

2 Kuwait sends reinforcements to Turkey, Greece as wildfires rage



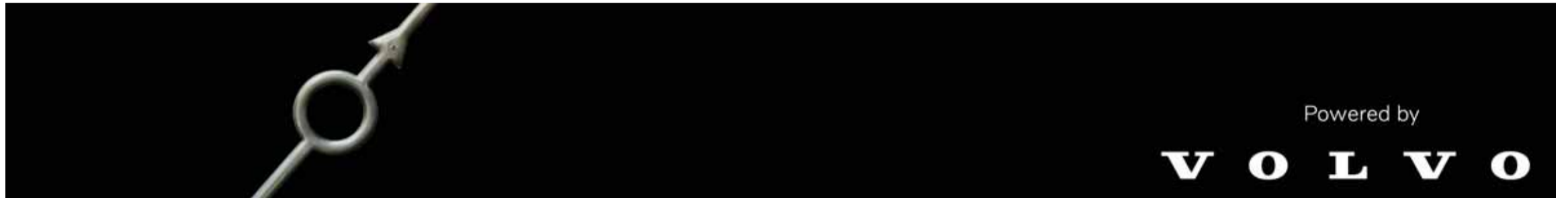
5 Raisi tells Macron nuclear talks must guarantee Tehran's 'rights'



13 Egypt papyrus makers keep tradition alive despite slump



14 India showers cash on Olympic hero Chopra



UN panel sounds 'code red' warning on climate change

UN chief insists report must be 'death knell' for fossil fuels



PEFKI, Greece: A local resident gestures as he holds an empty water hose during an attempt to extinguish forest fires approaching this village of on Evia island on Sunday. — AFP (See Page 5)

PARIS: We ignored the warnings, and now it's too late: Global heating has arrived with a vengeance and will see Earth's average temperature reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels around 2030, a decade earlier than projected only three years ago, according to a landmark United Nations assessment published yesterday.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) bombshell - landing 90 days before a key climate summit desperate to keep 1.5C in play - says the threshold will be breached around 2050, no matter how aggressively humanity draws down carbon pollution. Years in the making, the sobering report approved by 195 nations shines a harsh spotlight on governments dithering in the face of mounting evidence that climate change is an existential threat.

Nature itself has underscored their negligence. With only 1.1C of warming so far, an unbroken cascade of deadly, unprecedented weather disasters bulked up by climate change has swept the world this summer, from asphalt-melting heatwaves in Canada, to rainstorms turning city streets in China and Germany into rivers, to untamable wildfires sweeping Greece and California.

"This report is a reality check," said Valerie Masson-Delmotte, who co-lead hundreds of scientists

in reviewing a mountain of published climate science. "It has been clear for decades that the Earth's climate is changing, and the role of human influence on the climate system is undisputed." Indeed, all but a tiny fraction of warming so far is "unequivocally caused by human activities," the IPCC concluded for the first time in its three-decade history. The world must brace itself for worse - potentially much worse - to come, the report made clear.

Even if the 1.5C target humanity is now poised to overshoot is miraculously achieved, it would still generate heatwaves, rainfall, drought and other extreme weather "unprecedented in the observational record", it concluded. At slightly higher levels of global heating, what is today once-a-century coastal flooding will happen every year by 2100, fueled by storms gorged with extra moisture and rising seas.

"This report should send a shiver down the spine of everyone who reads it," said Dave Reay, director of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute at the University of Edinburgh, who was not among the authors. Another looming danger is "tipping points", invisible thresholds - triggered by rising temperatures - for irreversible changes in Earth's climate system.

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News in brief

Iraq to host 'regional summit'

BAGHDAD: Baghdad is to host a regional summit late this month, with French President Emmanuel Macron also attending, the Iraqi premier's office said yesterday. Mustafa Al-Kadhemi's office has said Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi Arabia's King Salman have been invited. But Baghdad has not said whether President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran would attend. — AFP

Jeweler to appeal extradition

LONDON: Fugitive Indian jeweler Nirav Modi can appeal his extradition to his homeland, where he is accused of defrauding one of the country's largest banks of \$1.8 billion, the High Court in London ruled yesterday. Judge Martin Chamberlain said Modi would be allowed to appeal against the initial court decision on mental health grounds and his right not to face inhuman treatment. — AFP

Iran caseload exceeds 40,000

TEHRAN: Iran's daily COVID caseload crossed the 40,000 mark yesterday, its health ministry said, marking a new record in infections and deaths for the second day running. In the past 24 hours, 40,808 people tested positive for the coronavirus and 588 died, it said. The latest figures bring the total number of infections to 4,199,537 and the number of deaths to 94,603. — AFP

France extends COVID pass

PARIS: France yesterday began enforcing a COVID pass in cafes, restaurants and trains, a tightening of rules the government hopes will boost vaccinations but which has prompted weeks of angry protests. The pass, already needed for the last three weeks to go to a cinema, attend a concert or visit a museum, will be needed to partake in usually routine aspects of life in France such as sipping a coffee in a cafe or travelling on an inter-city train. — AFP

Tourists from Russia fly to Egypt resorts

CAIRO: Flights bringing tourists from Russia to Egypt's Red Sea resorts arrived yesterday for the first time since the October 2015 jihadist bombing of a Russian airliner, officials said. Moscow barred direct flights to Egypt after the bombing of the passenger plane shortly after it took off from the popular resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all 224 people on board.

Yesterday morning's EgyptAir flight from the Russian capital brought 300

tourists to the resort town of Hurghada, an Egyptian civil aviation official said. A second flight later landed in Sharm el-Sheikh, where Russia's ambassador to Egypt and the provincial governor welcomed the passengers, an airport source said. EgyptAir CEO Amr Abulenein told AFP the national carrier would be operating a total of seven flights a week between Moscow and Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh.

A Russian delegation inspected both airports and resort hotels at the end of last month to check on security and health procedures, according to Russia's Tass news agency. The attack almost six years ago claimed by the jihadist Islamic State group dealt a blow to Egypt's key tourist industry, and the sector has been further battered by the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



HURGHADA, Egypt: Visitors from Russia arrive in this Red Sea resort yesterday on the first Russian tourist flight since the Oct 2015 bombing of a Russian airliner. — AFP

PSG braces for Messi arrival as Barca weeps

PARIS: Lionel Messi was expected to arrive in the French capital yesterday, lured by the limitless funds of Paris Saint-Germain, having said a tearful farewell to Barcelona after 21 years. The 34-year-old, seen by the French giants' Qatari owners as the vital missing piece of their frustrating Champions League puzzle, has already

had fans playing a guessing game.

On Sunday night, dozens of PSG diehards gathered at the gates of Le Bourget airport to the north of the capital in the hope of catching a glimpse of their newest 'galactico'. Their wait was in vain although French media maintained that it was a question of 'when' and not 'if' Messi arrives. "The news is expected Monday, even Tuesday. This is the most likely scenario," said Le Parisien yesterday morning.

"It only seems to be a matter of hours," suggested sports daily L'Equipe, which proclaimed "we are

Continued on Page 2



PARIS: People gather outside the Parc des Princes stadium as Argentinian football player Lionel Messi was expected to arrive yesterday. — AFP

Iraq rebels without a future

BAGHDAD: Kitted out and nowhere to go: Many young Iraqis in Baghdad make an effort to be hip, even as they admit their country may have no future. Take Mohammed, for example. He has set up for the night in a smoky cafe with two friends. He's 23, has serious hair and a handlebar moustache. Mohammed is a guitarist whose friends

like his songs, even if his mother doesn't. And at least he has his espresso.

In Baghdad "there are very few places for young people" to go, and he feels stifled by "conservative" Iraqi society, he said. And then there's COVID. And Iraqi politics. "Society keeps boys and girls apart," Mohammed said. "By the time of university, you've had no contact with girls, so you don't know how to behave."

As for the coronavirus, like 95 percent of Iraq's 40 million people, he isn't vaccinated. The number of daily infections is running at around 10,000. Mohammed is "afraid of the virus", but

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BAGHDAD: Mohammed, 23, plays the guitar as he sits with his friends at a coffee shop in the Karrada district of the capital on Aug 6, 2021. — AFP

Kuwait sends reinforcements to Greece, Turkey as wildfires rage



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Force team participating in efforts to battle wildfires in Greece. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti army announced yesterday that two Air Force transport planes left to Greece with some 40 Kuwaiti firefighters to help put out massive wildfires still raging in coastal towns of the European country. Directorate of the moral guidance and public relations of the army said that the aid comes as per His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's instructions. The two airplanes departed from Abdullah Al-Mubarak air base with the attendance of Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mikrad, Charge d'Affairs at the Embassy of Greece in Kuwait Antonius Hazeroğlu and a number of air base officers.

On Sunday, some 45 Kuwaiti firefighters began arriving in Turkey to join efforts to put out massive wildfires still raging in coastal towns, the Kuwaiti military said, adding the aid comes as per His Highness the Amir's instructions. The Kuwaiti contingent are equipped with an assortment of fire-fighting gear, while another team of firefighters will pursue a similar mission in neighboring Greece, where drought-fueled wildfires have been spreading for five days, said a military statement. Wildfires have been raging in Greece and Turkey amid a heat wave not seen in southern Europe in decades. — KUNA



The Kuwait Fire Force team participating in efforts to battle wildfires in Turkey.



Fire engines sent by Kuwait to take part in efforts to battle wildfires in Greece.

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PSG braces for Messi arrival as...

Continued from Page 1

entering the most incredible days in the history of the French championship." Before signing the contract in Paris, Messi will first have to undergo a medical examination. Stressing no deals had been done, Messi conceded at his tearful farewell news conference in Barcelona on Sunday that joining PSG was a "possibility".

In reality, they are the only club who can afford what is expected to be a deal worth \$35 million (\$41m) a year for the 34-year-old Argentine. "I gave everything for Barcelona from the first day that I arrived right to the last. I never imagined having to

say goodbye," a tearful Messi told the news conference. "I have still not come to terms with the reality of leaving this club now - I love this club."

Yesterday morning, the images of the Argentinian in tears leapt out from the pages of all the Spanish sports dailies such as Marca, AS and Sport. One note of discord came from a group of Barcelona fans, represented by Parisian lawyer Juan Branco, who announced yesterday their intention to lodge a complaint with the European Commission in connection with the rules of financial fair play that Barcelona and PSG must follow.

The group also intends to ask the French courts to suspend a possible transfer. Messi, widely considered the most gifted player in the history of the game, won 35 trophies at Barcelona after joining as a 13-year-old - including four Champions Leagues and 10 league titles while his 672 goals are a record tally for one club. — AFP

Iraq rebels without...

Continued from Page 1

like most Iraqis who gather in public spaces, he doesn't wear a mask. "But my mates are vaccinated, so that's OK," he said.

Talk turns to politics, a hated subject for those who joined the unprecedented Oct 2019 uprising against corruption and mismanagement. "I was shot three times" by anti-riot forces, Mohammed said, lifting his T-shirt to reveal a huge scar. He was one of 30,000 people wounded in the protests. Nearly 600 were killed.

At least 70 activists have been targeted for murder or kidnapping by unidentified groups. The activists believe these are Shiite militias financed by and linked

to Iran. Mohammed said there is no way will he vote in the planned general election in October. "There's no future in Iraq," says the Red Crescent worker, who earns the monthly equivalent of \$400.

Ahmed is 19 and agrees. Once a week, he and friends meet under the Jadriya Bridge in Baghdad, and then hit the streets on scooters. He loves social media such as Tik Tok, and doesn't dwell too much on the future. Ahmed would like to be a civil servant, but says: "It's difficult because everything goes through the 'wasta' system - of using influence and personal connections to get ahead. His graduate brother has been jobless for three years, like two in every five young Iraqis.

Falima is even younger: at just 17, she stands out in a conservative society for not wearing hijab head covering. She sports tattoos on her fingers, wears makeup and has pink and yellow hair. At weekends she hangs out with friends in cafes. But there are limits. Bars with alcohol and nightclubs "are not for me, as a woman and at my age". — AFP

UN panel sounds 'code red' warning...

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Disintegrating ice sheets holding enough water to raise seas a dozen meters; the melting of permafrost laden with double the carbon in the atmosphere; the transition of the Amazon from tropical forest to savannah - these potential catastrophes "cannot be ruled out," the report cautions. "An important reason for taking urgent action on emissions is to decrease the chances that one or more of these world-changing events will be triggered over the 21st century," said Andrew Watson, Royal Society Research Professor at the University of Exeter.

Our natural allies in the fight against climate change, meanwhile, are suffering battle fatigue. Since about 1960, forests, soil and oceans have steadily absorbed 56 percent of all the CO2 humanity has chucked into the atmosphere - even as those emissions have increased by half. But these carbon sinks are becoming saturated, according to the IPCC, and the percentage of human-induced carbon they soak up is likely to

decline as the century unfolds.

"This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "Countries should also end all new fossil fuel exploration and production, and shift fossil fuel subsidies into renewable energy." In his most frontal assault yet on the fossil fuel industry that powers the global economy, Guterres said "immediate action" was needed to decarbonize the energy sector.

"The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: Greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk," said Guterres. "If we combine forces now, we can avert climate catastrophe. But, as today's report makes clear, there is no time for delay and no room for excuses."

The report offers a sliver of hope for keeping the 1.5C goal alive. The IPCC projected the increase in global surface temperature for five emissions scenarios - ranging from wildly optimistic to outright reckless - and identifies best estimates for 20-year periods with mid-points of 2030, 2050 and 2090. By mid-century, the 1.5C threshold will be breached across the board - by a 10th of a degree along the most ambitious pathway, and by nearly a full degree at the opposite extreme. — AFP

Local

Thousands received COVID-19 vaccine during holiday in Kuwait



KUWAIT: A combination of photos released by Kuwait's health ministry showing people queuing to receive their COVID-19 vaccine jabs during the holiday. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: A large number of people in Kuwait received their COVID-19 vaccine jabs during the Hijri New Year holiday, the health ministry announced yesterday. Thousands of people headed to vaccination centers in Mishref, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Jaber Causeway and the Taddamon sports club after receiving text messages to receive their doses during the holiday, the ministry said, noting that around 100,000 texts are sent on a daily basis.

Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases had increased by 555 to 403,349 on Sunday, as deaths increased by three to 2,369, the health ministry announced. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stood at 671 by Sunday, with 243 of them in intensive care units, ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, revealing that another 8,630 were receiving regular treatment. Meanwhile, the ministry announced Sunday that 751 people recovered from the virus the previous day, raising total recoveries to 392,350. On Saturday, the ministry announced 501 new cases, five deaths and 840 fresh recoveries.

Another 751 people were cured of the virus, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 392,350, ministry spokesperson Dr. Abdallah Al-Sanad said in a statement. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 671, with 243 of them in intensive care units, he added, revealing that another 8,630 are receiving regular treatment. Some 10,884 swab tests were conducted over the last day out of a total of 3,511,276, mentioned the official. He went on to urge nationals and expatriates alike that abiding by health precautions, mainly, following social distancing rules, is the only way to halt the spread of the virus.

Dr Sanad noted on Saturday that continuation of reporting positive evaluation signs confirms that the country's overall health system is on the right path, and closer to being in control of the current wave. He also valued efforts exerted by health officials, staff, and all workers, including doctors, nursing, technical and administrative staff, and the cooperation of the various supporting state agencies and voluntary teams. — KUNA



Kuwaiti tourists must submit vaccine certificate to enter facilities in France

PARIS: French Foreign Ministry announced yesterday that all Kuwaitis visiting France must submit a certificate that proves the person was vaccinated to enter daily facilities such as cinemas and restaurants. In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), an official at the French Foreign Ministry said that to participate in activities, a person is required to submit a certificate that shows that they had received one of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved vaccines which are Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. He pointed out that a person is required to download "TousAntiCovid" application and follow the country's health guidelines.

For unvaccinated people, they are required to take a PCR test within 48 hours to enter those facilities, he added. Earlier yesterday, France started using this policy, although tens of thousands of people objected to this policy saying that it diminishes their freedoms. The French government allowed a week for business owners to initiate this new system using QR code that allows people to enter those



LILLE: A waiter checks a customer's COVID-19 health pass on a mobile phone at the entrance of a restaurant in Lille, northern France, yesterday. — AFP

places; children are excluded. Kuwait's Ambassador to France Sami Al-Suleiman had earlier urged all Kuwaiti citizens to comply with the new health restrictions in the European country. In a statement to the press, the Ambassador said that France is witnessing a fourth

wave of the coronavirus pandemic, stressing adherence to health measurements in the country. The ambassador assured the embassy's keenness on the safety of all its citizens in France and its willingness to answer their inquiries on emergency line numbers: 06706738340147235425. — KUNA

Are you getting paid on public holidays?

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The labor law says employees should be paid during all public holidays. They should also be paid double if they work during these holidays and get an extra day off in compensation. But many companies are not complying with the law, based on complaints by some employees randomly questioned by Kuwait Times.

"We are not paid - they only give us an extra day off. They do not want to pay because they say the company is in trouble and barely makes enough to pay the employees. This is the case of many companies, especially during the pandemic," said Melanie, a cashier at a supermarket in Kuwait City. "For many years we haven't seen any extra money for working during holidays. I hope they pay us, as it will help our families, since earning extra money now is really hard," said Mansour, a Pakistani office worker in Mirqab.

The Kuwait labor law mandates that before the 7th of each month, the salaries of all employees must be sent to the bank. All employees are also entitled to paid leave on all official holidays, a day off every week, and an annual leave of 30 days even during the first year of work. Meanwhile, payment for each day of leave is equivalent to the employee's basic daily pay, and must be given to them before going on leave. If the employee is terminated, they are entitled to full payment of their accumulated leave days regardless of years of service. This is also equivalent to the basic pay per day.

Minister pushes reduced renewal fee for 60+ residents

KUWAIT: It seems the issue of residents aged 60 and above without a university degree is back on the table, as the KD 2,000 fee proposed earlier to renew their work permits will probably be reviewed. Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday that Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Salman has asked the Public Authority for Manpower's board to reconsider the KD 2,000 fee.

Informed sources said Salman sent the request

with his earlier recommendation for the renewal fee to be KD 500 along with medical insurance from a private insurance company. It is expected PAM's board will meet next week to discuss Salman's request. Sources said the minister's request is warranted for several reasons, including that the largest group included in this decision cannot afford the KD 2,000 fee. Moreover, health insurance in the private sector guarantees the strength and cohesiveness of the health system by reducing the pressures this group is subjected to.

Although Salman's proposal was only supported by the commerce and interior ministry undersecretaries and rejected by the majority of the board, sources said reopening of discussions in this regard have positive expectations for obtaining more support for the minister's proposal to reduce the fee.



KUWAIT: People shop at the Souq Sharq fish market in Kuwait City during auction on Sunday, as auctioning resumed in the country after six months of closure amid the coronavirus pandemic. Only people vaccinated against COVID-19 are allowed to attend the auction. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

Ministry closes Jahra gym over dancing classes

KUWAIT: Various liberal groups and activists in Kuwait have voiced their rejection of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry decision yesterday to close a Jahra gym after it announced giving belly dancing classes. The Ministry said the temporary closing came because the gym is not licensed to provide classes or courses of any kind, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported.

Teachers with expired visas to return to Kuwait?

KUWAIT: Teachers stuck abroad and who's visas have expired may have a chance to return to Kuwait after August 15, according to a local report. Authorities at the education ministry have provided the interior ministry with names of teachers in this situation to issue temporary visas for them to be able to return to Kuwait, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting an education ministry source. The report does not specify whether this applies to public school teachers only, or public and private school teachers.

Iraqis urged to provide info on missing Kuwaitis

BAGHDAD: Iraq's defense ministry on Sunday appealed to Iraqi people, who have any information on the bodies of the missing Kuwaitis in Iraq, the Amiri archives or other Kuwaiti properties, to provide it to authorities. The ministry called on those people to contact the Kuwaiti Embassy in Baghdad at: 07802604124, the Kuwaiti Consulate in Irbil at: 07511745555, the Kuwaiti Consulate in Basra at: 07828000066, and the International Mission of the Red Cross in Iraq at: 07703157444 and 07502120245. The Iraqi ministry has been pursuing the search for the missing Kuwaitis, in collaboration with the International Mission of the Red Cross. The ministry previously found some of them in a mass grave in Al-Muthanna Governorate, south of the country.

Local

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News in brief

Kuwait reports KD10.8b deficit for 2020/2021

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Finance said Saturday the budget deficit hit KD 10.8 billion (nearly \$35.5 billion) in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021. The figure reflects an increase by 68.174.8 percent compared to last year, according to a ministry press release. Oil revenues in the last fiscal year stood at KD 8.790 billion (\$28.9 billion); a 42.8-percent decline from the previous year, while non-oil revenues declined by 6.5 percent to KD 1.730 billion (some \$5.6 billion). The expenditures on salaries and subsidies accounted for 73 percent of the aggregate expenditure, noted the release. Commenting on the figures, Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Khalifa Hamada said FY 2020-2021's deficit is the "highest in Kuwait's budgetary history".

Foreign Minister congratulates new UN Envoy to Yemen

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah congratulated Hans Grundberg on his appointment as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Yemen. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser expressed during a phone call his sincere wishes of success to Grundberg upon assuming such important position. He reiterated the State of Kuwait's principled and unwavering commitment to Yemen's unity, stability and security, as well as support to all efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful solution to the crisis. In this regard, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser underlined the importance of implementing the Saudi peace initiative in Yemen, in addition to the Gulf initiative, outcomes of the Yemeni National Dialogue and the UN Security Council Resolution 2216. The top diplomat also reiterated Kuwait's support for efforts and measures to be undertaken by the Special Envoy in the matter.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Players compete during a motosurf racing in Ahmadi Governorate, Kuwait, on Friday. — Photo by Ghazy Qaffaf (Xinhua)

Ambassador meets prominent Pakistani executives in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Pakistani executives from the accountancy profession working in various industrial and service sectors in Kuwait met the Pakistani Ambassador Sajjad at the Pakistan House recently. At the start of the meeting, the ambassador welcomed everyone at the Pakistan House. He reiterated that Pakistani professionals in Kuwait should play a positive role in further enhancing Pakistan's image in accountancy, finance and technology field.

Ambassador Sajjad also highlighted the achievements of Pakistanis in Kuwait in other areas like health, financial services and technology. He hoped that these trends will continue and that the Pakistani diaspora in Kuwait will "continue to make Pakistan proud of their ever-growing achievements in their fields."

He then requested the executives gathered to



ask questions and responded to their enquiries and gave his views on the issues raised. The Pakistani executives thanked the ambassador for accepting to meet them and were pleased to hear the measures taken by the ambassador and his team to solve the issues faced by the Pakistan community and also thanked them for their responsiveness whenever

help has been requested.

During lunch organized for the prominent Pakistani executives, further discussions were held and future actions determined. At the end of the meeting, the ambassador lauded the positive role being played by the Pakistani executives in Kuwait and wished them success in their future endeavors.

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Kuwait Airways commends decision to allow residents in

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) praised Kuwait's recent decision to allow residents fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to enter the country, saying that it the latest of decisions taken this year that are hoped to help revive the aviation industry that was heavily impacted by the pandemic.

In this regard, KAC reiterated in a press statement yesterday that it had launched its first commercial flight to Munich, Germany on July 17, with schedule flights to this destination two times a week; Thursdays and Saturdays. KAC had launched on July 10 its first commercial flight to Geneva, Switzerland, as it schedules two flights a week to this destination; on Mondays and Fridays. On July 8, the airline announced increasing weekly flights to London to three; on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. KAC had resumed operations to the British capital in the middle of June at a rate of a single flight a week. It has also announced renewing operations to Paris, Malaga, Frankfurt and Sarajevo.

On June 15, it announced starting three flights per week to Bodrum on Saturdays, Tuesdays and



Thursdays. And on June 18, it began organizing three flights a week to Trabzon on Sundays, Mondays and Fridays, in addition to the regular flights to Istanbul. Moreover, the national carrier announced two flights per week to Tbilisi on Mondays and Fridays, in addition to several summer tourism destinations. The corporation has affirmed its readiness to restore full operations of commercial flights in line with approval of the health authorities and resumption of air navigation in other countries. KAC had relaunched its first commercial flight to Paris earlier this month. Flights to this destination operate thrice weekly on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.





Nagasaki marks atomic bomb anniversary

Belarus leader denies violent crackdown on critics

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(Left) In this file photo taken on July 25, 2021, a home burns as flames from the Dixie fire tear through the Indian Falls neighborhood of unincorporated Plumas County, California. (Right) (FILES) An aerial file photo taken on Aug 15, 2019 shows an iceberg as it floats along the eastern coast of Greenland near Kulusuk. —AFP



World shudders at UN climate report

Mix of horror and hopefulness as scale of emergency dawns on many

PARIS: World leaders, green groups and influencers reacted yesterday to a "terrifying" UN climate science report with a mix of horror and hopefulness as the scale of the emergency dawned on many. US presidential envoy on climate John Kerry said the IPCC report, which warned the world is on course to reach 1.5C of warming around 2030, showed "the climate crisis is not only here, it is growing increasingly severe". Frans Timmermans, the European Union's deputy climate chief said the 3,500-page report proved "it's not too late to stem the tide and prevent runaway climate change".

Britain's Boris Johnson, whose government is hosting a crucial climate summit in November, said the assessment "makes for sobering reading". "I hope today's IPCC report will be a wake-up call for the world to take action now, before we meet in Glasgow

in November for the critical COP26 summit," he said. Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed said the document confirmed that climate vulnerable nations were "on the edge of extinction".

'Suicidal'

Saleemul Huq, director of Dhaka-based environmental think tank ICCCAD, said the IPCC report was "the final warning that bubble of empty promises is about to burst". He said it showed G20 countries needed to accelerate emissions cuts to ensure their economies are in line with the 1.5C target. "It's suicidal, and economically irrational to keep procrastinating," said Huq.

Dorothy Guerrero, head of policy at Global Justice Now, said the report was a "terrifying warning of our future unless drastic action is taken." "There is no

denying the science of the climate crisis," she said. "But policymakers refuse to face up to the fact that it is rooted in economics and a history of colonial exploitation."

Action

Many interpreted the IPCC's assessment as a clarion call to overhaul the fossil-fuel powered global economy. "Where can we start? Almost everywhere," said Katherine Hayhoe, chief scientist for The Nature Conservancy. "Accelerating the transition to clean energy; reforming our most environmentally-damaging activities; and recalibrating financial flows to accelerate the economic transition."

Climate wunderkind Greta Thunberg said the report was a "solid (but cautious) summary" of the state of the planet. "It doesn't tell us what to do," she

said on Twitter. "It is up to us to be brave and take decisions based on the scientific evidence provided in these reports. We can still avoid the worst consequences, but not if we continue like today, and not without treating the crisis like a crisis." Ugandan climate justice activist Vanessa Nakate tweeted "Scientists warn time running out on the 1.5C target! World leaders must get serious about climate change!"

Fossil fall guys

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said yesterday's report "must sound a death knell" for coal, oil and gas and warned that fossil fuels were destroying the planet. Greenpeace was even more direct. "Dear fossil fuel industry," the charity said on Twitter. "We'll see you in court." —AFP

Firefighters try to stop Greek blaze from reaching forest

PEFKI, Greece: Firefighters battled heat and suffocating smoke for a seventh consecutive day yesterday on the Greek island of Evia, swept by the most destructive of the wildfires that have destroyed hundreds of homes and forced thousands to flee. Greece and neighboring Turkey have been battling devastating blazes for nearly two weeks as the region suffers its worst heat-wave in decades.

The wildfires continue as an alarming UN climate report warned that the planet is warming faster than previously estimated. Two people have been confirmed dead in Greece and eight in Turkey, while dozens have been hospitalized. While most of the fires that have blazed elsewhere in Greece for nearly two weeks have stabilized or receded, the ones on rugged and forested Evia - Greece's second largest island after Crete - were the most worrying, creating apocalyptic scenes.

Saving villages

Authorities were yesterday putting the priority on saving the villages of Kamatriades and Galatsades because "if the fire passes through there, it will end up in a thick forest that will be difficult to extinguish," firefighters told the Greek news agency ANA. As the sweeping wall of fire laid siege to one village after another on the north of the island, firefighters toiled until dawn to quench flames at Monokarya in order to protect the town of Istiaia, all without the help of water-dousing aircraft, ANA reported.

Thick and suffocating smoke yesterday also

enveloped the coastal region of Pefki, where hundreds of villagers had been evacuated by sea, while others regrouped, an AFP reporting team said. Around 300 people evacuated from surrounding villages spent the night in a ferry moored near the long beach. Looming in the haze offshore, a military ship awaited further evacuees.

The ferry "was the only place where people could get a little peace and security," a military official, Panagiotis Charalambos, told AFP. Like many nearby communities, Pefki "had no electricity or water," he said. "Here, the people lived from the forest, from the crops, olives and tourism. There's nothing of that left now," said Louisa, a pensioner in Pefki.

Finance Minister Christos Staikouras said up to 6,000 euros per household would be allocated to residents whose homes were damaged, as well as 4,500 euros for the injured. In the town of Aidipsos, collections of basic necessities were organized for villagers who had lost everything in the fire. "Have you seen the state offer us water? Snacks for the children? No one! They are just letting shopkeepers and individuals give water to people," Pefki resident Giorgos told AFP.

Climate change reality

While rain brought some respite from the blazes in Turkey over the weekend, Greece continued to suffer from an intense heatwave that Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said should show even doubters the hard reality of climate change. Yesterday's report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that the 1.5C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement would likely be breached around 2030 - a decade earlier than it projected just three years ago.

Meanwhile the EU said it was mobilizing "one of Europe's biggest ever common firefighting operations" to assist Greece and other countries. The response was needed "as multiple fires affect



GLATSONA, Greece: A firefighter tries to extinguish a fire in this village on Evia island yesterday. —AFP

several countries simultaneously," EU crisis management commissioner Janez Lenarcic said. Giorgos Kelaitzidis, Evia's deputy governor, echoed many when he blasted the "insufficient forces" to fight the fires while "the situation is critical" on the island. He said at least 35,000 hectares of land and hundreds of homes have been burned.

From July 29 to August 7, 56,655 hectares were burnt in Greece, according to the European Forest Fire Information System. The average area burnt over the same period between 2008 and 2020 was 1,700 hectares. Some 650 firefighters have so far been deployed on Evia, according to Greek authorities. But the air support faced "serious difficulties" because of turbulence, thick smoke and limited visibility, Greece's Civil Protection deputy minister Nikos Hardalias said.

The situation looked better elsewhere, with officials saying that fires in the southwestern Peloponnese region and in a suburb north of Athens had abated. A fire on Crete was brought under control. But Hardalias warned the risk of fires resurging was heightened. —AFP

Raisi tells Macron nuclear talks must guarantee 'rights'

TEHRAN: Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday told his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that negotiations with world powers to revive the 2015 nuclear deal must guarantee Tehran's "rights". "In any negotiation, the rights of the Iranian people must be upheld and the interests of our nation ensured," Raisi said in an hour-long phone call, according to the Iranian presidency's website.

This is Raisi's first reported call with a Western leader since taking office last week. Raisi took over from Hassan Rouhani, a moderate whose landmark achievement during his two-term presidency was the 2015 nuclear agreement, which provided international sanctions relief in exchange for limitations on Tehran's nuclear program.

Former US president Donald Trump torpedoed the deal three years later by unilaterally withdrawing Washington from it and reimposing crushing

sanctions. Six rounds of nuclear talks between Iran and world powers were held in Vienna between April and June in an attempt to revive the accord. The last round concluded on June 20, with no date set for another.

Iranian officials have said negotiations will not resume before the new government takes over, while an EU official said at the weekend that meetings could resume in Vienna from early September. The accord's remaining parties are Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia. "The Americans clearly violated their obligations by imposing new sanctions," Raisi told Macron, while also stressing the "failure" of European members of the deal to help Iran circumvent US sanctions.

In response to the reimposed US sanctions, Tehran pulled back from most of its main nuclear commitments under the deal. During his swearing-in ceremony on Thursday, Raisi repeated Tehran's official position that it was pursuing only "peaceful" nuclear technology, and said that he will support "any diplomatic plans" to lift the sanctions on his country.

Tehran has recently also faced warnings and accusations from the Zionist entity and its allies over a deadly tanker attack, for which it denies responsibility. The MT Mercer Street, an oil products tanker operated by Zionist-controlled Zodiac Maritime, was



Emmanuel Macron

Ebrahim Raisi

struck on July 29 off Oman's coast. Two crewmembers, a Briton and a Romanian, were killed.

Iran has warned the Zionist entity not to take military action against it after its arch-foe threatened Tehran over the tanker attack. "The Islamic republic is very serious about providing security and maintaining deterrence in the (Arabian) Gulf and Sea of Oman Region," Raisi told Macron, without referring directly to the incident or the accusations. Iran "will confront elements that deprive the region of its security", he added. —AFP

Cuomo accuser says groping a 'crime' as top aide resigns

NEW YORK: An executive assistant to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo described in forceful detail her groping allegations against him in an interview broadcast yesterday, saying he broke the law and must be held to account. Brittany Comisso, who has filed a criminal complaint against the politician, spoke as Cuomo faces mounting pressure to step down after a damning report that documented the sexual harassment allegations against him from 11 women.

"The governor needs to be held accountable," Comisso said in an interview with "CBS This Morning" and the Times Union newspaper. "What he did to me was a crime. He broke the law." Comisso said Cuomo touched her inappropriately twice last year while they were working at his executive mansion.

The veteran Democrat, 63, has repeatedly denied ever touching a woman inappropriately. "Maybe to him, that he thought this was normal. But to me and the other women that he did this to, it was not normal. It was not welcomed. And it was certainly not consensual," Comisso said. The interview aired a day after reports top Cuomo aide Melissa DeRosa, described by New York media as one of his closest confidants, had stepped down.

DeRosa was named in the explosive report released last week that said Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women, including nine of whom were current or former state workers. She was described as part of a group of loyalists working to retaliate against a woman who had accused the governor of harassment.

In her resignation note Sunday - obtained by several US media outlets - she said the last two years had "been emotionally and mentally trying". "It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve the people of New York for the past 10 years. New Yorkers' resilience, strength, and optimism through the most difficult times has inspired me every day," she said.

Her resignation followed Comisso's filing of a criminal complaint against Cuomo, increasing the likelihood of him being charged. Comisso's allegations formed part of the report. Despite the mounting pressure, Cuomo has rejected calls from President Joe Biden and other leading Democrats to quit, and state lawmakers are moving to impeach him. Cuomo was initially praised for his handling of the coronavirus crisis before he was engulfed in accusations that he covered up the scale of deaths in nursing homes - a scandal in which DeRosa had also been implicated. —AFP

International

Belarus dismisses criticism over activist's death, athlete

Lukashenko denies violent crackdown on critics, slams Western sanctions

MINSK: Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko denied yesterday that his authoritarian government was using torture and violence to silence all dissent, a year after he sparked massive protests by claiming to have won a disputed election. He also denied his country had any involvement in the death of an activist in Ukraine or in trying to forcibly bring home an athlete from the Tokyo Olympics.

In power since 1994, the mustachioed leader insisted he won a "totally transparent" vote last August and accused the opposition of preparing a "coup". But Amnesty International said yesterday that thousands in Belarus had been detained, forced into exile or left to live in fear since protests erupted. "What repression?" Lukashenko said at his annual press conference, a marathon event that lasts for hours. "Have I shot anyone? Have I killed anyone?"

He denied widespread reports of torture in Belarusian prisons. Local rights groups say Belarus has over 600 political prisoners and has recorded testimonies of torture. He also said his country's KGB had nothing to do with the death of 26-year-old Belarusian activist Vitaly Shishov, who was found hanged in a Kiev park last week.

After the death, Ukraine said it would step up security for Belarusian political exiles on its territory. "He was a nobody for us," Lukashenko said. "We have enough people to deal with without Shishov," he said, adding that the death had strained relations with Ukraine.

He then accused runner Krystsina Tsimanouskaya - who claimed the Belarus team tried to forcibly bring her home from the Tokyo Olympics and has since sought refuge in Poland - of being "controlled" by Warsaw. He denied that the country's political leadership tried to force the athlete onto a plane to Minsk. There was "not a single" KGB agent at the Tokyo Olympics, he claimed.

'Not an easy year'

Lukashenko's regime has faced increased criticism this summer after the Olympian's defection and the activist's death. Lukashenko - who claims to have won more than 80 percent of the 2020 vote - vowed to resist Western pressure and accused the Belarusian opposition of trying to stage a "coup" last year. "Some were preparing for fair and honest elections, while others were calling for a coup d'etat," he told officials and journalists.

The opposition believes Svetlana Tikhanovskaya - who had stood in the election in the place of her jailed husband and now lives in exile - to be the real winner. Tikhanovskaya has been rallying Western support and recently met US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Lukashenko admitted he had not had "an easy year" and said national unity had been "threatened" by the political crisis.

'Never get on our knees'

Last week, the trial of the last remaining protest leader still in Belarus - Maria Kolesnikova - started in Minsk. She has been in custody since September after resisting a forced deportation by the KGB security services by ripping up her passport. Belarus has also forced more than fifty independent organizations to close this summer, and raided the homes of dozens of journalists.

Lukashenko, who is backed by Moscow, has strived to present the crisis as part of strained relations between the West and Russia. Yesterday, he denounced Western sanctions on his regime and vowed to resist international pressure. "We will never get on our knees," he said. His rival Tikhanovskaya, who now lives in neighboring



MINSK: Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko speaks during a press conference yesterday. —AFP

Lithuania, is planning to lead a rally in Vilnius to mark the anniversary.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned last month that EU member states are drawing up stronger sanctions to add to those already targeting Lukashenko and his allies. These could be approved at a meeting of EU ministers next month. —AFP

Drought threatens farms supplying much US food

REEDLEY, California: In the valleys of central California, the search for water has turned into an all-out obsession as the region suffers through a drought that could threaten the US food supply. Residents have watched with dismay as verdant fields have turned into brown, dusty plains, leaving shriveled trees, dying plants and exasperated farmers. Much of California, and of the broader US West, has suffered through years of lighter-than-usual precipitation and a particularly dry winter.

State and local authorities, fearful that there may not be enough water for city dwellers or wildlife, have abruptly cut supplies to farms, provoking anger and consternation. Along the roads between major farming operations, billboards have popped up everywhere, urging: "Save California's Water." They accuse the authorities of "dumping... our water in the ocean."

Growers complain that the state's Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, is strangling them under a mountain of pointless restrictions, leaving them unable to fill their usual role of supplying America's supermarkets.

'Starving' the world

"I had two wells dry up last week," 28-year-old Nick Foglio, a fourth-generation farmer and feed

broker, told AFP. He added that he has "2,000 acres of alfalfa going dry." Standing in a dusty field near Fresno, he said he worries that with "the wrong political agenda, we're simply going to starve ourselves and probably the rest of the world." California authorities don't seem to be hearing that message.

Reacting to dire signs of a worsening climate crisis, they passed new emergency legislation last week to prevent thousands of people - notably farmers - from diverting streams or rivers. "In a year when Mother Nature doesn't make it rain, there is no water for them," said Jeanine Jones, a manager with the California Department of Water Resources.

A 'devastating' situation

When the authorities cut off water supplies, farmers find themselves forced to rely on wells, dug deep into the ground at costs of several thousand dollars. They draw groundwater from subsurface pools hundreds of feet deep. But even they eventually run dry. "The situation is pretty terrible," said Liset Garcia, who relied on well water to irrigate half her 20-acre farm - until it dried up.

She has been waiting for weeks for a well-drilling service - which has more work than it can handle - to make it to her farm in hopes of finding even a small new supply of water deep in the ground. Sitting in her vegetable stand near the town of Reedley, the 30-year-old farmer greets clients with enthusiasm that belies the ravages her farm has suffered in a warming world.

Heat has destroyed several of her crops - which have "literally baked under the sun." "There's a lot



GRAPEVINE, California: Cows graze in a dry landscape at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley in California's drought-stricken Central Valley on July 23, 2021. —AFP

of foliage that is already burnt and pretty much just crisped up," as well as "fruit not getting a size - not getting its juiciness and sweetness," she said, wearing a checked shirt and a baseball hat marked "Sweet Girl Farms". "It becomes even a luxury to have food," she said with a grimace. "Does that sound insane?"

Climate change, scientists say, will even more extreme and frequent episodes of drought - further jeopardizing food security. Feeding America in these conditions will be a challenge. But the region may already have found one partial savior. Under leaden skies, workers in uncultivated fields recently uncrated huge boxes. Inside were thousands of solar panels - offering a new business opportunity and the promise of some relief for a region in pain. —AFP

California fire second-worst in state history

GREENVILLE, California: The monstrous Dixie Fire in northern California has grown to become the second-largest wildfire in state history, authorities said Sunday, with three people reported missing and thousands fleeing the advancing flames. As of Sunday, the fire had destroyed 489,287 acres, authorities said, up from the previous day's 447,723 acres. It now covers an area larger than Los Angeles. The Dixie blaze is the largest active wildfire in the United States, but only one of 11 major wildfires in California. Over the weekend, it surpassed the 2018 Mendocino Complex Fire to make it the second-worst fire in state history. "It was like driving out of a war zone that you see in a movie," Tami Kugler told AFP, sitting beside her tent at an evacuation station after fleeing the historic town of Greenville before it burned down.

"My neighborhood is gone - I mean gone, gone. Everybody I care and love about that's in that neighborhood, their homes are gone," she said, adding: "I didn't have insurance." On Saturday, Governor Gavin Newsom visited the

charred remains of Greenville, expressing his "deep gratitude" to the teams fighting the flames. He said authorities had to devote more resources to managing forests and preventing fires. But he added that "the dries are getting a lot drier, it is hotter than it has ever been... we need to acknowledge just straight up these are climate-induced wildfires." Climate change amplifies droughts, creating ideal conditions for wildfires to spread out of control and inflict unprecedented material and environmental damage. The Dixie blaze, which on Saturday left three firefighters injured, remained 21 percent contained Sunday, unchanged from the day before, the CalFire website reported. Crews estimate the fire, which began July 13, will not be fully extinguished for two weeks.

Higher temperatures forecast

Weak winds and higher humidity have provided some succor to firefighters, but they are bracing for higher temperatures expected to exceed 38 Celsius in the coming days. Heavy smoke was making driving hazardous for fire crews in some areas, and steep trails also made access difficult. The state's eight largest wildfires have all come since Dec 2017. The still-blackened scars of previous fires have aided Dixie Fire crews at times, reducing available fuel. Thousands of residents have fled the area, many forced to find temporary housing - even living in tents, and



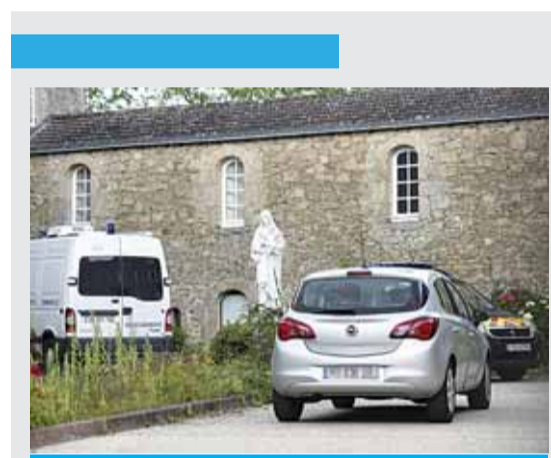
GREENVILLE, California: The last of the day's light makes the burned landscape glow on Sunday. —AFP

often unsure whether their homes have survived. At an evacuation site under smoky skies in Susanville, exhausted families sat in folding chairs beside tents and vehicles packed with belongings grabbed from their abandoned homes.

The Plumas County sheriff's office said it was still searching for three people listed as missing, after two others were found over the weekend. The Dixie Fire has already destroyed about 400 structures - gutting Greenville - and CalFire said workers and equipment were being

deployed to save homes in the small town of Crescent Mills, five kilometers southeast of Greenville. More than 5,000 personnel are now battling the Dixie blaze.

Despite repeated evacuation orders from the authorities, some residents have refused to flee, preferring to try to fight the fire on their own rather than leave their property. By late July, the number of acres burned in California was up more than 250 percent from 2020 - itself the worst year of wildfires in the state's modern history. —AFP



SAINT-LAURENT-SUR-SEVRES, France: French gendarmerie vehicles are parked where a French Catholic priest was murdered yesterday. —AFP

French priest murdered by cathedral arsonist

PARIS: A Rwandan refugee suspected of causing a major fire that ravaged the cathedral in the French city of Nantes last year murdered a Catholic priest in western France yesterday, the interior minister and a source close to the investigation said. "All my support for the Catholics of our country after the dramatic murder of a priest in the Vendee region," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin wrote on Twitter, saying he was heading to the scene.

A source close to the investigation, who asked not to be named, said a man had earlier gone to police in the town of Mortagne-sur-Sevre and declared he had killed a priest. The man was already under judicial control over the fire at Nantes cathedral in July 2020, the source added. The source added that the priest, aged 60, had been welcoming the man into his church for several months. The man, named as Emmanuel A has confessed to being behind the fire at the Gothic Nantes cathedral that horrified France on July 18, 2020. He had initially been placed under arrest before being freed under judicial control. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who accuses the government of being weak on immigration, sought to seize on the incident, saying that in France "you can be an illegal migrant, set fire to a cathedral, not be expelled and then reoffend by murdering a priest".

Darmanin immediately accused her of "making a polemic without knowing the facts" saying the man could not be expelled from France so long as he was under judicial control. Immigration is set to be a major issue when Le Pen challenges centrist President Emmanuel Macron for the presidency next year. The Nantes blaze came 15 months after the devastating 2019 fire at the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, which raised questions about the security risks for other historic churches across France. While firefighters were able to contain the Nantes blaze after just two hours and save the main structure, its famed organ, which dated from 1621 and had survived the French revolution and World War II bombardment, was destroyed. Also lost were priceless artefacts and paintings, including a work by the 19th-century artist Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin and stained glass windows that contained remnants of 16th-century glass. Repairs are due to take several years. The man, an asylum-seeker from Rwanda who has lived in France for several years, had worked as a volunteer at the church. —AFP

Militants kill 51 villagers in Mali, 12 Burkina troops

BAMAKO: Suspected jihadists massacred 51 civilians in northern Mali and killed 12 troops in an ambush in neighboring Burkina Faso, the authorities said yesterday, highlighting the security crisis gripping the two fragile states. "Terrorists" on Sunday invaded the villages of Karou, Ouatagouna and Daoutegou near Mali's border with Niger, a military officer told AFP, using a term officials use to designate jihadists. "(They) massacred everyone," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A document by the local prefecture, seen by AFP, said 51 people had been killed in the coordinated attacks,

homes had been looted and cattle stolen. A local official, who also asked not to be identified for security reasons, said "20 civilians were massacred in Karou. Fourteen civilians were killed in Ouatagouna, and other civilians were killed in the hamlet of Daoutegou". The assailants arrived on motorbike, taking the villagers by surprise, he said. An official at a fourth village said his locality had also come under attack. An army unit has been sent to provide help, a military officer said, but a source in a Malian NGO said communications with the remote area were poor after jihadists had attacked telecoms sites.

Mali, a landlocked and impoverished state in the heart of the West Africa's Sahel region, has been battling a jihadist insurgency since 2012. The crisis began with unrest in the north of the country that spread to Mali's ethnically volatile center and then to neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso. Armed groups linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group are steering the campaign today. —AFP

Region launches Mozambique military mission

MAPUTO: Southern African countries yesterday inaugurated a regional military mission to help Mozambique take back control of its gas-rich northern province from jihadists that have been rampaging across towns and villages for nearly four years. Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi and Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi launched the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) at an event in Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado province.

"We reaffirm our joint commitment to fight against violent extremism together with the Rwandan forces,"

said Nyusi. He mentioned "news in recent days of the success of Rwanda's mission and our forces," referring to the recapture of Awase and Mocimboa da Praia towns from the insurgents, just weeks after the East African troops arrived. Mozambican forces, backed by Rwandan troops, on Sunday said they had driven out militants occupying Mocimboa da Praia, a port from where the first Islamist attacks were staged in October 2017. After being overrun in Aug 2020, the town became the de-facto headquarters of the Islamic State-linked extremists, who are locally referred to as Al-Shabab.

"The control of Mocimboa da Praia town and the gradual return of movement between Palma and Mocimboa da Praia is the product of the bravery and concerted effort of the forces with the aim of quickly returning stability to the region," said Nyusi. In March the militants struck Palma, forcing French energy giant Total to suspend work on a nearby \$20-billion gas project. —AFP

International

Taleban press on with northern offensive after weekend blitz

Insurgents enter Aibak without a fight

KABUL: The Taleban seized a sixth Afghan provincial capital yesterday following a weekend blitz across the north that saw urban centers fall in quick succession and the government struggle to keep the militants at bay. Insurgents entered Aibak without a fight after community elders pleaded with officials to spare the city from more violence following weeks of clashes on the outskirts, said Sefatullah Samangani, deputy governor of Samangan province.

"The governor accepted and withdrew all the forces from the city," Samangani added, saying the Taleban were now in "full control". A Taleban spokesman confirmed the city had been taken. The insurgents have overrun five provincial capitals across the north, sparking fears the government is rapidly losing control of the region. They have also taken Zaranj, capital of Nimroz province, in the southwest.

Earlier yesterday, the Taleban said they were moving in on Mazar-i-Sharif - the largest city in the north and a linchpin for the government's control of the region - after capturing Sheberghan to

its west, and Kunduz and Taloqan to its east. A spokesman said Taleban fighters had entered the city, but officials - and residents contacted by phone - said the group was exaggerating, with clashes confined to surrounding districts.

"The enemy is trying to distort public opinion and create anxiety for the civilian population by their propaganda," said a statement from the provincial police force in Balkh, where Mazar-i-Sharif is the capital. Mazar's longtime strongman Atta Mohammad Noor vowed to fight to the end, saying there would be "resistance until the last drop of my blood". "I prefer dying in dignity than dying in despair," he tweeted.

The loss of the city, steeped in history and long an economic hub, would signal the collapse of Kabul's control of the north and likely raise major questions about the future of the government. In neighboring Kunduz, the second-largest city in the north that fell to the Taleban Sunday, residents said insurgents were all over the city, occupying government offices and institutions.

"The security situation is not good

and we fled to save our lives," Rahmatullah, a 28-year-old resident, told AFP. "It is like a horror movie," he added. Another resident Abdul Qudoos said fears were growing that Kunduz would face food and water shortages.

Fighting in the south

As the Taleban pressed ahead in the north, fighting also raged in the south, where Afghan forces have been locked in heavy street-to-street fighting with the Taleban. The insurgents have for weeks been trying to take Kandahar and Lashkar Gah - both with Pashtun majorities from where the Taleban draw their strength. "We're clearing houses, roads, and buildings that the Taleban occupy," General Sami Sadat, commander of the Afghan army's 215 Corps, told AFP from Lashkar Gah.

The ministry of defense said hundreds of Taleban fighters had been killed or injured in the last 24 hours. Both sides routinely exaggerate death tolls that are virtually impossible to verify. The claims come a day after Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul and Taloqan in the north fell within hours of



KABUL: An Afghan worker paints near Kabul airport on Sunday. — AFP

each other. Northern Afghanistan has long been considered an anti-Taleban stronghold that saw some of the stiffest resistance to militant rule in the 1990s.

The region remains home to several militias and is also a fertile recruiting ground for the country's armed forces. Fighting in Afghanistan's long-running conflict has escalated dramatically since

May, when the US-led military coalition began the final stage of a withdrawal set to be completed before the end of the month. The withdrawal of foreign forces is due to finish at the end of this month ahead of the 20th anniversary of the USSR's pro-democracy movement. He was held for years in Soviet labour camps for his activism.

Soviet dissident Kovalev dies

MOSCOW: One of Russia's most famous human rights defenders and former Soviet dissident, Sergei Kovalev, died aged 91 yesterday, his family said. Kovalev was a biologist who became one of the leading members of the USSR's pro-democracy movement. He was held for years in Soviet labour camps for his activism.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he became a fierce critic of Moscow's war in Chechnya and warned against democratic backsliding when President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. His son Ivan Kovalev said on Facebook that his father died "in his sleep" in the early hours yesterday morning.

Russian rights group Memorial, which Kovalev co-founded, said he was "faithful to the idea of human rights always and in everything - in war and peace, in politics and everyday life". The leading rights organization - which has been labelled a "foreign agent" by Russian authorities under a controversial law - said Kovalev had campaigned for human rights since the 1960s.

Years in Gulag and exile

As a biology student, Kovalev had dreamed of devoting himself exclusively to science. But he changed his mind after the arrests of dissident writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky. "I then understood that it was not possible to only be in science," he said. "It would have been shameful." In 1968, Kovalev was fired from his job at a Moscow university laboratory for joining the Action Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR - considered to be the Soviet Union's first rights group.

He then grew close to the dissident academic Andrei Sakharov. Kovalev was part of a group of dissidents writing the "Chronicle of Current Events", an underground typed bulletin that reported on human rights violations in the USSR. It reported the arrests and psychiatric internments of the Soviet regime's opponents and on the situation in its labour camps.

He was arrested in 1974, accused of spreading "anti-Soviet propaganda" and sentenced to seven years in a Gulag camp, followed by three years of house arrest in the icy Siberian region



Sergei Kovalev

of Kolyma. He was only allowed to return to Moscow in 1987, thanks to the perestroika reforms launched by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He went on to help found Memorial, which recorded testimonies of Soviet political repression.

Kovalev was one of the few Soviet dissidents that entered post-USSR politics. He contributed to writing Russia's new constitution and was elected a parliamentary deputy twice. In 1994, he was appointed as chairman of President Boris Yeltsin's human rights commission in 1994. But he was forced to give up the post two years later for his outspoken criticism of Russia's brutal intervention in the Chechen conflict. — AFP

Nagasaki marks atomic bomb anniversary

NAGASAKI: The Japanese city of Nagasaki yesterday commemorated the 76th anniversary of its destruction by a US atomic bomb, with the mayor calling for the global community to build on a new nuclear ban treaty. Nagasaki was flattened in an atomic inferno that killed 74,000 people, three days after the nuclear bomb that hit Hiroshima.

The twin attacks rang in the nuclear age and gave Japan the bleak distinction of being the only country to be struck by atomic weapons. Survivors and a handful of foreign dignitaries offered a silent prayer at 11:02 am (0202 GMT), the exact time the second - and last - nuclear weapon used in wartime was dropped. For a second year, the number of people attending was much smaller due to coronavirus restrictions.

The ceremony is the first since an international treaty banning nuclear weapons came into force last year. "World leaders must commit to nuclear arms reductions and build trust through dialogue, and civil society must push them in this direction," Nagasaki mayor Tomihisa Taue said. The treaty has not been signed by countries with nuclear arsenals, but activists believe it will have a gradual deterrent effect.

Japan has not signed it either, saying the accord carries no weight without buy-in from nuclear-armed states. The country is also in a delicate position as it is under the US nuclear umbrella, with US forces responsible for its defense. "As the only country that has suffered atomic bombings during the war, it is our unchanging mission to steadily advance the efforts of the international community, step by step, towards realization of a world free of nuclear weapons," Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said at the ceremony.

On Friday, Japan marked 76 years since the US dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing



NAGASAKI: Doves fly during a memorial service for victims of the US atomic bombing at the Nagasaki Peace Park yesterday, as the city marks the 76th anniversary of the bombing. — AFP

around 140,000 people. Barack Obama became the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima in 2016, but Washington has never acceded to demands for an apology for the bombings. International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach travelled to Hiroshima in July, before the

start of the Tokyo Games, to mark the start of an Olympic truce - a tradition that calls for a halt to global conflict to allow the safe passage of athletes. But city officials were disappointed after the IOC refused a request to stage a minute of silence at the Games to mark Friday's anniversary. — AFP

Sri Lanka holds mass cremations as COVID surges

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has begun mass cremations to clear a backlog of dead bodies from COVID-19 as cases surge across the island, officials said yesterday. Daily virus infections in the country have doubled in a month to more than 2,500 with nearly 100 deaths, putting huge strain on hospitals. On Sunday evening Colombo Municipality began mass cremations, disposing of 15 corpses at the Colombo General Cemetery after the island's main hospital said it had no more freezer space.

It was the first mass cremation since December when the government overruled religious objections and cremated 15 members of the Muslim minority, including a 20-day-old baby. Following local and international protests, the government then allowed Muslims to be buried in a remote corner of the island's east, in accordance with Islamic traditions.

Indigenous peoples 'abused' under Nepal conservation policies

KATHMANDU: Nepal's indigenous peoples have been subjected to human rights violations including torture and unlawful killings under the country's conservation policies, Amnesty International and a local activist group said yesterday. Nearly a quarter of the Himalayan nation's land has been declared protected, while the government's conservation efforts - particularly for tigers and rhinos - are hailed as a success internationally.

But the policies have seen indigenous peoples "forcibly evicted" from their ancestral lands, said the report, released by Amnesty and the Community Self-Reliance Centre on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples. "That success has come at a high price for the country's indigenous peoples, who had lived in and depended on these protected areas for generations," Amnesty's Deputy South Asia Director Dinushika Dissanayake said in a statement.

Dissanayake said that since the 1970s, Nepal's governments have used an approach to conservation that "severely limited (indigenous peoples') ability to access traditional foods, medicinal plants and other resources". "Heavy-handed enforcement of these policies has subsequently resulted

in numerous cases of torture or other ill-treatment and unlawful killings."

A spokesman for Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation said the agency had yet to read the report, but added that the government sought to "minimize" conflict between the laws and indigenous rights. The report - which includes interviews with community members, activists and officials - cited the case of Raj Kumar Chepang, who died after allegedly being beaten by army officers in Chitwan National Park in July last year.

The 26-year-old, a member of the indigenous Chepang group who lived in Chitwan's forests for generations, was collecting snails with six others when they were allegedly confronted and beaten, the report said. "While returning home, Raj Kumar was not able to walk properly," one of the six people, Santosh Chepang, told the report's authors. "His condition grew worse, and that led to his death."

The rights groups said laws should be amended to restrict detentions and the use of force by the army in protected areas. "Nepal's authorities must recognize indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestral lands and allow them to return," added CSRC executive director Jagat Basnet. Indigenous communities should be included in conservation initiatives, with alternative housing and land provided to those who lose their homes due to the establishment of national parks, the report added. — AFP



COLOMBO: An army health official inoculates a man with a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine against COVID-19 on Aug 5, 2021. — AFP

Sri Lanka has recorded 5,107 deaths to date and almost 330,000 infections, according to official data. But experts say the true figure is much higher. The new wave comes after the government relaxed restrictions in April to allow celebrations for the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year. Regulations were tightened once more in May and eased again on July 10. — AFP

Bangladesh arrests Likee star for dance video at mosque

DHAKA: Bangladesh police have arrested a social media star for shooting a dance video with a woman at a mosque, officials said yesterday. The clip triggered online anger in the Muslim-majority nation, police said, and 20-year-old Yasin was arrested at his home in Daudkandi, some 60 km from Dhaka. Police said they are also hunting the woman in the video.

Yasin shot the clip last month and uploaded it to his account on the Likee video sharing site. He was seen in the video dancing with a woman on the stairs of the Daudkandi Model Mosque, one of 50 Muslim places of worship built recently by the government. His account has since been suspended but police said Yasin's dance videos had drawn more than 940,000 followers.

"He was arrested under the digital security law for hurting people's religious sentiments," Aminul Islam, the town's police chief told AFP, adding that the dancing had "desecrated the mosque". Police in Bangladesh, which is officially secular, have arrested scores of people for hurting religious sentiment, including many Hindus and followers of other minority faiths accused of defaming the Koran or posting comments that could hurt religious feelings. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, AUGUST 10, 2021

Alibaba CEO sacks manager accused of rape, condemns 'forced drinking culture'

Accused confesses to 'intimate acts' with the woman

BEIJING: Alibaba yesterday fired a manager accused of rape, as its CEO condemned the "ugly forced drinking culture" affecting one of China's most famous companies.

Sexual assault has got increasing attention in China recently, with celebrities — including Chinese-Canadian superstar Kris Wu, who was accused of rape — facing investigations and legal charges.

In the latest high-profile allegation that sparked public outcry, an unidentified employee at Alibaba accused her manager and a client of sexual assault during a work trip to eastern China, according to media reports.

She was allegedly made to drink and later violated. The e-commerce giant's CEO Daniel Zhang yesterday issued an internal memo to staff — seen by AFP — condemning the attack and his own company's initial handling of the complaint.

He said internal investigations found the accused had confessed to "intimate acts" with the woman while she was inebriated, violating company policy.

"He will be fired and never be rehired," Zhang said, adding the issue was now with the police. A company representative confirmed the accused has since been sacked.

Alibaba's client said in a statement that it had fired the employee accused of sexual assault. Zhang also hit out at an "ugly forced drinking culture", a business practice that has come under fire including at Alibaba.

"Regardless of gender, whether it is a request made by a customer or a supervisor, our employees are empowered to reject it," Zhang said.

The victim originally brought up the alleged assault to senior managers, according to a letter circulating on Chinese social media.

She eventually decided to go public.

Her case quickly went viral on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, with a hashtag of the incident now viewed 820 million times. It prompted users to share their own experiences, with one woman alleging her supervisor turned a blind eye when others pushed her to drink at a work dinner, only asking if she was "alright" the following day.

The president of Alibaba's neighbourhood retail business group Li Yonghe, and its human resources generalist Xu Kun, have resigned, the company said. They had failed to take appropriate action "when the employee reported a horrendous act such as rape", said Zhang in the memo.

Meanwhile, Alibaba pledged to establish a dedicated reporting channel for its more than 254,000 staff.

Alibaba has already been under government scrutiny, with regulators in the midst of a broad campaign to rein in the growing clout of tech giants. — AFP



HONG KONG: File photo taken on February 22, 2012 shows the logo of online shopping portal Alibaba.com is seen near its office in Hong Kong. Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba said yesterday that it was cooperating with a police investigation into sexual assault allegations aired by a company employee. — AFP

Aramco Q2 profits bounce back to pre-pandemic levels

RIYADH: Energy giant Saudi Aramco's second quarter profits for 2021 have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels due to higher oil prices, nearly quadrupling compared to the same period last year.

The company's success comes after its debts climbed last year, when Saudi Arabia was hammered by the double whammy of low prices and sharp cuts in production triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Aramco said on Sunday its net profit rose to \$25.5 billion in the second quarter of the year, compared to \$6.6 billion in the same quarter of 2020, owing to a stronger oil market and higher refining and chemicals margins, and with the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

In the second quarter of 2019, before global economies were hit hard by Covid-19 restrictions, the company posted a net profit of \$24.7 billion.

"Our second quarter results (for 2021) reflect a strong rebound in worldwide energy demand, and we are heading into the second half of 2021 more resilient and more flexible, as the global recovery gains momentum," Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser said in a statement.

Aramco-like other global oil giants, including ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and TotalEnergies, has reported stronger profits this year, riding a wave of higher prices amid recovering demand.

It reported "a 288 percent increase in net income from the same quarter of last year to \$25.5 billion and declaring a dividend of \$18.8 billion", according to the statement.

Sunday's announcement comes approximately two months after the company said it raised \$6 billion from its first dollar-denominated Islamic bond sale, posting earlier this year a 30 percent jump in



DHAHRAN: File handout picture shows Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil and gas company's Dhahran oil plants, in eastern Saudi Arabia. Aramco said yesterday its second quarter profits for 2021 nearly quadrupled compared to the same period last year. — AFP

first quarter profits.

Aramco—the kingdom's cash cow—said in May that its net profit rose to \$21.7 billion in the first three months of the year.

The energy giant posted a 44.4 percent slump in 2020 net profit, piling pressure on government finances as Riyadh pursues its multi-billion dollar projects to diversify the economy.

The world's leading oil producers agreed last month to continue to modestly boost output from August reaching a compromise after the United Arab Emirates blocked a deal.

An OPEC+ meeting decided to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to help fuel a global economic recovery as the pandemic eases.

The results come a day ahead of a UN report on climate change, which will give the international community its clearest ever warning about the dangers of accelerating global warming, according to Britain's COP26 President Alok Sharma.

Aramco opens up

Long seen as the kingdom's economic "crown jewel", Aramco and its assets were once tightly government-controlled and considered off-limits to outside investment.

But with the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, who is accelerating efforts to implement his "Vision 2030" reform programme, the kingdom has shown readiness to cede some control.

Aramco previously sold a sliver of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating \$29.4 billion for 1.7 percent of its shares.

In April, the company said it had struck a \$12.4-billion deal to sell a minority stake in a newly formed oil pipeline business, to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners.

And in June, Aramco "successfully raised \$6 billion, following the sale of US dollar-denominated sharia-compliant securities to leading institutional investors", the company said. — AFP

China factory gate inflation surges on commodity prices

BEIJING: Chinese factory inflation rose more than expected in July, data showed yesterday, as surging commodity prices offset government measures to temper costs.

The world's second largest economy has largely bounced back from strict coronavirus lockdowns last year but a fresh spike in cases of the highly transmissible Delta variant has raised concerns about the recovery.

That has raised concerns that inflation could spike further if lockdowns in parts of the country cause supply problems. The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, rose to 9.0 percent on-year, the same as May, which was a 13-year high, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

That came despite moves by the government to temper the price increases by raising export tariffs on certain iron and steel products, temporarily exempting tariffs on pig iron and scrap steel, and canceling export tax rebates for some steel products, to increase supply in the domestic market.

"The price increase of industrial products expanded slightly, affected by sharp increases in the costs of crude oil, coal and related products," said NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan in a statement. — AFP

China Telecom eyes \$8.4bn Shanghai IPO

SHANGHAI: China Telecom could raise more than \$8 billion in a Shanghai initial public offering that would be the biggest this year, months after it was delisted in the United States amid Washington's stand-off with Beijing. The firm said it had priced its offer at 4.53 yuan per share, which would be worth 47.1 billion (\$7.3 billion), according to a filing with the Shanghai Stock Exchange on Friday.

However, if an over-allotment option was exercised that would jump to 54 billion yuan (\$8.4 billion), Bloomberg News said. China Telecom was delisted by the New York Stock Exchange in January along with fellow state-owned telecoms firms China Mobile and China Unicom following an executive order by former president Donald Trump.

The order banned investments by Americans into a range of companies deemed to be supplying or supporting China's military and security apparatus. China Telecom is the country's largest fixed-line operator, and the share issue would be the biggest of the year, topping the \$5.4 billion raised in Hong Kong by TikTok rival Kuaishou Technology in February.

Many of China's biggest tech and telecom firms listed their shares on the more developed US stock markets in the 2000s as they sought access to funding, but the tide has been turning. Authorities have been pushing in recent years to instead encourage such companies to list on its domestic exchanges in Shanghai and Shenzhen, as well as Hong Kong, a trend expected to be accelerated by an ongoing government campaign to strengthen control over its major tech giants. — AFP

Global supply snags could mean fewer toys under the Christmas tree

NEW YORK: It's always "better to shop a little early" for the holidays, but this year, says Judy Ishayik, co-owner of a New York toy store, "We are telling people to shop for Christmas in September."

Global shipping snags are causing shortages, delivery delays and price increases—all headaches for toy stores and manufacturers. Ishayik's store, Mary Arnold Toys, has been selling toys for 90 years in the upscale Upper East Side section of Manhattan.

At first glance, the shelves appear well stocked. But at the back of the store and in the basement where the inventory is stored, there is a lot of empty space.

Struggling to adapt

Like many other sectors of the US economy working to get back to normal following the upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, toymakers and specialty stores have been trying to adapt, while struggling to replenish their supplies.

Some factories were forced to shut down during coronavirus outbreaks,

impacting manufacturing. And shippers have been overwhelmed by demand from online sales, exacerbated by a shortage of shipping containers, while in some ports, boats wait several days to unload their goods. In the United States, trucking firms are struggling to recruit drivers.

A feeling of panic was brewing ahead of the holiday season last year, with some retailers concerned that overwhelmed delivery firms like UPS or FedEx would not be able to get packages to customers on time. But those fears proved to be exaggerated.

In the end, families shopping for dolls, board games and building blocks for children stuck at home helped US toy sales jump by 16 percent in 2020, according to market research firm NPD.

Not enough boats

But with supply chains disrupted for over a year now, delays have piled up, said Jennifer Blackhurst, a supply chain specialist at the University of Iowa. "It's not impacting just one industry or just one product type. It's affecting companies across the board



NEW YORK: Shoppers enter the store as discount posters are displayed on the window of Mary Arnold Toys, New York city's oldest toy store on August 2, 2021. It's always "better to shop a little early" for the holidays, but this year, Judy Ishayik, co-owner of a New York toy store says, "We are telling people to shop for Christmas in September." — AFP

and they are all competing to get the shipping capacity," she told AFP. She warns the situation is unlikely to return to normal before next year.

Hasbro, maker of Transformers figures and the iconic Monopoly board game, is keenly aware of the problem and "working to ensure product availability during the holiday season,"

Chief Financial Officer Deborah Thomas said recently. The company placed holiday orders earlier, and diversified its sources, ports and carriers. But that comes at a cost: sea freight rates have quadrupled compared to the start of the year, Thomas said, which means Hasbro will have to increase its prices in the third quarter. — AFP

Business

Jailed Samsung chief granted release on parole: Justice Ministry

His freedom will ease concerns over decision-making at Samsung



SEOUL: File photo taken on January 18, 2021 shows Lee Jae-yong (C), vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, arriving at a court for a trial in his bribery scandal involving former South Korean president Park Geun-hye in Seoul. — AFP

SEOUL: The jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group will be released early on parole this week, South Korea's justice ministry said yesterday, easing concerns over a possible leadership vacuum at the conglomerate.

Lee Jae-yong—the 188th richest person in the world according to Forbes, with a net worth of \$12.4 billion—is currently serving a two-and-a-half year prison sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with the corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

But calls for his early release from both politicians and business leaders have grown in recent months over concerns about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the South Korean economy, the 12th-largest in the world. His freedom will ease concerns over decision-making at Samsung, by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates, or chaebols, that dominate

business in the country. There is a long history of top chaebol figures being charged with bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion, or other offences. But many of those convicted have subsequently had their sentences cut or suspended on appeal, with some receiving presidential pardons in recognition of their "contribution to the national economy".

South Korea traditionally issues pardons around this time of the year as it celebrates Independence Day on August 15, and the justice ministry said this year 810 people had been approved for release on parole.

Justice Minister Park Beom-kye said Lee was "among those granted parole in consideration of the national economic situation due to the prolonged coronavirus pandemic". The decision was "based on various factors including public sentiment and his attitude in prison", he told reporters.

Local reports said he was a "model prisoner" and this month a rule change came into effect cutting the proportion of the sentences prisoners must serve to be eligible for parole. Lee, 52, just comes into compliance with the new requirement and will be released on Friday. He was first jailed for five years in 2017, after Park's ouster, then walked free the following year when an appeals court dismissed most of his bribery convictions and gave him a suspended sentence. But the Supreme Court later ordered Lee to face a retrial, which convicted and jailed him again. Even so, yesterday's parole announcement will not be the end of his legal travails: He is currently on trial on separate accusations of manipulating a takeover to smooth his succession at the top of the Samsung group—the same issue on which he was said to have sought help from Park.—AFP

NBK named 'Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021'

KUWAIT: In recognition of its dominance in the banking services market in Kuwait thanks to consistent leadership and excellence, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was named as "Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021" by the preeminent business and finance magazine Euromoney in its Awards for Excellence for 2021.

Euromoney Awards for Excellence are based on several criteria including financial indicators reflecting asset growth and profitability, and outperformance of peers in terms of growth and expansion, as well as customer satisfaction with banking products and services meeting their needs, ability to adapt to changing operating conditions, and capabilities for business development and introduction of innovative products, services and advanced payment solutions.

Euromoney editorial committee analyze and compare the above criteria among banks, in conjunction with Euromoney market knowledge and research to select top performers. This award is a new addition to NBK's rich record of prestigious awards, consolidating the bank's unique position as a leading bank in Kuwait and the region, as well as a testimony of its excellence in providing innovative and advanced digital banking products and services.

National Bank of Kuwait has a dominant share in the local market across all business sectors thanks to its resilient business model, solid financial position, as well as its role in financing development projects, and outperformance of local and regional banks in key financial indicators, as reflected in all its top-notch banking products and services and advanced payment solutions provided to customers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the bank succeeded in strengthening its position as a leading provider of the best innovative banking services and solutions thanks to its digital superiority supported by a tremendous technological infrastructure built over many years, as part of implementing its digital transformation strategy, which made it fully prepared for these exceptional circumstances.

It is worth mentioning that NBK ranked 1st among Kuwaiti banks and 9th in the Middle East in the Banker's List of Top 1000 World Banks. Meanwhile, NBK continues to collectively enjoy one of the highest credit ratings among most major banks of the Middle East from the top three international credit rating agencies: Moody's, Fitch and Standard & Poor's. The Bank's ratings are supported by its strong capitalization, prudent lending policies, disciplined approach to risk management, as well as its highly experienced and very stable management team. Additionally, the bank maintains its listing in The World's 50 Safest Banks.

The Euromoney Awards for Excellence are one of the most prestigious international awards recognizing top performers in the banking sector, which are granted by the reputable Euromoney, which has been a global leading finance and business magazine for over 50 years.

KFH announces winners of 'Win with Hesabi' draw

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the 7th and 8th draws of "Win with Hesabi" campaign that offers 3 Jeep Wrangler Sport cars and cash prizes worth KD250 for 10 winners each month.

The draw was held at KFH Headquarters under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The winners are: Alaa Al-Kandari, Othman Al-Othman, Fahad Al-Mard, Ahmed Al-Shammari, Nouf Al-Bathali, Muneerah Al-Otaibi, Haya Al-Qatani, Wasmiya Al-Azmi, Ibrahim Al-Azmi, Abdulaziz Al-Faalkawi, Hadiya Al-Rashidi, Abdullah Al-Ali, Sondos Al-Bassam, Abdulrazzaq Al-Mutairi, Nourah Al-Enzi, Abdulaziz Al-Hajri, Widyah Al-Harbi, Haya Al-Hajri, Sara Al-Yagout, Arwa Al-Dhufeeri.

This campaign comes as part of KFH continuing efforts to add value to Hesabi customers including advantages, discounts, prizes, and exclusive rewards.

Once the social allowance is transferred to Hesabi program, customers enter the monthly draw on 10 prizes of KD250 each, in addition to 3 special draws on Jeep Wrangler Sport cars.

KFH offers "Hesabi for Youth" with a variety of privileges as part of its continued endeavor to provide adequate customer care, innovate new products and services and fulfill the needs of all customers of various age



categories and interests. Services and products are tailored to suit customers' needs and provide distinguished service as per global standards regarding quality, accuracy and speed.

Hesabi" program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active lifestyle. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts etc.

KFH continues to launch marketing campaigns to reward youth customers. Hesabi for Youth represents the ambitions and expectations of youth category and copes with KFH aspirations to attract the largest portion of youth who represents the major part of Kuwaiti society. Also, the account represents KFH initiative to diversify banking services and products.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON
05 AUGUST 2021

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	28,914	7,153.37	-0.2%	3.2%	18.2%	441,647,715	167,231,568	23,244	29.0	2.2	75.6%
Main Market	9,333	5,412.50	-0.5%	1.1%	18.9%	1,190,992,990	122,545,335	36,643	11.4	1.7	24.4%
All Share	38,247	6,565.84	-0.2%	2.6%	18.4%	1,632,640,705	289,776,903	59,887	24.7	2.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	22,065	1,494.15	-0.4%	3.3%	18.4%	274,103,362	101,521,154	11,459	29.3	2.2	56.96%
BASIC MATERIALS	952	1,067.22	-0.9%	-1.7%	18.8%	4,271,416	2,445,365	923	22.6	1.5	2.46%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	527	1,025.20	-1.0%	2.5%	37.4%	16,212,018	2,985,937	1,587	7.0	7.1	1.36%
CONSUMER STAPLES	233	763.93	-1.0%	0.0%	-6.7%	3,207,769	1,963,988	304	14.2	1.6	0.60%
ENERGY	295	1,414.59	-0.1%	-0.9%	10.7%	11,846,308	1,008,244	635	12.4	1.3	0.76%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	3,452	1,242.84	2.1%	3.5%	33.7%	739,082,985	88,278,095	23,137	6.4	1.7	8.91%
HEALTH CARE	405	816.20	1.9%	1.1%	-1.3%	7,995	3,880	10	35.5	5.6	1.05%
INDUSTRIALS	4,091	1,150.56	-0.8%	1.9%	29.1%	52,390,801	26,847,738	6,507	29.7	1.8	10.56%
INSURANCE	535	1,393.69	-0.8%	1.3%	20.5%	671,148	79,001	89	10.5	1.2	1.38%
REAL ESTATE	2,607	1,212.27	0.3%	2.3%	27.3%	504,953,690	55,083,595	12,945	22.8	1.3	6.73%
TECHNOLOGY	10	742.05	-1.9%	-4.7%	47.6%	185,005	19,061	20	-	0.9	0.03%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,317	1,080.86	-0.8%	0.7%	-1.9%	21,326,840	8,550,234	1,861	15.7	2.0	8.56%
UTILITIES	249	594.74	-0.4%	0.9%	-18.4%	4,381,368	990,611	410	20.3	3.6	0.64%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KMEFIC	195	22.6	257,209	39,775	20
BOURSA	1750	13.0	4,399,711	7,302,173	1,383
SANAM	75.3	10.7	11,803,218	887,946	553
ALKOUT	670	9.8	5,000	3,350	1
GNAHC	73.0	9.8	990,501	68,066	43

Top Losers

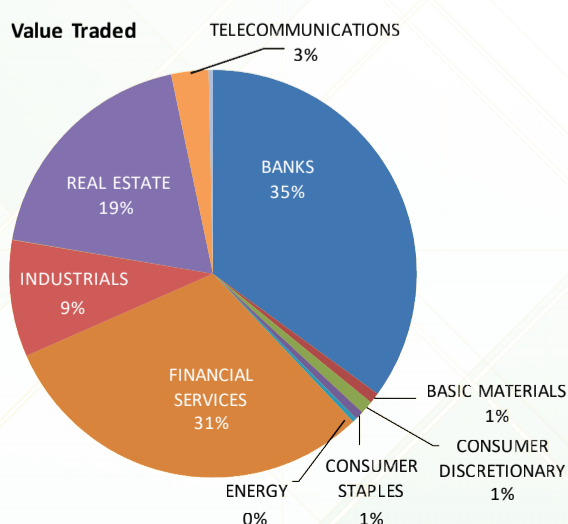
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MAZAYA	91	-15.9	328,545,687	30,982,119	6,506
KHOT	69	-13.1	47,307	3,676	18
PAPCO	54.5	-12.4	10,500	614	8
INOVEST	100	-10.7	13,616,594	1,405,461	570
QIC	65.6	-9.5	6,528	439	2

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MAZAYA	91	-15.9	328,545,687	30,982,119	6,506
BARREQ	38	-0.3	144,625,621	5,435,023	3,921
AUB	252	3.7	103,423,530	25,501,471	1,276
NIND	232	2.2	73,486,412	17,163,209	1,303
GFH	69	1.9	64,090,182	4,373,475	1,506

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MAZAYA	91	-15.9	328,545,687	30,982,119	6,506
KFH	785	0.0	35,498,433	27,906,209	3,264
AUB	252	3.7	103,423,530	25,501,471	1,276
NIND	232	2.2	73,486,412	17,163,209	1,303
NBK	891	-0.3	15,511,854	13,745,467	1,806



Market Summary:

- In contrary to the previous week, last week witnessed a drop in volume and value in both Premier and Main market indexes. Premier index volume dropped 1% while the Main index dropped 19%, and total value dropped 9%.
- Both Premier and Main indexes have achieved their targets and fall back to support levels. This might be attributed to the long weekend. Both indexes are showing strength and stability at the current levels.
- Technically, the All-Share index has achieved the target at 6595 and retreated which might continue to the next support level at 6494 and 6435. Staying above 6560 will lead to reaching 6760. The premier market has achieved the target at 7173 and reached a new all-time high level at 7195 then retreated. The fallback might continue to reach the next support level at 7073 and 7000. The main market has achieved the target at 5460 and retreated to a support level at 5393 and holding. The index might fall back to the next support level at 5330 which is expected to rebound strongly.

Business

NBK Weekly Money Market Report

Hawkish signals from central banks as global economic recovery remains robust

US job growth powered ahead amid high demand for workers

KUWAIT: After a year of COVID-19 related stimulus, markets are now looking at central banks for tightening signals as the global economic recovery remains robust. While the US Federal Reserve updated their policy guidance in June indicating future rate hikes, there has been a lack of clarity on their plans in regards to quantitative easing. If anything is for certain, the Fed is highly dependent on the US labor market improving before clearer signals are made.

Although the Fed as an institution refrained from commenting on QE, several US central bankers spoke up last week independently bringing the issue into the spotlight. Federal Reserve Vice Chair Richard Clarida said in a webcast discussion that he could "certainly" see the Fed announcing a reduction in its \$120-billion-a-month asset purchase program later this year, given the surprising pace of the economic recovery from the pandemic. Three other policymakers also signaled their readiness to start reducing the Fed's bond-buying program, though their views on timing differed.

On the other hand, the Reserve Bank of Australia stuck to their guns last week and committed to begin tapering bond purchases in September. The decision came as

a hawkish surprise to market participants who had anticipated that the RBA might delay taper plans in response to the negative impact from the latest round of lockdowns hitting Australia's economy. In its policy statement, the RBA highlighted that the economic recovery has been stronger than expected and that it is not overly concerned by the temporary disruption from the latest COVID outbreak. The RBA also sees the economy continuing to grow strongly again next year as it benefits from significant policy support and increased vaccinations.

The hawkish comments from the RBA have markets now looking towards the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's policy meeting next week for similar announcements. Following a record breaking release in New Zealand's latest employment report, interest rate expectation polls are now fully pricing in a rate hike in the upcoming meeting.

The Bank of England continued the common-wealth trend when it said a modest reduction in policy support could be needed. The statement read, "the Committee judges that, should the economy evolve broadly in line with the central projections in the August Monetary Policy Report, some modest tightening of mone-

etary policy over the forecast period is likely to be necessary to be consistent with meeting the inflation target sustainably in the medium-term." The hawkish policy signal reflects the BoE's optimism that the UK economy will continue to recover strongly from the COVID shock in the coming years. The BoE is expecting the UK economy to expand robustly by 7.25% this year and 6.0% next year. At the same time the BoE displayed more concern that the inflation overshoot could prove more pronounced in the near-term. It now sees inflation rising to a peak of around 4.0% later this year before falling back to their 2.0% target over the following 2-3 years.

US non-farm payrolls

US job growth came back strong in July suggesting the economy maintained its momentum at the start of the second half of this year. Nonfarm payrolls increased by 943,000 jobs last month after rising 938,000 in June and unemployment rate fell to 5.4% from 5.9%. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast payrolls increasing by only 870,000 jobs. The Labor Department's closely watched employment report also showed strong wage gains, as employers competed for scarce worker squashing fears of a hiring slowdown.

The growth came as labor-intensive service businesses continued to hire given strong pent-up customer demand. Furthermore, educational employment boosted the numbers as summer school programs increased in demand as students looked to catch up on lost time. The release will weigh heavily on the Federal Reserve's next monetary policy steps. If the strong readings persist over the next couple of months, then it might the Fed the green light for early QE tapering.

German retail sales

German retail sales increased much more than expected in June following an easing of COVID-19 restrictions, supporting hopes for a consumer-driven recovery in Europe's largest economy over the summer months. The Federal Statistics Office said retail sales rose 4.2% on the month in real terms after an upwardly revised increase of 4.6% in May. The June reading was more than double a Reuters forecast for a rise of 2.0%. Annually, retail sales jumped 6.2% in real terms following an upwardly revised drop of 1.8% in the previous month.

Euro zone business activity

Euro zone business activity roared in

July, expanding at its fastest pace in 15 years, as the lifting of more coronavirus restrictions and an accelerated vaccine drive injected life into the bloc's dominant service industry. IHS Markit's final composite PMI climbed to 60.2 last month from June's 59.5. IHS Markit's final services PMI for Germany rose to 61.8 in July from 57.5 in June, the strongest since the survey began more than 24 years ago.

UK construction

Activity in Britain's construction industry grew last month at its weakest pace since February due to shortages of building materials and contractors, adding to signs of post-COVID bottlenecks in the economy. The IHS Markit/CIPS construction PMI fell from June's 24-year high of 66.3 to 58.7 in July. This was the PMI's lowest reading since February and the sharpest single-month drop since April 2020, Britain's first full month of COVID lockdown. While the PMI still points to solid growth in the sector, economists polled by Reuters had expected a much smaller slowdown to a reading of 64.0. The construction PMI pointed to big inflation pressures in the pipeline, as construction firms' costs grew only slightly less than the 24-year high recorded in June.

Markaz appointed by DHAMAN to manage auction of investor shares

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" has been appointed by the Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) to manage the auction of strategic investor shares in the company, which will become one of the key healthcare providers for expatriates in Kuwait. The collaboration will also further solidify Markaz's track-record as one of the leading investment banking institutions in the Middle East and North Africa region.

As the financial advisor, Markaz will manage the public auction process for the sale of 26 percent stake in DHAMAN. The sale will help DHAMAN to unleash its full potential and achieve many shining milestones on its journey. Commenting on the announcement, Ali H. Khalil, CEO of Markaz, said: "We are pleased that the Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) has chosen Markaz as the financial advisor in the sale of its strategic investor shares. This appointment is a strong testimony to the stellar track record and the vast experience of Markaz's Investment Banking services across various sectors. By employing the best of our technical execution capabilities and in-depth industry knowledge, we will help bring on board a strategic investor who will add value to DHAMAN and play a decisive role in accelerating its growth, while also contributing meaningfully to the development of the

healthcare sector. Through this collaboration, we aim to forge a strong relationship with DHAMAN, which will establish itself as a leading provider of healthcare solutions in Kuwait."

On his part, Dr Mohammad Al-Qenai, acting CEO of DHAMAN, commented: "DHAMAN is offering the strategic partner's stake to the bidding through cooperation with 'Markaz' as a consulting partner for the auction management due to their distinguished expertise in this field. This offering of the 26% of shares in the company comes in conjunction with the near completion of the company's first operational phase, as it is planned to receive hospital buildings in Jahra and Ahmadi governorates from the contractor at the beginning of the year 2022. DHAMAN is conducting an extensive recruitment campaign to attract qualified and experienced staff in related fields in parallel with the completion of the operation of 5 primary healthcare centers and the start of receiving beneficiaries of the new mandatory medical insurance service expected in the second half of 2022. This represents an achievement of the goals of establishing DHAMAN as included in Kuwait's National Development Plan (New Kuwait 2035) which is an important step in upgrading the healthcare sector in Kuwait. Additionally, Abdulaziz Alardi, from Meshari Al-



Mohammad Al-Qenai



Ali Khalil



Abdulaziz Alardi

Osaimi Law Firm, the legal adviser appointed by DHAMAN for the sale of the strategic investor's shares in the Company, commented: "We were able to obtain a Resolution from the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) regarding proceeding with the sale of the shares of the strategic investor after the current investor failed to pay the consideration for the shares, in accordance with Article 155 of the Companies Law, which considers the sale as a peremptory rule, and therefore excluded from the rules of sale specified in the civil and commercial Pleadings Law and CMA regulations".

It is worth mentioning that Markaz offers its clients a world-class variety of investment banking solutions across advisory related to mergers and acquisitions (M&A), equity and debt issuance, listing and credit rating advisory and capital restructuring. Since 1997, Markaz has successfully executed investment banking transactions of over USD 5.1 billion across the region.

AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 4th August 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Bader Habeeb Al-Awadh, Salem Ahmad, Mohammad Jaweed Housin, Falah Saeed Al-Saeb, Batool Reda Najaar, Shahad Fouad Abdullah, Mohammad Abdullah Al-Ajmi, Hamdi Mohamad Ebrahim, Henda Ibrahim Al-Abdulrazaq, Mohammad Hamad Al-Qahtanih, Abdullah Mohammad Al-Ajmi, Raaed Ahmed Abdullghani, Noor Hidder Atash, Yousef Abdullaziz Al-Qalaf, Jameelah Mohan Abbasi, Farooq Baig Mansour, Neamah Shafer Al-Shareefi, Salah Askar Al-Bulushi, Haya Khaled Al-Hadhoud and Abd Al-Hussain Ghloum Hajeyah.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account unique and attractive to all society segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

NBK gives customers chance to win 0% interest loan for salary transfer

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always strives to provide its customers with exceptional rewards through its outstanding campaigns, which aim to meet their expectations. This year, the bank is offering customers various options under its Kuwaiti Salary Acquisition Campaign including a 0% interest auto loan, 0% interest personal loan, or travel miles for their favorite destinations.

In this campaign, NBK offers new salaried customers the opportunity to choose between a 0% interest auto loan up to KD 25,000 from leading car dealerships including Land Rover, BMW, and Mini Cooper (AAS), Toyota and Lexus (Al Sayer), Mercedes-Benz (Al Mulla) and Nissan (Al Babtain).

For customers who do not need an auto loan, they can get a 0% interest loan up to KD 15,000 for anything they like. In addition, the NBK Kuwaiti Salary Campaign gives new salaried customers the choice to earn up to 80,000 miles with NBK-Kuwait Airways

(Oasis Club) Visa Card, allowing them to travel to any destination of their choice included in the Kuwait Airways Oasis Club Program.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al-Najdi, Marketing Segment Manager, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Rewarding our customers is a key part of our strategy to enrich their banking experience, and we strive to diversify the rewards to meet the various needs of their different segments. NBK maintains solid partnerships with leading brands in Kuwait, which contributes to providing our customers with offers that meet their expectations."

Al Najdi noted that transferring salary to NBK provides customers with various benefits that are not limited to rewards, but also a full-fledged banking experience including top-notch products and services as well as cutting-edge payment solutions.

When transferring their salary to the bank, NBK customers get various benefits including an array of the

solutions by stc joins Manama-IX

KUWAIT: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced that it has joined the platform of Manama Internet Exchange (Manama-IX), the Bahrain based Internet peering service provider. The news comes shortly after the announcement of the 20-fold growth in Manama-IX platform's traffic, between the first quarters of 2020 and 2021, making it the fastest growing internet exchange platform in the region since its inception in 2019.

By joining the platform, solutions by stc will be able to optimise its resources by eliminating the need to be present at multiple IX locations, benefitting from lower interconnect charges and transit costs. Through their presence on the Manama-IX platform, solutions by stc will be able to reach a wider number of international peering partners and take advantage of, among

other benefits, an enhanced VR and gaming experience for its end users in Kuwait, due to improved internet quality with faster response time and low latency.

Chief Executive Officer of solutions by stc, Mohammad N Al-Nusif, said: "We are proud to join the Manama-IX platform as part of our commitment to continuously develop and enhance the user experience for our valued customers. The peering platform will elevate the gaming arena for users, while providing a next level immersive VR gaming experience. Through this solution, we aim to lower latency issues and enhance the in-game responsiveness for customers, allowing them to enjoy their online games with minimal game play interruptions."

He added, "By joining Manama-IX, solutions by stc will benefit from direct connection to Amazon Web Services (AWS), meaning a more reliable service and higher throughput network connectivity in the areas most visited and used by our customers."

Al-Nusif concluded, "solutions by stc has built a strong network of solid partners, such as Manama-IX, who have assisted the Company in providing its customers with a

range of pioneering and innovative digital solutions that cater to their diverse needs. By optimizing our resources, leveraging the strength of our network, and utilizing the capabilities of the Manama-IX platform, we plan to transform the gaming world for our local customers and throughout the region. This initiative falls in line with stc's strategic plan to provide safe and secure world-class connectivity through IT solutions under one roof, paving the way for digital transformation not only for businesses, but for our clients as well."

Batelco Acting General Manager of Global Business Hani Askar said: "We welcome solutions by stc to the Manama-IX community and look forward to enabling improved performance and redundancy to their network. Our newest tenant recognizes Manama-IX's capabilities as both a peering solution and a content access solution that serves to improve internet performance and lower costs with a single connection."

He added: "By creating more places for network providers to exchange traffic within the region, the Manama IX platform works to improve network robustness, allowing for

most advanced digital banking services and payment solutions, in addition to access to the largest branch and ATM network in Kuwait. NBK also has a broad geographical footprint across key regional and global markets.

Furthermore, NBK customers can easily make quick and easy transactions any time, through NBK Digital Banking Channels, mainly NBK Mobile Banking, which the bank strives to continuously upgrade by adding updates that are well-received by customers.

Customers can also choose from a wide range of NBK Credit Cards providing them with the first and largest rewards program in Kuwait with up to 900 participating outlets. In addition to the bank's widespread branch network all over Kuwait and across 15 countries, and its large ATM/CDM network, as the bank always provides customers with a highly advanced and secure banking experience.



Abdullah Al-Najdi



more alternative paths, even if one path is down. Removing the need for traffic to traverse "long-haul fiber paths" between cities decreases the chances of disruption and enhances overall performance and user experience."

"Batelco's vision behind Manama-IX is to contribute towards the development of Internet services across the region, in line with Bahrain's national vision of becoming a leading regional digital hub," Mr. Askar concluded. solutions by stc also offers a range of connectivity solutions, fixed or wireless services, 5G technology, ICT, IoT and the IT products and services led by stc.

Lifestyle | Feature



Displaced Syrian boys stand on the podium after winning medals during the so-called 'Camp Olympics 2020' in the town of Fuaa, in the northwestern Syrian last major rebel bastion of Idlib. — AFP photos



An organizer holds medals to be distributed to the winners of the so-called "Camp Olympics 2020".



Displaced Syrian children run with cutout of horse heads, during the so-called "Camp Olympics 2020".



Displaced Syrian boys in karate outfits square off against each other.



This aerial view shows the logo of the so-called "Camp Olympics 2020" in the town of Fuaa.



A displaced Syrian boy lands on household mattresses as he performs a high jump.



Syrian children hold 'Tent Olympics' of the displaced

Displaced Syrian boys stand on the podium after winning medals in the so-called 'Camp Olympics 2020'.

Hurling a javelin, leaping over hurdles and sprinting beyond rows of tents to win gold, displaced children in the northwest of war-torn Syria staged their very own Olympics. As the Tokyo Olympics wrapped up at the weekend, 120 boys from 12 different camps excitedly gathered late Saturday for their own version of the Games in Syria's last major rebel bastion of Idlib. Each wearing the color of their camp, it was their turn to be the star athletes on a running track and soccer pitch etched in the red earth besides the tent settlement of Yaman near Idlib city.

Among the participants at the "Tent Olympics 2020", Walid Mohammed Al-Hassan, 12, was delighted to have represented his camp in the long jump. "We had such fun," he said, three fellow team mates huddled around him with their arms draped over his shoulders. "I won second place in the long jump," he said, grinning from ear to ear in his team's uniform of white head band and blue vest. The eight to 14-year-olds competed in a host of disciplines.

Also on the program were javelin, discus, high jump, hurdles, gymnastics, martial arts, volleyball, badminton, football, running and even "horse racing". Surrounded by a small crowd, two boys in white karate outfits squared off against each other, while another-much shorter-appeared to act as referee. On the race track, a boy ran as fast as he could clutching a cutout of a horse's head to his chest in a "horse race". As the sun set, participants and organizers cheered wildly as the winners stepped up onto the podium to receive their medals under a shower of confetti. A boy named Abdallah, who did not give his age, said his team had won gold in badminton.

'Real free heroes'

The Idlib region is home to nearly three million people, two-thirds of them displaced from other parts of Syria over the course of its 10-year-old conflict. The majority of those who have lost their homes live in camps dotted across the jihadist-dominated region, dependent on humanitarian aid to survive and battling the cold and floods in winter.

Organizer Ibrahim Sarmini said the event aimed to give the children some hope, but also draw the attention of the

people since starting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests, and displaced millions in and outside the country.

Syrian athletes competed at the Tokyo Olympics as part of two teams-six on the national one representing the Damascus government, and nine on the international Olympic Refugee Team. Two Syrian brothers took part last month in the different teams, although they both live in Germany. "It's sad to see young Syrians taking part as refugees," Sarmini said. "But it's great



A displaced Syrian boy lands on household mattresses as he performs a jump.

international community to their plight. We wanted "to introduce the kids to different kinds of sports that we, as a society, hadn't really tried before", he said. But "the main aim was to shine a light on the camp residents, children and adults, who are living a very tough life", said the representative of Syrian charity Benefits. Syria's war has killed around 500,000

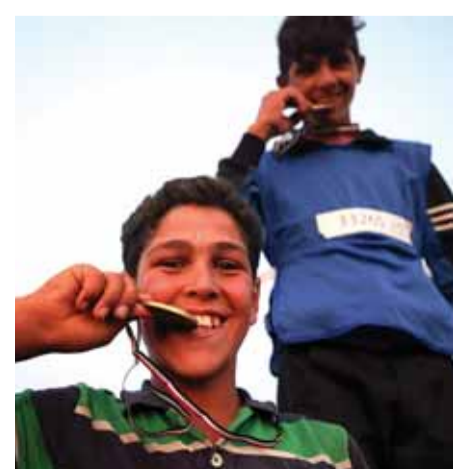
for us that there are real free heroes to represent the people here in northwest Syria at the Olympics." While none of the Syrian members of the refugee team won a medal, weightlifter Man Asaad earned Syria a bronze. — AFP



This aerial view shows a field at a camp for displaced Syrians.



Displaced Syrian boys in karate outfits warm up.



Displaced Syrian boys celebrate their victory by biting their medals won.



A member of the Society of Fat Mermaids swims during MerMagic Con.



A mermaid swims during MerMagic Con.



Seaweed tops, made by Mermaid Me, sold during MerMagic Con.



Mermaids and Mermen gather around the main pool for a group photo during MerMagic Con.



Mermaids and Mermen take part in an open swim during MerMagic Con.



Mermaids and Mermen take part in an open swim during MerMagic Con.

Kool and the Gang's Dennis 'Dee Tee' Thomas dies at 70

Dennis "Dee Tee" Thomas, a co-founder of the legendary soul-funk band Kool and the Gang, whose hits included "Celebration," died on Saturday at age 70, the group announced. Thomas, "beloved husband, father and a co-founder of Kool & the Gang, passed away peacefully in his sleep at the age of 70 in New Jersey," said a Facebook statement from the group. Another founding member, Ronald Bell, died last year.

"An original member of Kool & the Gang, Dennis was known as the quintessential cool cat in the group, loved for his hip clothes and hats, and his laid-back demeanor," his bandmates wrote. "Alto saxophone player, flutist, percussionist as well as master of ceremonies at the band's shows," he made his farewell appearance with the group on July 4 at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, the statement added. Kool and the Gang became a major smash in the 1970s, pumping out hits like "Get down on it," "Jungle Boogie" and "Ladies' Night," with

its brassy funk putting it in a class with Earth, Wind and Fire, the Isley Brothers and Sly and the Family Stone.

Brothers Robert and Ronald Bell, along with friends Thomas, Robert Mickens, Charles Smith, George Brown and Ricky Westfield founded the group in 1964 in New Jersey, first under the name the Jazziacs. The long-running group fused jazz, soul and funk. Thomas was the group's stylist, the statement said, making sure they "always looked fresh." "In the band's early days, Dennis also served as the 'budget hawk,' carrying the group's earnings in a paper bag in the bell of his horn." Kool and the Gang was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2018. It remains a DJ favorite and is heavily sampled especially in the rap world, its tracks appearing in songs by artists including Jay-Z, Nas, NWA, Tupac, The Wu-Tang Clan, Snoop Dogg, A Tribe Called Quest and Busta Rhymes. — AFP



In this file photo US musicians Robert 'Kool' Bell (left), James 'JT' Taylor (second left), Ronald Bell (third from left) and Dennis Thomas (right) of Kool & The Gang perform onstage during the Songwriters Hall of Fame 49th Annual Induction and Awards Dinner at New York Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York City. — AFP

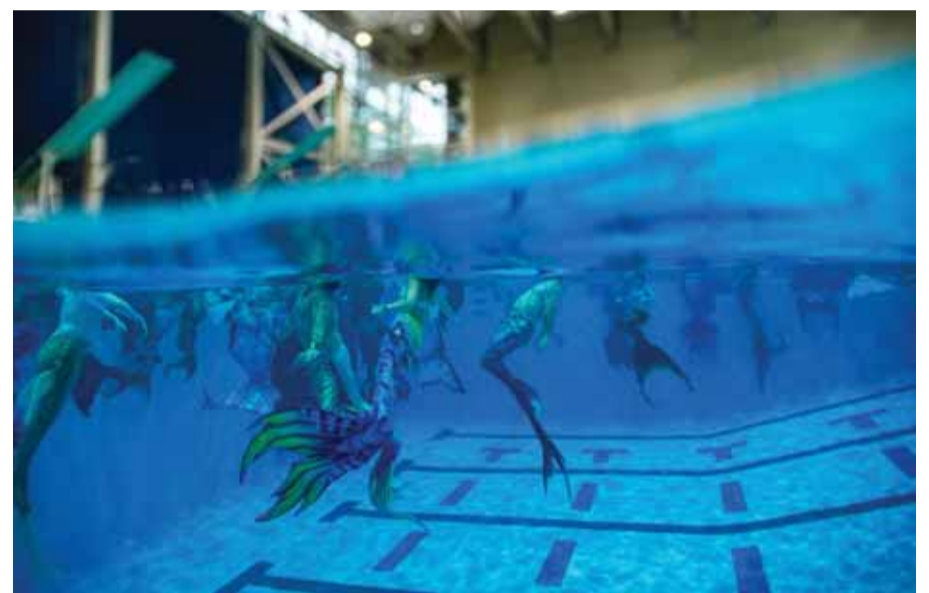
Part of our world: Mermaids mingle at US convention

Tresses swirled and fins shimmered as thousands of people donned tails to dive into a weekend of all things mermaid at the MerMagic convention in Virginia. Held at an aquatic center in Manassas, in the eastern United States, the convention is billed as the world's largest dedicated to mermaids, and attracts enthusiasts from all walks-or swims-of life. "It is really for everyone, because you don't necessarily have to swim to be a mermaid, you don't necessarily even have to have a tail," said Morgana Alba, a co-founder of the convention. "There's a legend of a different kind of mermaid in just about every society going back as far as history's been recorded, which means there's really no wrong way to be a mermaid."

One group, the Society of Fat Mermaids, were looking to reinforce that message and attract more fans of fins. The society's founder Che Monique said she posts pictures of the group's members swimming and performing tricks in the pool while decked out in their mermaid finest on Instagram to encourage others to think, "hey, I can do that too." But some might be put off by the high price tag that comes with becoming a mermaid.

Many "merfolk" spend thousands of dollars on colorful and intricate outfits, much of that often going into custom-made tails of silicone or foam and fabric.

On the trade show floor, vendors sold everything from full tails to accessories to decorate and finish a mermaid's look, including headpieces, necklaces, rings and clothing. "This is definitely not a cheap hobby," mermaid Jasmine Glover told AFP, saying the tail she was sporting at the convention cost "probably between



Mermaids and Mermen take part in an open swim during MerMagic Con at the Freedom Aquatic Center in Manassas, Virginia. — AFP photos

\$2,000 and \$3,000." Then there are expenses like getting lifeguard and free diving certifications, she added, "to make sure I'm safe." Midday at the aquatic center saw several hundred merfolk perched on the edge of the large pool for a group photo and an open water swim. While many were there just for fun, others came



Meagan Jones, 30, poses during a private photo shoot by photographer Craig Lawrence during MerMagic Con.

in a competitive spirit and tried their luck in the Mer-Olympics or the Miss Mermaid USA Pageant. "I think it's really pretty amazing," said Hannah Sayward, a bright flower crown topping her tumbling blonde curls and her sparkling pastel-hued tail fanning across the poolside. "People used to believe in mermaids and now scientifically people don't, but honestly, a bunch of people with a dream and a will have made mermaids real." — AFP

Friday-through-Sunday period, less than half its week-earlier total. The film, which puts a modern twist on a 1950s theme park ride, stars Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson. In third was Universal's psychological thriller "Old," at \$4.1 million. Gael Garcia Bernal, Vicky Krieps and Rufus Sewell star in the M. Night Shyamalan tale of a group of people who begin to age precipitously while trapped on a secluded beach.

In fourth place, for the second straight week, was Disney Marvel superhero flick "Black Widow" starring Scarlett Johansson, which took in \$4.0 million. It now has domestic earnings of \$174 million, pushing it past Universal's "F9: The Fast Saga" as the top-grossing film in North America so far this year. And in fifth was Matt Damon film "Stillwater" from Focus Features, at \$2.9 million. Damon plays a burly American oil worker who travels to France to help his estranged daughter (Abigail Breslin) when she is jailed for a killing she says she did not commit. Rounding out the top 5 were:

"The Green Knight" (\$2.6 million)
"Space Jam: A New Legacy" (\$2.5 million)
"Snake Eyes" (\$1.6 million)
"Escape Room: Tournament of Champions" (\$1.3 million)
"F9: The Fast Saga" (\$1.2 million)—AFP

UK salsa enthusiasts get back on the dance floor

Salsa dancing was among the first casualties of restrictions on close-contact indoor activities during the coronavirus pandemic and among the last in the UK to see bans lifted. Now enthusiasts of the paired-dance technique set to Latin beats of the same name have wasted no time shimmying back onto the dance floor. "Go out and dance while it's still allowed, while it's still legal," dance teacher Dani K tells his students at a studio in the British capital. At an evening class in the Angel area of north London, the 40-year-old Frenchman and his partner Sarah Rowe, 32, reflect on the difficulties of the past 15 months.

Students in plimsolls spin partners round on the dance floor, counting steps diligently and high-fiving each other after each dance. No one wears a facemask but the studio has air conditioning. "To be among people again, it feels great," says Vitaliy Zasadny, a 29-year-old systems engineer. "Salsa is a social dance and without people, it's not really salsa—you're dancing on your own." Restrictions on indoor events were lifted in England on July 19, allowing a host of activities to resume, from mingling in pubs to sitting inside at restaurants.

Before then, Dani had to adapt, teaching some classes where students learned the basic steps on their own but without any contact with their partners. "Partner dance is more difficult... because we need to touch," he tells AFP. "It was difficult because I could feel the frustration of the students." One of those who took the socially distanced class, Joana Castro, a nurse originally from Portugal, joins Wednesday's class. "This is my first ever lesson touching a partner," she says, smiling. "It's hard to let someone lead, but it's so much more fun. I really enjoyed it."

Both teachers have led online classes, too, teaching people at home. Despite the limitations of the format, Rowe calls the virtual classes "a lifeline for us mentally and obviously financially". — AFP

'Suicide Squad' tops N America box office with a tepid total

With COVID-19 fears again depressing North American moviegoing, new Warner Bros/DC superhero film "The Suicide Squad" led the weekend box office but took in only an estimated \$26.6 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. The movie, dubbed a pseudo-sequel to 2016's major hit "Suicide Squad," again featured A-listers Margot Robbie and Viola Davis, but two big names from the earlier version—Will Smith and Jared Leto—sat this one out. The film's simultaneous release on HBO Max further hurt its box-office totals.

Hollywood has been struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels. "This is an unforgiving market," David Gross, who runs consulting firm Franchise Entertainment Research, told Variety. Last week's box office leader, Disney's family-friendly adventure film "Jungle Cruise," slipped to second spot, taking in \$15.7 million for the



In this file photo (from left) Joel Kinnaman, James Gunn, Margot Robbie, and John Cena attend the Warner Bros. premiere of 'The Suicide Squad' at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



**EGYPT PAPYRUS MAKERS
KEEP TRADITION ALIVE
DESPITE TOURISM SLUM**

Abdel Mobdi Moussalam, 48, cuts papyrus reeds from his land in the village of Al-Qaramous in Sharqiyah province, in Egypt's northern fertile Nile Delta region, northeast of the capital. — AFP photos

In the lush green fields of Egypt's fertile Nile Delta Valley, farmers and artisans are struggling to make a living as they keep alive the Pharaonic-era tradition of making papyrus. In the 1970s, an art teacher in the village of Al-Qaramous taught farmers the millennia-old techniques for transforming the plant into sought-after paper decorated with ornate drawings and text. The village and its surrounds, located

eager visitors. But tourism in the North African country has taken a battering since its 2011 revolution, and after a Russian airliner was downed by the Islamic State group in 2015. The COVID-19 pandemic has further debilitated the sector: Egypt earned just \$4 billion in tourist revenues last year, a quarter of what it had anticipated before the global health crisis. Today, Al-Qaramous has 25



Farmer and painter Said Tarakhan, 60, draws on papyrus sheets at home.

'It will return'

The papyrus plant, with its fan-shaped foliage, grows in water and can reach four meters (13 feet) in height. Its form has served as inspiration for decorating the columns of ancient Egyptian temples. To make paper, workers use wire to cut the stems into thin strips, which are immersed in water and then layered on top of each other to create sheets. The sheets are placed into a compressor to compact them, and the resulting paper is left to dry in the sun before being decorated with writing or colorful designs.

Papyrus workshop owner Abdel Mobdi Moussalam, 48, said his staff has dwindled from eight a decade ago to just two. "Papyrus is our only source of income. It's what feeds me and my children," he told AFP. Tarakhan said he was trying to branch out into other papyrus products such as notebooks and sketchbooks. A few months ago, his son Mohammed launched an online store to sell their new range. "At first, we were just selling locally to those who came to us, but after COVID, we thought that we could reach

more people, and even foreigners, through the internet," the 30-year-old said.

"We are trying to think differently so that we can carry on," said the elder Tarakhan, who in 2014 founded a local association for papyrus craftspeople. "I thank COVID-19 for locking us in our homes and forcing us to improve our business model." Near the famous Giza Pyramids around 100 kilometers away, Ashraf al-Sarawi displays papyrus paintings in his large shop, devoid of tourists. He said he lost most of his income last year due to the pandemic, but expressed hope that tourism would pick up soon. "Tourism never dies," the 48-year-old said. "It may get sick for a while, but it will return." — AFP



A woman uses a thread to slice papyrus into thin strips at the workshop.

about 80 kilometers (50 miles) northeast of Cairo, now make up the largest hub of papyrus production in the country, experts in the sector say.

Once used by ancient Egyptians as writing paper, local artists now decorate the papyrus with hieroglyphics, Arabic calligraphy and representations from antiquity and nature to create souvenirs for

farms trying to make ends meet by selling papyrus, compared to around 500 prior to the revolution, according to farmer and artist Said Tarakhan. "I lost about 80 percent of my total income-I used to earn nearly \$1,000 a month and now it's almost zero," the 60-year-old told AFP as he showed off his replica Tutankhamun paintings.



A woman cuts papyrus by a thread at the workshop in the village of Al-Qaramous.



A woman lays out soaked thin strips of papyrus to form a sheet, before compression and drying at the workshop in the village of Al-Qaramous.



Farmer and painter Said Tarakhan, 60, draws on papyrus sheets at home.

'South Park' creators sign latest streaming mega deal

"South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone signed a massive deal to make 14 movies of their enduring satirical cartoon for streaming service Paramount+, as Hollywood's frenzied scramble for online content accelerates. While MTV Entertainment Studios—which like Paramount+ is owned by parent

corporation ViacomCBS—did not release any financial figures, Bloomberg News put the deal at \$900 million, which would make it one of the largest in television history.

The Paramount+ streaming platform launched in March in a bid to compete in a crowded and content-hungry marketplace led by the likes of Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime. In a statement, MTV Entertainment's Chris McCarthy said developing new content with "tremendous talent like Matt and Trey, is at the heart of our strategy to continue growing Paramount+." The deal also includes multiple new series of "South Park" for television network Comedy Central, which will see the long-running satire reach its 30th year by 2027.

"South Park," set in small-town America and known for crude language and lampooning hot-button social issues since 1997, has already spawned one film, multiple video games and other merchandise.

"Comedy Central has been our home for 25 years and we're really happy that they've made a commitment to us for the next 75 years," said Parker and Stone in the joint statement. "We can't wait to get back to doing traditional South Park episodes but now we can also try out new formats," they added. While ViacomCBS did not immediately comment on the \$900 million figure, it would put the deal on a par with Reese Witherspoon's sale of her Hello Sunshine company to a new private

equity-backed media venture this week. It also comes after Amazon in May agreed to buy MGM studios for \$8.45 billion. Other streaming platforms recently launched by major media and tech companies to join the so-called "streaming wars" include HBO Max, Peacock and Apple TV+, each seeking vast content libraries to attract and retain subscribers. ViacomCBS said Wednesday that it had reached 42 million streaming subscribers. Current market leader Netflix has more than 200 million. — AFP

Ariana Grande to appear and perform in Fortnite video game

An avatar of Ariana Grande will appear in the popular video game Fortnite and perform some of the pop superstar's greatest hits over the weekend, in an event highlighted by game maker Epic Games to showcase their new strategy. In five different rounds, to target all time zones, players can choose an option that will let them go on an adventure with Grande. The 28-year-old singer's avatar is a human-fantasy creature hybrid dressed in either a silver skirt and top or a short outfit made of blue scales.

During the rounds, which last about half an hour, several of the Grammy winner's songs will play, including "Be Alright" and "Positions." Grande-themed merchandise will also be available in the game's store. The special appearance is part of a shift for Fortnite from a survival game to a general entertainment platform. "That's a big area where we want to innovate because Fortnite should always really exist in partnership with real world activities," Phil Rampulla, head of brand at Epic Games, told AFP. "We are not replacing concerts, we are not replacing movies, we are existing in harmony with those things and extending and enhancing those things." A juggernaut of the video game industry, Fortnite boasts about 350 million gamers throughout the world. — AFP



In this file photo recording artist Ariana Grande performs onstage during the 2018 Billboard Music Awards at MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Johnny Depp to be honored by San Sebastian film festival

Hollywood star Johnny Depp, who lost a libel case last year against a British newspaper that labeled him a "wife-beater", will receive a lifetime achievement award at Spain's San Sebastian film festival, organizers said yesterday. The 58-year-old, best known as the swaggering Jack Sparrow in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise, will collect the festival's Donostia award at a ceremony on September 22 in "recognition of his career," they said in a statement. Past recipients of the Donostia award—the festival's highest honour which is named after the Basque word for the coastal town of San Sebastian—include actors Meryl Streep, Richard Gere, Ian McKellen and Robert De Niro.



The US actor brought a libel claim against The Sun tabloid for a 2018 article that branded him a "wife-beater" during his tempestuous relationship with his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard. But a judge last year ruled against him—saying the article had been proven to be "substantially true"—and Depp was ordered to pay the newspaper's publishers News Group Newspapers £628,000 (\$871,000) in legal costs. The case, which laid bare the actor's battle with drink and drugs, was dubbed "the biggest English libel trial of the 21st century". In its aftermath, Depp said he was asked to step down from his role in the "Fantastic Beasts" film franchise based on the book by Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling. The 69th San Sebastian film festival, the highest-profile movie event in the Spanish-speaking world, takes place from September 17 to 25. The festival was originally intended to honor Spanish language films but has established itself as one of the most important movie festivals in the world. — AFP

Sports

'Most challenging' Tokyo Olympics declared closed

TOKYO: The Tokyo 2020 Games were declared closed on Sunday by IOC chief Thomas Bach, who said it had been the "most challenging Olympic journey" after a year's pandemic delay and threats of cancellation.

Bach called the Tokyo Games "unprecedented" as he addressed the 68,000-seat Olympic Stadium, which was empty of spectators as Japan battles a record coronavirus outbreak. "In these difficult times we are all living through, you give the world the most precious of gifts: hope," the International Olympic Committee president told athletes at the ceremony.

"And now I have to mark the end of this most challenging Olympic journey to Tokyo: I declare the Games of the 32nd Olympiad closed," Bach said. It marked a low-key end to an extraordinary Olympics that have mostly played out in empty venues with only athletes, team officials and media present.

Athletes have lived in strict biosecure conditions with social distancing at the Olympic Village and instructions to wear masks unless eating, sleeping, training or competing. As the Olympic flag was passed to Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo for the 2024 Games, live footage showed cheering crowds in the French capital — in stark contrast to Tokyo. Bach has described how the IOC considered cancelling the Olympics and claiming the costs on its insurance policy but said officials ploughed ahead with holding the Games "for the athletes".

'Our athletes moved people'

On Sunday, the climax of the biggest sports event since the pandemic, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge won the men's marathon and the USA edged China at the top of the medals table. The United States scored victories in volleyball, track cycling and basketball to top the tally with 39 gold medals, just one ahead of China.

The Olympics were plagued by low Japanese support as they went ahead with Tokyo and other regions under a state of emergency and with infections multiplying to new highs. But Japan's record haul of 27 golds to finish third on the table has won hearts. Britain were fourth with 22 and the Russian Olympic Committee, the team for Russian athletes after their country was banned for systematic doping, were fifth with 20.

"We believe our athletes' earnest spirit and all-out performance moved people," said Tsuyoshi Fukui, chef de mission for the Japanese team. A succession of big names have failed to perform in Japan, where new sports skateboarding, surfing, sport climbing and karate brought young new stars to the fore. But marathon world record holder Kipchoge showed his class on Sunday, kicking in the closing stages and clocking 2hr 08min 38sec to retain the title he won in 2016.

Tokyo counts cost of \$15 billion pandemic Olympics 'gamble'

TOKYO: Tokyo awoke to a huge bill and soaring coronavirus cases yesterday after pulling off a mid-pandemic Olympics that at times looked impossible and had a mixed reception to the end. Olympic officials have been predictably bullish, saying the Games offered hope and uplifting moments, and went off without any major coronavirus outbreaks.

"These Olympic Games have been a powerful demonstration of the unifying power of sport," International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach said at his closing press conference. But it will take longer for Japan to reckon with a Games that were highly controversial and unfolded as virus cases exploded in Tokyo and elsewhere.

The Asahi Shimbun daily, which had called for cancellation despite being a sponsor of the Games, said the nearly \$15 billion event was a "gamble" with people's lives. "This gamble went ahead, making the situation worse," it said yesterday.

A poll conducted by the paper over the last two days of the Games found 56 percent of Japanese supported holding the event, with 32 percent opposed. Just 32 percent said they felt the Games were "safe and secure", with 54 percent unconvinced.

Tokyo's 2020 Olympics were unlike any other, starting with last year's historic postponement that upturned years of planning for athletes. Restrictions at the Games themselves meant masks for all, cheering for none, and fans banned from almost all venues for the first time.

'High praise'

Despite everything, as the Games opened there were signs that Japan's public might be having a change of heart. Thousands flocked to the Olympic

India showers cash on Olympic hero Chopra

NEW DELHI: Indian companies and governments promised cash and gifts worth more than two million dollars to javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra after he won India's first ever Olympic athletics gold medal. The 23-year-old farmer's son, who two years ago underwent surgery on a career-threatening elbow injury, threw 87.58 meters in the Tokyo Olympic stadium on Saturday to send his country into raptures.

Chopra led India's most successful Olympics ever with a gold, two silver medals and four bronze. He will lead a cash bonanza for the winning athletes—the government in his home state of Haryana said it would give Chopra a 60 million rupee (\$800,000) bonus.

Other state governments offered another \$400,000 between them and a leading education company promised \$270,000. Chopra said he hoped the Olympic gold would be a turning point for his country's athletes. "In athletics, I feel we have missed medals by fine margins over the years. So this medal was important," he said. "Now that I have won, I feel



TOKYO: Fireworks light up the sky over the Olympic Stadium during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, in Tokyo, on Sunday. —AFP

"I know there were a lot of people against holding this Olympics due to the coronavirus," said a flag-waving, 47-year-old fan on the marathon route who gave his name as Tsujita. "But I am glad it took place. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for everyone." The marathon, moved north to Sapporo to avoid Tokyo's summer heat, was one of the few events to allow spectators.

Trans athletes, 'twisties'

Fears of a major outbreak among the mostly vaccinated Olympic athletes and officials proved unfounded and 430 cases were picked up during the Games, including 32 in the Olympic Village. However, the virus has lurked as an ever-present threat. Victory celebrations were muted, with lonely laps of honor. But the athletes' emotions were on full view.

Superstar gymnast Simone Biles provided the most jaw-dropping moment when the American abruptly pulled out of competition over a bout of the "twisties", a disorienting mental block. Biles, widely acknowledged

as the greatest gymnast in history, recovered sufficiently to claim a redemptive bronze medal in her final event, the beam.

Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard of New Zealand became the first openly transgender woman to compete at the Games and Canada's Quinn became the first openly transgender Olympic medalist, with gold in the women's football. In other highlights, US swimmer Caeleb Dressel assumed the mantle of Michael Phelps with five gold medals and Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah achieved a sprint double on the track. Among the final events on Sunday, Jason Kenny claimed the men's keirin to become the first Briton to win seven Olympic titles.

The USA started the day two golds behind China but the women's basketball and volleyball titles and track cyclist Jennifer Valente's omnium victory put them top of the table. Tokyo will host the Paralympics from August 24. The Olympic circus will reconvene in just six months when Beijing, faced with boycott threats and a renewed coronavirus emergency, holds the Winter Games in February. —AFP

Stadium for a glimpse of the opening ceremony fireworks and a chance to take their photo in front of the Olympic rings.

"When the sport got under way, people defied requests to stay away from events held on public roads, and snapped up Olympic merchandise in stores across Japan. "If you see these athletes running in front of you, you can't help but cheer for them," Hirochika Tadedo told AFP along the route of the triathlon, which passed in front of his home. Tributes to the athletes were a key theme of editorials in Japan yesterday, with the Yomiuri Shimbun offering "high praise for competitions into which they poured all their efforts."

There had been concerns about what the pandemic and the postponement would mean for sport at the Games. But despite some high-profile disappointments, performances remained impressive, with world records broken and the successful introduction of several new sports including skateboarding and surfing.

The coronavirus cast a long shadow over the Games from the start, and several athletes' Olympic dreams were shattered by the results of a PCR test. Most though were just happy the Games went ahead at all. "Mid-pandemic they successfully held an amazing Olympics. Always greeting us with a smile and so much kindness. Thank you," wrote Australian footballer Alanna Kennedy on Twitter.

'Brightened the world'

"The Games have been held in the most challenging circumstances imaginable and the organizers have excelled," added Hugh Robertson, chairman of the British Olympic Association. The Olympics were also a triumph for Japanese sport, with a record 27 gold medals in everything from baseball to skateboarding.

Japanese Olympic officials said they felt the gold rush drove public support for the Games, pointing to the families who brought children to venues to cheer outside or hung flags in their windows. But behind the cheering, there is a looming sense of crisis over the sharp rise in virus

we can do anything."

Chopra was up against the previously in-form Johannes Vetter of Germany who had thrown a season's best of 96.29 meters before the Olympics, but had an off day and failed to qualify for the throw-off as one of the top eight.

"If the first throw is good, then you grow in confidence. My second throw was also stable," Chopra told reporters of the throw in the second round that won the title. "I wasn't sure of the gold (after that effort), but knew I had thrown my best."

"We can't bring thoughts of gold into our minds (during the competition). Such thoughts are dangerous, then there is a risk that we may not put the required effort. Now I want to achieve the 90-metre mark as soon as possible," he added.

Pizza for life

Byju Raveendran, owner of the Byju's education tech company that is chipping in for a bonus, said India had to make its athletes "heroes so that we transform ourselves from a sport loving nation to a sport-playing nation".

The Indian cricket board, the BCCI, and the Chennai Super Kings Indian Premier League team vowed to give \$135,000 each and Chopra will also get \$100,000 from the Indian Olympic Association. Other firms offered free air travel, luxury cars and cash gifts



TOKYO: A video announcing the next Olympics Game of Paris 2024 is shown next to the Olympic Cauldron and the Olympic flame during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, at the Olympic Stadium, in Tokyo, on Sunday. —AFP

cases during the Games.

Tokyo and many other parts of the country are under virus state of emergency, and only around a third of the country is fully vaccinated as the Delta variant fuels surging infections. The issue could weigh on Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's political future, as he faces a leadership race and then a general election by October. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Gold medalist India's Neeraj Chopra, surrounded by his fans and security personnel displays his medal upon his arrival at the airport in New Delhi yesterday, after competing in the men's javelin throw event in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. —AFP

that took Chopra's bonus over two million and more was expected before he returns to India.

All of the Indian medal winners can expect big cash rewards for their return, with the IOA offering \$53,750 for a silver, and \$33,500 for a bronze. India's cricket board said they would give \$168,000 to the men's hockey team for its bronze medal—the first in four decades. And state governments also promised hundreds of thousands to the team. —AFP



Tokyo Olympics medals table after Sunday's final events:

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
United States	39	41	33	113
China	38	32	18	88
Japan	27	14	17	58
Great Britain	22	21	22	65
Russian Olympic Committee	20	28	23	71
Australia	17	7	22	46
Netherlands	10	12	14	36
France	10	12	11	33
Germany	10	11	16	37
Italy	10	10	20	40
Canada	7	6	11	24
Brazil	7	6	8	21
New Zealand	7	6	7	20
Cuba	7	3	5	15
Hungary	6	7	7	20
South Korea	6	4	10	20
Poland	4	5	5	14
Czech Republic	4	4	3	11
Kenya	4	4	2	10
Norway	4	2	2	8
Jamaica	4	1	4	9
Spain	3	8	6	17
Sweden	3	6	0	9
Switzerland	3	4	6	13
Denmark	3	4	4	11
Croatia	3	3	2	8
Iran	3	2	2	7
Serbia	3	1	5	9
Belgium	3	1	3	7
Bulgaria	3	1	2	6
Slovenia	3	1	1	5
Uzbekistan	3	0	2	5
Georgia	2	5	1	8
Taiwan	2	4	6	12
Turkey	2	2	9	13
Greece	2	1	1	4
Uganda	2	1	1	4
Ecuador	2	1	0	3
Ireland	2	0	2	4
Zionist entity	2	0	2	4
Qatar	2	0	1	3
Bahamas	2	0	0	2
Kosovo	2	0	0	2
Ukraine	1	6	12	19
Belarus	1	3	3	7
Romania	1	3	0	4
Venezuela	1	3	0	4
India	1	2	4	7
Hong Kong	1	2	3	6
Philippines	1	2	1	4
Slovakia	1	2	1	4
South Africa	1	2	0	3
Austria	1	1	5	7
Egypt	1	1	4	6
Indonesia	1	1	3	5
Ethiopia	1	1	2	4
Portugal	1	1	2	4
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Estonia	1	0	1	2
Fiji	1	0	1	2
Latvia	1	0	1	2
Thailand	1	0	1	2
Bermuda	1	0	0	1
Morocco	1	0	0	1
Puerto Rico	1	0	0	1
Colombia	0	4	1	5
Azerbaijan	0	3	4	7
Dominican Republic	0	3	2	5
Armenia	0	2	2	4
Kyrgyzstan	0	2	1	3
Mongolia	0	1	3	4
Argentina	0	1	2	3
San Marino	0	1	2	3
Jordan	0	1	1	2
Malaysia	0	1	1	2
Nigeria	0	1	1	2
Bahrain	0	1	0	1
Lithuania	0	1	0	1
Namibia	0	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0	1
Turkmenistan	0	1	0	1
Kazakhstan	0	0	8	8
Mexico	0	0	4	4
Finland	0	0	2	2
Botswana	0	0	1	1
Burkina	0	0	1	1
Ghana	0	0	1	1
Grenada	0	0	1	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Moldova	0	0	1	1
Syria	0	0	1	1

Kuwait ends Tokyo Olympics campaign with single bronze



TOKYO: Abdullah Al-Rashidi shows off his men's skeet bronze medal he won at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

TOKYO: Kuwait ended its Tokyo 2020 Olympics campaign with a single bronze medal won by shooter Abdullah Al-Rashidi in the skeet competition. In the shooting competitions at the Asaka Shooting Range, Rashidi won the bronze medal at the skeet event, while the trio Mansour Al-Rashedi, Talal Al-Rashidi and Abdulrahman Al-Faihan showed good skills in the competitions, but did not win any medals. Kuwait participated with 10 athletes, partaking five different sport events, in the 32nd Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, which ended on Sunday. Abdulrahman Al-Fadhel competed in the rowing competition, where he participated in several rounds, held at Tokyo Bay's Sea Forest Waterway. In the men's 110-meter hurdles, Yaqoub Al-Youha finished seventh, recording a time of 13.69 seconds. Meanwhile, Mudhawi Al-Shammari, a Kuwaiti sprinter, participated in the 100-meter race, with a time of 11.81 seconds, qualifying for the first round after achieving third place in the pre-qualifying race.

The Olympic swimming participant Lara Dashti achieved fourth place, recording a time of 29.69 seconds in the 50-meter swimming competition. Abbas Qali came in fourth place during his competition for the 100-meter butterfly race, recording a time of 53.62 seconds, therefore was unable to qualify for the second round. Lastly, Mohammad Al-Musawi, a Kuwaiti karateka, concluded the participation of Kuwait in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, coming up short in his qualification round. —KUNA

Sports

Bottles thrown, match held-up as Marseille fight back in Ligue 1

PARIS: Marseille came back from two goals down to win 3-2 at Montpellier in their French Ligue 1 opener on Sunday but the game was held up when fans pelted the pitch with bottles. The clash at the Stade Mosson was halted in the 89th minute after Marseille substitute Valentin Rongier had been hit on the head with a bottle.

Montpellier's Florent Mollet was also targeted as he readied to take a corner. Referee Jeremie Pignard led both teams off the pitch while appeals were made for calm. The game was eventually restarted after a delay of 10 minutes. "It's always unfortunate because it penalizes everyone. The referee did what he had to do. It's always a little sad to see this kind of thing," said Montpellier coach Olivier Dall'Oglio.

The derby was played in front of 13,500 fans as the first weekend of the new season witnessed the return of spectators after seven months of matches played behind closed doors due to the pandemic. An own-goal by Luan Perez and a strike by Gaetan Laborde had given Montpellier a 2-0 lead at half-time. But Cengiz Under pulled one back for Marseille in the 67th minute before two goals in five minutes by Dimitri Payet completed the recovery.

Earlier, Turkish striker Burak Yilmaz was hailed "a true leader" after forcing home a last-gasp goal as Lille fought back to a 3-3 draw at Metz as the French champions opened their title defense. The surprise champions, who also beat Paris Saint-Germain in the French Super Cup last week, were trailing 3-1 before late goals from Nanitamo Ikone and Turkish national team captain Yilmaz gave them

a hard earned away point.

It was a cautionary tale for Metz who foolishly gave the ball away with a shot on goal deep into injury time. Yilmaz then rampaged the full length of the pitch with the seconds running down to dribble into the area from the left wing and squeeze a shot home from a tight angle. "That is a true leader," Lille coach Jocelyn Gourvenec said of Yilmaz. "He's a real professional, a real athlete and works so hard when the chips are down."

Lille captain Jose Fonte was furious after giving up three goals. "It's not right and I'm not happy. But after that we showed why we are champions," said the Portuguese international. Christophe Galtier led Lille to the title last season but quit and joined ambitious south-coast outfit Nice. However, there was to be no champagne reception in his first game as the Ineos-bankrolled side were held 0-0 at home by Reims.

In Brittany 18,000 fans were on hand to see Rennes draw 1-1 with promoted Lens, where teenage winger Kamaldeen Sulemana from Ghana opened the scores with a snap-shot before Lens drew level late on after a goalmouth mix-up.

Promoted Clermont got off to a flyer beating Bordeaux 2-0 away thanks to late goals from top scorer in Ligue 2 last season Mohamed Bayo, and Jodel Dossou with the last kick of the game. Strasbourg also suffered a 2-0 home defeat as Ismael Traore and Stephane Bahoken bagged second half goals for visitors Angers.

Lorient took the lead with a Vincent Le Goff strike in a tight game at Saint-Etienne, who levelled



MONTPELLIER: Marseille's players react after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between Montpellier and Marseille at the Mosson stadium in Montpellier, southern France on Sunday. — AFP

from the spot with a Wahbi Khazri penalty. Paris Saint-Germain might be closing in on signing Lionel Messi but another Argentinian was their match-

winner on Saturday as Mauro Icardi's goal secured a 2-1 victory against newly-promoted Troyes. Lyon were held to a 1-1 draw by Brest. — AFP

Frankfurt upset as Bundesliga teams struggle in German Cup

PARIS: Eintracht Frankfurt were knocked out of the German Cup 2-0 by third division Waldhof Mannheim on Sunday as Bundesliga clubs struggled at lower-division opponents. With top-flight teams kept apart and assigned away games in their first competitive matches of the season, several stumbled six days before the Bundesliga kicks off.

In Mannheim, the home team struck twice early in the second half. Captain Marcel Seegert headed the first after 48 minutes. Four minutes later Joseph Boyamba lobbed former Paris Saint-Germain keeper Kevin Trapp. Eintracht finished with 10 men

after Austrian international Martin Hinteregger received a second yellow card after 62 minutes.

Three Bundesliga teams were taken to extra time by fourth-tier opponents and two needed penalties to advance. Champions League bound Wolfsburg escaped embarrassment at Pruesen Muenster when Croatian international Josip Brekalo volleyed a 90th minute equalizer.

Beantpole Dutch striker Wout Weghorst then nodded in from close range in the 103rd minute and Ridle Baku struck in the last minute of extra time to secure a 3-1 victory. At Elversberg, Jonathan Burkardt saved Mainz with equalizers at the end of normal time and extra time, after Luca Schnellbacher had twice given the hosts the lead.

The visitors then won an epic shootout 8-7 when Elversberg's Laurin von Piechowski, with the 16th penalty, became the first player to miss. Cologne finished 1-1 after normal time and extra time at Carl Zeiss



WIESBADEN: Dortmund's teammates celebrate Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Braut Haaland (second left) for scoring the 0-1 during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) 1st round football match SV Wehen Wiesbaden v Borussia Dortmund in Wiesbaden, south-western Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

Jena and then won the shootout 4-2. Hertha Berlin left it late at third-division Meppen as Davie Selke headed the only goal in the 90th minute. Relegated Schalke made an encouraging start to their season with a 4-1 win at Villingen with summer acquisition Marius Buelter scoring

twice. On Saturday, Erling Braut Haaland hit a hat-trick as holders Borussia Dortmund eased past Wehen Wiesbaden 3-0. Bayern Munich's first-round tie on Friday was postponed until August 25 after fifth-tier opponents Bremer were quarantined with cases of the coronavirus. — AFP

No Messi, no problem as Barca defeat Juventus

BARCELONA: Barcelona started life without Lionel Messi on Sunday with a 3-0 win over Juventus in the pre-season Gamper Trophy. Messi had earlier Sunday said his farewells to the club he had served for 20 years at a tearful news conference. Memphis Depay opened the scoring for Barcelona after just three minutes with Martin Braithwaite adding a second goal just before the hour mark from a corner. Young hope Riqui Puig scored a third in stoppage time with a fine left foot drive. In Sunday's other high-profile friendly, Real Madrid and AC Milan fought to a 0-0 stalemate. Spain's La Liga season gets underway on Friday while the Italian Serie A starts on August 22. — AFP



SANT JOAN DESPI, Spain: Juventus' Colombian midfielder Juan Cuadrado (center) challenges Barcelona's Dutch forward Memphis Depay and Uruguayan defender Ronald Araujo during a friendly football match at the Johan Cruyff Stadium in Sant Joan Despi near Barcelona on Sunday. — AFP

Ex-FIFA boss Blatter meets Swiss prosecutor in payment probe

ZURICH: Former world football chief Sepp Blatter yesterday met with a Swiss prosecutor investigating suspected fraud surrounding a FIFA payment to Michel Platini, as the long-running probe inches towards a conclusion.

Former FIFA president Blatter, 85, is being investigated over a two million Swiss franc (\$2.2 million, 1.85 million euro) payment in 2011 to Platini, who was then in charge of European football's governing body UEFA.

After the interview at the federal prosecutor's office in Zurich, the city where FIFA has its headquarters, Blatter said he would return on Tuesday to resume the final hearing in the investigation. "It is a normal audience. It's the first part. The second part will be tomorrow," he told journalists waiting out-



ZURICH: Former president of World football's governing body FIFA, Sepp Blatter, waves as he leaves the building of the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland to attend a hearing in Zurich yesterday. — AFP

side. "It was in a good spirit."

Blatter, who was accompanied by his lawyer Lorenzo Erni, said he would spend the rest of the day resting and working. He smiled and waved as he was driven away. The hearing with a federal prose-

cutor from the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) of Switzerland was postponed to August due to the retired Swiss football administrator's health.

He spent two months in hospital in December and January under undergoing heart surgery, and in March was convalescing in a clinic. Due to Blatter's condition, he was only meant to spend around 90 minutes with the prosecutor yesterday. But he spent more than two and a half hours inside and said he would return today. Joseph "Sepp" Blatter joined FIFA in 1975, became its general secretary in 1981 and the president of world football's governing body in 1998. He was forced to stand down in 2015 and was originally banned by FIFA for eight years, later reduced to six, over ethics breaches when he authorised what prosecutors termed a "disloyal payment" to Platini — in other words, one made in his own interests rather than FIFA's. Blatter and Platini, 66, found themselves at the center of a Swiss federal investigation. "Specifically, the criminal proceedings against Joseph Blatter are now being conducted on suspicion of fraud, breach of trust and unfaithful business management," the OAG said in a statement ahead of yesterday's hearing. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Lijo Davis holder of passport number R5453235 on behalf of my son Antonio holder of passport number R8271668 Do hereby declare Adding Surname LJJO, no changes in his given name ANTONIO. (C 0626) 10-8-2021

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Cost-benefit weighs in favor of Messi at PSG

PARIS: Barcelona could not afford to keep Lionel Messi but Paris Saint-Germain have made their move for the 34-year-old and, while the cost of the deal may be astronomical, it is still likely to be a very smart bit of business if or when it goes through.

Barca — swimming in debt of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) — ultimately found themselves in a no-win situation with their talisman. Keeping him would have maintained salaries at an untenable 110 percent of revenue.

Even letting him go leaves that figure at 95 percent with the Catalan club a prime example of how living beyond one's means eventually ends in the tears Messi shed Sunday in confirming his departure, Barca unable to defy financial gravity any longer.

An annual salary north of 70 million euros (\$82 million) net per season, while breaking Spanish league salary cap requirements, was a price that made sense for Barcelona. Marc Ciria, director general of Diagonal Inversiones consultancy, recently calculated Messi generated some 235 million euros more than he earned over the past four years.

Qatari-owned PSG, who bought Messi's close friend Neymar from Barcelona for 222 million euros in 2017, can afford the Argentinian wizard, who they see as the final piece in the jigsaw to land a first Champions League crown.

'Stratospheric'

Messi, who had agreed to a 50 percent wage cut with Barcelona and a five-year deal taking him to the age of 39, is reputedly being offered some 40 million euros a year over two seasons in Paris with the possibility of a third.

Neymar, whose transfer will ultimately cost PSG more than 500 million euros

wages included, earns an after-tax salary of 30 million euros annually according to documents released in 2018 by Football Leaks.

Messi, nicknamed "La Pulga" (the flea), boosts overall annual earnings to around 110 million euros thanks to lucrative sponsorships with the likes of Pepsi and Adidas, ahead of the likes of long-time La Liga rival Cristiano Ronaldo, LeBron James or Roger Federer.

"We're on another planet here — it's stratospheric" with Messi, says sports marketing analyst Virgile Caillet, adding a putative arrival at the Parc des Princes would constitute "an event such as (has happened) only once or twice in football — with (Diego) Maradona when he signed for Napoli or (Zinedine) Zidane going to Real."

French 'Galacticos'

PSG have essentially taken over the Real Madrid mantle of the home for "galacticos" — megastars whose global status lifts their clubs to another level. Although the pandemic knocked a 125 million-euro dent in PSG's finances across 2019-20 alone, the club's ownership by Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) means their pockets are deep enough to close a deal.

The recent relaxation of UEFA's financial fair play rules because of the pandemic helps too. "That leaves more margin than previously," says Christophe Lepetit, director of France's Centre for the Law and Economics of Sport in Limoges.

Getting Messi aboard would mean PSG "developing new marketing approaches. That dovetails perfectly with the PSG strategy," says Caillet. "Messi is a cast-iron guarantee. From the moment you recruit him you have a num-



LE BOURGET: Supporters try to spot an aircraft that just landed as they gather outside Le Bourget airport, north of Paris, as Argentinian football player Lionel Messi was expected to arrive yesterday. — AFP

ber of additional revenue streams which flow almost automatically: derivative merchandise, ticketing, partnerships. It's an unmissable opportunity."

A further plus compared with the 400 million euros shelled out in 2017 to buy Neymar and Kylian Mbappe is the fact PSG don't have to pay a transfer fee for the out-of-contract Messi. "In terms of amortization (costs) there is just the salary — I'd say that makes it much more

affordable," smiled Caillet.

A decade into their ownership of PSG, QSI have pushed a policy of capturing big names — even those in the twilight of their careers, notably David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimovic. PSG are the seventh-richest club in the world according to the most recent Deloitte Football Money League, still trailing the likes of Barca, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Manchester United.

For Caillet, Messi will lift them to even greater heights on and off the pitch. "A second stage was needed for the PSG rocket. Messi will bring an acceleration," says Caillet. "It seems paradoxical given his age — but Messi incarnates PSG's future both economically and in sporting terms," says Caillet as "his arrival brings together three iconic brands — Paris, Jordan (PSG's kit manufacturer) and Messi." — AFP



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