations

WASHINGTON: The IMF board of governors on Monday greenlit a \$650 billion increase in cash reserves for member nations, the last step in an initiative to boost liquidity for the most vulnerable countries. The move increases by \$456 billion the stock of Special Drawing Rights (SDR), the International Monetary Fund's currency, giving countries more funds to draw on as they struggle to recover from economic hit from COVID-19.

Turkish power plant encircled by deadly blaze

HISARONU, Turkey: Roaring blazes encircled a Turkish thermal power plant yesterday and forced farmers to herd panicked cattle toward the sea as wildfires that have killed eight people raged on for a seventh day. The nation of 84 million has been transfixed in horror as the most destructive wildfires in generations erase pristine

forests and rich farmland across swaths of Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts.

Frightened tourists have been forced to scamper onto boats for safety and dozens of villages have been evacuated as wild winds and soaring heat fan the flames. An AFP team in the Aegean city of Hisaronu saw farmers pulling their screaming animals out of burning barns and shepherding to them to the relative safety of the beach.

"The fire happened in an instant," local farmer Mevlut Tarim said after managing to pull some of his panicked

Continued on Page 2

vulnerable countries struggling to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis," she said. The program, which was approved by the IMF's executive board in mid-July, will be implemented on August 23. Newly-issued SDRs - which are based on a basket of major currencies - will be allocated to member countries in proportion to their quota in the Washington-based institution. Emerging and developing nations are to receive around \$275 billion, the IMF said.

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MUGLA, Turkey: Men herd cows and sheep away from an advancing fire on Monday in the Marmaris district. — AFP

Amir receives newly appointed Kuwaiti officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Secretary General of the Cabinet Wael Eisa Al-Asousi.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar, Secretary General of the Cabinet Wael Eisa Al-Asousi and Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for

Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, who presented to His Highness the Amir Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar, Secretary General of the Cabinet Wael Eisa Al-Asousi and Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri,

on their appointment. Amiri Diwan chief Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad also presented Asfar, Asousi and Dhafiri to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in a separate meeting,

attended by Lt Gen Mohammad Jamal Al-Theyab and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at His Highness Crown Prince's office Mazen Al-Issa. His Highness the Crown Prince also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

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Iran's Raisi inaugurated...

Continued from Page 1

the hostility of our enemies and because of the shortcomings and problems inside the country," he said.

In his response, Khamenei acknowledged Iran suffered from "many shortcomings and problems", but quickly added: "The country's capabilities are even more numerous. "Fixing economic problems takes time and cannot be done overnight," he said. Raisi won a presidential election in June in which more than half the electorate stayed away after many heavyweights were barred from standing.

A former judiciary chief, he has been criticized

by the West for his human rights record. Yesterday's ceremony marked Raisi's formal accession to office. He will next be sworn in before parliament tomorrow when he is to submit his proposed government line-up. Raisi's presidency will consolidate power in the hands of conservatives following their 2020 parliamentary election victory, marked by the disqualification of thousands of reformist or moderate candidates.

Iran's economic woes, exacerbated by US sanctions, will be the new president's top challenge, said Clement Therme, a researcher at the European University Institute in Italy. "His main objective will be to improve the economic situation by reinforcing the Islamic republic's economic relations with neighbouring countries" and others such as Russia and China, Therme said. The 2015 deal saw Iran accept curbs on its nuclear capabilities in return for an easing of sanctions. — AFP

IMF OKs \$650bn new reserves for...

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But "we will also continue to engage actively with our membership to identify viable options for voluntary channeling of SDRs from wealthier to poorer and more vulnerable member countries to support their pandemic recovery and achieve resilient and sustainable growth," Georgieva said. Wealthy countries could, for example, transfer their SDRs by using those attributed to them to

finance the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Fund, which would increase the supply of low-cost loans to the poorest countries.

Anti-poverty group Oxfam welcomed the IMF's decision. The "new SDRs will bring much-needed liquidity to struggling developing countries without adding to their unsustainable debt burdens," Nadia Daar, head of the Washington-based NGO, said in a statement. It is "unfathomable that wealthy nations would fail to reallocate a substantial portion of their SDRs - at least \$100 billion as agreed by the G7" at a mid-June summit, she said. It is also necessary for governments to "work transparently and together with civil society" so that SDRs are used wisely, Daar added. — AFP

COVID-19 returns to Wuhan...

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The US said yesterday it has distributed more than 100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses overseas - more than all other countries combined - as President Joe Biden touts his record on countering the Delta variant. The announcement, which follows the administration belatedly achieving its July 4 target for getting 70 percent of American adults at least one shot, marked

"just the beginning" of US efforts to help the world battle the pandemic, the White House said.

And Iran, the Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic, registered more than 39,000 cases yesterday, its highest daily figure yet. The health authorities in Iran said another 378 people died of coronavirus and 39,019 tested positive in the past 24 hours. According to official figures widely believed to underestimate the real toll, the virus has killed 91,785 people in the Islamic republic out of 3,979,727 cases of infection. The new record comes a day after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered that "necessary measures" be taken to contain what the government warns is a fifth wave of the country's outbreak. — AFP

Turkish power plant encircled...

Continued from Page 1

herd through pitch-black smoke and patches of burning turf encircling his farm. "One of my cows died. It burned," he recalled. "I had never seen anything like it. You can't even call it a fire. It was really like a bomb."

Officials in neighboring Greece have blamed two blazes on the island of Rhodes and the Peloponnese

peninsula on a record heatwave they link to climate change. Another fire near Mount Parnitha cut off Athens from large stretches of northern and southern Greece. Temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius across the south of Turkey have set off a record surge in electricity use that caused power outages Monday in cities such as Ankara and Istanbul.

But the mayor of the Aegean coast city of Milas said he was more worried about what might happen should an uncontrolled fire raising massive plumes of smoke over the region engulf the local thermal power plant. Mayor Muhammet Tokat posted an increasingly urgent series of messages on Twitter showing the blazes spreading up a hill toward the presumed location of the plant. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Prime Minister receives letter from Iraqi counterpart to Amir

KFAED plays vital role in strengthening ties between

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace the representative of Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Khadhemi, Minister of Planning Khaled Battal Al-Najem and his official delegation. During the meeting, attended by Minister of National Assembly Affairs Mubarak Al-Harees, His Highness the Prime Minister received letter from Khadhemi addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The meeting was attended by the chief of the Prime Minister's office Abdulaziz Dakheel Al-Dakheel and the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) Dr Khaled Mahdi.

Later yesterday, Iraqi planning minister Najem announced the completion of a surgery clinic in Basra funded by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), noting that there are plans in place for similar joint projects in the future.

Important role

KFAED had played an important role in serving

Kuwait's political goals by supporting the Arab countries in implementing their projects to reach sustainable development. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2 1990, the ties between the two countries were not the best until the fall of Iraq's dictatorship in 2003, after that Kuwait supported the government of Iraq by providing soft loans and donations through the KFAED.

Lately, the cooperation between KFAED and Iraq was at best. The institution funded the Iraqi government with about \$300 million distributed on different fields. In 2005 and 2007, Kuwait allocated about \$50 million and \$60 million respectively to help rebuild the educational and health facilities in different Iraqi regions. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti government provided Iraq with \$80 million in 2012 to finance a residential area in Um Qasar, in the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations.

Reconstruction of Iraq

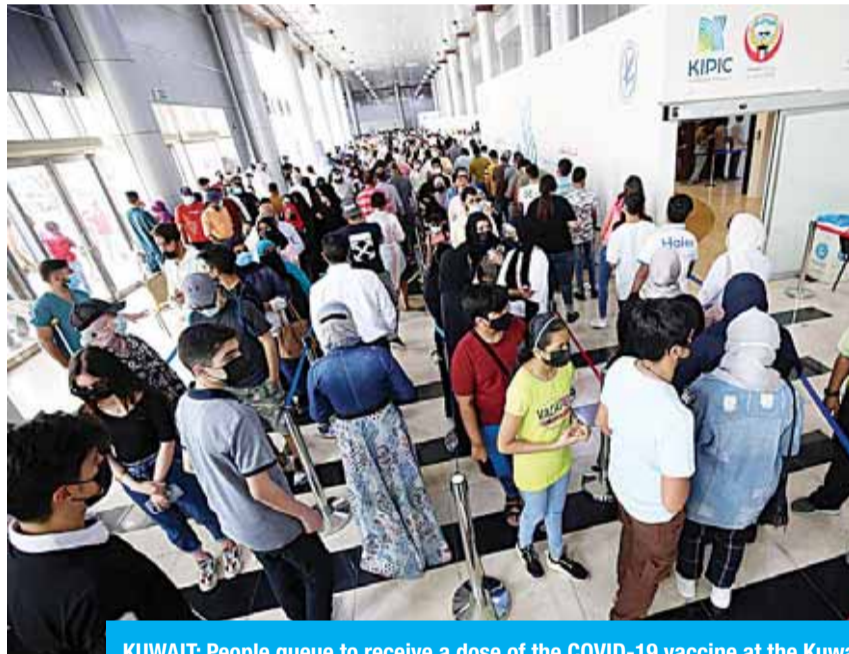
In 2015, Kuwait has hosted the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq by an initiative of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, where \$500 million were allocated and the KFAED donated \$100 million to help the displaced and the communities in need. In 2016, KFAED provided Iraq with \$100 million to help rebuild the areas damaged by terrorist operations. Kuwait in 2018 signed a \$80 million-loan agreement with Iraq to help finance a schooling project as part of the second International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq. The project aims at supporting the social and economic development in Iraq by improving the educational level for schools students.

Moreover, the project includes the establishment of 73 new schools in 15 different governorates. KFAED was established in 1961 to assist Arab and other developing countries in developing their economies by extending loans on concessionary term to finance development projects in the developing countries. The Fund also provides technical assistance to finance feasibility studies of projects, as well as the training of nationals of the borrowing countries. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives from Iraq's Minister of Planning Khaled Battal Al-Najem a letter from Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Khadhemi to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —KUNA

Kuwait races to vaccinate population



KUWAIT: People queue to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the Kuwait Vaccination Center yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Large crowds of people were present at Kuwait Vaccination Center yesterday to receive their doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, as Kuwait races to vaccinate the public especially with the approaching start date of the school year next month.

Kuwait had announced that more than 2.5 million citizens and residents of Kuwait have received the COVID-19 vaccine since the beginning of the vaccination campaign in the country. During the Cabinet weekly meeting, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-

Sabah shed light on the developments of the pandemic situation in the country, affirming that there is a comforting decline in the number of infections and fatalities. The patient recovery rate climbed to 96 percent, the minister added. The Cabinet expressed satisfaction with the positive indicators that have been achieved, stressing the importance of continuing to adhere to the health requirements and to the necessity of vaccination.

Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases had climbed

by 805 to 399,343 on Monday as deaths increased by 11 to 2,339, the health ministry said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 866 as of Monday, with 288 of them in intensive care units, ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, revealing that another 10,314 were receiving regular treatment. Another 1,289 people were cured of the virus raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 386,690 by Monday, Dr Sanad added. —KUNA

KIA appoints new board of directors

KUWAIT: Kuwait Investment Authority has appointed a new board of directors. The newly appointed board members are Khaled Ali Al-Fadil, Sheikh Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Fahd Muhammad Al-Rashed, Faisal Abdullatif Yousef Al-Hamad and Ghanem Suleiman Saqr Al-Ghunaiman. The move was approved by Kuwait's cabinet on Monday, Arabic newspaper Al-Qabas reported. KIA, which had more than \$580 billion in foreign assets at the end of last year according to ratings agency Fitch, manages two funds - one is a nest egg for when oil prices run out, the other is used to cover Kuwait's budget deficit. Its role in providing liquidity to the government has become increasingly important last year as a standoff between cabinet and parliament has blocked a law that would allow the government to finance its deficit by borrowing in the overseas markets. KIA's previous board tenure expired in April. A new managing director is yet to be named.



Society provides patients with expensive meds

KUWAIT: Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Chairman of the Board Ahmad Al-Sarraf said the society was and still is supporting underprivileged patients of all nationalities, and bears the cost of their medication. Meanwhile, Director General Khalid bin Sabt received several relatives of patients and presented them with expensive medicines to help them out and continue their medication protocols. Bin Sabt said that there is continued coordination with concerned parties to follow the cases that need help. He called upon the public to support the society and keep in touch through its website www.khf-kwt.com.

Nugra residents hope 'dangerous' construction ends soon

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Construction at a mosque near Qutaiba Street in Nugra has been stalled for almost three months with little progress. When Kuwait Times went to investigate yesterday, some people were working on the project. However, there is no safety or perimeter fence at the construction site. A trench has been dug around the mosque to place a permanent fence, but there is no sign to warn passersby on the danger of the debris or construction material.

"My father used to pray in that mosque. He is complaining that the construction is long overdue. It's been under renovation for the past three months and hasn't been completed yet. My father nearly fell down the hole one day since there is no safety fence around it. People are still using the mosque even though it's without electricity or water," said Rasha, who lives nearby.

Another resident of the area said he hopes the mosque's construction works will be over soon. "I used to pray in this mosque regularly because it's the nearest to my residence. Hopefully they will fast-track the construction. Haram, we've had enough!" he exclaimed.



KUWAIT: Pictures showing the construction works near the mosque. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



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invasion's memory in exhibition

KUWAIT: Some of the artworks displayed at the exhibition. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Cabinet
recalls martyrs'
ultimate sacrifice

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet recalled on Monday the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on its 31st anniversary, saying that the Kuwaiti leadership and people denounce that heinous crime. This came as ministers held their weekly session at Seif Palace, under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The Cabinet expressed its great appreciation for the prominent role played by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the late Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in liberating Kuwait and dismissing the aggression.

The country also appreciated the efforts of those leaders in rebuilding the country in record time, in collaboration with the sincere citizens. During the meeting, the Cabinet expressed pride for the unity and cohesion of the Kuwaiti society and their steadfastness against the brutal aggression and its practices, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said after the meeting. The Cabinet remembered the hundreds of brave martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their beloved nation. Kuwait also recalled, with great appreciation, the role of Saudi Arabia and all Gulf states as well as allied countries who contributed to the liberation. The ministers prayed for the safety and security of Kuwait under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Separately, the prime minister and ministers congratulated His Highness the Amir on the advent of the 1443 Hijri year, which falls on August 9. —KUNA



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over 40 Kuwaiti artists are participating in the 'We Won't Forget' art exhibition with their artworks expressing scenes from the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This exhibition is being held at the Kuwait Arts Association in Hawally from Aug 2 to 9, 2021 from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The works on display portray various situations and events that took place from the Iraqi invasion till the liberation of Kuwait (between Aug 2, 1990 and Feb 26, 1991).

The scenes include moments before the invasion, the entry of Iraqi troops, bombings of buildings, defending against the invading forces, demonstrations, executions, random arrests, burning of oil

fields, prisoners of war, Bayt Al-Qurain and thanking foreign forces, among others.

Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George attended the opening ceremony and expressed his happiness to witness the wonderful art collection. "This exhibition is held on this important day when this great country was invaded and then liberated. These pictures very clearly express the events that are in people's minds until today. I can feel the emotion of the artists," he told Kuwait Times.

Other senior officials also attended the opening ceremony of the exhibition, including the Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Kamel Al-Abduljaleel, participating artists and other guests.

Sheikh Mubarak
Al-Abdullah attends
graduation ceremony

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah said "we are in an era of civilization and knowledge and there is no place for the ignorant in it." Sheikh Mubarak was speaking during a ceremony to honor general education graduates. He said the difficulties that were imposed by the coronavirus pandemic subjected education administrations to a tough test, where teachers had an appreciable role through their efforts over online education.

The ceremony was held at the arena hall of 360 Mall and included several activities in a first-of-its-kind move to return education to its normal situation. The ceremony included graduates from four secondary schools: Abdullah Al-Jaber, Saleh Al-Shihab, Jassem Al-Kharafi and Essa Al-Hamad. Sheikh Mubarak said despite the difficulties and the isolation the world faced, Kuwait dealt with the pandemic in a distinguished way. Quick decisions taken to prevent the virus from spreading, including



Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah

launching online education, which is something parents were not accustomed to and for which teachers exerted appreciable effort.

"Awareness of Kuwait's people led to the success of the experience and we became happy with the graduation of students. We made this day a symbolic expression of our joy with you and our dear country," Sheikh Mubarak said. "Kuwait deserves more and your parents deserve respect and appreciation for their efforts and sacrifices over 14 years of your study," he added. Graduate Salah Al-Ali expressed pleasure over the ceremony, which was held under difficult and strange circumstances that brought humanity to a halt.

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Afghan army urges civilians to leave city besieged by Taliban

US belatedly hits Biden's COVID vaccination goal

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KIEV: Journalists are seen at the place where Vitaly Shishov (seen inset), the head of the Belarusian House in Ukraine, an NGO, was found hanged in a park yesterday. — AFP

Missing Belarus dissident found hanged

Shishov's body discovered in Kiev park • Police open murder probe

KIEV: A missing Belarusian dissident was yesterday found hanged in a park in Ukraine, with police opening a murder probe and supporters accusing the regime of Alexander Lukashenko of killing the activist who helped his compatriots flee repression. Vitaly Shishov, 26, headed the Belarusian House in Ukraine, a non-governmental organization, and was involved in everything from helping fellow compatriots settle in Ukraine to staging anti-regime protests.

Belarus strongman Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, has been cracking down on any form of dissent since mass protests erupted after last year's elections, deemed unfair by the West. Many Belarusians have fled, often to neighboring Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. "Belarusian citizen Vitaly Shishov, who had gone missing in Kiev yesterday, was today found hanged in one of the Kiev parks, not far from where he lived," the police said in a statement. It said they had opened a murder probe.

Igor Klymenko, head of the national police, told reporters police were pursuing two main leads: Suicide and murder disguised as a suicide. He said the activist had scratches on his nose and

body which were consistent with a fall. An AFP journalist saw several police cars and dozens of police at the scene, some carrying black bags. The activist went jogging in Kiev on Monday morning but did not return and could not be reached on his mobile phone.

The Belarusian House in Ukraine accused the Lukashenko regime of being behind the murder of Shishov. "There is no doubt that this is an operation planned by Chekists to liquidate a Belarusian who presented a true danger to the regime," the NGO said in a statement, referring to security service agents. Shishov moved to pro-Western Ukraine in the autumn of 2020, after joining anti-government protests in Belarus, and helped establish the Belarusian House in Ukraine.

'Deteriorating situation'

The NGO said that it had repeatedly received warnings about possible "provocations, including kidnapping and liquidation" and that Shishov had been followed. Belarusian authorities have used force to put down historic demonstrations against Lukashenko's rule and have been trying to snuff out

remaining dissent, jailing university students and shutting down independent media.

Belarus has a history of political killings and disappearances, and regime critics have claimed that the Belarusian security services run death squads that hunt down and target Lukashenko opponents. The United Nations called on the Ukrainian authorities to conduct a "thorough, impartial and effective investigation". "This adds another level to our concerns and our worries about what is happening in Belarus," UN human rights spokeswoman Marta Hurtado told reporters in Geneva. "The situation is deteriorating clearly".

'Not safe even abroad'

Speaking to reporters after meeting UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in London yesterday, exiled Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya said the activist's death was a "crime" but she wanted to wait for the results of the probe. She also said she understood she "can disappear at any moment". "Even abroad Belarusians cannot be safe as long as there are those who are trying to take revenge on them and

hide the truth by getting rid of the witnesses," Tikhonovskaya said in a statement on messaging app Telegram earlier in the day.

Last week, Lukashenko praised his security services in a speech in which he also slammed rights activists and called Tikhonovskaya a "nasty woman". He claimed the opposition was armed and "was ready to go from words to actions at any moment". The head of the KGB security service, Ivan Tertel, said that Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states had US-backed "centers for information and psychological operations" which they used to "isolate" Minsk.

Shishov's death came as Belarusian athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya said she was forced to withdraw from the Tokyo Olympics and threatened with forced repatriation for criticizing her athletics federation. The sprinter, who was granted a humanitarian visa by Poland on Monday, said she feared being jailed if she returned to her country. Lukashenko sparked international outrage in May by dispatching a fighter jet to intercept a Ryanair plane flying from Greece to Lithuania in order to arrest a dissident onboard. — AFP

Turkish farmers watch animals perish in flames

HISARONU, Turkey: Farmer Mevlut Tarim says the furious fire that burned his cow alive, killed eight people and scorched vast swathes of Turkey was like an explosion. "The fire happened in an instant," the 67-year-old told AFP after managing to pull and push some of his screaming animals through pitch-black smoke and patches of burning turf encircling his farm. He said he, too, was lucky to be alive. "One of my cows died. It burned," he recalled. "I had never seen anything like it. You can't even call it a fire. It was really like a bomb."

Tarim's story is similar to those of other farmers as the deadliest and most destructive fires in generations rage across Turkey's southern coast

for a seventh day. Thousands of farm animals have perished and huge chunks of lush forest coating the rolling hills have turned into skeletal sticks and ash. The anguished farmers have been trying to direct their herds toward the relative safety of the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts.

But guiding the panicked animals is difficult and the winds whipping up the firestorms around them are unpredictable. And the exhausted firefighters dumping seawater on the flames from helicopters and dousing the wreckage with hoses are not always able to arrive in time to help farmers such as Tarim.

'Not running away'

Lemis Sapir is a local insurance agent who felt it was his duty to stay put and help out any way he could. "I didn't feel like running away," the 44-year-old said. "We are going to give all the help we can." Turkish social media have been filled with images of brave locals trying to put the fires out with everything from garden watering



MUGLA, Turkey: A sheep is covered with flames coming from an advancing fire on Monday in the Marmaris district. — AFP

pitchers to tree branches.

Sapir said the burning town of Hisaronu on the Aegean Sea has received reinforcements from other regions. "But because of the height of the mountains, which are steep, and

the very thick forest, the firefighters can't intervene," he said. "The air reinforcements are not strong enough. There are fires in too many places in Turkey at the moment and we can't respond to them all." — AFP

Zionist court delays decision on Sheikh Jarrah evictions

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity's supreme court delayed a decision Monday in the case of Palestinian families facing expulsion by Zionist settlers in annexed east Jerusalem, an issue that exploded into armed conflict in May. Palestinians said they were offered the chance to remain in their properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood as "protected tenants" who would recognize Zionist ownership of the homes and pay a symbolic annual rent, but they refused. "They placed a lot of pressure on us to reach an agreement with the (Zionist) settlers in which we would be renting from the settler organizations," said Muhammad El-Kurd, from one of four Palestinian families at the heart of the case. "Of course this is rejected," he said.

Years-long battle

Monday's hearing was part of a years-long legal battle waged by Jewish Zionist organizations trying

to reclaim property owned by Jews in east Jerusalem prior to the Zionist entity's founding in 1948. Palestinian residents say Jordan granted them homes on the property after they were expelled from towns in what became the Zionist entity. On Monday they argued newly obtained Jordanian documents proved their case.

The four families had initially been ordered evicted, but the order was suspended as they pursued an appeal in the legal system. The agreement proposed Monday would have Palestinian families pay 1,500 shekels (\$465) a year to the settler organization Nahalat Shimon. Lawyer Sami Irshid, representing the Palestinians, rejected the Zionist claims to the property. "We are willing to be listed as protected tenants while retaining our rights," he said in court. "We will request recognition of the property rights the government of Jordan gave us."

Ilan Shemer, representing the Jewish Zionists, said that "this arrangement will be an empty arrangement". Danny Seidemann, an attorney specializing in Jerusalem, told AFP the court delayed a decision in an effort to bridge those positions, with judges asking the Palestinians to present a list of potential protected tenants. Seidemann said an agreement could defer evictions for decades. "It also means evictions at some point would be



JERUSALEM: Palestinian residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood attend a hearing at the Zionist supreme court on the case of Palestinian families facing expulsion by Zionist settlers in annexed east Jerusalem. — AFP

inevitable," he said. The case has become an international cause, with dozens of people demonstrating outside the court on Monday. Clashes in May over possible Sheikh Jarrah evictions spread to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, sparking a Zionist crackdown that escalated into an 11-day war between the Zionist entity and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip. — AFP

Lebanese officials 'criminally negligent' over port blast: HRW

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch yesterday accused Lebanese authorities of criminal negligence for failing to secure a shipment of hazardous chemicals that caused last year's monster port blast, despite repeated warnings. The watchdog recommended an independent UN investigative mission conduct its own inquiry, and advocated for broad international sanctions against top officials. The Aug 4, 2020 explosion of a shipment of ammonium nitrate fertilizer haphazardly stored at the Beirut port for six years killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital, in one of the world's largest non-nuclear blasts.

Victims' families and the broader public widely saw the explosion as the result of incompetence and corruption on the part of the ruling class, but one year on, no official has been brought to justice. A 126-page HRW report, released one day before the first anniversary of the tragedy, identified top officials in the government, customs, the army and security agencies who were aware of the shipment and its dangers but failed to take necessary action.

"Multiple Lebanese authorities were, at a minimum, criminally negligent under Lebanese law in their handling" of the ammonium nitrate shipment, said the report, which draws on interviews and official correspondence, including previously unpublished material. "Evidence strongly suggests that some government officials foresaw the death that the ammonium nitrate's presence in the port could result in and tacitly accepted the risk of the deaths occurring," it said.

The report, entitled "They Killed us from the Inside: An investigation into the August 4 Beirut blast", accused authorities of violating the right to life and said that their actions could amount to "homicide" under domestic law. The rights group recommended sanctions against "officials implicated in ongoing violations of human rights related to the August 4 blast and efforts to undermine accountability". Sanctions, HRW said, would "provide additional leverage to those pressing for accountability through domestic judicial proceedings". — AFP

International

US belatedly hits Biden's COVID vaccination goal

Newest wave of infections pushes hospitalizations to levels seen in last summer

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday hit President Joe Biden's goal of administering at least one dose of a COVID vaccine to 70 percent of adults almost a month late, as the newest wave of infections pushed hospitalizations to levels seen last summer. Biden's administration had initially targeted Independence Day on July 4 to reach the goal and declare victory over the worst of the pandemic.

But falling vaccination rates, particularly in politically conservative regions in the South and Midwest, and among younger people, those with lower income and racial minorities, meant the objective was missed. While 60.6 percent of eligible adults and 49.7 percent of the total population are now fully vaccinated, the United States has fallen behind its northern neighbor Canada, which started its immunization campaign later but has now fully vaccinated 59 percent of its people.

It comes as America was being battered by a new wave driven by the hyper-contagious Delta variant, which has sent national daily cases soaring to beyond 70,000, according to data that excludes unreliable weekend numbers. Across the country, hospitals were seeing on average more than 6,200 daily COVID admissions, while more than 300 people are dying every day.

"These cases are concentrated in communities with lower vaccination rates," Jeff Zients, White House COVID task force coordinator, told reporters. "One in three cases nationwide occurred in Florida

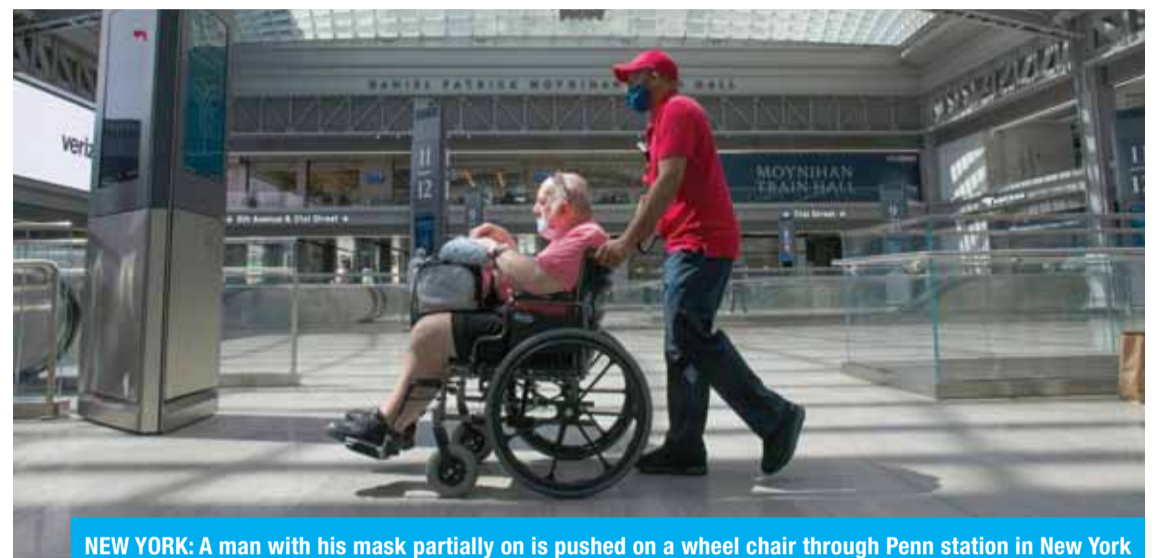
and Texas this past week," he added. In a silver lining, states that lagged behind in their vaccination rates are now beginning to catch up, according to the latest data.

The eight states with the highest current case rates have seen an average increase of 171 percent in their daily vaccination rate compared to three weeks ago, said Zients.

These include Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. Momentum was also picking up for vaccine mandates in the private sector, with Disney and Walmart implementing new requirements and incentives for employees. Last week, Biden's administration announced federal workers would need to either get vaccinated or submit to regular tests, following similar steps by California and New York.

Vaccines holding up

While Delta poses the strongest threat yet to vaccine protection, the current generation of shots were continuing to keep the vast majority of vaccinated people out of hospital and alive. According to cumulative data reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by July 24, vaccination resulted in an eight-fold reduction in disease incidence and 25-fold reduction in hospitalizations and deaths. In the state of Tennessee, over the month of July, 97 percent of all COVID hospitalizations and 98 percent of deaths were among unvaccinated people, data showed.



NEW YORK: A man with his mask partially on is pushed on a wheel chair through Penn station in New York Monday. —AFP

Breakthrough infections, meanwhile, remain uncommon, but when they do happen, preliminary research suggests there is an increased risk of onward transmission of the Delta variant compared to past strains. With this in mind, the CDC last week reinstated guidance for fully vaccinated people to wear masks indoors in areas considered high-risk, which is now 79 percent of all the country's counties.

Meanwhile, President Biden urged the imposition of a new ban on evictions to prevent a wave of homelessness as the more infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus takes hold. But just a day after a nationwide eviction moratorium expired, Biden acknowledged the administration does not have the legal authority to help renters stay in their homes. —AFP

News in brief

16 hostages killed in DR Congo

KOMANDA, DR Congo: At least 16 people were knifed to death weeks after being taken hostage in the Democratic Republic of Congo's east, in bloodletting blamed on armed Islamists, military and local sources said yesterday. According to local civilian sources, the victims, who included two women, had been held by members of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which the US says is linked to the Islamic State group. The hostages were killed along a main highway near Idohu, in the restive Ituri province, according to local official Dieudonne Malangai. Ituri's military governor Johnny Luboya Nkashama speaking in Komanda, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the slaughter, condemned the killings. —AFP

Brazil's Bolsonaro faces probe

BRASILIA: Brazil's Superior Electoral Court announced Monday it will investigate far-right President Jair Bolsonaro for his constant and baseless attacks on the country's electronic voting system. The country's highest electoral body also agreed to ask the Supreme Federal Court to investigate the president for spreading misinformation during a Facebook Live event last Thursday, in which Bolsonaro spoke for more than two hours about his conviction that there had been fraud in the last two presidential elections, saying he should have won in the first round in 2018. —AFP

'Arbitrary' detention of Canadians

OTTAWA: US President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday discussed China's "arbitrary detention" of two Canadian citizens. In a telephone conversation, the two leaders discussed Beijing's two-year detention of former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig and Canadian businessman Michael Spavor, who are both being held on charges of spying. "The Prime Minister and the President discussed China's arbitrary detention of Canadian citizens Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig. The leaders agreed on the need for their immediate release," a press release from Trudeau's office said. —AFP

Colombia warns vaccine refusers

BOGOTA: Authorities in a Colombian town have run out of patience with people refusing coronavirus vaccines, ordering them on Monday to stay at home or face a fine, or even prison. "We have to take a strong stance as leaders... Everyone has to be vaccinated, if not, they cannot circulate in the municipality of Sucre," the town's mayor Elvira Julia Mercado said on Blu Radio. She decreed a stay-at-home order, lasting eight days, for people who have not yet been vaccinated despite the municipality having enough doses to immunize all its 28,000 inhabitants. —AFP

Three dead in Djibouti clashes

DJIBOUTI: At least three people died after a rare outbreak of intercommunal violence in Djibouti during which the police intervened, the public prosecutor said Monday. Fighting broke out on Sunday in several parts of the capital Djibouti, between the ethnic Afar group, which straddles Djibouti's borders with Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Issa, Djibouti's other main ethnic group. "There were several extremely serious criminal acts. Houses were intentionally set on fire," Lamisse Mohamed Said told public television, without giving any possible reason for the violence. —AFP

A year after exile, legal woes haunt Spain's ex-king

MADRID: A year after Spain's former King Juan Carlos went into self-imposed exile in the face of mounting questions over his finances, he remains under a cloud of suspicion that complicates his return home. He announced on August 3, 2020 he was moving abroad to prevent his personal affairs from undermining his son King Felipe VI's reign and sully the monarchy.

But his choice of new home—the United Arab Emirates, where some of his business affairs triggered the scandals that tainted his reputation in the first place—only raised Spaniards' eyebrows further.

Juan Carlos has told his son that he would like to return to Spain "but he won't come back without the approval" of the royal household, said Jose Apezarena, the author of several books on Felipe. And the position of the royals is that "until his legal problems end, he should not return", Apezarena told AFP.

The 83-year-old former king is the target of three

Nicaragua's Ortega to stand for re-election

MANAGUA: Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega is to stand for a fourth consecutive term in November's general election, his Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party said on Monday.

"We have our formula, our candidates were elected unanimously," said Gustavo Porras, an FSLN legislator, during the party congress. Ortega's wife, Vice-President Rosario Murillo, will again be his running mate. The presidential power couple's election ticket was ratified by all 2,932 members present at the FSLN virtual congress just hours before the enrolment deadline for candidates. Former leftist guerrilla Ortega, 75, who is accused by his opponents of authoritarianism, has been in power since 2007. His 70-year-old wife has been his vice-president since the last election in 2017.

"We are here to continue the fight against poverty," said Murillo. The government has been accused of repression after detaining more than 30 opposition figures during the last two months, including seven presidential hopefuls. It left the main opposition alliance submitting a surprise pairing to run for president in November, with former right-wing

E Sudan residents say bodies seen in river in Tigray

JUBA: Residents of an east Sudanese town said Monday they had seen bodies washing up the river on the border with Ethiopia's conflict-hit Tigray region in recent days. The unidentified bodies were floating on the Setil River-known in Ethiopia as the Tekeze, which runs through its northern Tigray region—since Saturday, according to residents from Wad al-Hilou in Sudan's Kassala state.

"The bodies I saw today were wounded and had their hands tied," one witness told AFP by telephone on Monday, declining to be identified. Tefera Tewodoros, an Ethiopian doctor working at Sudan's Hamdayit refugee transit centre on the border, said he saw nine bodies of men and women at the river on Monday alone.

"We also saw 28 bodies on Saturday and Sunday in Wad al-Hilou, mostly of men with gunshot on different parts of their bodies," he said. A fisherman living in the area who requested anonymity said he also

separate investigations over his financial dealings, including those linked to a high-speed rail contract in Saudi Arabia that was awarded to a Spanish consortium. Prosecutors in Spain and Switzerland are looking into suspicions he received kickbacks for facilitating the deal.

The suspicions center on \$100 million (85 million euros) that Saudi Arabia's late King Abdullah allegedly deposited in 2008 into a Swiss bank account to which Juan Carlos had access. The other two investigations concern the alleged existence of a trust fund in Jersey linked to Juan Carlos and the undeclared use of credit cards linked to accounts not registered in his name, a possible money-laundering offence.

'Very bored'

Spanish monarchs have immunity during their reign but Juan Carlos abdicated in 2014 following a series of health problems and embarrassing revelations about his personal life, leaving himself vulnerable to prosecution. While he has not been charged with any crime, the probes have tainted his reputation as a leader of Spain's democratic transition following the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. Outside of the Royal Palace in central Madrid, opinions were divided.

"He is being judged without any evidence, he should be able to come home if that's what he

wants," said Pura Fernandez, 46, a bank worker. But delivery rider Angel Galan, 27, was less sympathetic. "He may have done some great things for Spain but if he committed irregularities I am not sad that he is gone," he said. —AFP



PALMA: Spanish King Felipe VI waits for the arrival of the Spanish prime minister ahead of a meeting at the royal family's summer residence at the Marivent Palace in Palma de Mallorca yesterday. —AFP

guerrilla Oscar Sobalvarro, 68, supported by Berenice Quezada, a 27-year-old ex-beauty queen with no political experience.

The FSLN congress also validated the 92 candidates for the National Assembly and 20 for the Central American Parliament. The closing of inscriptions comes amidst an atmosphere of heightened tensions in Nicaragua as the European Union on Monday slapped new sanctions on Murillo, her son Juan Carlos and six government officials for "serious human rights violations."

Ortega, Murillo and top government officials had already been sanctioned by the United States and Canada over the violent repression of protesters in 2018 that left more than 300 people dead.

Critics of Ortega say the raft of arrests since the beginning of June has been aimed at removing any serious competition from November's election. One of those detained is Cristiana Chamorro, the daughter of former president Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, who defeated Ortega in the 1990 election. Chamorro was the favorite to defeat Ortega this time around.

Aiming to free 'political prisoners'

The detained opposition figures have been accused of "treason" and threatening "sovereignty," under a controversial law initiated by Ortega and approved by parliament in December. They are accused of supporting foreign sanctions and interference but the law has been widely criticized as a means of freezing out challengers and silencing

saw bodies lying on the riverbanks. Images circulated online purporting to show bodies washed up by the river. AFP was unable to immediately verify the authenticity of the images.

Fighting in Tigray broke out in November between Ethiopia's federal forces and the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, said his forces' move into the region was in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps. The conflict has killed thousands and sent tens of thousands fleeing into neighbouring Sudan. Ethiopia's government on Monday said reports of a massacre in the town of Humera, in western Tigray, were "fake", claiming "propagandists" were "using false images and showing graphic images" to spread disinformation. The Tekeze River runs through Humera.

Meanwhile, government security agents in South Sudan on Monday arrested at least two prominent activists who joined a call for a peaceful public uprising to seek political change, one of their colleagues said. A coalition of civil society groups last week issued a declaration saying they have "had enough" after 10 years of independence marked by civil war, escalating insecurity, hunger and political instability. Kuel Aguer Kuel, a former state governor,



MANAGUA: In this file photo taken on November 08, 2006 of then presidential candidate for the Sandinista National Liberation Front Daniel Ortega (top) and his wife Rosario Murillo flashing the V sign in Managua. —AFP

opponents. The potential presidential opponents detained had mostly agreed to present a single opposition candidate to improve their chances of unseating Ortega.

The Citizens Alliance for Liberty (CXL) last week picked Sobalvarro as its candidate. Sobalvarro is a former member of the Contreras, a right-wing guerrilla group that was backed by the United States and fought a three-year armed struggle against the Sandinista government led by Ortega in the 1980s. —AFP

and renowned analyst Augustino Ting Mayai, were arrested in the capital Juba for signing the declaration, said Rajab Mohandis, another of the signatories. The arrests came on the same day that hundreds of lawmakers were sworn in to a newly created national parliament, a key condition of a peace deal that ended South Sudan's brutal civil war. The Sudd Institute, an independent think tank involved in the coalition, has also been shut down and its executive director Abraham Awolich is among other activists also being sought by the authorities, Mohandis told AFP.

Awolich said in a separate statement on Twitter that he was on the run after the Sudd Institute was stormed and its staff arrested over Friday's declaration by the People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA). But he said he would not be bowed. "Our people are rising up to fire the dictators and murderers and I am proud to stand with them. The time has come to bring down the failed yet dangerous regime."

The PCCA also remained defiant on Monday, saying in a statement it was intent on leading a non-violent "revolution" in the world's newest country and to seek "regime change". It called for the resignation of both President Salva Kiir and his archfoe turned deputy Riek Machar, who remain uneasy bedfellows in the coalition government. —AFP

International

Afghan army urges civilians to leave city besieged by Taleban

40 civilians killed in last 24 hours as fighting rages in Lashkar Gah

KANDAHAR: Residents were urged yesterday to evacuate a besieged Afghan city as the army prepared a major offensive against Taleban insurgents after three days of heavy fighting. The Taleban have seized control of much of rural Afghanistan since foreign forces began the last stage of their withdrawal in May, but are now focused on capturing provincial capitals, where they are meeting stiffer resistance.

Fighting is raging for Lashkar Gah, the capital of southern Helmand province, with the United Nations saying at least 40 civilians were killed in the last 24 hours. General Sami Sadat, commander of the 215 Maiwand Afghan Army Corps, told residents to get out as soon as they could.

"Please leave as soon as possible so that we can start our operation," he said in a message to the city of 200,000 delivered via the media. "I know it is very difficult for you to leave your houses — it is hard for us too — but if you are displaced for a few days, please forgive us.

We are fighting the Taleban wherever they are. We will fight them... we will not leave a single Taleban alive," he said. Officials said earlier that insurgents had seized more than a dozen local radio and TV stations in Lashkar Gah, leaving only one pro-Taleban channel broadcasting Islamic programming.

"Deepening concern for Afghan civilians... as fighting worsens," the UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) tweeted. "UN urges immediate end to fighting in urban areas."

'Taleban are everywhere'

"Fighting was intense this morning," said Sefatullah, director of Sukon radio in the city. He said US and Afghan air force planes had pounded

Taleban positions, and that fighting was ongoing near the city's prison and a building housing the headquarters of police and intelligence agencies. In recent days, the US military has intensified air strikes across the country in a bid to stem Taleban advances.

"The Taleban are everywhere in the city, you can see them on motorcycles in the streets. They are arresting or shooting people who have smartphones," a resident of Lashkar Gah told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The Taleban are in the people's houses and the government is bombing them. About 20 houses in my neighborhood have been bombed, they are fighting street-to-street battles," he said. The loss of Lashkar Gah would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government, which has pledged to defend cities at all costs after losing much of the rural countryside to the Taleban over the summer.

In the western city of Herat, also under siege, hundreds of residents chanted "Allah-u Akbar" (God is greatest) from their rooftops Monday night after government forces countered the latest Taleban assault. Officials said government forces had managed to push back the insurgents from several parts of Herat — including near the airport, which is vital for resupplies.

'War crimes'

Washington and London meanwhile accused the Taleban of committing atrocities that may amount to "war crimes" in the town of Spin Boldak, which the insurgents captured last month along the border with Pakistan. Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission earlier said the insurgents had indulged in revenge killings there of at least 40

people. "The Taleban chased and identified past and present government officials and killed these people who had no combat role in the conflict," the group said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the international recognition the Taleban want will not be possible if they seek "to take the country by

force and commits the kind of atrocities that have been reported".

Fighting across the country has displaced around 80,000 children from the start of June, humanitarian organization Save the Children said yesterday, adding that many schools and health facilities had also been damaged. —AFP



KANDAHAR: In this file photo Afghan internally displaced families are pictured upon their arrival from the outskirts Kandahar, who fled due to the ongoing battle between Taleban fighters and Afghan security forces, at a refugee camp in Kandahar. —AFP

US spurns Myanmar election plan, urges ASEAN pressure

WASHINGTON: The United States said Monday that Myanmar's junta was playing for time with a two-year election timeframe as Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepared to encourage ASEAN to appoint an envoy. Blinken is participating virtually in a week of talks involving foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the latest bid by President Joe Biden's administration to engage a region at the frontlines of US competition with China.

Ahead of the ASEAN talks, Myanmar's junta chief promised to hold elections and lift a state of emergency by August 2023, extending an initial timeline given when the military deposed elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

The announcement is "a call for ASEAN to have to step up its effort because it's clear that the Burmese junta is just stalling for time and wants to keep prolonging the calendar to its own advan-

tage," said a senior US official, using Myanmar's former name of Burma. "All the more reason why ASEAN has to engage on this and live up and uphold the terms of the five-point consensus that Myanmar also signed up to."

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing attended a meeting with ASEAN members on the crisis in April that led to the so-called consensus statement that called for an immediate end to violence and a regional special envoy. But the junta leader later distanced himself from the statement, no envoy has been appointed and more than 900 people have been reported killed in the six-month crackdown on dissent.

ASEAN is not known for its collective diplomatic clout and its meetings have frequently pitted the United States and China against each other as they seek influence. The US official said Blinken would address Beijing's "coercion" against ASEAN nations in the dispute-rife South China Sea and also highlight human rights concerns within China.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Southeast Asia last week, where he hammered in on the South China Sea, saying Beijing's claims had no basis in international law. Vice President Kamala Harris plans this month to visit historic US partner Singapore as well as Vietnam, which has

media outlets have about their future in Hong Kong, a city which was once a bastion of free speech in China. "We believe no matter where we are, as long as the freedom in our hearts is connected, we can create larger space for freedom," Wu wrote.

China is currently remoulding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image after huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago. A sweeping national security law imposed last year has criminalized much dissent and authorities have embarked on a campaign to root out those deemed unpatriotic.

Many of the city's most prominent pro-democracy activists have been arrested or jailed. Others have fled overseas. Yesterday, public broadcaster RTHK confirmed veteran host Vines had left for the UK, blaming what he said was "white terror sweeping through Hong Kong".

"The institutions that ensure the liberty of Hongkongers are being dismantled by people who care so little that they don't even flinch when it becomes abundantly clear that the very essence of the place is being destroyed," Vines wrote in an email to colleagues, RTHK reported.

In a separate interview with Hong Kong Free Press, political artist Wong said he had moved to Taiwan in search of "100 percent freedom" because of diminishing freedom in his home city.

killed were swept away in the flood and the rest died when their mud houses collapsed, officials said.

Dozens of people were plucked from the rooftop of a submerged building with military helicopters, including a 100-year-old woman and a nine-month-old baby, Khan added. Panicked residents had to flee for higher ground after water from a nearby dam was released, causing sudden flooding. "We fear scores of people are still marooned. Indian Air Force helicopters and disaster management personnel are struggling to rescue them," he added.

Villager Samir Nandi, 65, said he had "never witnessed such a flood". "Many people in (my) village took refuge on the roof of the buildings and they are waiting to be rescued." Authorities have set up more than 40 relief centers for the displaced in the flood-affected districts, senior state official Harekrishna Dribedi, said. This year's monsoon, which had earlier inundated the western coast, has claimed the lives of at least 250 people so far. Last month, at least 200 people died in the western state of Maharashtra after landslides sent torrents of mud onto villages. The northern Himalayan states, including Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, have also reported several deaths. —AFP

HK media outlet, broadcaster and artist all quit city

HONG KONG: Hong Kong online news outlet Inition announced it was relocating to Singapore yesterday citing fading press freedoms, the first local media to quit the financial hub as authorities crack down on dissent. The announcement came the same day that veteran broadcaster Steve Vines and Kacey Wong, one of the city's best known political artists, also separately confirmed they had left Hong Kong because of declining freedoms.

"Over the past six years, the road to freedom has become tougher and more dangerous, the world is increasingly polarized and antagonistic," Inition's chief editor Susie Wu wrote in an article commemorating the outlet's sixth year anniversary. She cited Hong Kong's steady slide down annual press freedom ranking lists and the rise of "little pinks"—staunch nationalists—in mainland China.

Inition is a comparatively small Chinese-language outlet with some 60,000 paying subscribers. But its departure illustrates the concerns many

16 more killed, dozens rescued in India's monsoon deluge

KOLKATA: At least 16 people have been killed and a quarter of a million people displaced from their homes after heavy monsoon rains lashed eastern India, officials said yesterday, as the air force joined rescue efforts. The latest deaths in West Bengal came a few days after 11 people were also killed in the state as the torrent of water swept away homes and triggered landslides.

Flooding and landslides are common during India's treacherous monsoon season from June to September and causes widespread devastation. The annual downpours have been worsened by climate change, experts say. Two river banks were breached and flooding affected at least half a million people in six districts in West Bengal over the past two days, the state's disaster management minister Javed Ahmed Khan told AFP. Five of the 16 people



YANGON: A protestor jumps over a makeshift barricade during a crackdown by security forces on a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon's Thaketa township. —AFP

moved increasingly close to Washington despite war memories.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi is expected to meet Blinken in person in Washington this week, while Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman earlier visited Indonesia and Thailand as well as Cambodia—often seen as the most pro-Beijing ASEAN nation. —AFP



HONG KONG: This file photo shows local artist Kacey Wong sitting in his sculpture 'Asteroids & Comets' at the Harbor Arts Sculpture Park in Hong Kong. —AFP

Multiple international media companies, including AFP, have their regional headquarters in Hong Kong, attracted to the business-friendly regulations and free speech provisions written into the city's mini-constitution.

But many media outlets are questioning whether they have a future there. The New York Times moved its Asia hub to South Korea after the law was enacted last year, and others have drawn up contingency plans. —AFP

China to release updated climate plans 'in near future'

HONG KONG: China's climate envoy yesterday said the world's most populous nation would release its updated plans to reduce carbon emissions "in the near future" as nations prepare to meet later this year for a pivotal global conference. Climate negotiators from 196 countries and the European Union as well as businesses, experts and world leaders will gather in Glasgow in November for the COP26 summit.

The meeting is the crucial next step in getting the world's nations to agree to the kind of reduction in carbon emissions needed to stave off catastrophic climate change. Under the Paris Agreement, countries are meant to have submitted updated 2030 climate targets ahead of COP26. But nearly half have yet to do so, including key global emitters like China and India. Yesterday, China's top climate negotiator said Beijing's updated plans would soon be released, potentially before the Glasgow meet. "In the near future relevant policy papers will be out there, there will be detailed implementation plans," Xie Zhenhua told an online webinar organized by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

"Then we're going to talk about that support to the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow," he added, according to a simultaneous English translation of his speech. The United Nations is pushing for a global coalition committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 which will cover all countries. China has said it will aim for carbon neutrality by 2060.

The 2015 Paris Agreement adopted a collective promise to cap the planet's rising surface temperature at "well below" two degrees Celsius and an aspirational limit on 1.5 degrees.

Many scientists now say 1.5 degrees must be reached to effectively tackle climate change and say huge emitters like China will be crucial in making that a reality. Record-smashing heatwaves, floods and drought across three continents in recent weeks—all amplified by global warming—have added pressure for decisive action in Glasgow. China is reluctant to commit to 1.5 degrees. "Some countries are pushing to rewrite the Paris Agreement," Xie said. "That is, they want to strive to change the target of control for the rise of temperature from two degrees Celsius to 1.5 degrees Celsius." —AFP



KOLKATA: A resident (right) sitting on a boat helps a man (center) walking through a road submerged by floodwaters following heavy monsoon rains in Ghatal, Paschim Medinipur district, about 100 km from Kolkata Monday. —AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2021

Boursa Kuwait net profits surge by 39% for the first half of 2021

Shareholder equity attributable to parent company increases 61% • Total operating revenue sees an increase of 120%

KUWAIT: In a meeting of its board members yesterday, Boursa Kuwait announced net profits attributable to equity holders of the parent company of KD 7.8 million for the six month period ended 30 June 2021, a notable increase of 39 percent compared to the same period in 2020, when the company recorded net profits of around KD 5.6 million.

The company generated 39.03 fils earnings per share, an increase of 39 percent compared to its total of 28.05 fils over the same period in 2020, while the Group's total assets came in at approximately KD 106.5 million, which is a 155 percent increase versus its 2020 total for the same period of KD 41.7 million. Shareholder equity attributable to equity holders of the parent company increased from KD 32.7 million at 30 June 2020 to KD 52.6 million at 30 June 2021, an increase of 61 percent, while total operating revenue came in at KD 14.9 million, an increase of 120 percent over the same period in 2020 which stood at approximately KD 6.8 million.

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi commented: "We are pleased to have recorded net profits of around KD 7.8 million for the first half of 2021, which is an almost 39 percent increase over its 2020 total over the same period. The results we see today mirror the strength of the operational model and the solid strategy in place, as well as the company's underlying strong financial health, which have allowed us to deliver an exceptional performance."

He continued: "As the world continues to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are hopeful that the results made in the first six months are an indication of things to come for Boursa Kuwait, the Kuwaiti capital market and the national economy. In closing, I would like to thank my fellow board members, the executive team and the esteemed Boursa Kuwait employees for their monumental efforts during the year."

The increase in net profits is partly due to the consolidation of the Kuwait Clearing Company since the third quarter of 2020, which also recorded improvements to its



Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi



Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi

bottom line. Other factors contributing to the increase include a rise in the total traded value by 53.41 percent, including a 295 percent increase in Main Market traded value, and a rise in trading volume by 100.31 percent compared to the first half of 2020. The recorded traded value for the first half of 2021 came in at approximately KD 6.5 billion, while the traded shares during that period were approximately 41.7 billion. Active accounts also increased by 38.94 percent, further contributing to Boursa Kuwait's bottom line.

Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer commented on the company's financials for the first half of 2021, saying: "Boursa Kuwait saw a 120 percent increase in total operating revenue in the first six months of 2021, and the Group's assets saw a 155 percent increase to about KD 106.5 million. These results indicate that the company enjoys a great deal of investor confidence as well as demonstrating the ongoing value and efficiency of the company."

Boursa Kuwait's security, which has been traded since



September 2020 on the "Premier Market" increased by 15.45 percent in the first half of 2021, demonstrating the company's potential for growth and expansion, a testament to the unwavering confidence it enjoys from investors.

Al-Osaimi added: "As we continue making improvements to our suite of products and services, and entice more companies to list, we remain steadfast in enhancing the Kuwaiti capital market and making it more attractive to investors. The capital market apparatus launched margin trading, netting and Tradable Rights Issue as part of its ongoing commitment to improving market efficiency and facilitating access to it, as well as enhancing transparency and governance, increasing liquidity and instilling investor

confidence as part of our overarching efforts to raise our market's profile locally, regionally and around the world."

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait, a self-listed company and one of the government entities to successfully undergo privatization, has implemented many steps in accordance with international practices and standards enhance the position of the exchange regionally and globally, as well as transform Kuwait into a regional and global investment destination, by focusing on creating an attractive issuer base and broadening its investor base, increasing the depth and breadth of its products, as well as upgrading its infrastructure and business environment to international standards.



A staff member of Al-Safat Investment Co receives vaccination.



Staff of the Al-Safat Investment Company are waiting to be immunized at the vaccination center at Al-Safat Tower, Hawally.

Al-Safat Investment vaccinates its staff in cooperation with MoH

KUWAIT: Al-Safat Investment Group has organized, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, a vaccination campaign for the staff of the Group and its subsidiaries, as well as those of the leasing companies and institutions in Al-Safat Tower in Hawally. The anti-COVID vaccination campaign won the praise of all employees and workers in Al-Safat Tower. Al-Safat Investment Co was keen on following all the procedures and precautions of the Ministry of Health.

Sahab Khajah, Manager of Supporting Services Department at Al-Safat Investment said that the operation progressed smoothly with the

cooperation between the work team and the Health Ministry. Khajah praised the role of the Health Ministry team in applying the standards that ensure maximum success of the campaign and interacting with the initiative of Al-Safat and several other companies. He pointed out that the campaign involved a high degree of organization, supervision and follow-up by a specialized team observing all the required criteria and rules.

He added that Al-Safat Investment Co is always keen on implementing precautionary measures against the virus. It was keen on providing this service to the employees of company and company's subsidiaries providing them with immunity and contributing to reaching full societal immunity in the days to come.

He asserted that Al-Safat Co initiative adds to the government efforts to return to normalcy, pointing out that a good indicator of this is the high rate of vaccinations which helps immunize all segments of Kuwaiti society.

Alibaba revenue, the vast majority of which comes from its core e-commerce platforms, increased 34 percent on-year to \$31.9 billion, according to the company. Still, that fell short of a Bloomberg poll of analysts who had forecast 49 percent growth.

Alibaba blamed the lower net income on strategic investments. A statement accompanying the earnings announcement made no mention of the tech clampdown. "We believe in the growth of the Chinese economy and long-term value creation of Alibaba," Chairman and CEO Daniel Zhang said.

Huge fines

After years of giving them relatively free rein to help digitize the Chinese economy, regulators are now seeking to hobble dominant digital platforms. The moves echo a global pushback against the increasing clout of Big Tech that has Facebook, Google and others also facing scrutiny at home and abroad.

Alibaba has received particular attention after billionaire co-founder Jack Ma publicly criticized Chinese regulators in October for reining in a push into online lending, wealth management and insurance products by Alibaba's online payments arm Ant Group. The government said it imposed the \$2.78 billion fine on Alibaba for its practice of forbidding merchants who wish to sell their wares on its popular online marketplaces from simultaneously offering

Societal responsibility

Sarah Al-Mukaimi, Marketing and Public Relations Manager at Al-Safat Group, said that such initiatives are in line with the Group's societal responsibility towards its employees and those of the companies and the entities it deals with. She revealed that about 500 workers in Al-Safat Tower were vaccinated in the space of four hours and pointed out that the company was from the very beginning keen on communicating with the Health Ministry to ensure the company's adherence to the required procedures. She added that Al-Safat Investment Co was in the forefront of implementing the highest degree of precaution in accordance with local and international health standards.

Al-Mukaimi went on to say that "Al-Safat Investment is committed to the interests of the environment, Kuwaiti society and main stakeholders. It also endeavors, through these initiatives, to register many achievements at the level of sustainable development of society and employees."



them on rival e-commerce sites, saying the company had "abused its dominant position in the market".

The Alibaba fine was a record and nearly three times the almost \$1 billion levied by China against Qualcomm in 2015, Bloomberg reported earlier.

Even before the fine, the regulatory crackdown had cost Ma and Ant Group dearly. A planned record-shattering \$35 billion Hong Kong-Shanghai IPO by Ant Group, which would have added to Ma's already massive wealth, was abruptly shelved. Ma subsequently disappeared from public view for weeks, and Ant Group was ordered by regulators to return to its roots as an online payment services provider.

PepsiCo to sell Tropicana, Naked stake to PAI Partners

PARIS: US drinks giant PepsiCo said yesterday that it will sell a majority share in its drink brands Tropicana and Naked to French investment fund PAI Partners for \$3.3 billion. PepsiCo planned to retain a stake of 39 percent in the joint venture and invest some of the proceeds in "healthier snacks, zero-calorie beverages, and products like SodaStream which are focused on being better for people and the planet," a statement said. Terms of the deal included "an irrevocable option to sell certain (other) juice businesses in Europe" by early 2022, pending regulatory approval, it added.

PepsiCo purchased SodaStream in 2018 for \$3.2 billion and sees a bright future for the healthy food and drink market. It acquired the Tropicana line of fruit juices in 1998 and Naked, which makes smoothies, in 2007. Juice sales amounted to around \$3 billion in 2020 for Pepsi, but the profit margin was not as strong as for other products.

In July, the US group raised its 2021 forecasts and now expects core sales to expand by six percent.

Meanwhile, "this joint venture with PAI enables us to realize significant upfront value, whilst providing the focus and resources necessary to drive additional long-term growth for these beloved brands," PepsiCo chairman and chief executive Ramon Laguarta said in the statement. PAI managing partner Frederic Stevenin added: "We believe there is great growth potential to be realized through investments in product innovation, expansion into adjacent categories, and enhanced scale in branded juice drinks and other chilled categories."

"We are also thrilled that PepsiCo will remain involved as our partner in the joint venture." Since the early 2000s, PAI has also built up a 50-percent stake in the yoghurt brand Yoplait. —AFP



Alibaba earnings fall as China tech giants face turmoil

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce leader Alibaba Group said yesterday that it posted lower profit but maintained steady revenue growth, indicating that a government crackdown on the country's tech giants was having little impact on its core business. Alibaba said its net income in the April-June quarter came in at \$4.1 billion yuan (\$7 billion), down five percent on-year.

The Hangzhou-based company was the first of China's tech champions to feel the wrath of a government that has become concerned over their rapid growth and data security. In April, regulators fined Alibaba a record \$2.78 billion for anti-competitive practices, dragging the company to a rare operating loss in the January-March quarter. Since then, the government has taken a number of other measures against major Chinese digital players, sending their share prices tumbling. But through it all, Alibaba's revenues remained solid as China's economy has weathered the global pandemic well, with company executives saying it had even helped fuel online shopping.

KFH reports KD 102.2 million net profit for first half of 2021

An increase of 79.5% compared to the same period last year

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq said that KFH has, by the grace of Allah, reported net profit of KD 102.2 million for the first half of 2021 for KFH shareholders; an increase of 79.5 percent compared to the same period last year. Earnings per share for the first half of 2021 reached 12.21 fils; an increase of 79.3 percent compared to the same period last year.

Net financing income for the first half of the year reached KD 291.8 million; a decrease of 1.3 percent compared to the same period last year. Total operating expenses for the first half of the year stabilized to reach 152.1 million at the same level for the comparative period.

Net operating income reached KD 248.0 million; a decrease of 7.3 percent compared to the same period last year, affected by the decrease in investment income compared to the same period last year. Financing receivables as of the end of the first half of 2021 reached KD 11.1 billion, ie an increase of KD 338.8 million or 3.2 percent compared to end of year 2020. Investment in Sukuk as of the end of the first half of 2021 reached KD 2.7 billion; an increase of 0.2 percent compared to end of year 2020.

Total assets as of the end of the first half of 2021 reached KD 21.5 billion ie an increase of KD 44.5 million or 0.2 percent compared to end of year 2020. Depositors' accounts reached KD 15.8 billion ie an increase of KD 459 million or 3.0 percent compared to end of year 2020.

Shareholders' equity as of the end of the first half of 2021 reached KD 1.9 billion ie decrease of KD 65 million or 3.3 percent compared to end of year 2020. In addition, the capital adequacy ratio reached 18.58 percent which is above the minimum limit required by regulators. This ratio confirms the solid financial position of KFH.

Positive financial indicators

Al-Marzouq explained that the H1 positive results, including the growth of profitability and financing receivables reflect the financial strength and creditworthiness of KFH. The figures also confirm the efficiency of KFH's operational performance and its business model as well as the tangible improvements achieved by the bank in digital transformation and various strategic initiatives.

He said that KFH's liquidity ratios remained higher than the regulatory requirements, whilst non-performing financings (NPFs) decreased with higher coverage ratios, adding that the asset quality and capital efficiency improved. These improvements confirm the strength of KFH's capital base, its great experience in risk management and its high ability to deal with exceptional circumstances and market fluctuations.

Historical issuance

Al-Marzouq noted the successful issuance of \$ 750 million AT1 Mudaraba Sukuk by KFH, saying that the historic Sukuk- the largest issuance in Kuwait in terms of size- received subscription orders exceeding \$2 billion, close to three times the targeted issue size.

He explained that Mudaraba Sukuk aims to support KFH's Tier 1 capital, diversify its financing resources, increase its financial and investment capabilities, support the infrastructure projects and the local productive economic sectors as well as help customers with their expansion plans regionally and globally.

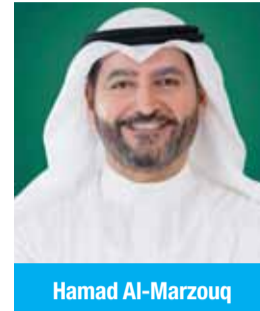
Sustainable development

Al-Marzouq said that as part of its sustainable development strategy, KFH has successfully contributing to different strategic societal initiatives which reflected positively on society and the national economy, such as the KD 20 million initiative to pay the debts of defaulting debtors, in addition to its excellence in various aspects of social responsibility. He added that KFH has launched a project to develop the sustainability strategy to integrate with business strategy of KFH, paying attention to the efficiency of risk management, developing human resources, enhancing the transparency and credit rating through the 7th sustainability report according to the latest global principles and criteria.

Al-Marzouq stressed the role of KFH in sustainability through "Green Sukuk" that aims to raise funding for different sustainability projects.

Development plans

Al-Marzouq said that KFH plays its role as a main pillar in supporting the national economy and the development plans in Kuwait and the region by



Hamad Al-Marzouq



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood

participating in project financing and providing a wide range of banking and financing solutions, including trade finance, contracts, SMEs, and business banking, in addition to large companies and development projects. He noted the coordination and harmony in the performance of the Group's subsidiaries in Turkey, Bahrain, Germany, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Al-Marzouq said that KFH has a diversified financing portfolio that covers various vital sectors, including energy, water, electricity, infrastructure and construction. He stressed KFH's capability to continue financing government development projects as part of Kuwait Vision 2035.

Excellence and leadership

Meanwhile, Acting Group CEO at (KFH), Abdulwahab Essa Al-Roshood said that H1 financial results were positive and in line with the set plans and the bank's strategy, indicating the growth in profits is attributed to the decline in the level of provisions as a result of the decrease in the cost of risks and non-performing financings (NPFs), in addition to the improvement of the operating environment as a whole. Al-Roshood added that KFH's achievements have been recognized worldwide with KFH ranking first locally in the S&P list of top 20 MEA banks, and in the "MEED" list of the 100 largest listed companies in the Middle East and Africa in terms of market value.

He pointed out that KFH won prestigious awards from international magazines and institutions such as the "World's Best Islamic Bank 2021" Award and "Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank in Kuwait" Award 2021 from Global Finance Magazine. Along with other illustrious awards won by KFH based on specific professional standards,

the bank won "Best Islamic Bank in Middle East" and "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" 2021 Awards from the prestigious "The Banker Magazine", and "Best Islamic Bank in the Middle East" Award and "Best Bank in Kuwait" Awards from EMEA Finance Magazine.

Digitization and innovation

Al-Roshood explained that KFH achieved qualitative leaps in innovation and digital transformation strategy which met customer's aspirations and provided added value to their experience and industry. He noted that the digitization of banking operations contributes to raising the efficiency of performance, enhancing financial inclusion, increasing productivity and reducing costs, and thus enhancing profitability. Al-Marzouq highlighted the move forward in investing in emerging technologies and FinTech companies, to maintain the lead on competitors and achieve customer's aspirations, especially the youth, in such a rapidly changing and evolving environment.

Youth support and strategic initiatives

Al-Roshood stressed the role of KFH in supporting Kuwaiti youth as they are a driving force for the local economy and a main pillar for moving ahead in the development journey by relying on highly qualified creative youth. He pointed out KFH's support of various initiatives that serve society, including the "Kafa'a" initiative to develop specialized national capabilities in banking and financial sector, as well as the banking awareness "Diraya" initiative. These two initiatives were launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) and Institute of Banking Studies (IBS). Al-Roshood concluded: "As we affirm the continuation of the ideal approach to the bank's vision and strategy in promoting digital innovation in distinguished products, services and campaigns, and leading the global development of the Islamic finance industry, we cherish the trust and support of the Board of Directors, shareholders and customers, and we value the role of the regulatory authorities. Whilst commending the efforts of the employees and all partners and stakeholders, we affirm our endeavor to continue enhancing customer experience and maintaining leadership in the Islamic financial services industry."

Praise be to Allah

بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House



Financial Results for the First Half of 2021

		30/06/2021	30/06/2020	%
Net Profit for Shareholders	"KD Million"	102.2	56.9	79.5
Earnings per Share	"Fils"	12.21	6.81	79.3
Net Financing Income	"KD Million"	291.8	295.7	(1.3)
Net Operating Income	"KD Million"	248.0	267.6	(7.3)
		30/06/2021	31/12/2020	%
Financing Receivables	"KD Million"	11,086	10,748	3.2
Total Assets	"KD Million"	21,547	21,502	0.2
Depositors' Accounts	"KD Million"	15,776	15,317	3.0
Total Shareholders' Equity	"KD Million"	1,871	1,936	(3.3)

Business

NBK named best bank in 'Innovation in Digital Banking' in the Middle East

Bank wins The Banker international magazine's award in its annual survey

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) maintains a leading position and obvious superiority as a provider of the most advanced digital services in the region. In this context, the bank has won the "Innovation in Digital Banking" Award in the Middle East in The Banker international magazine's annual survey.

The "Innovation in Digital Banking" Award recognizes the outstanding efforts made by institutions in the area of innovation and digital technology, with a focus on digital initiatives demonstrating banks' progress achieved in innovation and digital transformation. The initiatives and efforts of all participating institutions are evaluated in seven categories: innovative mobile banking, advanced digital payment solutions, data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, cybersecurity, financial inclusion initiatives, and open banking.

NBK outperformed its peers in four categories namely mobile banking, data analytics, AI and robotics, and digital payment solutions. The initiatives of the participating banks are evaluated by an independ-



Mohamed Al-Othman

ent panel of judges comprising a group of experts and specialists in banking and technology ranging from analysts, executives and academics.

On this occasion, Mohamed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "The current crisis has brought about radical changes in the banking industry. At NBK, we were fully prepared for these transformations, thanks to our digital transformation strategy, which contributed to strengthen our leadership and excellence as a provider of advanced digital services and payment solutions."

"Our digital channels are seeing a massive demand from our customers, who have become highly

dependent on them for their transactions, in view of the services we provide and continuous enhancements made to meet their needs, as well as our keenness to communicate with them to identify these needs using the latest data analytics methods." Al-Othman indicated that NBK was proactive and ahead of peers in providing cutting-edge payment solutions in the market, mentioning: "A few weeks before the crisis, we had successfully launched Garmin Pay and Fitbit Pay early last year, and before the end of the year, we launched Samsung Pay, all first introduced in Kuwait by NBK," he said.

On the excellence in mobile banking, Al-Othman said: "We regard NBK Mobile Banking App as our largest branch, and we are investing heavily in making continuous enhancements to it." Al-Othman accentuated that NBK succeeded in intensive robotic automation of its operations over the past period, thus boosting its capabilities and huge technological infrastructure, which is the key pillar for its digital banking excellence.

NBK Mobile Banking App provides a secure platform to manage money easily, at any time, allowing customers to make various banking transactions, pay for their purchases, view offers and discounts while shopping, in addition to other enhancements and new services that are regularly introduced in the app. The Banker is a UK-based Financial Times publication founded in 1926. It is one of the most reputable financial intelligence magazines that conducts surveys to select and recognize top performing and leading banks and financial institutions in 120 countries around the world.

Key indicators of NBK digital channels

- MOB Transaction Growth - YoY - 57% (YTD June '21)
- Quick pay Transaction growth - 90% (SPLY Jun '21)
- MOB active user Growth - 27% (SPLY Jun '21)
- Penetration of mobile in overall Transactions - 41% (June '21)
- Penetration of self service channels - 97% (June '21)

Markaz: Kuwait equity market continues to rally

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" recently released its Monthly Market Review report for the month of July 2021. Markaz report noted that Kuwait equity market had another month of gains. Kuwait All Share index extended its good run and rose 3.0 percent for the month and 18.7 percent for the year. Market liquidity in July, as indicated by the average daily traded value, stood at \$139 million, a decrease of 35 percent compared to the earlier month.

Among Kuwait sectors, Consumer Goods was the top gainer, rising 6.2 percent followed by Financial Services at 5.2 percent, while Technology and Basic Materials declined by 8 percent and 1.7 percent respectively for the month. Among blue chips, Boubyan Bank was the top gainer, rising by 9.3 percent. The stock has gained 48 percent for the year after another strong financial performance in the second quarter in which net profits rose 20 percent Year-on-Year. Agility Public Warehousing rose 7.4 percent in July, continuing its stellar performance from previous months. The stock has 60 percent gains for the year.

Regionally, S&P GCC composite index gained 1.2 percent for the month. Most of the GCC markets with the exception of Abu Dhabi made small gains during the month. KSA, Qatar, and Bahrain increased 0.3 percent, 0.2

percent and 0.6 percent respectively while Dubai and Oman lost 1.6 percent and 0.8 percent respectively. Abu Dhabi was the largest gainer rising 7.1 percent during the month led by a rally in blue-chip firms.

Among the GCC blue chip companies, the best performer was UAE's International Holdings Company which gained 11.5 percent during the month and 215 percent for the year. The Company has benefited from many of its subsidiaries being listed on the Abu Dhabi Stock exchange in the last 2 years and which have subsequently made good gains post listing. Saudi Blue Chips like Al-Rajhi Bank and Saudi National Bank which made great returns in the first 6 months of 2021 were down in July as some investors booked profits due to high valuations.

The performance of global equity markets was flat, with the MSCI World Index closing 1.7 percent higher in July, US market (S&P 500) with a gain of 2.3 percent and MSCI Emerging Index losing 7 percent due to a fall in Chinese tech stocks as the Chinese Government took action against monopolies like Tencent, Didi etc. UK's FTSE 100 fell 0.1 percent for the month after consumer spending rose slower than expected due to increase in COVID-19 cases.

Oil prices closed at \$76.3 per barrel at the end of July as oil markets consolidated after several consecutive months of gains. OPEC+ in its latest meeting held on July 18, decided to increase production by 400,000 barrels a day, beginning from August. This will add about 2 percent to the world's supply by the end of the year. The decision was taken on account of rising global oil demand as the economic recovery continues in most parts of the world and to end the disagreement between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on how fast to increase supply.

ABK-Egypt reports solid profit of EGP 580 million in first half 2021

CAIRO: Al-Ahli bank of Kuwait - Egypt (ABK-Egypt), one of Egypt's fastest growing banks, yesterday reported strong results for the six-month period ended 30th June 2021. Net operating profit stood at EGP 756 million, a 20 percent increase compared to the first half of 2020. Net interest income grew by 13 percent to reach EGP 1 billion. Total assets grew by 19 percent to reach EGP 49 billion. The bank's total customer deposits saw a sharp increase of 27 percent standing at EGP 42.6 billion compared to EGP 33.6 billion for the period ended 31 December 2020. Total loans portfolio grew by five percent for the six-month period compared with last year to reach EGP 22.90 billion.

The bank's profit before tax stood at EGP 580 million and net profit at the end of the first half of 2021 increased by 12 percent over the corresponding half in 2020 to reach EGP 396 million. The increase in net profit is a testament to the success of prudent management decisions in mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic.

Ali Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt said: "The positive financial results achieved by the bank in the first half of this year, despite the economic and health challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, reflect the bank's ability to respond with agility and positivity in all circumstances to achieve sustainable profits. As one of the leading financial institutions in Egypt, we will continue our commitment to support retail and corporate customers, providing them with high-quality banking solutions while ensuring we continue to enhance and strengthen the social fabric through the social responsibility initiatives launched by the bank. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the executive management team and all employees for their dedication throughout this period."

Khaled El Salawy, CEO & Managing Director of ABK-Egypt expressed his pride at the positive results achieved by the bank during the first half of the year and voiced his gratitude to the teams for their dedication in ensuring the protection of customer and shareholder interests during this challenging period. He also stressed that the bank's priorities since the beginning of the pandemic have been to take quick measures to maintain the quality of the credit facilities portfolio, provide high liquidity ratios and invest in digital banking solutions and electronic banking services provided to retail and corporate customers, ensuring swift adaptation in an ever changing market.

In conclusion, Khaled El-Salawy stated that he is fully convinced that the banking sector has already begun to recover gradually from the effects of the pandemic, thanks to the initiatives put forward by the Central bank of Egypt. He stressed that despite the unprecedented negative impact of the pandemic, the Egyptian economy has the



Ali Marafi



Khaled El Salawy

ability to contain and overcome the impact of the crisis to achieve and exceed global growth rates.

ABK-Egypt will continue to innovate and implement a long-term strategy to support institutions and companies across Egypt to support economic recovery. Within the framework of this commitment, ABK-Egypt recently launched a certificate of deposit for companies at a fixed competitive rate that caters to the varying needs of businesses to provide them with the necessary flexibility to overcome economic challenges.

ABK-Egypt is committed to promoting values of social responsibility as part of its dedication to serving, developing and advancing the communities in which it operates. The bank works closely and collaboratively with non-profit organizations, government agencies and community entities to provide the necessary support. Emphasizing its commitment to support efforts to provide health care in local communities, ABK-Egypt made a financial donation in favor of Ahl Masr Burn Hospital in the name of "Ahl Masr Foundation for Development". The donation will aid the construction of the facility and the provision of life saving medical equipment to treat burn victims.

As part of its commitment to supporting health and wellbeing of the community, ABK-Egypt donated towards ten medical convoys in partnership with Ibrahim Badran Foundation. The convoys were organized for school children in ten underprivileged villages in Qalubia, and is equipped to support 7000 patients and 8000 beneficiaries over the course of 2021. In addition, the bank donated an Ultrasound device for the second consecutive year to Dr Moustafa Mahmoud Association Medical Center.

The bank actively advocates and supports the empowerment of women in society. ABK-Egypt financed ten small businesses led by women, supporting initiatives that play a key role in driving economic independence for women. Through this contribution, they are able to work independently and make the necessary provisions for their families in the face of economic adversity.

How Huawei's AppGallery, talabat partnered to provide best-in-class customer experience

Exclusive interview with Onur Elgun, vice president of Strategy MENA at talabat

KUWAIT: Over the course of nearly two years, Huawei, the global tech giant, and talabat, the leading food delivery and q-commerce platform in the MENA region have teamed up to create a range of initiatives, to develop a seamless customer experience on their platforms and also to continue positioning their brands as technology leaders in their respective industries. We sat down with Onur Elgun, Vice President of Strategy MENA at talabat, who shared with us some insights about the collaboration with Huawei, since the organization integrated with AppGallery, Huawei's official distribution platform and one of the three top marketplaces globally.



Onur Elgun, vice president of Strategy MENA at talabat

Question: Why has talabat decided to partner with Huawei and integrate the AppGallery?

Elgun: Huawei is one of the largest smartphone manufacturers globally, with more than 730 million smartphone users. In this region, it has developed into a leading tech player also. Our data showed a clear increase in our customers ordering on the talabat app through Huawei devices - particularly in some of our high-growth markets, such as Egypt. With customer experience being a top priority for both ourselves and Huawei, working closely with the team at Huawei to truly create an integrated experience for both Huawei and talabat customers was a logical next step. Lastly, we operate in a competitive, fast-moving industry, which is why corporate partnerships are essential. By bringing two great tech organizations together through data-driven solutions, we are essentially solving customers' needs before they have to search for the solution!

Question: How long have you been working with the AppGallery team, and what are the key initiatives that have been conducted so far?

Elgun: Since 2019, we've been working with Huawei and AppGallery team, a very supportive and reliable partner to our organization. Where we have seen real value is in their curiosity with our business and their customer-first mindset. It's not just about creating a corporate partnership; it's about how we do the right thing for our joint customers.

We have worked closely across all our nine markets and launched significant co-branded campaigns in the MENA region. One of our key campaigns was the re-branding campaign from Otlob to talabat in Egypt. We

created a co-branded campaign through a wide range of promotional activities to benefit Huawei smartphone end-users and generate awareness of our re-branded talabat app in Egypt. The success of this campaign was incredible, as it reached 94 percent of the target audience - and we saw an increase of 240 percent in downloads.

However, our partnership is about much more than campaigns. It is about working together to really change how our customers experience the talabat app on their Huawei devices. These include small tweaks, such as news feed integration, allowing users instant access to the talabat app with a simple swipe. We have seen a significant increase in engagement of 144 percent through this integration, which has definitely been a game-changer on the Huawei platform.

We are also partnering with Huawei as a developer from a technology perspective. talabat is one of the first food & delivery apps in the region to run its app on the newly launched Super Device range. This allows our app to connect seamlessly with the Huawei flagship smartwatch, the Huawei Watch 3 | 3 Pro, providing users with a more convenient, smoother, and more secure experience. In addition, when ordering from talabat, the smartwatch converts to a smart assistant, allowing our customers to track and get notifications on their order status directly from their wrist!

Question: What do you expect from Huawei's AppGallery partnership from a business perspective?

Elgun: All of the corporate partnerships that we undertake have one goal, to better improve the experience of our ecosystem - our customers, vendors, riders, wider community, and employees. In this case - the opportunity to have a key presence on Huawei devices helps us to create a seamless experience for both theirs and our customers. Naturally, this partnership will allow improved brand awareness, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate together moving forward.

Question: Do you have any other joint projects planned in the future?

Elgun: Our experience working closely with Huawei has been fantastic; hence, we have many upcoming projects in the pipeline.

One of our key focuses here at talabat is to become the most loved and downloaded app in the MENA region - a true companion for our customers' lives, and we believe Huawei can continue to make a significant contribution to this. We're really excited to continue working with Huawei to integrate more innovative technology. This will include making the talabat app available on Huawei's Petal Search and Petal Maps, plus the Super Device range such as the next-generation TV - the Huawei Vision S and the new 12.6-inch Huawei MatePad Pro tablet set to be launched soon in the MENA market.

We look forward to continuing to strengthen our partnership and relationship with the fantastic Huawei team moving forward!

Only 2 months left to enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draw for KD 1,500,00 prize

KUWAIT: With August upon us, there are only two months left to deposit for the chance to win Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account's grand annual draw prize of the year, with the last day to participate being Wednesday, September 30 for the chance to win the KD 1,500,000 prize. The annual draw is currently scheduled to take place on January 13, 2022 in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

In addition to the annual draw, Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers account holders multiple services and features that are designed to encourage and reward clients for saving, with periodic draws worth valuable prizes. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semiannual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000. To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account at any time. To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the higher the balances in an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Opening an Al-Danah account is also easier than ever, with customers being able to open their accounts

online through Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking services.

With the last day to participate for the chance to win the Al-Danah account's grand annual prize just around the corner, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, commented: "We recently announced our first Al-Danah millionaire of the year, the winner of the semi-annual draw prize, and we are now anxiously awaiting the announcement of our grand draw prize winner, who will receive the KD 1.5 million prize! As usual, we are inviting all our clients to take an even more active approach to their financial affairs, and prioritize saving on a habitual basis with an Al-Danah savings account, with which they can take advantage of multiple chances to win exciting prizes, in addition to being rewarded for their loyalty throughout the year. We are wishing everyone the best of luck!"

Numerous benefits

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

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Uruk-Hai warriors from the Lord of The Rings during the parade through the Wellington streets prior to the worldwide premier of the third and final Rings movie "Return of The King", Wellington, New Zealand. — AFP

Reese Witherspoon's production firm bought by private equity group

Reese Witherspoon's women-focused production company behind television hits such as "Big Little Lies" is being purchased by a new private equity-backed venture aiming to break into Hollywood's fast-expanding streaming market. The majority invest-



In this file photo US actress Reese Witherspoon arrives for the 26th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. — AFP

ment from a not-yet-named media venture backed by US private equity giant Blackstone and announced Monday reportedly values Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine at \$900 million, according to the Wall Street Journal and CNBC. "I started this company to change the way all

Dizzee Rascal gets charged with assault

The 'Bonkers' hitmaker - whose real name is Dylan Mills - was arrested on June 8 on suspicion of common assault following a "domestic argument" with a woman at her home in South London in which she reportedly sustained an injury but did not require hospital treatment. The Metropolitan Police told The Sun newspaper: "Dylan Mills, 36, of Sevenoaks, Kent, has been charged with assault after an incident at a residential address in Streatham on 8 June. Officers attended and a woman reported minor injuries. She did not require hospital treatment." The 36-year-old grime artist is due to appear at Croydon Magistrates' Court in London on Friday, 3 September 2021. The alleged incident comes just a year after Dizzee helped to distribute food parcels to families amidst the coronavirus pandemic. The 'I Luv U' hitmaker joined the team at Kitchen Social in east London, where he grew up, to hand out five meals for families of four. He said at the time: "I was given an amazing opportunity to visit and help out Kitchen Social at Bygrave Primary School in Poplar, who are providing free food, books and school equipment to kids in the local area where I grew up. Thank you to all the amazing people I met and thanks to Mayor's Fund for London for connecting the dots." Meanwhile, Dizzee previously insisted he invented grime. The 'Dance Wiv Me' hitmaker said: "I get people moaning like, 'Ah, you're trying to come back to grime, now?' What are you talking about? "I was making grime before anyone else. That's not something that's even really out there as a fact, but at the same time, you've got people like Stormzy bigging me up, saying that I'm the one who influenced him. And you can hear it." — Bang Showbiz



women are seen in media," said Witherspoon of the entity behind series including "The Morning Show" and "Little Fires Everywhere."

The Blackstone deal "will enable us to tell even more entertaining, impactful and illuminating stories about women's lives globally," she said in a statement. The new media venture is headed up by two former Disney executives, Kevin Mayer and Tom Staggs. Its launch comes as multiple Hollywood giants are competing to expand their streaming services, with the likes of Netflix, Disney+, HBO Max and Amazon Prime Video hungry for content. Witherspoon, 45, who won a best actress Oscar for 2005's "Walk the Line," has moved increasingly into producing in recent years, although she also stars in Apple TV+ hit "The Morning Show," alongside Jennifer Aniston.

The company is working on feature films including "Legally Blonde 3" and an adaptation of best-selling novel "Where The Crawdads Sing," which was boosted by its selection as part of Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine Book Club. She will continue to oversee Hello Sunshine's day-to-day operations along with current CEO Sarah Harden, a joint statement said. "We look forward to backing Reese, Sarah, and their world-class team as they continue to produce and identify dynamic, engaging content for years to come," said Mayer and Staggs. Mayer and Staggs are reportedly targeting further purchases of content creators to build an "independent, creator-friendly home for cutting-edge, high-quality, category-defining brands and franchises," joining a fiercely competitive market. In May, Amazon agreed to buy MGM studios for \$8.45 billion, giving the US tech giant a vast content library to further its ambitions in streaming. — AFP



Robbie Williams shaves his son's hair off

The 'Angels' hitmaker styled his 'do into a Mohican last week in an attempt to conceal his balding patches and it seems the eye-catching new look has rubbed off on his six-year-old son Charlie, whom he has with his wife Ayda Field, as he asked him to give him the same haircut. Taking to her Instagram account, Ayda, 42, uploaded a video of Robbie holding the shears and Charlie in front of him engrossed in a video. She said: "So, what's happening daddy?" Robbie replied: "Charlie wants a Mohawk" Ayda said: "You mean like daddy? So you're doing a Mohican?" As Robbie took the clippers to Charlie's head, Ayda exclaimed: "Charlie, don't move your head right now! Oh my gosh, it's getting really aggressive. You sure you want this Charlie? It's getting a little too late for that. Ah I can't look!" She captioned the clip: "Charlie wants to look just like daddy #likefatherlikeson #barbershop #dadlife AWxx @robbiewilliams (sic)" The 47-year-old singer previously revealed his own hairless look when he let his wife loose with the clippers last month. Captioning the video at the time, she wrote: "@robbiewilliams Is all or nothing when it comes to his hair ... and apparently, it's nothing now #nohairdontcare #instamood #thebaldandthebeautiful #who'snext? AWxx (sic)" In the clip, the couple - who also have kids Teddy, eight, Coco, two, and 18-month-old Beau together - posed for a "before" picture before she got to work on his long locks, using the clippers to shave his head. She even blew a bit of his hair into his face as she admired her handy work. —Bang Showbiz

Amazon to launch 'Lord of the Rings' series in September 2022

Amazon announced Monday that its big-budget "The Lord of The Rings" series, based on the fantasy saga by J.R.R. Tolkien, will premiere worldwide in September 2022. The streaming service hopes that the yet-to-be-titled series will rival the success of "Game of Thrones." The first episode will be available on September 2, 2022. Amazon, which acquired the television rights to the cult classic in 2017 for an estimated \$250 million, said in a statement that "filming of Season One completed today (Monday) in New Zealand."

Situated in Middle Earth and featuring some of the epic's most iconic characters,

the series begins with new adventures "beginning in a time of relative peace, thousands of years before the events of J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings' books," the statement said. The first season's episodes will be released on a weekly basis, according to Amazon, which also posted the first images from the show on social media Monday. The cast includes Cynthia Addai-Robinson, known for her role in the series "Spartacus," and Robert Aramayo, who played a young Eddard Stark in "Game of Thrones," which became a behemoth of the fantasy genre over the course of its eight seasons.

With the multi-season adaptation of Tolkien's literary work already turned into a successful movie franchise in the early 2000s, Amazon hopes to score points for its streaming platform Amazon Prime Video against competitors such as Netflix and Disney Plus. The internet titan founded by Jeff Bezos bought the storied MGM studios at the end of May for \$8.45 billion. The purchase of the almost century-old Hollywood studio bolstered its streaming library, adding the James Bond and Rocky franchises to the platform. — AFP



Pine trees burn on a hillside at the Dixie Fire, in Twain, California. — AFP photos

'Terrible proof': California fire documentary explores human failings behind blazes

Months after Oscar-nominated filmmaker Lucy Walker began making a documentary about the largest-ever wildfire in California, the blaze lost its crown to an even bigger inferno. The 2017 Thomas Fire is now only the seventh worst by area destroyed and is likely to be overtaken soon by the Dixie Fire raging through the state's northern forests, as climate change makes wildfire season longer, hotter and more devastating. "One of the things that I learned in the course of making this film, is these fires happen all the time-they happen over and over and over again," said Walker.

"It's just terrible proof of the thesis of the film. I didn't mean to be proven right, or to make such a topical film, but that's where we find ourselves." "Bring Your Own Brigade," in theaters Friday, takes a wide-ranging look at the causes, conflicts and possible solutions that swirl around the increasingly deadly wildfires in the western United States. It begins with harrowing footage of two fires in November 2018 that devastated Malibu and Paradise-two Californian cities at different ends of the socio-economic scale-in which a total of 88 people perished. Filmmakers were embedded with firefighters during the carnage, and the movie focuses on the characters and personal stories of emergency responders and the stubborn residents who have since returned to live in communities that were reduced to ashes.

Along with tales of heroism, the film quickly finds that many of those most affected by the wildfires-and the climate change that scientists say heightens the risk of blazes-are often the most reluctant to change their behavior. Malibu residents vote down a proposal to pay more taxes to fund more firefighters, instead turning their ire on the emergency officials who they say failed to save their homes. And the city of Paradise rejects a series of cheap and effective proposals to help prevent further tragedies, shunning solutions as simple as a law requiring five

feet (1.5 meters) of "defensible space" that must be cleared of vegetation around homes.

"For a town like Paradise not to be able to adopt different building standards means that they're just going to be in the same position again," said Walker. "We haven't managed to convince them even that these small compromises or small costs are worthwhile. I think that was really illuminating," she told AFP.

'American individualist'

While addressing climate change directly, the film also explores other causes of wildfires that should in theory be easier to fix. It makes the seemingly paradoxical case that large-scale logging-a solution proposed by former president Donald Trump-actually makes wildfires worse. The deadly Camp Fire in Paradise ripped through a nearby timber plantation, able to spread rapidly through thickly planted trees, logging debris, and invasive species such as highly flammable grasses. Walker also talks with members of indigenous groups such as the Plains Miwok, who protected themselves from massive wildfires for centuries before Europeans arrived by lighting small, carefully managed "prescribed burns."

The practice-designed to remove hazardous vegetation-is becoming increasingly common again in California, although residents often oppose it over safety fears and air quality concerns. "When we're not in this emergency state, it's hard to want to make compromises and sacrifices," said Walker, who has received two Oscar nominations including for 2010 documentary "Waste Land." "I think that's not uniquely an American thing, although I think that it is perhaps epitomized by the gun-toting American individualist." This year's fire season suggests that attitude will need to change fast. By late July, the number of acres burned in California was up more than 250 percent from 2020 — itself the worst year in the state's modern history. — AFP



Firefighter hand crews pose for a picture as they put out hot spots near rustic mountain cabin homes on a hillside at the Dixie Fire, in Twain.

Dissident artist leaves Hong Kong for Taiwan

One of Hong Kong's best known artists confirmed yesterday that he had moved to Taiwan in search of "100 percent freedom" from the government's crackdown on dissent. Kacey Wong's departure is the latest blow to Hong Kong's reputation as a regional haven for the arts and free speech as government critics face growing scrutiny from authorities. Wong, 51, posted a black-and-white video on Facebook in which he sang a rendition of Vera Lynn's wistful ode "We'll Meet Again". "Leaving is not easy, staying is also difficult," he wrote.

In an interview with the Hong Kong Free Press website, Wong confirmed he had fled Hong Kong for political reasons, citing the diminishing space for artistic freedom since China imposed a national security law that criminalized much dissent. The Cornell-educated artist is known for his contemporary visual arts focusing on social activism and politics. In one 2018 performance art piece called "The Patriot", Wong performed China's national anthem on an accordion while inside a red metal cage. Last year authorities passed new laws making it illegal to mock China's national anthem or flag, meaning any repeat of such a performance would be fraught with risk. "I want and I demand 100 per cent freedom, with no compromise," Wong told Hong Kong Free Press.



This file photo shows local artist Kacey Wong playing the accordion inside a red mobile prison artwork called 'The Patriot', a protest performance art project protesting against the National Anthem Law, at his studio in Hong Kong. — AFP

"I always appreciated Taiwan's culture and art, I think it's very mature and deep and the society is sophisticated and raw at the same time, which I like," he added. Earlier this year Wong distributed hundreds of candle stubs from previous vigils marking Beijing's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown after Hong Kong authorities banned public commemorations. The arts have been heavily impacted by the security law, which was introduced to quash dissent after pro-democracy protests two years ago.

All films must now be censored for any content that breaches the law and multiple books have been pulled from shelves. On Monday, Cantopop star Anthony Wong Yiu-ming was charged with corruption for singing at an election rally of a pro-democracy politician three years ago. Two authors of a children's book that likened democracy supporters to sheep surrounded by wolves were charged with sedition last month. Despite this, Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has insisted that freedom of speech remains intact in the city. "I would honestly ask you, what sort of freedoms have we lost, what sort of vibrancy has Hong Kong been eroded?" she said in a radio show late last month. — AFP



Venezuelan musicians, members of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra, perform 'El Principito Symphonic' during a rehearsal at a house in Buenos Aires. — AFP photos



Venezuelan musicians, members of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra, perform "El Principito Symphonic".

VENEZUELAN REFUGEE ORCHESTRA BACK TOGETHER AFTER ARGENTINE LOCKDOWN

After a year and a half of silence due to the coronavirus pandemic, the sounds of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra have returned to a house in Buenos Aires. The group—made up of Venezuelans who fled their country's economic crisis to Argentina—is preparing for a performance of the Symphonic Little Prince, a symphony they created during

an escape, it was all that we thought about," he said. "I'm really looking forward to it and cannot wait to present it." Inspired by the novella "The Little Prince" by French author Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the Symphonic Little Prince is an original composition created by the 120-strong Venezuelan orchestra, whose members arrived in Argentina four to five

'What gives us power'

One of them, Omar Zambrano—who lives in the house where the orchestra rehearses—came up with the idea of forming a Venezuelan musical troupe. But the coronavirus plunged the orchestra into "a dark period" from which they have only emerged thanks to their composition, said Zambrano, the group's executive director. "We thought about it before the pandemic, but we didn't manage to do it because the composition and arrangements take a lot of time. "It's the result of many wills: the composers, the arrangers, the performers, the director. "Little by little, it was developed during the pandemic, piece by piece as the quarantine rules were relaxed."

During this time, they also launched an online music school: Latin Vox Academy, to help the musicians earn some money. "We probably wouldn't be doing what we're doing without the trauma of displacement and the pandemic," said Zambrano. "Turning bad into good is what gives us power. Turning trauma into joy is an art."

When things were at their toughest, the orchestra received help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). "The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of the migrant and refugee population. Most of these people work in the informal sector and were openly affected by the health measures," said UNHCR representative Juan Carlos Murillo.

But the Latin Vox Machine project "allowed them to continue working and interacting. It is a reliable example of the courage, determination and resilience of refugees and migrants," he added. After Syria, Venezuela has produced the sec-



A Venezuelan musician, member of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra, arrives to a rehearsal.



Venezuelan violinist Maria Andreyana Chavez, member of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra, talks with AFP.



Venezuelan Omar Zambrano (left), founder of LatinVox Machine orchestra, and Venezuelan singer Isa Ramos, talks with AFP during a break of the rehearsal of "El Principito Symphonic".

the lockdown, and that they released on disc at the end of July. The violas are rehearsing in the living room, while the violins are in the kitchen. Later, the keyboards and choir will take their places to practice. They hope to play their symphony in public for the first time in November. The orchestra's director Enmanuel Gonzalez can hardly wait.

"The Little Prince is a beautiful project. It was a labor of quarantine and was also

years ago. They were among the millions of people who fled the crippling economic and political crises in their home country. Most of the Latin Vox Machine orchestra were trained in Venezuela's prestigious El Sistema program, where Gustavo Dudamel, the new director of the Paris Opera, also began his training. Yet after arriving in Argentina, many earned a living busking in the Buenos Aires metro.

ond-largest number of displaced people in the world, with 5.6 million fleeing since 2015, according to a UNHCR estimate. Around 185,000 of them live in Argentina.

A 'blessing'

Singer Isa Ramos and orchestra coordinator Cesar Perez kept in contact with the musicians during the pandemic to look after their needs. "We created a network and organized a huge collection with wonderful families," said Ramos. "We paid several people's rent for several months. We looked after medical situations, surgeries." They also bought Christmas presents for the musicians' children. Violinist Maria Andreyana Chavez says the orches-

tra was a "blessing" during the months of lockdown in Argentina, and she never stopped rehearsing on Sundays.

"It's the unity, seeing each other again, after so much time, to hear each other again," said Chavez. "We've been really blessed with The Little Prince. It gave us a lot: a goal, a continuation, a succession," Zambrano agrees. "This dynamic of rehearsing, following an artistic objective, is a privilege that we treasured and shared," he said. "The rehearsals were worth more even than the concerts." — AFP



This handout photo shows Netflix Chief Marketing Officer Bozoma Saint John speak at TED Monterey in Monterey, California. — AFP photos



This handout photo shows organizational psychologist Adam Grant speaking at TED Monterey in Monterey, California.

TED talks seek to inject optimism into pandemic gloom

A TED conference under the theme "The Case for Optimism" on Monday threw down the gauntlet for a return to face-to-face gatherings, despite the daunting challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, climate change and deep political divides. Even with those dark clouds, speakers ranging from scientists and academics to artists and entrepreneurs took to the TED stage for the four-day event. "We are trying to juggle it and do it right," TED curator Chris Anderson told the gathering while stressing pandemic precautions.

"We are living through a piece of history. Even though what we've heard is alarming, we can find optimism." The

event at the heart of what has become a global platform for mind-bending concepts aimed at making the world a better place returned to its roots with a scaled-down event on the edge of Silicon Valley. Proof of vaccination was required, and badges were only given to those who passed COVID-19 tests on arrival. A welcome kit included masks, wipes and sanitizers. And the annual gathering that had grown to some 1,800 attendees at its venue in Vancouver was limited to about 600 attendees at a Monterey conference center. Despite none of the attendees testing positive for COVID-19, Anderson urged everyone to wear masks given the highly-transmissible Delta variant.

"I felt the weirdest combination of intense excitement and intense nervousness," Anderson said of the weeks leading up to the conference. "I want to salute the courage and commitment of each of you to come here; I know it wasn't necessarily easy to come." The annual TED conference was among a slew of events that went virtual last year due to the pandemic, which prompted lockdowns to reduce the spread of COVID-19. TED attendee Betul Kacar, an astrobiologist who is a professor at the University of

Arizona, took solace in the turmoil rolling society.

"Chaos is needed for change to occur, and the world is definitely changing," Kacar said during a break in the talks. "When things go smoothly, evolution doesn't happen." TED talks tackled hot-button topics from capturing the carbon that is damaging the climate to researchers developing vaccines, and people dealing with shutdowns caused by the pandemic.

"I'm a cynic by nature," said Akash Bhatia, a managing director at Boston Consulting Group who specializes in disruptive technologies. "It's early in this, but some of the talks nudge a bit to the other side to be a little more optimistic." Conference talks are crafted into videos shared free online for what has grown into a global following since its founding in 1984. "We are living through a cynicism epidemic," said speaker Jamil Zaki, a psychology professor who heads a neuroscience lab at Stanford University. "It is not a system upgrade; it's mental malware. We can take control of our stories to escape the cynicism trap." — AFP

Study confirms ancient Spanish cave art was made by Neanderthals

Neanderthals, long perceived to have been unsophisticated and brutish, really did paint stalagmites in a Spanish cave more than 60,000 years ago, according to a study published on Monday. The issue had roiled the paleoarchaeology community ever since the publication of a 2018 paper attributing red ochre pigment found on the stalagmitic dome of Cueva de Ardales to our extinct "cousin" species. The dating suggested the art was at least 64,800 years old, made at a time when modern humans did not inhabit the continent.

But the finding was contentious, and "a scientific article said that perhaps these pigments were a natural thing," a result of iron oxide flow, Francesco d'Errico, co-author of a new paper in the journal PNAS told AFP. A new analysis revealed the composition and placement of the pigments were not consistent with natural processes—instead, the pigments were applied through splattering and blowing. What's more, their texture did not match natural samples taken from the caves, suggesting the pigments came from an external source. More detailed dating showed that the pigments were applied at

different points in time, separated by more than ten thousand years.

This "supports the hypothesis that the Neanderthals came on several occasions, over several thousand years, to mark the cave with pigments," said d'Errico, of the University of Bordeaux. It is difficult to compare the Neanderthal "art" to wall paintings made by prehistoric modern humans, such as those found in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc cave of France, more 30,000 years old. But the new finding adds to increasing evidence that Neanderthals, whose lineage went extinct around 40,000 years ago, were not the boorish relatives of Homo sapiens they were long portrayed to be.

The team wrote that the pigments are not "art" in the narrow sense of the word "but rather the result of graphic behaviors intent on perpetuating the symbolic significance of a space." The cave formations "played a fundamental role in the symbolic systems of some Neanderthal communities," though what those symbols meant remains a mystery for now. — AFP



In this file photo, this combination of pictures shows a general view and close-up of a partly coloured stalagmite tower in the Spanish cave of Ardales, southern Spain. — AFP

Sports

'I did it for me': Biles takes Olympic bronze after mental health battle

TOKYO: Simone Biles' nightmare Olympics concluded with the US gymnastics superstar returning in the beam final yesterday, declaring "I did it for me" after taking bronze behind Chinese teenager Guan Chenchen.

It was Biles' first taste of competition in Tokyo since dramatically standing down during the women's team final last week, struggling with the "twisties", a condition meaning gymnasts lose the ability to orientate themselves in mid-air.

"I was just happy to be able to perform regardless of the outcome. I wasn't expecting to walk away with the medal, I was just doing this for me," said Biles, who revealed her aunt died two days ago. "I did this for me and me only. I just went out there and had fun."

After also withdrawing from the first three apparatus finals in the uneven bars, vault and floor, she said she had only been cleared to compete in the beam on Monday night. "We almost missed the deadline!" she disclosed, adding: "Just to have one more opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games meant the world. Training for five years and then coming here, and then kind of being triggered

and not being able to do anything, it wasn't fun."

The four-time gold medalist from the Rio Games received a huge cheer from her US teammates when she entered the arena. With bib 392 on her back, she filed in with the other eight finalists, blowing a kiss to the cameras. Another cheer rang out when the stadium announcer said: "And now, representing the United States...Simone Biles."

'Nervous'

She looked pensive on her comeback as she waited for her turn to climb up onto the 10cm wide beam for one of the most intensely scrutinized 90-second routines of her or anyone else's life. Among the audience for the 19-time world champion's heart-warming return to the field of battle at the Ariake Gymnastics Centre was Olympic chief Thomas Bach and two canine cardboard cutouts of her beloved French bulldogs — Lilo and Rambo.

Peeling off her Team USA red tracksuit, she practiced her dance moves in her star-spangled banner leotard as she waited for her turn as the third to per-

form. At 6:11 pm local time (0911 GMT), it was her time. One long week on from her first shock withdrawal, the 24-year-old from Ohio was finally back at her day job.

Wiping her brow, she approached the beam, chalked up, and finally got the wheels back on her derailed Olympic campaign. While avoiding any twists incorporated in her favored and most difficult moves, she put in a solid performance, ending with a double backward somersault, double pike dismount.

Her face breaking into a broad grin, she waved and hugged rivals and team officials, the relief of having performed clear on her face. Her routine earned the triple world champion on the apparatus 14,000 points.

"I was a little bit nervous for the dismount just because we had to switch it and I probably haven't done a double pike dismount since I was 12 years old, so it was kind of hard to control that," said Biles. "But to go out there and compete one more time and have everybody's support meant the world."

She was lying second behind Tang Xijing until 16-year-old Guan, the last of the eight finalists to go, put in a superb



TOKYO: USA's Simone Biles poses with her bronze medal during the podium ceremony of the artistic gymnastics women's balance beam of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Gymnastics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

display to take gold with 14,633 points, relegating Biles to bronze, the same color she won in Rio. Bach was one of the first to congratulate her on her come-

back, as were 'Lilo' and 'Rambo' in their mute manner from the stands, after her Tokyo nightmare ended in smiles on the third rung of the beam podium. — AFP

Gymnastics GOAT Biles now mental health trailblazer

TOKYO: Simone Biles arrived in Tokyo with superstar billing and history in her sights. She leaves with her reputation enhanced — not by more gold medals, but by her candid approach to mental health. The American, gymnastics' acknowledged GOAT (Greatest Of All Time), provided the shock of the Tokyo Olympics when she abruptly pulled out of the team competition over the "twisties", a disorientating mental block. But it could turn out to be one of her most influential moments, with signs that other top athletes are already following her example by prioritizing mental wellbeing over competition.

Biles was widely hailed for her move, unheard-of in the middle of an elite sport competition, with USA Gymnastics offering its full support and Olympics chief Thomas Bach praising her courage. "Who one year ago would have admitted to say (they) have mental health problems?" Bach said.

The four-time champion was side-

lined for most of the Games, with her quest for a record-equaling nine career Olympic gold medals largely forgotten. However, she bravely returned for the final competition, the beam, and took bronze with a solid routine including a double backward somersault, double pike dismount.

This was despite still suffering from the "petrifying" twisties, where gymnasts temporarily lose their ability to orient themselves in mid-air — sometimes resulting in horrendous falls. "I don't think you realise how dangerous this is on hard/competition surface nor do I have to explain why I put health first," she wrote on Instagram. "Physical health is mental health."

Biles' actions have been quickly replicated elsewhere, with Olympic champion swimmer Adam Peaty and England cricketer Ben Stokes both announcing breaks for their mental health in recent days. Diver Shi Tingmao revealed her struggles with depression — a rare admission for a Chinese ath-



TOKYO: USA's Simone Biles practices ahead of the artistic gymnastics women's balance beam final of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Gymnastics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

lete — after winning gold in Tokyo.

Biles' struggles are all the more poignant given her aura of invincibility and the 'GOAT' tag she had embraced — to the extent of having a goat motif in rhinestones on her leotard. In other sports, that sort of confidence might risk being perceived as

arrogance. Where Biles is concerned, it was more a matter of fact. This year, Biles had underscored her greatness by becoming the first woman ever to pull off a Yurchenko double pike — a complex, gravity-defying vault that no other woman has attempted in competition. — AFP

US wary of Australian threat in women's basketball quarters

TOKYO: The United States are wary of a "formidable" Australia after the Opals staged a great escape to book a quarter-final showdown with their arch-rivals in the women's Olympic basketball tournament. The all-conquering Americans remain on track for a seventh consecutive title after winning their three group games, but now face a team that inflicted a rare defeat on them prior to the start of the Games.

That Australian side featured its best player Liz Cambage, but she pulled out ahead of Tokyo citing mental health struggles and her team have struggled without her. The world number two Opals suffered tough losses to Belgium and China in the preliminaries and were left with the unenviable task of needing to beat Puerto Rico in their final group game by at least 25 points to stay alive on Monday.

Stunningly they did, battling to a 96-69 victory despite being behind at the end of the first quarter. "Was it the great escape? I guess so," skipper Jenna O'Hea said. "Knowing before the game that it was a 25-point margin (required to qualify), it's a bit daunting in the back of your mind. It wasn't a small number at that."

It ensured a clash today with the world's top-



SAITAMA: Australia's Jenna O'hea (left) goes to the basket past Puerto Rico's Michelle Gonzalez (right) in the women's preliminary round group C basketball match between Australia and Puerto Rico during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Saitama Super Arena in Saitama on Monday. — AFP

ranked team, led by WNBA legends Sue Bird, Diana Taurasi and Sylvia Fowles and who are on a 52-game winning streak in Olympic competition. "Australia will be a formidable opponent because we know each other so well, and we look forward to the challenge of getting out of the quarter-finals," said US coach Dawn Staley. "We certainly have to

execute on both sides of the ball and continue to get better to advance."

Two teams from Asia made it to the quarter-finals for the first time with undefeated China, spurred by outstanding center Li Yueru, facing Serbia today with a semi-final berth at stake against either the US or Australia. — AFP

Hong Kong golfer Chan has Schauffele secret Olympic weapon

KAWAGOE: Hong Kong golfer Tiffany Chan will begin her quest for the Olympic podium today with a secret weapon in her bag — men's gold medalist Xander Schauffele's yardage book. Chan is neighbors with Schauffele in Las Vegas and her caddie Aaron Chu is great friends with Austin Kaiser, who carried the American's bag to golden glory on Sunday.

"I saw Xander winning," Chan told AFP during practice yesterday. "My caddie is his friend because we all live in Vegas together. And it is amazing, you know, having a friend that lives right next door winning the gold medal. Having seen him hold his nerve and finish strong, I'm really happy for him. Simply amazing."

Chu texted Kaiser on Sunday asking if he could have the book, containing key notes on distances, hazard locations and slopes at the Kasumigaseki

Country Club course. "There are some notes, especially on the greens, which hopefully can help us," said Chu, who is also friends with British Open champion Collin Morikawa.

Chan, the world number 251, was able to get some tips from double major winner Morikawa, who lost out to Taiwan's C.T. Pan for bronze in the men's event after an epic seven-man playoff. "Being able to learn from Xander and Collin, and getting the yardage book and asking for their opinions is an advantage hopefully," said Chan, who finished tied 37th at the Rio Olympics as an amateur five years ago.

Chan works with coach Rick Sessinghaus, who is Morikawa's swing guru. "I'm always trying to follow how they do things," she said of Morikawa and Schauffele. "I super idolize them as they are so good at such a young age." Chan is Hong Kong's only golfer to earn a card for the elite US LPGA Tour. She registered her first top 10 finish at the LA Open in April this year.

Tokyo 2020 has been Hong Kong's most successful Olympics, with fencer Edgar Cheung Kulong delivering only their second gold medal. There have also been two silvers for Siobhan Haughey in the pool, another first for Hong Kong. "If they can



KAWAGOE: Hong Kong's Tiffany Chan shows a smile as she practices ahead of the women's golf individual stroke play during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Kasumigaseki Country Club in Kawagoe yesterday. — AFP

do it, anyone from Hong Kong can also shine on the big stage," said Chan. "Being able to watch them achieve their goals and dreams, it's definitely inspiring." — AFP

IOC to probe Belarus officials over athlete's forced flight

TOKYO: Olympic officials said yesterday they will investigate Belarus over claims the team tried to force an athlete now sheltering in Poland's Tokyo embassy to return home after she criticized her coaches. Krystina Tsimanouskaya says she fears for her safety if she returns to Belarus, and she is expected to travel to Poland this week after being offered a humanitarian visa.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday accused Belarus of an "act of transnational repression" over the alleged attempt to force her home. Tsimanouskaya spent the night in Poland's embassy in Tokyo after arriving there Monday evening. Warsaw has denounced what it calls a "criminal attempt" to kidnap the athlete. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said he had spoken to the "courageous" Tsimanouskaya, who is "currently well taken care of and safe".

"I assured her that she can count on the support and solidarity of Poland. In the coming days, she will fly to Warsaw, where she will be able to thrive without obstacles and, if she so chooses, will receive further assistance," he wrote on Facebook. Tsimanouskaya's husband Arseny Zdanovich told AFP he had fled Belarus and was hoping to join his wife "in the near future".

"I believe it would not be safe for me to be there," the 25-year-old fitness trainer said by phone from Ukraine. Tsimanouskaya, a 200 metres specialist, criticised the Belarusian athletics federation after they tried to force her to run in a relay. She said that outburst led to the attempt to forcibly send her home.

Belarus strongman Alexander Lukashenko has cracked down on any form of dissent since mass protests erupted after elections last year that were deemed unfair by the West. Tsimanouskaya was one of more than 2,000 Belarusian sports figures who signed an open letter calling for new elections and for political prisoners to be freed.

Poland is a staunch critic of Lukashenko's regime and has become home to a growing number of dissidents. Morawiecki said offering the athlete help was an important gesture "to get the word out on the international arena as to what is happening across our eastern border," telling Belarusians "we won't leave you stranded!"

'Alarming athlete abuse'

Activist group Global Athlete called overnight for the IOC to immediately suspend Belarus's Olympic committee and allow the country's athletes to compete as neutral athletes. The NGO said Tsimanouskaya's "alleged kidnapping... is yet another example of the alarming athlete abuse occurring in Belarus."

IOC spokesman Mark Adams said the body was launching a formal investigation and also expected to receive a report from Belarus's Olympic committee yesterday. "We're going to need to establish facts," he told reporters in Tokyo, adding that the IOC would "need to hear everyone involved." Asked about the safety of the team's remaining athletes at the Games, Adams said IOC and Tokyo 2020 staff were based at the Olympic Village and could be approached if necessary.

The US secretary of state accused Lukashenko's regime of trying "to commit another act of transnational repression: attempting to force Olympian Krystina Tsimanouskaya to leave simply for exercising free speech." "Such actions violate the Olympic spirit, are an affront to basic rights, and cannot be tolerated," he tweeted. Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, sparked international outrage in May by dispatching a fighter jet to intercept a Ryanair plane flying from Greece to Lithuania in order to arrest a dissident onboard. — AFP



Iglesias joins Cuban Olympic boxing greats with Tokyo gold

TOKYO: Roniel Iglesias added his name to Cuba's Olympic boxing hall of fame after winning a second gold medal yesterday, as women fighters voiced their determination to get more girls into the sport. The 32-year-old Iglesias put on a masterclass to defeat British hope Pat McCormack on unanimous points and claim the welterweight title in style in Tokyo.

Iglesias has now won three Olympic medals, adding

Tokyo gold to his London 2012 light-welterweight gold and bronze at Beijing 2008. In doing so he joins a star cast of Cuban boxers to seal a hat-trick of Olympic boxing medals. They also include Felix Savon (three gold), Teofilo Stevenson (three gold) and Lazaro Alvarez (three bronze).

Iglesias, who failed to win a medal at the Rio 2016 Olympics, said he does not plan to stop there and is already eyeing the Paris 2024 Games. He said that, following injury and his disappointment in Rio, some people in Cuba had written him off.

"There are always fans who have their opinions and it is true that many people thought that Roniel would not make it in these Games," he said. "Many people said that this was the end of the line for me. But only us boxers know what is happening, we know the injuries that we suffer and what we have to overcome. I always knew that I had it in me. Now those doubters have been proven wrong and those who believed in me were right."

The knockers spurred on him, said Iglesias. "That was an extra push for me to get up every morning and give that extra bit of effort," he added.

Women medalists come out fighting

In the women's competition, Sena Irie became the first Japanese woman to win Olympic boxing gold with a unanimous points victory over Nesthy Petecio of the Philippines. Women's boxing entered the Olympics for the first time at London 2012, when there were only three weight categories, but there are five in Tokyo and women's boxing is more popular than ever.

But women boxers say more needs to be done. Underlining the challenge that women's boxing still faces for recognition in some countries and the

Denmark were on the cusp of a clear victory, the crash happening as Madsen went to overtake a tiring Tanfield, who had been dropped by the trailing British team.

Britain complain

But Britain believed Denmark should have been disqualified for the collision, having already complained about the Danes wearing illegal garments on Monday, including tape on their legs and undervests, to reduce resistance. Instead, Denmark went unpunished for the garments while Madsen was considered to have caught Tanfield. Denmark advance to today's final against Italy while Britain were handed a race for seventh against Switzerland. "My take on it was he caused the crash of an opponent," said British coach Iain Dyer. "We feel pretty let down by the UCI."



Izu: Netherlands' Roy van den Berg celebrates winning the gold medal in the men's track cycling team sprint finals during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Izu Velodrome in Izu, Japan, yesterday. — AFP

Faster, higher: Climbing makes Olympic debut

TOKYO: Athletes scammed up giant walls and clambered over plastic boulders as climbing made its Olympic debut yesterday, taking the sinew-straining, muscle-bulging sport to dizzying new heights. Twenty climbers competed in the men's qualifying round, testing their mettle over the three disciplines of speed, lead and bouldering.

South Africa's Christopher Cosser and South Korea's Chon Jong-won kicked off the opening speed round, where climbers race up a 15-metre (50 feet) vertical wall using a series of plastic holds. Under a setting sun on the outside wall, Cosser zipped to the top in 6.48 seconds, while Chon slipped near the start and spun back down on his safety rope. "It's kind of surreal," said Cosser. "It's been a dream of mine since I was a little kid, so to fully experience it is phenomenal." The combined score of the three events determined the final positions, with eight climbers going through to the final round. France's Mickael Mawem finished first, followed by Japan's Tomoa Narasaki and 17-year-old American Colin Duffy.

The bouldering round saw climbers try to "solve" four short courses without a rope, making dramatic leaps and hauling themselves around with impressive strength. In lead climbing, they clipped hooks along the face of a 15-metre wall, trying to climb as high as they could. "It was a wild experience to try to be here and not go crazy with nerves, but I made it through so I'm happy to be done," said American Nathaniel Coleman, who qualified in eighth. "You're pretty tired by the end of the day but you only have one climb left to do. You turn off all the pain and turn off all the hurt and you just go."

'Forget the sweat and grease'

But the conditions took their toll on the climbers, with Narasaki opting out of one of his two speed runs and a bouldering course to save wear and tear on his fingers. The humidity of Tokyo's sweaty summer also



TOKYO: An overview shows Cuba's Roniel Iglesias celebrating after winning against Britain's Pat McCormack after their men's welter (63-69kg) boxing final bout during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Kokugikan Arena in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos

stereotypes that endure, Irie said that some people have the impression that women fighters "are violent or scary or aggressive". "That's not the case," said the 20-year-old home fighter after winning the featherweight title, the first boxing gold of the pandemic-delayed Games. "I want to wipe out those aggressive images of boxers."

That defiant message was echoed by Irma Testa, the

bronze medalist from Italy. "I can only say that I am really proud," said the 23-year-old, who had also made a small piece of boxing history for her country. "For me it was really important to win a medal in order to make women's boxing in Italy more popular. So it's the first medal ever for women's boxing (in Italy), and with this medal I can show young girls in Italy that boxing is also a sport for women, not just men." — AFP

Germany, Netherlands triumph to end British reign in velodrome

SHIZUOKA: Germany and the Netherlands both claimed gold in the velodrome yesterday as crushing victories over Britain finally signaled the end of British dominance in the sport. The Germans broke the world record for a third time in two days to beat Britain by more than six seconds in the women's team pursuit final. The British team were over three seconds behind in the final of the men's team sprint, as the Netherlands cruised to victory. "To win the gold medal with a world record, it's just unbelievable," said Germany's Mieke Kroeger. "This is the dream of every athlete."

The Netherlands arrived as the three-time world champions in the men's team sprint. Their gold medal is their first in men's track cycling since 1936. "We always take the British team very seriously," said Roy van den Berg. "But we have proved we have dominance of our own in recent years. To show it here at the Olympics is amazing." Two silver medals still represents a decent return for Britain but it falls below their previous high standards. Britain had won the last three Olympic golds in the men's team sprint and the previous two in the women's team pursuit.

Their disappointment was intensified by an extraordinary crash in the men's team heat against Denmark, with the Danes awarded victory despite Frederik Madsen smashing into the back of Britain's Charlie Tanfield. "I was so tired, I didn't know if Charlie was 10 or 20 meters away. I couldn't react," said Madsen. "It's awful for this to happen in an Olympic semi-final."

'She never gets tired': Indonesian dad hails daughter's badminton gold

TOKYO: As Ameruddin Pora's relatives gathered in his living room, shouting at the final of the Olympics badminton women's doubles, he locked himself in his room to watch his daughter win Indonesia's historic gold medal. Apriyani Rahayu, 23, and her veteran partner Greysia Polii picked up the badminton-mad country's first Olympic gold medal in Tokyo on Monday, and its first-ever Olympic medal in the women's doubles.

"Everyone was screaming with joy outside, I decided to lock myself up in my room so that I can focus (on) praying while watching the game alone, and Allah heard my prayers. She won the gold medal," 63-year-old Pora told AFP yesterday a day after his daughter's win.

Her fellow Indonesians were also celebrating, taking to social media on Monday to hail the gold medal win, while President Joko Widodo said the victory was a gift for the country's independence day that is slated for August 17.

Pora said his daughter used her mother Siti Jahar's death in 2015 as fuel for the momentous victory, a gift to the woman who inspired her rise to become a professional badminton player. One day before flying to Tokyo, Rahayu flew home to Konawe city in southeast Sulawesi island to visit her mother's grave and to ask for a blessing from her father. The badminton star's relatives also came to Pora's house to pray for her during the short home visit. "She has this tradition whenever she wants to attend a competition, she always returns home to meet her parents, asking me for a prayer," he said. "Our prayers are finally answered by God." — AFP



TOKYO: This picture taken on June 12, 2021 shows students warming up before the karate lesson at a "dojo" of Kenkojuku Budokan karate school in Hachioji area of Tokyo. — AFP

Karate hoping to land killer blow before Olympic knockout

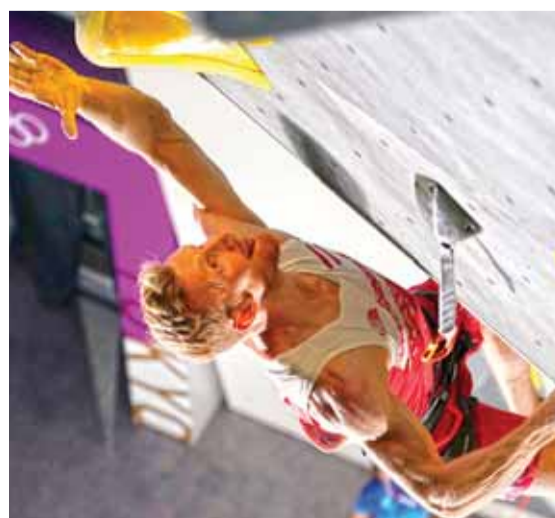
TOKYO: From Cobra Kai to Chuck Norris, karate is known around the world — but practitioners of the Japanese martial art are hoping the Tokyo Olympics can bring an even wider audience. After decades of campaigning, karate finally chops its way onto the Olympic stage in Japan as one of four sports making a Games debut. But the International Olympic Committee's decision to drop it from the 2024 Paris Games means it only has one shot to make an impact.

In Japan — birthplace of the high-kicking, hard-punching martial art — practitioners young and old want the sport to leave a lasting impression on global viewers. "I watch the athletes who are going to be at the Olympics and I think they're so cool," nine-year-old Yusei Iwai told AFP at a Tokyo karate dojo, after going through a series of warm-up exercises with around 30 classmates. "Karate becoming an Olympic sport means lots of different people will learn about its culture and history and find out what's so good about it."

Karate arrived in mainland Japan from the southern Okinawa islands in the early 20th century, and quickly became popular as a form of self-defense. But its true essence goes far beyond just punching and kicking, becoming a part of everyday life for those who practice it. "You don't have to wear karate gear to practice," said 72-year-old Yukimitsu Ono, who has been doing karate for around 55 years. "When I'm on the phone, I stand on one leg. When I'm chopping something in the kitchen, I stand with my legs spread apart and braced. It's become natural for me."

Olympic karate is split into two competitions — kumite and kata. Kumite involves two fighters trying to land blows on each other in bouts of up to three minutes, while kata sees athletes perform choreographed moves for the judges to score. Karate officials have been pushing for the sport to be included in the Olympics since the 1970s, and the athletes taking part this summer are excited to finally be there. "It feels significant that the first time karate is appearing at the Olympics is in Tokyo," said Mayumi Someya, who will represent Japan in the women's 61kg kumite competition. "I think it's important that we convey the appeal of karate when we appear at the Games."

Karate's image took a body-blow earlier this year though, when a Japanese official was forced to resign after being accused of bullying by former world champion Ayumi Uekusa. Uekusa, who will compete at the Tokyo Games, said Masao Kagawa hit her in the face with a bamboo sword in training, leaving her with a bruised eye. But karate aficionados insist the sport has become much safer over the years, and are hoping the Games can help it shed its stern image. "Before karate got into the Olympics, parents used to enroll their kids because they wanted to toughen them up — kids who were quiet or who would cry a lot," said Tomokatsu Okano, who owns a chain of karate dojos in Japan and the United States. — AFP



TOKYO: In this overview image Austria's Jakob Schubert competes in the men's sport climbing lead qualification during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Aomi Urban Sports Park in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP



Warholm world record in hurdles epic, Mihambo soars to long jump gold

TOKYO: Norway's Karsten Warholm shattered the world record to claim gold in an epic 400m hurdles at the Olympics yesterday as Germany's Malaika Mihambo soared to victory in the long jump. One of the most eagerly anticipated events of the Olympic track and field program, the 400m hurdles lived up to its billing as world champion Warholm produced a jaw-dropping performance in fierce midday sun at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium.

The 25-year-old stormed over the line in an incredible 45.94 seconds, slicing a massive 0.8sec off his own world mark of 46.70 set in Oslo last month. Long-time USA rival Rai Benjamin pushed Warholm hard in the home straight and took silver in another blistering time of 46.17sec, the second fastest in history.

Brazil's Alison dos Santos narrowly missed ducking inside the old world record, clocking 46.72sec to take bronze. Warholm roared in apparent disbelief as he spotted his winning time, dropping to his knees and ripping open his running vest.

"I always say that the perfect race doesn't exist, but this is the closest I've come to a perfect race," Warholm said. The two-time world champion said he decided to set a furious pace from the gun in order to "stress" his rivals. "After that I just ran for my life," he said. "I would have died for that gold medal today."

It was the dramatic final act of an entertaining morning session on day five of the athletics competition that produced a gold for German long-jumper Mihambo in a classic duel with 2012 gold medalist and four-time world champion Brittney Reese of the United States.

Mihambo was lying in the bronze medal position ahead of her final jump, but hammered down the runway to register a season-best jump of 7.00 meters to take the lead. "I knew this was my last chance and that I had to do it, and I knew I had more in me than 6.95," Mihambo told AFP. "So I believed in myself."

Mihambo's leap left Reese — who had led the competition with a best jump of 6.97m — with one final attempt to win gold. But the American could only manage 6.84 with her last effort, taking silver ahead of Nigeria's Ese Brume, who won bronze with a jump of 6.97m.

Mihambo admitted she had found it hard to watch as she waited nervously to see if Reese would snatch



TOKYO: Norway's Karsten Warholm reacts after winning and breaking the world record in the men's 400m hurdles final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

gold with the final jump of the competition. "I tried to have a sneak peek on the display," she said. "I really don't like this position where you cannot do anything about it and you have to watch the girls do what they have to do. It was a horrible moment, but at least it was short."

Felix off the mark

Elsewhere yesterday, US track and field's golden girl Allyson Felix got her fifth Olympic Games off to a smooth start, cruising to victory in her opening 400m heat. The 35-year-old needs one more medal in Tokyo to become the most decorated female track and field athlete in Olympic history, a title she shares with Jamaica's Merlene Ottey with nine medals.

Felix, the only woman in Olympic history with six

athletics gold medals, romped home in 50.84sec. "It's nice to get going," Felix said. "It feels like I've been waiting forever. It felt good to get out there and bump it up for the semi." In the opening round of the men's 200m world champion Noah Lyles eased into the semi-finals, winning in 20.18sec. Fellow qualifiers included his compatriot Kenny Bednarek in 20.01sec and 17-year-old US sensation Erriyon Knighton in 20.55sec.

The qualifying rounds of the women's javelin competition featured upsets with Croatia's 2016 gold medalist Sara Kolak crashing out after failing to register a mark from three attempts. The Czech Republic's Barbora Spotakova was also a surprise early casualty, the 2008 and 2012 gold medalist finishing just outside the qualifying places to miss out on the final. —AFP

Thompson-Herah seals 'double-double' with 200m gold

TOKYO: Elaine Thompson-Herah made Olympic history in Tokyo yesterday, emulating fellow Jamaican Usain Bolt to complete an unprecedented women's sprinting "double-double" with victory in the 200 meters. Thompson-Herah, the 2016 Olympics 100m and 200m gold medalist who defended her 100m title on Saturday, sealed a record fourth individual gold after storming home in a blistering 21.53sec. Namibian teenager Christine Mboma took silver in 21.81sec while the USA's Gabby Thomas won bronze in 21.87sec.

The 29-year-old Thompson-Herah's time was the second fastest in history after Florence Griffith Joyner's world record of 21.34sec set at the drug-tarnished 1988 Seoul Olympics. As well as becoming the first woman to claim a 100m-200m double-double, emulating Bolt, who eventually won three consecutive 100m-200m Olympic titles, Thompson-Herah is the only female track and field athlete to win four individual Olympic track golds. "It really means a lot to me to be in that history

book, because I've been through a lot and it tells my story," Thompson-Herah said.

The Jamaican favorite had got off to a blazing start, building a lead off the bend which she never relinquished as she motored to the line. It looked as if Thomas and Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce would take the silver and bronze, but that duo were passed by a scorching finish over the final 20 meters from the 18-year-old Mboma who plundered silver. "The mission was to go again and capture the medal, which was the plan," said Thompson-Herah.

Thompson-Herah had faced a battle to qualify for Tokyo, with a niggling Achilles problem hampering her fitness earlier this season. She finished third in the 100m and 200m at the Jamaica trials behind Fraser-Pryce, who had entered the Olympics as Jamaica's main threat.

"It hasn't sunk in yet," Thompson-Herah said. "I don't want to get too excited, because I haven't slept since the 100m final. I don't know how I've done it, I've been laying down, not sleeping but I've still managed to come out here."

Thompson-Herah revealed she is now eyeing Griffith Joyner's 33-year-old world record. "I will continue to dominate," she said. "I wish I could show you my phone right now. My notes each day that I go through have my 'hymns' that I have written down: PB, world lead, world record and to

"Yeah, we want gold," she said. "It's an accomplishment that I wanted off my list."

It was a remarkable display from Mu, showing a confidence and maturity that belied her relative inexperience in championship-level track and field. Drawn in lane three, Mu glided into the lead before the 200m mark and never looked back, clocking a brisk 57.82 first lap.

World record vow

She then cranked up the pace in the closing 200 meters, pulling away from the field to cross the line with a comfortable margin of victory from the fast-finishing Hodgkinson. It was a performance reminiscent of David Rudisha's world record-breaking performance at the 2012 Olympics, when the Kenyan led from start to finish to claim a brilliant gold.

"That race was literally insane," Mu told AFP. "I think I've compared myself to him once, just thinking about how he ran. 'If the world record had gone down (tonight) I would have been like 'Yeah, definitely Rudisha.'"

The women's 800m world record remains one of the longest-standing records in athletics, a daunting 1:53.28 set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of then Czechoslovakia during the Cold War state-sponsored doping era.

With time on her side and with an emerging crop of 800m runners coming through, Mu believes that bench-



TOKYO: Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah celebrates with the flag of Jamaica after winning the women's 200m final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

mark could well be vulnerable in the years ahead. "Most definitely I think it's possible," she said. "Especially with the other athletes, like Keely (Hodgkinson). She's amazing and we have some time to go. I'm sure within the next couple of years we'll continue to push each other. That record's definitely going to go down." —AFP

defend my title. So I can tick three things off."

Namibian teen Mboma was only running the 200m because she and compatriot Beatrice Masilingi, who finished sixth in 22.28sec, are barred from their preferred distance of 400m under international rules because they have heightened testosterone levels. Under World Athletics regulations, they would have to undergo treatment to lower their testosterone if they want to compete in distances from 400m to a mile. —AFP



TOKYO: Gold medalist USA's Athing Mu (left) and bronze medalist USA's Raevyn Rogers pose on the track after competing in the women's 800m final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

mark could well be vulnerable in the years ahead. "Most definitely I think it's possible," she said. "Especially with the other athletes, like Keely (Hodgkinson). She's amazing and we have some time to go. I'm sure within the next couple of years we'll continue to push each other. That record's definitely going to go down." —AFP

Wlodarczyk makes history

In the meantime, Poland's Anita Wlodarczyk became the first female athlete to win the same Olympic track and field event three times in a row with victory in the hammer yesterday. The 35-year-old Pole, who won golds at the 2012 and 2016 Games in London and Rio, dominated the field with a best throw of 78.48 meters. It was a massive 1.45m clear

Tokyo Olympics medals won yesterday	
Artistic Gymnastics - Men's Parallel Bars	GOLD - ZOU Jingyuan - China SILVER - DAUSER Lukas - Germany BRONZE - ARICAN Ferhat - Turkey
Artistic Gymnastics - Women's Balance Beam	GOLD - GUAN Chenchen - China SILVER - TANG Xijing - China BRONZE - BILES Simone - United States of America
Artistic Gymnastics - Men's Horizontal Bar	GOLD - HASHIMOTO Daiki - Japan SILVER - SRBIC Tin - Croatia BRONZE - NAGORNYY Nikita - Russian Olympic Committee
Athletics - Women's Long Jump	GOLD - MIHAMBO Malaika - Germany SILVER - REESE Brittney - United States of America BRONZE - BRUME Ese - Nigeria
Athletics - Men's 400m Hurdles	GOLD - WARHOLM Karsten - Norway SILVER - BENJAMIN Rai - United States of America BRONZE - dos SANTOS Alison - Brazil
Athletics - Men's Pole Vault	GOLD - DUPLANTIS Armand - Sweden SILVER - NILSEN Christopher - United States of America BRONZE - BRAZ Thiago - Brazil
Athletics - Women's Hammer Throw	GOLD - WLODARCZYK Anita - Poland SILVER - WANG Zheng - China BRONZE - KOPRON Malwina - Poland
Athletics - Women's 800m	GOLD - MU Athing - United States of America SILVER - HODGKINSON Keely - Great Britain BRONZE - ROGERS Raevyn - United States of America
Athletics - Women's 200m	GOLD - THOMPSON-HERAH Elaine - Jamaica SILVER - MBOMA Christine - Namibia BRONZE - ROGERS Raevyn - United States of America
Boxing - Women's Feather (54-57kg)	GOLD - IRIE Sena - Japan SILVER - PETECIO Nesthy - Philippines BRONZE - ARTINGSTALL Karriss - Great Britain BRONZE - TESTA Irma - Italy
Boxing - Men's Welter (63-69kg)	GOLD - IGLESIAS Roniel - Cuba SILVER - McCORMACK Pat - Great Britain BRONZE - ZAMKOVAI Andrei - Russian Olympic Committee BRONZE - WALSH Aidan - Ireland
Canoe Sprint - Women's Kayak Single 200m	GOLD - CARRINGTON Lisa - New Zealand SILVER - PORTELA Teresa - Spain BRONZE - JORGENSEN Emma Aastrand - Denmark
Canoe Sprint - Men's Canoe Double 1000m	GOLD - Cuba SILVER - China BRONZE - Germany
Canoe Sprint - Men's Kayak Single 1000m	GOLD - KOPASZ Balin - Hungary SILVER - VARGA Adam - Hungary BRONZE - PIMENTA Fernando - Portugal
Cycling Track - Women's Team Pursuit	GOLD - Germany SILVER - Great Britain BRONZE - United States of America
Cycling Track - Men's Team Sprint	GOLD - Netherlands SILVER - Great Britain BRONZE - France
Diving - Men's 3m Springboard	GOLD - XIE Siy - China SILVER - WANG Zongyuan - China BRONZE - LAUGHER Jack - Great Britain
Sailing - Women's Skiff - 49er FX	GOLD - Brazil SILVER - Germany BRONZE - Netherlands
Sailing - Men's Skiff - 49e	GOLD - Great Britain SILVER - New Zealand BRONZE - Germany
Sailing - Men's One Person Dinghy (Heavyweight) - Finn	GOLD - SCOTT Giles - Great Britain SILVER - BERECZ Zsombor - Hungary BRONZE - CARDONA MENDEZ Joan - Spain
Sailing - Mixed Multihull - Nacra 17 Foiling	GOLD - Italy SILVER - Great Britain BRONZE - Germany
Weightlifting - Men's 109kg	GOLD - DJURAEV Akbar - Uzbekistan SILVER - MARTIROSYAN Simon - Armenia BRONZE - PLESNIEKS Arturs - Latvia
Wrestling - Men's Greco-Roman 77kg	GOLD - LORINCZ Tamas - Hungary SILVER - MAKHMUDOV Akhzor - Kyrgyzstan BRONZE - YABIKU Shohei - Japan BRONZE - HUSEYNOV Rafiq - Azerbaijan
Wrestling - Men's Greco-Roman 97kg	GOLD - EVLOEV Musa - Russian Olympic Committee SILVER - ALEKSANYAN Artur - Armenia BRONZE - MICHALIK Tadeusz - Poland BRONZE - SARAVI Mohammadadi - Iran
Wrestling - Women's Freestyle 68kg	GOLD - MENSASH STOCK Tamyra Mariama - United States of America SILVER - OBORUDDU Blessing - Germany BRONZE - CHERKASOVA Aila - Ukraine BRONZE - ZHUMANAZAROVA Meerim - Kyrgyzstan

Mighty Mu storms to Olympic 800m gold

TOKYO: Teenager Athing Mu became the first American woman to win the Olympic 800m crown in more than half a century yesterday, producing a superb display of front-running to win the gold. The 19-year-old prodigy from New Jersey, who only turned professional in June after a successful college career, led from start to finish to win in a new US national record of 1min 55.21sec.

Britain's Keely Hodgkinson — another 19-year-old — took silver in 1:55.88 while Raevyn Rogers of the United States took bronze in 1:56.81. Mu, whose parents moved to the United States after fleeing civil war in Sudan, is the first American woman to win the Olympic 800m title since Madeline Manning at the 1968 Mexico City Games. "It's awesome," said Mu. "I feel like I've just accomplished one of my goals. I just wanted to be a medalist."

Mu said that her ambition grew bigger than that as it got closer to the final. "I wasn't really putting gold on that, but as it got closer to the final today, I was like,

Kuwait's Yoha misses 110m hurdles semi

TOKYO: Kuwait's Yaqoub Al-Yoha was unable to advance to the semifinals in the men's 110-meter hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics after finishing seventh in his heat yesterday. Yoha ran his season's best 13.69 seconds in Heat 2 at the Olympic Stadium. The top four runners in each heat and the next four fastest qualified to the semifinals today.

Elsewhere, world champion Noah Lyles endured a finish-line gaffe to qualify from yesterday's semi-

finals for the Olympic 200 meters final. The 24-year-old inexplicably slowed up with 10 meters of his semi to run and was promptly overtaken at the line by Canada's Aaron Brown and Liberian Joseph Fahnbulleh, all three credited with 19.99sec. It meant Lyles didn't qualify automatically as one of the first two finishers, instead handed an anxious wait as the third and final semi-final went ahead.

That was won in some style by Brown's teammate Andre de Grasse, the Rio silver medalist, who clocked a national record of 19.73sec ahead of American Kenneth Bednarek, in 19.83. Lyles qualified as one of the next two fastest, along with Jereem Richards of Trinidad and Tobago. US teen sensation Erriyon Knighton won the opening semi-final con-

vincingly in 20.02sec, scoring a psychological blow by casually looking across the field no less than four times on the back stretch through to the line. The 17-year-old will become one of the youngest ever 200m finalists when he lines up at the Olympic Stadium today.

Sensational Thompson-Herah seals 'double-double', Biles wins brave bronze

TOKYO: Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah made history with the Olympic sprint "double-double" yesterday, as superstar gymnast Simone Biles stared down the dreaded "twisties" to bravely win bronze.

Thompson-Herah's blistering 200 meters win, following her brilliant 100m victory, made her the first woman to win both Olympic sprints twice in a row, evoking memories of her retired compatriot Usain Bolt. It rounded off a stunning day on the track, when Norway's Karsten Warholm obliterated his own 400m hurdles world record and Athing Mu, 19, became the first American woman to win the 800m in 53 years.

Thompson-Herah's 21.53sec was the second fastest ever seen after Florence Griffith Joyner's world record of 21.34, set at the drug-tarnished 1988 Seoul Olympics. As well as becoming the first woman to claim a 100m-200m "double-double", the 29-year-old is the only female track and field athlete to win four individual Olympic golds. "It really means a lot to me to be in that history book, because I've been through a lot and it tells my story," the Jamaican said. Namibia's Christine Mboma, who was only running the 200m because she is barred from her preferred 400m for elevated testosterone levels, took silver in 21.81, while the USA's Gabby Thomas took bronze in 21.87.

Gymnast Biles had pulled out of her other finals as she battled the "twisties", a disorientating mental block, but she returned in medal-winning style to high excitement at the Ariake Gymnastics Centre. The American four-time gold-medalist, widely considered the "GOAT" (Greatest Of All Time) put in a solid routine including a double backward somersault and double pike dismount, smiling broadly as she was congratulated by her teammates.

Biles was lying in the silver medal position until the final competitor, 16-year-old Chinese Guan Chenchen, stepped up and scored 14.633 points to take first place, pushing teammate Tang Xijing into silver. "I was just happy to be able to perform regardless of the outcome," said Biles, who revealed her aunt died two days ago. "I did it for me and I was proud of myself for being able to compete one more time." China's double world champion Zou Jingyuan won the men's parallel bars and Japan's all-around winner Daiki Hashimoto, 19, completed a breakout Olympics with gold in the horizontal bar.



TOKYO: Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah crosses the finish line to win the women's 200m final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Hurdles epic

Earlier, the Olympic Stadium witnessed one of the great races when Warholm shattered his own world record by nearly 0.8sec in an epic 400m hurdles final. The 25-year-old stormed over the line in 45.94 seconds, pushed hard down the home straight by USA rival Rai Benjamin, who took silver in 46.17 — the second fastest in history. "I dream about it like a maniac," Warholm said, adding: "I didn't touch one hurdle. I was even able to find another gear coming home, so 'wow'. It's just so big."

There was more drama in the women's long jump, when Germany's Malaika Mihambo snatched gold from former champion Brittney Reese with her last leap of the competition. Mihambo, 27, was lying in the bronze medal position ahead of her final jump, but powered down the runway to register a season's best of 7.00 metres and Reese could not respond. Nigeria's Ese Brume took bronze.

"It was, I think, the most exciting women's long jump competition in history," said Mihambo. Swedish world record-holder Armand Duplantis leapt 6.02m to take pole vault gold, and Poland's Anita Włodarczyk won the women's hammer for the third straight Games with a heave of 78.48m. In cycling, Germany won the women's team pursuit gold in a world-record time of 4:04.242, and the Netherlands won the team sprint — their first men's track title since 1936. Briton Jason Kenny's silver in the team sprint made him the first track cyclist to win eight Olympic medals, just minutes after his wife, Laura, won her fifth medal in the team pursuit. Sena Irie became the first Japanese woman to win Olympic boxing gold, defeating Nesthy Petecio of the Philippines on unanimous points to take the featherweight title. And France's Bassa Mawem led the men's combined qualifications with 5.45sec in speed climbing, one of the sports that is making its debut as the Olympics seeks to reach new audiences. — AFP

Superb Asensio puts Spain into football final against Brazil

TOKYO: Spain will play reigning champions Brazil in the Olympic men's football final after Marco Asensio's superb extra-time winner yesterday secured a 1-0 victory over host nation Japan in Saitama. The Real Madrid winger came off the bench as a substitute and curled in a terrific strike in the 115th minute, sending Spain through to a first Olympic final since they finished runners-up at the 2000 Games in Sydney.

Japan will take on Mexico in Friday's bronze medal match. Mexico lost 4-1 on penalties to Brazil in Kashima following 120 goalless minutes. Having needed a last-gasp equalizer against Ivory Coast in the previous round before prevailing 5-2 after extra time, Spain created the better chances over the 90 minutes against Japan without making a breakthrough.

Japan goalkeeper Kosei Tani produced a key save to deny Rafa Mir in the first half, while VAR intervened to overturn a penalty awarded to Spain after a tackle by Maya Yoshida on Mikel Merino. Takefusa Kubo had a shot batted away by Unai Simon before Japan withstood a late siege, as Kou Itakura threw himself in the way of Martin Zubimendi's strike before Mir fired against the legs of Tani. As a shootout beckoned Asensio conjured up a touch of magic, spinning free inside the area and bending his effort beyond Tani's despairing dive.

Earlier, Brazil goalkeeper Santos saved Eduardo Aguirre's penalty in a shootout before Johan Vasquez smacked the post with Mexico's second attempt. Dani Alves, Gabriel Martinelli, Bruno Guimaraes and Reinier all scored for Brazil, who will be appearing in a fifth Olympic final in Yokohama. "It's very special to be able to take part in an Olympic Games and to get to the final. It's a really happy moment for me," said veteran Brazil captain Alves, who at 38 is one of three over-age players in the squad. "Since the very start we set ourselves the aim of seeking going, and I think we are deservedly in the final."

Mexico, who beat Brazil to win gold at London 2012, had scored 14 goals in four matches in this year's tournament — including six in their quarter-final victory over South Korea. Their best period against a disciplined Brazil came at the end of the first half as Luis Romo forced an excellent save from Santos, with Uriel Antuna's goalbound effort then blocked by Diego Carlos. — AFP



SAITAMA: USA's Kevin Wayne Durant goes for a dunk past Spain's Ricard Rubio (right) in the men's quarter-final basketball match between Spain and USA during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Saitama Super Arena in Saitama yesterday. — AFP

Durant leads USA into semi-final against Australia

SAITAMA: The United States kept their basketball gold medal dreams on track Tuesday by sweeping past world champions Spain 95-81 and into the semi-finals, while Olympic debutants Slovenia crushed Germany to set up a last-four clash with France.

Sharp-shooting Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant poured in 29 points and four assists for the Americans while Boston's Jayson Tatum chipped in with 13, nullifying Ricky Rubio's dazzling 38-point spree for Spain. The three-time defending champions will next face Patty Mills' Australia, who convincingly beat Argentina 97-59, for a place in Saturday's final.

World number three Australia are yet to finish on the podium at the Olympic Games, despite contesting the bronze medal match on four occasions. But with NBA stars like Mills and Joe Ingles in their ranks they believe they have enough firepower to break the drought in Japan.

Slovenia progressed on the back of 27 points from Zoran Dragic and another 20 from Dallas Mavericks star Luka Doncic in their 94-70 rout of Germany. They will meet France who edged Italy 84-75 in a nail-biter, with Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert drilling 22 points and fellow NBA mainstay Evan Fournier getting 21.

Gregg Popovich's USA team came to Tokyo with two shock defeats in exhibition games and then crashed in their opener against eventual Group A winners France — their first defeat at an Olympics since 2004. But they have steadied the ship and came through a see-sawing clash after knuckling down in

the final stretch to go 13-0 against their rivals in Olympic competition.

"We're in a good spot right now. Guys are starting to understand their roles and just get more comfortable within the team," said Durant. "I love how we stuck with it throughout this whole period of time and guys started figuring out what we need to do. We're supposed to be here (in the semis). For us it's about getting a gold."

Minnesota Timberwolves guard Rubio drilled 13 points to put Spain into a 21-19 lead after the first quarter as the US gave up a seven-point advantage. They traded the lead in a back-and-forth second quarter before Spain went on a 10-point run to move 39-29 clear. But inspired by Durant, the US fought back and two points inside the paint from Devin Booker with seconds to go drew them level 43-43 at the break.

Tough shots

The tide looked to turn in the third period with the US building a 22-6 streak to take charge before Spain regained ground to go into the final quarter just six points adrift at 69-63. With their reputation at stake — they have medalled in all 18 Olympics they have competed at, winning 15 golds, a silver and two bronze — the USA put their heads down to ensure they stayed in the tournament.

"They made some tough shots in the third quarter and we could not contain their firepower," said Spain's Los Angeles Lakers center Marc Gasol. "They made shots: 95 points is too many for us to win a game."

Earlier, world number 16 Slovenia continued their dream run against a German side ranked a place below them. "We knew it was not going to be an easy game. Even though everybody before the game expected us to win easy, it wasn't easy," said Slovenia coach Aleksander Sekulic. "These guys, they put their hearts out on the court." — AFP



Tokyo Olympics medals table after yesterday's events (G = Gold, S = Silver, B = Bronze, T = Total):

	G	S	B	T
China	32	21	16	69
United States	24	28	21	73
Japan	19	6	11	36
Australia	14	4	15	33
Russian Olympic Committee	13	21	18	52
Great Britain	13	17	13	43
Germany	8	8	14	30
France	6	10	8	24
Netherlands	6	7	7	20
South Korea	6	4	9	19
New Zealand	6	4	5	15
Italy	5	9	15	29
Hungary	4	4	3	11
Cuba	4	3	4	11
Czech Republic	4	3	1	8
Canada	3	4	7	14
Switzerland	3	4	5	12
Brazil	3	3	8	14
Croatia	3	3	2	8
Taiwan	2	4	4	10
Sweden	2	3	0	5
Poland	2	2	2	6
Denmark	2	1	3	6
Jamaica	2	1	2	5
Norway	2	1	1	4
Slovenia	2	1	1	4
Ecuador	2	1	0	3
Greece	2	0	1	3
Uzbekistan	2	0	1	3
Kosovo	2	0	0	2
Qatar	2	0	0	2
Spain	1	4	4	9
Georgia	1	4	1	6
Romania	1	3	0	4
Venezuela	1	3	0	4
Hong Kong	1	2	0	3
Slovakia	1	2	0	3
South Africa	1	2	0	3
Austria	1	1	3	5
Indonesia	1	1	3	5
Serbia	1	1	3	5
Belgium	1	1	1	3
Ethiopia	1	1	1	3
Philippines	1	1	0	2
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Turkey	1	0	5	6
Ireland	1	0	2	3
Zionist entity	1	0	2	3
Belarus	1	0	1	2
Estonia	1	0	1	2
Fiji	1	0	1	2
Iran	1	0	1	2
Latvia	1	0	1	2
Bermuda	1	0	0	1
Morocco	1	0	0	1
Puerto Rico	1	0	0	1
Thailand	1	0	0	1
Armenia	0	2	1	3
Colombia	0	2	1	3
Dominican Republic	0	2	1	3
Ukraine	0	1	6	7
Mongolia	0	1	2	3
Portugal	0	1	2	3
India	0	1	1	2
Kenya	0	1	1	2
Kirghyzstan	0	1	1	2
Nigeria	0	1	1	2
San Marino	0	1	1	2
Uganda	0	1	1	2
Bulgaria	0	1	0	1
Jordan	0	1	0	1
Namibia	0	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	0	1
Turkmenistan	0	1	0	1
Azerbaijan	0	0	3	3
Kazakhstan	0	0	3	3
Mexico	0	0	3	3
Egypt	0	0	2	2
Argentina	0	0	1	1
Finland	0	0	1	1
Ghana	0	0	1	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Malaysia	0	0	1	1