



3 Food trucks struggle amid pandemic, licensing woes



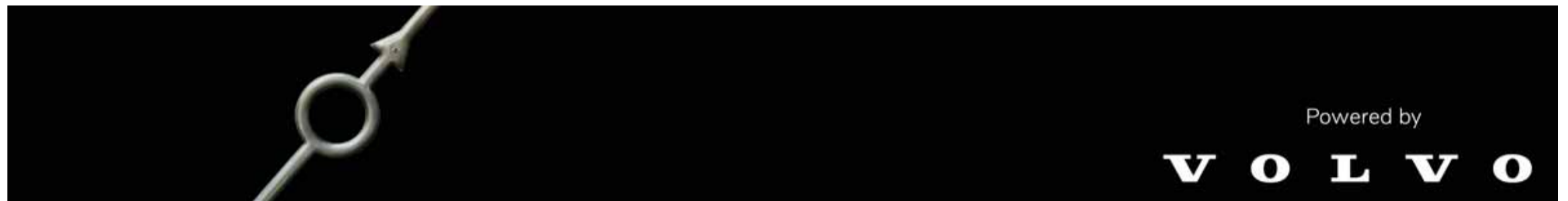
8 Win for Biden as Senate passes infrastructure bill



13 After 60 yrs of Indian rule, Goa's disappearing Portuguese legacy



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Back to school from Sept, with 20 students per class

Masks a must • Group activities banned • MP calls to cut PCR test cost to KD 10

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Public, private and foreign schools will reopen for on-campus learning in late September and early October amid stringent health precautions by authorities, Education Minister Ali Al-Mudhaf said yesterday. All foreign-language schools will reopen for students on Sept 26, while public and private Arabic schools will reopen on Oct 3, the minister said. The maximum capacity for any classroom will be 20 students, with students sitting two meters apart. A strict mask mandate for students will be enforced, he added.

Foreign schools will be allowed to offer online classes before Sept 26, with students attending on-campus classes from that date, Mudhaf told a virtual press conference following a Cabinet meeting. For public and private Arabic schools, classes will be divided into two groups: The first group will go to school on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, while the second group will go on Monday and Wednesday. In the next week, groups will swap attendance, with the second group going on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday and the first on Monday and Tuesday. The groups will continue to alternate on-campus atten-

dance, the minister said.

The duration of each period has been extended to one hour from 45 minutes to allow teachers to compensate for any loss in education due to the closure of schools from last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Like the overwhelming majority of countries around the world, Kuwait shut down schools and universities in the last academic year due to the pandemic and resorted to online education.

Mudhaf said a majority of teachers, students and administrators have been vaccinated, and those who choose not to get vaccinated are required to undergo

a PCR test every week on Sunday. Students are prohibited from gathering in any form, while all group activities are banned, he underlined.

MP Mohammad Al-Huwaila yesterday called on authorities to reduce the cost of the PCR test from KD 20 to KD 10. MPs Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Khalil Al-Saleh meanwhile called on the government to facilitate the return of foreign domestic helpers to help working families who are scheduled to return to work on Aug 15. The two lawmakers said strict government procedures have made it difficult and extremely expensive to bring back helpers or recruit new ones.

News in brief

TikTok most downloaded app

SAN FRANCISCO: TikTok was the world's most downloaded app last year, overtaking Facebook and its messaging platforms, market tracker App Annie said Tuesday. TikTok, owned by China-based ByteDance, is believed to have one billion users worldwide including more than 100 million in the US, and its short-form videos are especially popular with young smartphone users. — AFP

Instagram unveils new tools

WASHINGTON: Instagram yesterday announced new measures to curb abusive and racist content on the image-centric social network. The Facebook-owned platform said it would start using "stronger warnings" when people post potentially offensive comments, and a new "hidden words" feature that enables users to filter abusive messages. Instagram will also allow users to limit comments and message requests during "spikes of increased attention". — AFP

New Samsung foldable phones

SAN FRANCISCO: Samsung unveiled two upgraded folding smartphones yesterday as the South Korean sector leader sought to head off rising competition from Chinese firms in a fast-evolving market. The Galaxy Z Fold3 and Z Flip3 offer sleeker designs, improved water resistance and more durable screens are available for pre-ordering for delivery later this month in the United States, Europe and South Korea. — AFP

Iraq blast kills 8 troops

BAGHDAD: A blast killed eight members of the security forces yesterday during an operation in northern Iraq to detonate explosives planted by the Islamic State group, a security source said. A military sapper was preparing a charge to detonate unexploded ordnance laid by the militants in Salaheddin province "when a mistake was made and the explosion happened". The blast killed six soldiers and two policemen charged with oil field protection. — AFP

Dubai passenger volumes slump

DUBAI: Dubai International Airport reported yesterday a 41 percent drop in traffic in the first half of 2021, but said it anticipates "robust growth" after the easing of travel restrictions. The number of passengers that passed through the world's largest airport for international travel fell to 10.6 million in the first six months of 2021, according to a statement from the Dubai Media Office. — AFP (See Page 8)

Algeria mourns 69 dead as Med wildfires spread

TIZI OUZOU, Algeria: The death toll climbed to at least 69 as firefighters, soldiers and civilian volunteers battled blazes in forests across northern Algeria yesterday, in the latest wildfires to sweep the Mediterranean. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune declared three days of national mourning starting from today, and authorities say they suspect widespread arson after so many fires erupted in such a short space of time.

In an update, state-run news agency APS said the rash of more than 50 fires that broke out Tuesday had claimed four more lives, in addition to state television's toll of 65 dead, including 28 soldiers deployed to help overstretched emergency services. Several arrests have been announced, but the identities or suspected motives of those detained have not been disclosed.

Images of trapped villagers, terrified livestock and forested hillsides reduced to blackened stumps were shared on social media, many of them accompanied by pleas for help. AFP journalists saw villagers desperately trying to put out the spreading fires with makeshift brooms in an effort to save their homes.

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TIZI-OUZOU, Algeria: A couple watches a fire in the forested hills of the Kabylie region yesterday. — AFP

Sudan to hand Bashir to ICC for war crimes trial

KHARTOUM: Sudan will hand longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court along with two other officials wanted over the Darfur conflict, officials said yesterday. Bashir, 77, has been wanted by The Hague-based ICC for more than a decade over charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sudanese region.

The United Nations says 300,000 people were

killed and 2.5 million displaced in the Darfur conflict, which erupted in the vast western region in 2003. The "cabinet decided to hand over wanted officials to the ICC," Foreign Minister Mariam Al-Mahdi was quoted as saying by state news agency SUNA, without giving a timeframe.

The cabinet's decision to hand him over came during a visit by ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan, but it still needs the approval of Sudan's ruling sovereign council, comprised of military and civilian figures. Yesterday, Khan met with the leader of the sovereign council, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, as well as Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, its deputy chair. Daglo said Sudan "is prepared to cooperate with the ICC," SUNA reported.

Continued on Page 2



KHARTOUM: In this file photo taken on Aug 19, 2019, Sudan's deposed military ruler Omar Al-Bashir looks on from a defendant's cage during the opening of his corruption trial. — AFP

Messi eyes glory as Paris goes crazy

PARIS: Lionel Messi set his sights on more Champions League glory after being unveiled as a Paris Saint-Germain player yesterday as hundreds of fans gathered outside the club's stadium hoping to see their new idol. The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar was presented to media from all over the world at a news conference at the Parc des Princes after arriving in the

French capital the previous day and penning a two-year contract with the option of a third season.

PSG quickly emerged as the favorites to sign Messi following the shock of his departure last week from Barcelona and he arrives eyeing a fifth Champions League, with the most recent of his four victories with his old club coming in 2015. "I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," Messi told reporters inside a packed auditorium, with the audience including his wife Antonella, their children, and his father and agent, Jorge. — AFP (See Page 16)



PARIS: PSG's Qatari President Nasser Al-Khelaifi poses alongside Argentinian football player Lionel Messi as he holds up his number 30 shirt at Parc des Princes stadium yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait's Amir receives letter from Saudi King



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah reads a letter from King Salman Bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, delivered to him by Saudi Ambassador Prince Sultan Bin Saad Bin Khaled Al Saud. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, at Bayan Palace yesterday, a letter from King Salman Bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia. According to an Amiri Diwan statement,

His Highness the Amir was handed the letter by Saudi Ambassador to the country Prince Sultan Bin Saad Bin Khaled Al Saud. It included an invitation to His Highness from the Saudi monarch to visit the Kingdom.

The letter also dealt with deep-seated ties between the two countries and peoples, as well as means of further boosting such ties in all fields. His Highness the Amir then received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-

Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace yesterday. —KUNA

Qatar plan for polls stirs debate, falsehoods

DOHA: Qatar's long-delayed first legislative elections have stirred debate over eligibility as well as a flurry of online distortion. Elections to the 45-seat shura council, as proposed under a 2004 constitution, have been postponed repeatedly and its members have instead been directly named by Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

Following the publication of an election law on July 29, the polls are now expected to be held in October, although a date has yet to be set. Only descendants of Qataris who were citizens in 1930 will be eligible to vote and stand, disqualifying members of families naturalized since that year. The sizable Al-Murra tribe is one of those which could be excluded, according to Cinzia Bianco, a research fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"This is an issue that the Qataris have had since a

decade, as they educated their citizens to pursue democracy," she told AFP. Bianco pointed to significant pushback on social media. "Undoubtedly there is strong external interference to amplify the dissent for political reasons, but we should not hide behind trolls to delegitimize the organic discontent that exists," she told AFP.

Candidates will have to stand in constituencies linked to where their family or tribe was based in the 1930s, using data compiled by the then British-controlled authorities. The council, to be made up of 30 elected members and 15 appointed by the amir, can propose legislation, sack ministers and approve the annual budget, but its decisions are subject to veto by the Gulf state's ruler.

Bianco pointed to a possible compromise under which representatives of a family or tribe excluded by the electoral law could instead be appointed directly. Under electoral campaign rules, political parties are banned as is "stirring up tribal or sectarian strife among citizens in any way". The election law has sparked a torrent of fake news on social media with the Arabic hashtag #BoycottQatarElections trending on Twitter, despite initially being posted by only one account, indicating manipulation. — AFP

Sudan to hand Bashir to ICC for...

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Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who also met with Khan, said yesterday that "Sudan's commitment to seek justice is not only to abide by its international commitments, but it comes out of a response to the people's demands". But it remains unclear if Bashir would be extradited to face trial in The Hague, or could remain in Sudan. Volker Perthes, UN Special Representative to Sudan, said yesterday that the ICC "can help" with the "establishment of (a) Special Court for Darfur", without giving further details.

The transitional authorities have previously said they would hand Bashir over, but one stumbling block was that Sudan was not party to the court's founding Rome Statute. But last week Sudan's cabinet voted to ratify the Rome Statute, a crucial move seen as one step towards Bashir potentially facing trial.

ICC spokesperson Fadi El Abdallah did not comment on the announcement, saying Khan was "in Khartoum to discuss cooperation matters", but that the prosecutor would hold a press conference today afternoon. Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades before being deposed amid popular protests in 2019, is behind bars in Khartoum's high security Kober prison.

He is jailed alongside two other former top officials facing ICC war crimes charges - ex-defense

minister Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein and Ahmed Haroun, a former governor of South Kordofan. The ICC issued an arrest warrant for Bashir in 2009 for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, later adding genocide to the charges. Bashir was ousted by the military and detained in April 2019 after four months of mass nationwide protests against his rule.

The former strongman was convicted in Dec 2019 for corruption, and has been on trial in Khartoum since July 2020 for the Islamist-backed 1989 coup which brought him to power. He faces the death penalty if found guilty. Sudan has been led since Aug 2019 by a transitional civilian-military administration, that has vowed to bring justice to victims of crimes committed under Bashir.

The Darfur war broke out in 2003 when non-Arab rebels took up arms complaining of systematic discrimination by Bashir's Arab-dominated government. Khartoum responded by unleashing the notorious Janjaweed militia, recruited from among the region's nomadic peoples. Human rights groups have long accused Bashir and his former aides of using a scorched earth policy, raping, killing, looting and burning villages.

Khartoum signed a peace deal last October with key Darfuri rebel groups, with some of their leaders taking top jobs in government, although violence continues to dog the region. But after years of conflict, the arid and impoverished region is awash with automatic weapons and clashes still erupt, often over land and access to water. Last year, alleged senior Janjaweed militia leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abd Al-Rahman, also known by the nom de guerre Ali Kushayb, surrendered to the court, where he faces charges of murder, rape and torture. — AFP

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Firefighters battle flames in the forested hills of the Kabylie region east of the capital Algiers yesterday. — AFP

Algeria mourns 69 dead as Med...

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High winds fueled the rapid spread of the flames in tinder-dry conditions created by a heatwave across North Africa and the wider Mediterranean, fire official Youcef Ould Mohamed told APS.

Scores of separate wildfires remained active yesterday, spread across 17 provinces, emergency services spokesman Nassim Barnaoui told reporters. Most of the fires and 16 of the deaths were recorded in Tizi Ouzou district, in the mainly Berber region of Kabylie, east of the capital Algiers. "I left all my stock in my village and fled to Tizi Ouzou with my wife and three children," said Abdelhamid Boudraren, a shopkeeper from the village of Beni Yeni. "Luckily I own a flat in the center of Tizi Ouzou, where I'm holed up with my family and some neighbors."

The situation was "alarming", Letreche Hakim, the head of civil protection in Bejaia, the second biggest city in Kabylie, told APS. "Things were under control, but with the outbreak of nine large fires on Wednesday morning, our forces are scattered," Hakim said.

There have been mounting calls for aid convoys to be sent to the worst-hit districts with food and medicine from the capital. On Wednesday, an AFP correspondent saw several lorries headed to Tizi Ouzou with aid donated by the public. France's

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the former colonial power "stands ready" to offer support in tackling the situation, and expressed the "solidarity of France with the Algerian people", in a post on Twitter.

The British embassy in Algiers offered "condolences to those who have died, or been injured or affected". State media have reported four arrests for suspected arson. Meteorologists expect the heatwave across North Africa to continue until the end of the week, with temperatures in Algeria reaching 46 degrees Celsius.

In Algeria's neighbor Tunisia, the temperature in the capital Tunis hit an all-time record of 49 degrees Celsius on Tuesday. The Tunisian emergency services reported 15 fires across the north and northwest, but no casualties. On the northern shores of the Mediterranean, Turkey reported eight deaths and Greece three from wildfires that have raged for the past two weeks.

Each summer, Algeria endures seasonal wildfires, but rarely anything approaching this year's disaster. In 2020, nearly 440 sq km of forest were destroyed by fire, and several people were arrested on suspicion of arson. On Monday, the UN released a major report showing how the threat from global warming is even more acute than previously thought.

It highlighted how scientists are quantifying the extent to which human-induced warming increases the intensity and/or likelihood of a specific extreme weather event, such as a heatwave or a wildfire. Climate change amplifies droughts, creating ideal conditions for wildfires to spread out of control and inflict unprecedented material and environmental damage. — AFP

Local

Food trucks struggle through pandemic, licensing headache to make profit



KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing food trucks on the corniche in Kuwait City, as well as in Daiya and Kabb. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over the last few years, food trucks have become popular in Kuwait and around the Gulf, serving up burgers, fries, sodas and other street food. Food trucks are ubiquitous anywhere where crowds gather, but especially in places like Khairan, desert camping areas, festivals and bazaars. Unfortunately, the pandemic has halted most large gatherings, and as a result business for these trucks.

So many food trucks have begun parking lately in open areas along the corniche in Kuwait City and Salmiya, as well as in some neighborhoods. But brick and mortar restaurants are now challenging the food trucks' right to park where they like, claiming that the trucks are negatively affecting their business and sales.

Most of these food trucks are licensed, but some are not, and these unlicensed ones can be fined or

even confiscated by the Kuwait Municipality. Recently, the Municipality handed out fines and removed several unlicensed food trucks operating on the seaside.

According to the official website of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), 126 applications for food trucks were received in Dec 2020. Out of these, 44 have been issued and 82 are under process. The period of the license is set depending on the type of business. An owner of a food truck interviewed by Kuwait Times said the license for practicing this business depends on the license of the vehicle. He added if the vehicle is new, it gets a license of longer duration, while older models receive a shorter license period.

License 'by wasta'

Kuwait Times found four out of five food trucks at one location on the seaside were licensed. The owner of the unlicensed truck told Kuwait Times he

does not have a license although he meets all requirements. When asked if it's risky to operate the food truck without a license, especially since this location is frequently checked by inspectors, the owner, who asked that his name be withheld, told Kuwait Times that when he sees the inspectors, he drives away.

"In March I applied for the license after I met all the requirements. When I went to get the license, they told me that no new licenses for food trucks are being issued. Later I met an owner of a food truck who told me he just got his license. So I went back in June, but they again said they don't issue licenses anymore, so I wonder how did he got the license. I guess by wasta," he deduced.

The owner says he is tired of running his business without a license. "I'm now posting an ad to sell this truck. I'm tired of running from inspectors every time, not talking about all the losses I have suffered, including the breakage of the ice cream

machine and some other equipment and materials when I quickly drive away. Also, I'm subject to fines and even arrest orders. They should have told me from the beginning that they are not issuing licenses instead of letting me buy all the equipment and then not being able to run my business," he added.

But an inspector from MoCI said licenses for food trucks are still being issued by the ministry. "It's not true that we don't issue licenses now. Our inspectors inspect all licensed businesses, including food trucks. Our inspectors hand fines to violating food trucks, which is directly transferred to the prosecution," the MoCI officer explained. Meanwhile, according to the Municipality hotline staff, licenses should be issued by MoCI first. "Based on the license issued by MoCI, they can apply for a license from the Municipality. Finally, they have to obtain a license from the Interior Ministry. Our inspectors frequently go to check the trucks, which in many cases can be seized," the municipal officer said.



KUWAIT: Inspectors are seen inspecting a construction site in Al-Msasayel yesterday. — KUNA photos

Up to 1,502 laborers forced to work in Kuwait's scorching heat since June 1

KUWAIT: Inspectors yesterday found laborers working in the afternoon's scorching heat in the district of Al-Msasayel, and penalized their employers. The workers were found pouring masonry and carrying construction materials to a building site under the day's peak sunlight, Ahmad Dashti, head of the work safety division in Farwaniya Governorate, said in a statement to the press.

The national department for work safety, an affiliate of the Public Authority for Manpower, received up to 90 reports about such breaches and upon that, the inspection teams had headed to 2,001 sites since the start of June to determine whether the

workers were forced to work in the days' most scorching hours. Up to 1,502 workers were found to have been put in such difficult condition, thus the inspectors issued 785 penalties against the employers. In later re-inspections, the inspectors found that 725 employing companies had heeded the terms for the acceptable work hours.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Al-Otaibi, the judicial officer at the national center, said that the inspectors have been examining the work conditions in compliance with the Cabinet Resolution 535/2015 that prohibits compelling the laborers to work outdoors during the summer from start of June until end of August from 11 am to 4 pm. He indicated that fines set by the teams would be eventually specified by courts.

There have been significant positive response on part of the employing companies since launch of the monitoring tour in 2015, Otaibi affirmed, adding that the inspections would proceed until end of the current month. Kuwait this month and the past two months witnessed temperatures soaring to 48 degrees and above, particularly during middays. — KUNA



'Significant increase' in Philippine helpers' recruitment costs

KUWAIT: The arrival of Filipino domestic helpers has been accelerated lately, as demand for them is high, which has led to a significant rise in recruitment costs. Sources told Al-Rai daily the cost of bringing a helper from the Philippines ranges between KD 1,400 to KD 1,600, including KD 890 to be paid to the recruitment office, and the rest goes to pay for institutional quarantine, PCR tests and airfare. All these costs are borne by the sponsor - in case they wish to bring in the helper without going through the office, the cost will be KD 890 only, but there will be no guarantee if the helper escapes or refuses to work.

The sources expect the costs to increase because of the full curfew imposed from Aug 5 to Aug 20 in Manila, and the high cost on labor agencies in the Philippines. The arrival of helpers began with two flights from the Philippines to Kuwait in May, four flights in June, eight in July and 13 in the current month, while 10 flights are scheduled for September, the sources explained. They said around seven percent of domestic helpers had positive PCR test results before leaving for Kuwait, who were not allowed to board the plane.

Kuwaiti firefighters participates in putting out fires in Turkey

ISTANBUL: The Kuwaiti firefighting team, with all its equipment, continues to participate in controlling the current situation in the areas affected by forest fires in Turkey. Lt Col Abdullah Al-Saleem, the general coordinator of the team, said in a statement to the press that the Kuwaiti firefighters are in the state of Mugla and are currently coordinating with the Turkish Crisis and Emergency Department to distribute tasks to help put out the fires. He added that the Kuwaiti team is helping the Turkish side to put out the fires that have been burning for days and to secure the residents of the

areas there. The Kuwaiti efforts were greatly welcomed by the Turkish government and people, praising the efficiency of the Kuwaiti team's performance and Kuwait's standing by Turkey under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and his lofty directives, he said. Some 45 Kuwaiti firefighters arrived in Turkey to join efforts to put out massive wildfires raging in coastal towns. At least eight people have been killed since fires started in southern and southwestern Turkey on July 28. — KUNA



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News in brief

KIA appoints director

KUWAIT: Kuwait Investment Authority has appointed Badr Al-Ajeel as interim managing director pending a permanent appointment for this position. Reuters reported yesterday quoting an unnamed source.

Kuwait, Japan coordinate

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received a telephone call from his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi. The call dealt with various aspects of the solid relations bonding the two friendly countries. It also tackled means of boosting mutual cooperation, as well as major occurrences on regional and international arenas.

Kuwait, Djibouti discuss ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah met yesterday with Djiboutian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Momen. During the meeting, both sides tackled subjects of common interest, mainly security issues, said the Ministry of Interior's public relations department. Ambassador Momen thanked Minister Sheikh Thamer for the kind reception, stressing the importance of issues discussed during the meeting.

Kuwaiti held in Turkey

KUWAIT: Kuwait's embassy in Turkey is following up with Turkish authorities regarding the case of a Kuwaiti man who was recently involved in an accident in Turkey that has left one person dead. The man remains in custody pending investigations, as preliminary findings indicate that faults in the brakes in his rented vehicle may have caused the accident. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Prime Minister receives outgoing Ambassadors



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tarek Al-Qouni.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace the Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond on the occasion of ending his tenure. He later met with the Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tarek Al-Qouni, whose tenure is also coming to a close. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah also met separately with ambassadors Emond and Qouni yesterday. He praised their efforts and contributions to bolstering brotherly bonds between their respective countries and Kuwait. — KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tarek Al-Qouni.

Pumping gas from joint zone to Kuwait underway

KUWAIT: Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) announced yesterday the start of operating the first pipeline from Al-Khafji joint zone to Kuwait. Light gas is transported via the pipeline, which is of a 24 million cubic feet capacity, to networks of Kuwait Oil Company. KGOC said in a statement that operating the pipeline would boost optimum use of the petroleum resources in the joint zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and meet local needs for gas, particularly at peak consumption times. The statement lauded the cooperation with the Aramco Gulf Cooperation Company (AGOC) for accomplishing the high feasibility gas project in the joint zone. — KUNA



Kuwait celebrates Int'l Youth Day

KUWAIT: Kuwait and the rest of the world celebrate today the International Youth Day under the theme "Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health." In this context, Director General of Kuwait's Public Authority for Youth Dr Mishal Al-Rubaie said yesterday that Kuwait's 2035 vision targets investing in the power of youth and human resources, and the authority has several schemes as a main part of the country's development plan. This day, inception by the UN in 1999, will focus on the repercussions of the novel coronavirus on human health, the environment and diets, also, the importance of producing healthier and more sustainable food regimes.

Kuwait pays great attention to this category, which forms 72 percent of society, as the country established the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs in

2013 by a decree issued by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Rubaie noted that the authority will honor the winners of the youth creative programs in the period between August 16-18. He highlighted the youth's active role during the pandemic by participating in volunteer works in hospitals, supermarkets and governmental institutions. The director general said that the authority seeks to create opportunities for the youth and encourage them to work in the private sector by forming training programs in cooperation with companies and public beneficiary committees to decrease unemployment.

Meanwhile, the authority's spokesperson Asrar Al-Ansari said that the authority initiated several activities and launched a number of training programs that created more than 160 work opportunities, and more than 370 internships in the public and private sectors since its launch in September 2020. She also noted that the authority created programs to support craftsmanship and industrialism amongst the Kuwaiti youth in many fields. — KUNA

Kuwaiti official opens GCC meeting on human rights

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri inaugurated yesterday the coordination meeting for human rights' apparatuses in the Gulf Cooperation Council member states. Ambassador Dhafiri has addressed the conferees, underlining that the

GCC countries place the issue of human rights among the significant affairs. He also underlined significance of coordination among the relevant authorities in the GCC countries to emit "the true image as how deep our leaders attach to the human rights at various levels." The GCC was established in 1981 to cement cooperation among the regional countries — Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman — at various levels namely in the social affairs' sector and human rights. These states namely Kuwait have repeatedly affirmed keenness on observing these basic rights. — KUNA

Forum discusses role of scholarships in relation to job market

KUWAIT: The role of Kuwaiti state-funded scholarships in fulfilling the country's current job requirements was highlighted by Minister of Oil and Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Fares on Tuesday. This came as the minister inaugurated the second Gulf Forum for E-Learning, Education Post-Coronavirus Pandemic, organized by the Women's Institute for Development and Peace (WIDP), under the slogan "Education: A driving force behind development".

Kuwait's 2021-22 scholarship plan seeks to diversify university majors, with an emphasis on

specific disciplines, Dr Al-Fares highlighted at the talks. This includes fields such as medical and allied health sciences, computer science, cybersecurity and sustainable energy engineering, he added. The two-day forum, held remotely, went on to discuss the impacts of the coronavirus on education and solutions to the matter. It also showcased e-learning models implemented across the six-nation GCC bloc.

Meanwhile, head of WIDP Kawthar Al-Jowan maintained the importance of raising education standards to the economic development of nations, and how education contributes to Kuwait's 2035 strategic economic development strategy, alongside similar plans assumed by fellow Gulf countries. She said the discussions also tackled issues related to the transition from face-to-face learning to e-learning during the pandemic. — KUNA

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Taliban all smiles in captured cities as blitz rolls on

Briton arrested in Germany for 'spying for Russia'

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AYII, Greece: Children pour water after a forest fire near the village of Kastri on Evia island on Tuesday. —AFP

Greece counts cost of wildfires

Island fire 'slowly coming under control' • Situation more precarious in Peloponnese region

EDIPSOS, Greece: Nearly 900 firefighters were slowly bringing a wildfire under control that has raged for nine days on the Greek island of Evia, authorities said yesterday, while fresh forces were deployed to fight a massive blaze on the Peloponnese peninsula. Greece has started to count the cost from wildfires that have scorched their way through thousands of hectares, leaving three dead, hundreds homeless, causing incalculable damage and capping the critical tourism season.

The fires have been fanned by the country's worst most severe heatwave in decades and the authorities have pointed the finger at climate change, which experts say increases the intensity and frequency of such extreme weather events. Algeria has meanwhile become the latest Mediterranean country to be hit by devastating wildfires this summer, with the death toll there rising to 65 on Wednesday after eight people were killed in blazes in Turkey earlier in the month.

A huge multinational force has been deployed to back fire crews on the Greek island Evia, where the town of Istiaia has been under threat for days. "I think we can say that the fire fronts are slowly coming under control," Istiaia mayor Yiannis Kontzias told state TV ERT. "Yesterday, we saw the light of the sun for the first time

in days," he said, referring to giant smoke clouds that have choked residents and obstructed flights by water-bombing aircraft.

'Entire ecosystem destroyed'

But even as the immediate danger receded, Kontzias said local businesses "face extinction" in coming months in a tourism season already decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. "We have lost the month of August, which would have sustained people here over the coming year." "(Local) tourism has been demolished, most (visitors) have left," he said. "The damage is huge, and the environmental disaster will have economic repercussions for decades."

From July 29 to August 11, more than 93,000 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 2,330 hectares. A draft UN assessment seen exclusively by AFP called the Mediterranean a "climate change hotspot" and said increasing temperatures and aridity had lengthened fire seasons and "doubled potential burnable area".

Dimitris Haliotis, the head of a Red Cross team who came to Evia from across the country in Patras, said that

"the entire ecosystem is destroyed" on the island, with the loss of forest animals running in the hundreds. Theodoros Roumeliotis, the local hoteliers president on the Greek spa town of Aidipsos, said August reservations had collapsed by 90 percent. "It's a colossal loss," he told AFP. "Right now, hotels are obliged to refund one million euros in reservations cancelled," he said, adding that some operators were unlikely to survive the blow.

Peloponnese fires

The fire situation was more precarious yesterday in the mountainous Peloponnese region of Gortynia. Christos Lambropoulos, deputy governor for the broader Arcadia region, said efforts were concentrated on keeping the fire from reaching the thickly forested Mount Mainalo. "Villages do not seem at risk at the moment... but conditions change by the hour," he told ERT.

Forces in Gortynia were beefed up yesterday to nearly 600 firefighters including crews from the Czech Republic, Britain, France and Germany. EU states and other countries have so far contributed 21 aircraft, 250 vehicles and more than 1,200 firefighters, some of whom were due to arrive by Friday. Support from abroad has helped avert an even greater disaster. "When we arrived, it seemed like

the whole of Greece was burning," said Nicolas Faure, part of a detachment of French firefighters that arrived last week, and was later bolstered to over 170.

Another 60 firemen were tackling a smaller fire in Laconia, in the southeastern Peloponnese, the fire department said. In Evia, nearly 900 firefighters had been deployed, including Cypriots, Moldovans, Poles, Serbs, Slovaks, Romanians and Ukrainians. Serbian, Swedish and Swiss planes and helicopters were among a fleet of seven aircraft providing support.

There have been growing calls in Greece for the resignation of top public safety officials who as recently as June had insisted that the country was well-prepared. There was additional anger over the loss last week of much of the forest of Varibobi, one of Athens' last remaining nature reserves. Civil protection deputy minister Nikos Hardalias said Greece's resources were "stronger than ever before". "We faced an operationally unique situation with 586 fires in eight days during the worst weather phenomenon in 40 years," he said on Tuesday.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis this week apologized to the nation for any possible "shortcomings" in the state's response. He is to hold a press conference today. —AFP

Khamenei says halting COVID 'urgent' priority

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said yesterday that halting COVID-19 is an "urgent" priority and called for more vaccine imports and production, after record deaths and infections. The Islamic republic's COVID cases and fatalities have surged in recent weeks, in what officials have said is a "fifth wave" caused by the highly infectious Delta variant. "Today, the issue of the coronavirus disease is the country's primary and urgent issue," Khamenei said in a televised address focused on the health crisis.

Khamenei said the record number of casualties was "truly painful," and demanded greater efforts to boost vaccine "imports and domestic production". Iran is the Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic. It has recorded more than 95,600 deaths and over 4.2 million infections, with health authorities acknowledging the official casualty numbers underestimate the real toll.

In the past 24 hours, 42,541 people tested positive for the coronavirus - the country's highest daily caseload since the start of the pandemic. Iran has

pinned its hopes on vaccinations, but the campaign launched in February has progressed slower than anticipated. Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran has said it is struggling to import vaccines for its 83 million-strong population.

The authorities have approved the emergency use of two locally produced vaccines, with the only mass-produced one, COVIran Barekat, still in short supply. The other vaccines used in Iran include Russia's Sputnik V, China's Sinopharm, India's Bharat and AstraZeneca/Oxford, according to the health ministry. More than 13.8 million people have been given a first vaccine dose, but only 3.7 million have received the necessary two jabs, the ministry said yesterday.

Khamenei on July 24 received the second Barekat jab, developed by a powerful state-owned foundation known as Setad, his office said. In January, the supreme leader had banned the use of vaccines made by the United States and Britain, calling them "completely untrustworthy". "Part of the problem is lack of observance of health protocols by the people," Khamenei said yesterday, calling on the public to alleviate the "truly great concern" of overburdened health centers by being more careful.

He also pointed to the religious events held during the Islamic mourning month of Muharram as a "blessing" and a necessity for the Islamic republic but urged health protocols to be observed "with the



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei delivers a televised speech on the coronavirus situation yesterday. —AFP

utmost care". "Do not let these events be a cause of the virus' spread so that ... the enemies ridicule them and say (the events) caused the spread," Khamenei added.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on the population, and instead resorted to piecemeal measures such as temporary travel bans and business closures. The national COVID taskforce said it was considering imposing new restrictions as of Saturday, state media reported, following a meeting chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi on Tuesday. —AFP

can't do that' - I find that totally counter intuitive and quite frankly disingenuous," President Joe Biden, a Democrat, said Tuesday.

High viral spread

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention told vaccinated Americans in May that their risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19 was low enough that they no longer needed to wear masks. And in early July, the CDC assured parents that the stance would also apply to vaccinated kids starting the new school year, which usually begins in August or September. But those recommendations did not account for the highly contagious Delta variant.

Nor did it account for the fact that only about half of all Americans have now been fully vaccinated, and children under 12 aren't eligible yet. By the end of July, an about-face: Mask-wearing was once again recommended in indoor spaces, even for vaccinated people, in areas with high rates of COVID spread. That currently covers about 90 percent of the country.

'Two countries'

The health authority is basing their recommendation on data that shows that vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus more easily than those infected with earlier variants. Now, many businesses have also reverted back to requiring masks. Walmart, the biggest retailer in the United States, has re-imposed mask mandates on employees, two and a half months after telling vacci-

nated workers they didn't have to wear them.

The pandemic is currently especially severe in the southeastern United States, which is also the region with the lowest percentage of vaccinated residents. "The people that are unvaccinated are much less likely to wear masks," Northwell Health public health expert Eric Cioe-Pena told AFP. "We don't have the buy-in from the very people that we need the buy-in for."

In Arkansas, Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson imposed a mask mandate during the peak of the pandemic last winter. But he lifted it as cases fell, and, under pressure from deeply conservative local governments, signed a law banning mandates from being imposed again. "In hindsight, I wish that had not become law," Hutchinson said earlier this month.

On Twitter Monday, he alerted followers about his state's record number of Covid hospitalizations, warning there were only eight open ICU beds left. While Republican governors in Texas and Arizona have followed Florida's lead, Democratic-run states like New York and Illinois have imposed mask mandates for all students.

"We're behaving like they're two countries," Nahid Bhadelia, director of the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases Policy and Research at Boston University, told AFP. "And the sad part is they're not. Because what happens in the South is going to affect the North." With unvaccinated children in a classroom "if you take the politics out... the way you make it safer is you vaccinate everybody around them who's eligible," Bhadelia said. "And you require masks." —AFP

Facebook shuts down anti-vaccine influencer campaign

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Tuesday said it shut down a disinformation operation which sought to spread COVID-19 vaccine hoaxes by duping social media influencers into backing false claims. The leading social network labeled the operation a "disinformation laundromat" which sought to legitimize false claims by pushing them through people with clean reputations.

Influencers who caught onto the sham turned out to be the undoing of a deceitful influence campaign orchestrated by marketing firm Fazze in Russia, according to Facebook. "The assumption was the influencers wouldn't do any of their own homework, but two did," Facebook global threat intelligence lead Ben Nimmo said while briefing journalists. "It's really a warning - be careful when someone is trying to spoon feed you a story. Do your own research." Facebook said that in July it removed 65 accounts at the leading social network and 243 accounts at photo-centric Instagram that were linked to the campaign, and banned Fazze from its platform. Fazze is a subsidiary of a AdNow, an advertising company registered in Britain, according to media reports. The operation targeted primarily India and Latin America, but also took aim at the United States, as governments debated approving vaccines to fight the pandemic, according to Nimmo.

Late last year, the network of fake accounts tried to fuel a false meme that the AstraZeneca vaccine against COVID-19 would turn people into chimpanzees, Facebook reported. After going quiet for five months, the organizers attacked the safety of the Pfizer vaccine and leaked what it billed as an AstraZeneca document stolen by hacking, Facebook said. The campaign took advantage of online platforms including Reddit, Medium, Change.org, and Facebook, creating misleading articles and petitions then providing "influencers" with links, hashtags and more to spread vaccine misinformation, according to Nimmo. "In effect, this campaign functioned as a cross-platform disinformation laundromat," Nimmo said.

The operation was exposed by influencers in France and Germany who questioned claims made in email pitches from Fazze, prompting journalists to dig into the matter, according to Facebook. Facebook does not know who hired Fazze for the anti-vaccine campaign, but has shared its findings with regulators, police, and internet industry peers, according to head of security policy Nathaniel Gleicher. The campaign appeared to fall flat, with almost none of the Instagram posts receiving "likes," and English and Hindi language petitions at Change.org each getting fewer than 1,000 signatures, Facebook said. The security team at the social network has seen a trend of deceptive influence operations targeting multiple social media platforms and trying to recruit established personalities with followings to spread false messages, according to Gleicher. —AFP

Delta variant reignites US mask debate

WASHINGTON: The recent surge of COVID-19, driven by the Delta variant, has reignited political controversy around mask-wearing in the United States, with some governors opposing all measures to make masks mandatory despite advice from health authorities. The dispute feels familiar, harkening back to the early days of the pandemic when masks became a symbol of political affiliation in the US - the clash led by then-president Donald Trump, who made it a point of pride to be seen without a face covering.

More than a year later, the subject has again become particularly sensitive as another school year approaches. "This should be something that a parent is ultimately making the decision on," Republican Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida reiterated on Tuesday, having banned his state's schools from requiring students to wear masks. "We're going to do whatever we can to vindicate the rights of parents," he said.

Several Florida school districts have announced plans to defy the governor's order and require masks anyway. In response, DeSantis threatened to cut their funding or even suspend the salaries of school officials. "That a governor has the authority to say, 'You

International

Feigned ignorance or generational shift? #MeToo's 'redrawn lines'

Cuomo not the only powerful man to attribute behavior to not knowing better

NEW YORK: New York's soon-to-be ex-governor Andrew Cuomo is the latest politician to blame inappropriate behavior on shifting cultural norms, a defense critics see as a tactic to shirk responsibility in the face of scandal. Prior to his dramatic downfall and resignation, Cuomo was well-known for ruling with a mix of paternalism and pugnacity. He has insisted he always acted within bounds, even as women including former staffers began speaking out against him.

But on Tuesday, one week after the release of a bombshell report from the state attorney general's office - allegations included inappropriate touching and intimidating accusers - the now politically ostracized 63-year-old said he now realized the boundaries had shifted. "I have been too familiar with people. My sense of humor can be insensitive and off-putting," the governor said in a lengthy address announcing he would step down.

"In my mind, I have never crossed the line with anyone," said the nearly three-term state leader once tapped as a national political contender. "But I didn't realize the extent to which the line has been redrawn. There are generational and cultural shifts that I just didn't fully appreciate." Cuomo - who frequently touted his own efforts to end workplace discrimination, including signing legislation to that effect - is far from the only powerful man accused of sexual misconduct to attribute his behavior to not knowing better.

Former senator Al Franken, who resigned from US Congress in 2017 after snowballing allegations of unwanted touching and kissing, said he "learned from recent stories" that "I crossed a line for some women". And President Joe Biden has faced a number of accusations of inappropriate physical contact, which he and his supporters attributed to his touchy-feely style. "So I invaded your space. I'm sorry this happened," Biden said, when asked to apologize during the 2020 race. "I'm not sorry in the sense that I think I did anything that was inten-

tionally designed to do anything wrong or be inappropriate."

'Power grab'

For Jean Sinzdek, an associate director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, such a defense is "a disingenuous argument and missing the point". "This behavior has always been inappropriate," she told AFP. "There's nothing new about the fact that it's inappropriate." "It's just now our society's understanding that it's inappropriate, that women have been suffering with this for so long, and it's no longer acceptable that they suffer."

Audrey Nelson, a Colorado-based expert in gender communication, called Cuomo's blame on a generational disconnect "a scapegoat". "Personal space is personal space," she told AFP. "It is not generational." And invading that space? "If you want to reduce it to one simple concept, it's about power," Nelson said. She recalled the tenure of Bill Clinton - a former US president who multiple women in the 1990s accused of sexual harassment - who Nelson said "was known for pulling people in" when greeting them. "You'd shake hands, then he'd grab your upper arm and pull you in," Nelson said. "The power grab." The same was true in Cuomo's case, she added: "It's about conquering."

Different political standards?

A number of the US politicians who've resigned in recent years in the face of harassment accusations have been Democrats, including Franken, one-time New York State attorney general Eric Schneiderman, and now Cuomo. Conversely many Republicans, including former president Donald Trump and Supreme Court judge Brett Kavanaugh, have declined to step down despite accusations of sexual assault. Alabama Republican Roy Moore ran twice for Senate office - both times unsuccessfully - despite claims he had sexually assaulted multiple



NEW YORK: A screen shows news coverage of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo resigning over allegations of sexual harassment in Times Square on Tuesday. —AFP

women including several minors.

Sinzdek said the responses to sexual harassment allegations don't necessarily fall along party lines - "every case is different," she said - but that Democrats may "have a harder time looking away" given their frequent support of causes like anti-harassment laws. "It would be hard for them as a party, with the platform that they have, to look the other way. In that sense, the Democrats are held to a higher standard," she said.

Sinzdek praised the #MeToo movement for

"putting a spotlight on the issues of harassment and abuse, and giving women a voice and a platform to share their stories". "It's been the equivalent of a cultural earthquake in the political world, and we're going to feel the reverberations for a long time," she said. Part of that earthquake for Nelson means "intentions" - which politicians including Cuomo have cited in explaining that they never meant harm - are no longer a valid excuse to justify bad behavior. "Be aware. Pay attention," she said. "Hell is full of people with good intentions." —AFP

News in brief

Biden announces democracy summit

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden will convene a virtual "Summit for Democracy" on Dec 9 and 10 to which heads of state, civil society, philanthropy, and the private sector will be invited, the White House said yesterday. The summit "will galvanize commitments and initiatives across three principal themes: defending against authoritarianism, fighting corruption, and promoting respect for human rights," according to a White House statement. A year later Biden plans to host them once more - hopefully in person - to "showcase progress made against their commitments." —AFP

Get COVID shots - or else

NAIROBI: Kenyan civil servants have until late August to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or risk disciplinary action, according to a government document made public this week. The order comes as parliament is due to consider a motion to bar unvaccinated people or those without negative COVID certificates from certain public and private spaces. "Some public servants have deliberately avoided getting vaccinated so that they can stay away from work under the guise of working from home," public service head Joseph Kinyua said in a memo to government ministries. —AFP

'Lucifer' heatwave sweeps Italy

ROME: A blistering heatwave is sweeping across Italy this week, fueling fires in the south of the country, notably Sicily and Calabria, where a UNESCO-designated natural park is threatened. Temperatures hit 47 degrees Celsius in Sicily on Tuesday, near Syracuse, with meteorologists warning that Italy's all-time record of 48.5 degrees, in Sicily in 1999, could be beaten yesterday. Elsewhere in the south of Italy, the anticyclone dubbed Lucifer was forecast to send the mercury rising to 39-42 degrees yesterday before sweeping northwards, with weekend temperatures of up to 40 degrees in the central regions of Tuscany and Lazio, which includes Rome. —AFP

Priest died from blows to head

PARIS: A priest in western France who was murdered by a Rwandan asylum-seeker suspected of setting fire to a cathedral in an arson attack last year and to whom he had been giving shelter died from a succession of blows to the head, prosecutors said. An autopsy showed that Maire had six lesions in his head caused by violent blows, but it was not clear what weapon had been used, local prosecutors said in a statement late Tuesday. Rwandan asylum-seeker Emmanuel Abayisenga turned himself into police on Monday morning and said he had carried out the attack. —AFP

Libyans launch political talks

TRIPOLI: Delegates from war-torn Libya launched a new round of UN-led talks via video conference yesterday aiming to reach a compromise ahead of planned elections. The meeting comes six weeks after the failure of negotiations held in Switzerland between the 75 participants from all sides gathered for the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. Yesterday, the forum was to again try to agree on a constitutional framework to govern the crucial parliamentary and presidential elections in December. —AFP

Briton arrested in Germany for 'spying for Russia'

BERLIN: A British man suspected of spying for Russia in exchange for cash has been arrested in Germany, federal prosecutors said yesterday, in a stunning case compared to a Cold War thriller. The suspect identified only as David S, who worked as local staff at the British embassy, "on at least one occasion passed on documents he acquired as part of his professional activities to a representative of Russian intelligence".

"The accused received a cash payment in an unspecified amount in return," the federal prosecutor's office said in a statement. It said David S was taken into custody Tuesday in the eastern city of Potsdam on an arrest warrant issued on Aug 4. His home and place of work were searched. The suspect was believed to have been spying since November

Laschet missteps leave race for Merkel job open

FRANKFURT: Armin Laschet, the conservative candidate to succeed Angela Merkel as German chancellor, yesterday launched his campaign with polls showing falling support that could leave the outcome of September's vote wide open. Laschet, 60, once a frontrunner in the race, is now on the back foot as he begins his delayed tour with a dialogue with youths attending a boxing training camp.

The visit in Frankfurt coincides with latest opinion polls showing that backing for Laschet's CDU-CSU alliance has fallen another three points to 23 percent. The drop - a precipitous 13 points since the beginning of the year - leaves the conservatives just three points clear of the Greens and four points ahead of their current

coalition partner Social Democrats.

"Shocking polls," exclaimed Bild daily as it pointed out that the results could mean any variety of coalition emerging following the September 26 elections. And that includes combinations leaving Merkel's conservatives out of the ruling equation. Laschet, who secured the conservatives' nomination after a damaging battle with the leader of sister party CSU, Markus Soeder, began his quest for the chancellorship already under pressure from within his own alliance.

A whiff of discontent from Soeder's camp and disunity among the ranks had threatened to derail Laschet's bid for Germany's top job. But Laschet subsequently benefitted from a slump in support for the Greens' Annalena Baerbock after she was ensnared in a series of scandals including plagiarism allegations. Yet the tide dramatically turned against Laschet in mid-July, when deadly floods struck western Germany, washing away homes, businesses and critical infrastructure.

Bolsonaro flexes muscles with military parade

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro drew criticism Tuesday for presiding over a military parade outside the presidential palace, a show of strength as he fends off sinking popularity and a raft of investigations. Smiling with the military top brass at his side, the far-right leader stood atop the palace steps as a long convoy of tanks and armored vehicles filed through the Brazilian capital.

Critics said the display was reminiscent of Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship, for which Bolsonaro, a former army captain, is openly nostalgic. "This is pathetic... Our democracy has the means to defend itself to a coup-mongering outburst," said Senator Omar Aziz, chair of a Senate committee investigating the government's widely criticized handling of COVID-19. Bolsonaro, 66, is also facing investigations over his attacks on Brazil's electronic voting system, which he alleges - without evidence - is riddled with fraud. The Supreme Court and Supreme

Electoral Court have ordered him investigated for potential crimes in his unrelenting campaign against the system, which Brazil has used since 1996. The military parade came on the same day Congress defeated a Bolsonaro-backed bill to overhaul the system. The president wants "printable and auditable" paper ballots for every vote cast, in addition to the electronic system. But the bill got only 229 of the 308 lower chamber votes it would have needed to progress. Bolsonaro is trailing in the polls for the presidential election in October next year. Opponents accuse him of setting the stage to claim widespread fraud if he loses, following in the footsteps of his political idol, former US president Donald Trump. Bolsonaro insisted there was no link between the military parade and the bill debated before Congress. Officially, the event was for the armed forces to give the president an invitation to upcoming military exercises outside the capital. However, it is the first time tanks have rolled past the presidential palace, Congress and high court since the dictatorship era. "The president is using this tank parade to try to intimidate Congress and the Supreme Court," said political scientist Mauricio Santoro of Rio de Janeiro State University. "He wants to show the armed forces are on his side."

Nine opposition parties issued a joint statement con-

demning the display, including the Workers' Party of former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who leads Bolsonaro in the polls for 2022. Soldiers arrested a group of protesters who tried to block the convoy. A small crowd of Bolsonaro supporters also attended, some carrying signs calling for the military to intervene to "save Brazil". —AFP

"The fact that the arrest has been made in Berlin suggests it's a non-diplomatic member of the embassy, that's why the German judicial system has been brought to bear on it," he told Times Radio. If the suspect was a diplomat, the British authorities would have been more involved, he added. Lucas, a former foreign correspondent with The Economist covering eastern and central European affairs, said the arrest was "a reminder of how much effort the Russians put in to trying to find out what Western alliances are up to".

In June, German police arrested a Russian scientist working at a German university accused of working for Russian secret service since October 2020 at the latest. And German prosecutors in February filed espionage charges against a German man suspected of having passed the floor plans of parliament to Russian secret services in 2017.

Moscow is at loggerheads with a number of Western capitals after a Russian troop build-up on Ukraine's borders and a series of espionage scandals. In June, Italy said it had created a national cybersecurity agency following warnings by Prime Minister Mario Draghi that Europe needs to protect itself from Russian "interference". —AFP



FRANKFURT: Christian Democratic Union leader and candidate for Chancellor Armin Laschet addresses the media after visiting a children and youth boxing camp as part of his electoral campaign yesterday. —AFP

As state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia - one of the two hardest-hit regions, the conservative candidate was propelled to the frontline of

the disaster response. His visits to the flood-hit zones however have been marked by serious missteps that have left him sinking in the polls. —AFP



BRASILIA: Troops arrest protesters trying to block a military parade in front of the Planalto Palace on Tuesday. —AFP

demning the display, including the Workers' Party of former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who leads Bolsonaro in the polls for 2022. Soldiers arrested a group of protesters who tried to block the convoy. A small crowd of Bolsonaro supporters also attended, some carrying signs calling for the military to intervene to "save Brazil". —AFP

International

Afghan leader flies into besieged Mazar as Taliban extend gains

Biden gives no hint of delaying deadline to withdraw all US troops

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani flew to the besieged northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif yesterday to rally his beleaguered forces, with Taliban fighters having now taken more than a quarter of the country's provincial capitals in less than a week. His visit was immediately overshadowed by the mass surrender of hundreds of Afghan soldiers in nearby Kunduz, along with the overnight capture of another provincial capital - the ninth city to be overrun since Friday.

One army officer who asked not to be identified said they had endured withering mortar fire at Kunduz airport, and were left with no choice but to surrender. "There was no way to fight back," he told AFP. "My unit, with 20 soldiers, three humvees and four pick-up trucks just surrendered. We are now all waiting to get our pardon letter. There is a big queue."

In Mazar, Ghani held talks with long-time local strongman Atta Mohammad Noor and infamous warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum about the defense of the city, as Taliban fighters inched closer to its outskirts. The loss of Mazar would be a catastrophic blow to the Kabul government

and represent the complete collapse of its control over the north - long a bastion of anti-Taliban militias.

Hours before Ghani arrived, pictures posted on official government social media accounts showed Dostum boarding a plane in Kabul en route to Mazar, along with a contingent of commandos. After arriving in the city, Dostum issued a warning to the approaching Taliban. "The Taliban never learn from the past," he told reporters, vowing to kill the jihadists. "The Taliban have come to the north several times but they were always trapped. It is not easy for them to get out."

Dostum stands accused of massacring hundreds, if not thousands, of Taliban prisoners of war during the US-backed operations in 2001 that toppled the hardline Islamists' rule over the country. 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.

Further to the east of Mazar, in Badakhshan province's capital Faizabad, a local lawmaker told AFP that security



MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani arrives in this city yesterday. — AFP

forces had retreated after days of heavy clashes. "The Taliban have captured the city now," said Zabihullah Attiq, confirming the latest city to fall. Kunduz remains the Taliban's largest prize to date, with the mass surrender at the airport making a potential counterattack to retake the provincial capital highly unlikely for the time being.

An unknown number of government forces were still holding out at an army barracks outside the city. The insurgents appeared to be consolidating their hold over captured cities in the north, with rifle-toting militants patrolling the streets of Kunduz on foot and in armored humvees as smoke rose from smoldering shops destroyed

during the fight for the city.

No regrets

Government forces were also battling the hardline Islamists in Kandahar and Helmand, the southern Pashto-speaking provinces from where the Taliban draw their strength. In Kandahar, fierce clashes erupted between Taliban insurgents and security forces, with heavy fighting reported near the city's prison, which the militants have been trying to reach for weeks. The Taliban frequently target prisons to release incarcerated fighters and replenish their ranks.

But even as the Taliban routed government forces, US President Joe Biden gave no hint of delaying his deadline to withdraw all American troops by Aug 31, instead urging Afghan leaders to "fight for themselves" on Tuesday. And as fighting raged, US diplomats were desperately trying to breathe life back into all-but-dead talks between the Afghan government and Taliban in Doha, where Washington's special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was pushing the hardline Islamists to accept a ceasefire. — AFP

Philippines hands out cash to poor during lockdown

MANILA: Philippine tricycle driver Jesus Gomez struggled to make a living even before the capital Manila went back into a coronavirus lockdown last week that forced most of his customers to stay home and halved his meagre income. Six months behind in rent and unable to afford cooking gas, the 77-year-old joined hundreds of others yesterday at a covered basketball court to receive a thousand peso (\$20) government handout.

About 80 percent of the more than 13 million people living in the sprawling national capital region are eligible for the one-off cash payment to ease the economic pain caused by the latest lockdown. "It's a big help because if there's no cash aid I can't buy (cooking) gas," said Gomez, who earns 200 pesos on a good day during lockdown.

Restrictions introduced since the start of the pandemic have shattered the Philippine economy, cost millions of jobs and left many families hungry. A resurgence in infections, partly fueled by the hyper-contagious Delta variant that has torn through neighboring countries, has triggered lockdowns in the capital and other areas.

President Rodrigo Duterte said recently the country could not afford more lockdowns. But with only



MANILA: People line up to receive cash aid from the national government yesterday. — AFP

about 10 percent of the population fully vaccinated and hospitals filling up fast, authorities have few options to slow the spread of the virus. The stricter rules, which include an eight-hour nighttime curfew as well as a ban on restaurant dining and outdoor exercise, are expected to cost the economy about \$3 billion a week in lost output.

'Even one peso is important'

Enriqueta Guerrero, 68, said she used to rely on her children to supplement the 100 pesos she earns a day cleaning and cooking for another household. But they have also struggled to make ends meet during the pandemic, she explained as she sat on a plastic

chair waiting for her name to be called to collect her cash. "If I don't work, I don't eat," said Guerrero, who plans to use the aid to buy groceries on Sunday, her only day off.

Officials warned Tuesday of economic "speed bumps" ahead, even after data showed gross domestic product rebounded 11.8 percent on-year in the second quarter. It was off a 17 percent slump in the same period last year when the country endured its first crippling lockdown. "Before I could take it fairly easy driving the tricycle, but now even one peso is important," Gomez told AFP, before walking back to his vehicle in the hope of finding a rare customer. — AFP

Taliban all smiles in captured Afghan cities as blitz rolls on

KUNDUZ: As residents of Kunduz fled the northern Afghan city in fear for their lives this week, its Taliban captors were all smiles. One bearded fighter patrolling the city, clad in camouflage with a gun slung over his shoulder, beamed ear-to-ear as he offered a friendly handshake to an arm extended from a car window. Buoyed by a foreign troop withdrawal that is due to end later this month, the hardline Islamist group's rank-and-file have flooded the streets of Kunduz and other provincial capitals after capturing them in a rapid advance since the weekend.

Nine cities have fallen to the insurgents in the last week - some without a fight - in a lightning offensive that has seen mostly northern population centers fall like dominoes. Kunduz's last line of defense appeared to collapse yesterday as hundreds of Afghan soldiers who retreated to a nearby airport surren-

dered, a local lawmaker told AFP.

Victorious fighters in militant garb now police the city on the backs of motorcycles or humvees taken from the overrun Afghan forces, while others pose for photographs with captured weaponry. They also received a warm welcome 100 km south in Pul-e-Khumri, where young men swarmed their gun-toting Taliban occupiers for selfies just hours after security forces were overpowered and the city fell to the insurgents.

With police cars now sporting the distinctive white flag of the Taliban - which also now looms over the city square - there were few outward signs of the heavy fighting that had taken place as civilians went about their day under the watchful eyes of their motorbike-riding rulers. But those who have fled the frontlines have brought tales of horror wrought by the hardline Islamist group, detailing reprisals against former



PUL-E-KHUMRI: A Taliban fighter is seen with locals yesterday after the Taliban captured the capital of Baghlan province. — AFP

government workers, summary executions, beheadings, and kidnappings of girls for forced marriages. Shops in Kunduz's markets were left blackened and burnt out by the fighting between Afghan forces and the Taliban.

During their first stint in power - from 1996 until their toppling by US-led forces soon after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks - the Taliban earned notoriety

for a strict interpretation of Islamic law that punished even petty crimes with public floggings and executions. The Taliban captured Kunduz - capital of the province of the same name - in two brief offensives in 2015 and 2016, before Afghan forces heavily backed by US firepower ousted them from the city. The first lasted two weeks, and the second just a day. — AFP

containers to block the route to Prayut's residence, prompting a separate clash amid heavy rain as police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at protesters from an elevated tollway.

Protesters retaliated by flinging projectiles and setting a police truck on fire, black smoke pluming into the air. Demonstrators had clashed with and police in Bangkok Tuesday, with 48 arrested and nine officers injured including one shot in the leg. Officers used tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets while protesters retaliated with firecrackers and rocks.

Bangkok police, facing accusations of heavy-handedness, insist their approach is in line with the law and urged people not to jeopardize public health and safety. A youth-led pro-democracy movement began last year and at its peak drew tens of thousands of people to rallies demanding the resignation of Prayut, the former army chief who came to power in a 2014 coup.

The movement broke long-held taboos by demanding reforms to Thailand's monarchy, and scores of protesters have been hit with multiple royal defamation charges, which carry maximum penalties of 15-year jail terms. But the movement lost momentum as COVID cases surged and its leaders were detained. A Bangkok criminal court yesterday denied

Thai police crack down on protest

BANGKOK: Thai police used rubber bullets and tear gas on protesters for a second day in a row yesterday as demonstrators rallied against the government and its handling of the coronavirus crisis. Demonstrators in Bangkok defied a ban on public gatherings as Thailand tries to curb its worst virus outbreak so far - more than 21,000 new cases were announced yesterday.

The slow roll-out of the kingdom's vaccination program as well as financial hardship from restrictions are fueling public anger towards Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha's government. About 150 protesters gathered at the major intersection of Bangkok's Victory Monument yesterday afternoon, intending to march to Prayut's residence. They quickly dispersed as riot police moved in and arrested at least two demonstrators.

Earlier protesters burnt an effigy of a Thai judge who denied bail to political detainees. "Police are not our enemies. Our true enemy is the government," one protester told the rally. Authorities then used shipping



BANGKOK: Pro-democracy protesters set a police truck on fire during a protest calling for the resignation of prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha yesterday. — AFP

bail to protest leader and human rights lawyer Anon Numpa, citing concerns over the likelihood of further offending and breaching bail conditions. — AFP

News in brief



Indo Tibetan Border Police personnel are seen during rescue operations at the site of a landslide at the Reckong Peo-Shimla Highway in Kinnaur District in Himachal Pradesh yesterday. — AFP

10 dead in India landslide

SHIMLA: Rescuers were working to clear tons of rocks and mud yesterday after a landslide buried about 60 people in India's Himalayan north, killing at least 10. A bus carrying between 20 and 25 people had been buried under rubble, said the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which is involved in the rescue efforts. Television channels showed images of a truck and cars mangled and half-buried in the debris as well as slabs of rock and bits of tree on a road. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Thakur and offered the national government's support for the rescue operation, which also involves the local border police. — FP

Melbourne extends lockdown

MELBOURNE: Five million people in Australia's second-largest city will remain under stay-at-home orders for at least another week after authorities extended a lockdown yesterday after failing to curb Melbourne's latest COVID outbreak. The city entered its sixth pandemic lockdown last Thursday after a fresh Delta variant cluster emerged at a Melbourne school and quickly spread. In Sydney, more than five million people are enduring their seventh week under stay-at-home orders, currently scheduled to remain until the end of August. — AFP

China approves mixed-vaccine trial

BEIJING: China's drug regulator has approved the country's first mixed-vaccine trial, a company involved in the study said, as the rapid spread of the Delta variant raises concern about the efficacy of domestically produced jabs. The trial will test the efficacy of combining an "inactivated" vaccine made by China's Sinovac with a DNA-based one developed by US pharmaceutical company Inovio, a statement issued on Tuesday said. — AFP

Two die jumping from building

YANGON: Two people died and three were injured after jumping from the fourth floor of a building in Myanmar's commercial capital to escape a raid by security forces, authorities said yesterday. Security forces arrested two men and a woman during a raid on a building in Botadung township in Yangon on Tuesday, according to the junta-backed True News channel. Four other men and a woman "jumped out of the window of the fourth floor to avoid arrest," it said, adding the woman and one of the men had died of their injuries. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, AUGUST 12, 2021

Wages rise in US as companies scramble for staff amid crunch

Consumer prices up 0.5% in July, up 5.4% past 12 months

WASHINGTON: An acute labor crunch amid the coronavirus pandemic is boosting US wages, with many large chains now paying \$15 an hour, a minimum level long sought by Democrats and labor activists. The disruption of COVID-19 has led to record job openings, but also millions of unemployed workers, some of whom dropped out of the labor force to stay home to take care of children.

But some workers have used the pandemic to retire or try to change careers. Economists say that so far, the wage bump has not resulted in troubling inflation. "For the first time since the late 1990s, low-wage workers have a little more leverage to demand higher pay," said David Cooper, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive Washington think tank.

Facing a sudden jump in business as the US economy reopened, restaurants, retailers and other employers have struggled to fill open positions, and have boosted pay, and even offered signing bonuses or other perks to new workers. Last week, pharmacy chain CVS became the latest big chain to announce plans to lift its minimum wage to \$15 an hour, joining a group that already includes

Target, Chipotle and Amazon, among others. The new policy will take effect at CVS in July 2022.

Walmart, the biggest private US employer, in late July announced it was dropping the \$1-a-day fee for its employee education program. The initiative supplements wages at the giant retailer, which pays less than its much smaller rival Costco.

Inaction in Congress

The announcements comes as President Joe Biden's effort to win a significant boost to the federal minimum wage remains stalled in Congress. Upon taking office, Biden sought to more than double the wage to \$15 an hour from \$7.25 where it has been for the last 12 years.

"What the Democrats could not accomplish, businesses are delivering to them because of pandemic effects," Rubeeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, told AFP.

"There was so much opposition to a \$15 minimum wage but companies have no choice right now but to pay up to attract/retain workers." The competition for workers means average pay for

supermarket and restaurant workers has now topped \$15, according to an article in The Washington Post.

"Overall nearly 80 percent of US workers now earn at least \$15 an hour, up from 60 percent in 2014," the newspaper said, while adding that a \$15 average wage is different from a minimum wage and many workers still earn less. The trend of rising wage pressure is expected to continue for some time. Companies surveyed by Willis Towers Watson expect to lift wages three percent in 2022, up from 2.7 percent this year.

Permanent change?

But experts do not believe the trend to necessarily endure beyond the pandemic. "The structures of the US economy that have suppressed wage growth ... for decades haven't changed," Cooper said. "We should be careful not to conclude that this will be a long-term permanent change."

Gregory Daco, chief US economist at Oxford Economics, said many of the companies boosting wages should also see a benefit. "It's the people with the lowest salaries who are getting a raise and that usually means more of it goes to



SANTA MONICA, US: In this file photo a shopper pays for oranges in a citrus tent at the West LA Farmer's Market in Santa Monica, California. —AFP

consumption," Daco said. "Whatever more the companies are giving to workers, they're likely to make up in higher sales." Farooqi also expects the current period of wage hikes to end, noting the large number of unemployed workers. "We do not expect a wage spiral that will feed into inflation," Farooqi said. "Wages are not likely to keep accelerating if busi-

nesses can find workers easily."

The next major update on inflation will come Wednesday with the consumer price index for July, which is expected to rise 0.5 percent after surging 0.9 percent in June. Hourly wages rose 0.4 percent in July compared with June and 4.7 percent over the year-ago period, according to the Labor Department. —AFP

Jazeera Airways reports 138% spike in passengers flown in Q2

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways yesterday reported on its financial and operational performance for the second quarter of the year, announcing a 137.7 percent increase in number of passengers flown with a higher load factor of 51.3 percent and an operating revenue of KD 7.4 million.

The operational performance shows positive signs that travel will recover at a fast pace after eased restrictions come to effect by mid of Q3 2021 and the number of vaccinated in Kuwait improve.

The airline registered a net loss of KD 6.5 million for Q2, driven by lower yields as scheduled operations started to return in comparison to Q2 2020 and higher costs due to increase operations and higher fuel prices. Yield decreased from Q2 2020 to the average level of KD 68.3.

Commenting on the results, Jazeera Airways Chairman, Marwan Boodai said: "With vaccinations rolling out at a fast pace in Kuwait and other coun-

tries within our network, travel restrictions have eased, and countries started opening their borders ahead of the summer season. Appetite for travel was evident and Jazeera rolled out a series of new destinations by the month of June to cater to the significant demand for popular touristic destinations as well as new places to discover. We acquired milestone traffic rights and operated at a high load factor despite limitations in the number of returning passengers at Kuwait International Airport."

Rolling out its summer schedule with favorite destinations for tourists, Jazeera resumed its services to the



Marwan Boodai

Lebanese capital, Beirut, in addition to other popular summer destinations such as Tbilisi (Georgia), Trabzon and Bodrum (Turkey). The airline launched a new service to London Heathrow airport, making it the first LCC in the Middle East to operate direct flights to the airport. The airport is the favourite gateway to the UK for the Kuwaiti traveller, and there is high demand from the large seg-

ment of accustomed tourists who are more than eager to return to London this summer, as well as for students at universities in the city.

Other new services, some never before served by a direct route from Kuwait, comprised destinations that do not require quarantine for vaccinated tourists. These included Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and Yerevan (Armenia).

Positive outlook for Q4 2021

Boodai concluded: "We remain positive that demand for travel will only increase and restrictions lifted. Kuwait has already announced easing its restrictions starting August 1, increasing the number of arriving passengers and opening return flights to non-Kuwaiti residents. Recovery is imminent as vaccinations continue to be administered at high pace.

"Jazeera maintains a strong financial position and has completed its capital increase which was oversubscribed by 210 percent. The airline has historically safeguarded its shareholders' rights and ensured a reliable service during crises, and we have our team to thank for their long-term vision."

Financial and Operational Highlights

Q2 2021 Highlights:	H1 2021 Highlights:
• Operating revenue: KD7.4 million	• Operating revenue: KD15.6 million
• Operating loss: KD6.0 million	• Operating loss: KD11.3 million
• Net loss: KD6.5 million	• Net loss: KD11.7 million
• Passengers: 104.1 thousand, up 137.7%	• Passengers: 208.2 thousand
• Yield: KD68.3	• Yield: KD71.6
• Load factor: 51.3%	• Load factor: 54.7%



Dubai airport passenger volumes slump 40% in first half of 2021

DUBAI: Dubai International Airport reported yesterday a 41 percent drop in traffic in the first half of 2021, but said it anticipates "robust growth" after the easing of travel restrictions. The number of passengers that passed through the world's largest airport for international travel fell to 10.6 million in the first six months of 2021, according to a statement from the Dubai Media Office.

In the first quarter of last year, the airport had welcomed 17.8 million passengers before it temporarily suspended commercial flights in the second quarter to curb the spread of the coronavirus. "Dubai Airports is projecting robust growth for Dubai International in the second half of the year," the statement said. The emirate, one of the seven that make up the UAE, was one of the first destinations to

reopen to tourism in July last year.

It became a magnet for visitors escaping dreary winter weather and stringent COVID-19 restrictions.

The UAE launched a vaccination campaign in December and has inoculated 72 percent of its nearly 10 million population. Last year, Dubai International Airport reported a 70 percent drop in traffic, with the number of travellers falling from more than 86 million in 2019 to 25.9 million in 2020. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), global air passenger traffic plunged by an unprecedented 66 percent last year owing to travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

But the airport is expecting better volumes in the six months to the end of December 2021. "In anticipation of the robust recovery of global air travel, we started the second half on a high note," Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports, said in the statement. "We have already witnessed some of our busiest weekends of the year in July, and... the outlook for 2021 in terms of passenger numbers looks very promising." Tourism has long been an economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed 16.7 million such visitors in 2019. The government was last year counting on the six-month Dubai Expo 2020 global trade fair—delayed by a year and now set to open in October—to attract millions of visitors and boost the economy. —AFP

Output hikes by oil producers not enough: US

WASHINGTON: A boost in production agreed on by the world's leading oil producers is "simply not enough" to fuel the global economic recovery from COVID-19, US national security advisor Jake Sullivan said yesterday. The increases agreed on by OPEC+ (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies) last month "will not fully offset previous production cuts that OPEC+ imposed during the pandemic until well into 2022," he said in a statement released by the White House. "At a critical moment in the global recovery, this is simply not enough," the statement said.

"Competitive energy markets will ensure reliable and stable energy supplies, and OPEC+ must do more to support the recovery." The price of gasoline is currently \$3.19 per gallon, up from \$3.14 a month ago and more than a 45 percent jump from the year-ago level when travel was constrained in the United States by myriad COVID-19 restrictions. Sullivan's statement comes three weeks after the OPEC+ group unveiled an agreement to boost output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August.

The deal means the group's output will be restored to its pre-pandemic level by the end of 2022. Oil producers have faced a complex challenge to modulate output amid COVID-19, with the most recent uptick in infections from the Delta variant raising doubts about demand, especially in China. Crude prices, which briefly hit six-year peaks in June, have fluctuated in recent days amid these worries. The Biden administration also released a letter from National Economic Council Chief Brian Deese to the Federal Trade Commission calling on the agency to use "all of its available tools to monitor the US gasoline market" and guard against "anti-competitive" conduct. —AFP

Win for Biden as Senate passes infrastructure bill

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden hailed the Senate passage Tuesday of a "historic" \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package, celebrating a major bipartisan win on a plan he vowed would "transform America." By funding work on roads, bridges and ports, as well as clean water and high-speed internet, Biden said the bill—which still needs House approval—would create thousands of high-paying jobs for people without college degrees.

"This historic investment infrastructure is what I believe you, the American people, want," Biden said in a White House address. "This bill shows that we can work together," he said.

Some seven weeks after the Democratic leader stood with senators from both parties hailing a preliminary agreement, the bill received rare bipartisan support in Washington's highly-polarized political atmosphere. Needing just a simple majority, it passed by 69 votes to 30 with backing from a third of Republican Senators.

The measure now faces a make-or-break vote in the House of Representatives in coming weeks, where its future is less certain as divisions have sprung up in the Democratic majority.

Democratic Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer credited Biden for winning approval of "the first major infrastructure package in over a decade on a bipartisan basis" after just seven months in office.

"It's been a long and winding road, but we have persisted," Schumer said. The ambitious plan provides for \$550 billion in new federal spending on transport infrastructure, but also for public transit, broadband internet, and clean water, as well as electric charging stations and other measures to fight climate change. The total price tag—the equivalent of Spain's 2020 gross domestic product—relies on other public funds that have already been appropriated.

Sweeping domestic agenda

In a deeply divided Washington, the bill's final approval would mark a resounding victory for Biden, a former senator who touts his ability to reach across the aisle. In a sign of the continued influence wielded by former president Donald Trump, three Republican senators who participated in the negotiations announced they would not support the plan after Trump threatened reprisals for helping to hand Biden a political win.

But top Republican Senator Mitch McConnell voted for it, aware of the program's huge popularity among voters tired of historic neglect of the nation's highways. Passage looks less certain in the House of Representatives, where rifts have emerged within the narrow Democratic majority between the progressive and moderate wings. Negotiations are likely to be drawn out, and a final vote in Congress may not come until the fall. US business groups applauded the Senate vote saying it provides long-overdue investments and creates jobs. —AFP

Business

Kamco Invest reports net profit of KD 6.3 million for first half of 2021

Total revenue reached KD 15.9m with fee income representing 54.1%

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced its financial results for the six months period ended 30 June 2021. The company reported a net profit of KD 6.3 million (EPS: 18.41 fils) compared to a net loss of KD 3.9 million during the same period in 2020 (EPS: -11.35 fils).

Total revenue for the period reached KD 15.9 million (6M 2020: KD4.5 million), with fee and commission income amounting to KD 8.6 million, representing 54.1 percent of total revenue.

As at end of June 2021, assets under management stood at KD 4.3 billion (\$14.2 billion), an increase of 9 percent since 31 December 2020 impacted by new amounts raised, as well as the positive performance of managed assets. Kamco Invest's equity funds and managed portfolios continued to outperform their respective benchmarks, whereas Kamco Investment Fund emerged as the winner of the Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards Kuwait 2021 in the categories of "Best Equity Fund Over 5 Years", and "Best Equity Fund Over 10 Years". During the 6 months period, both the Kamco Investment Fund and Al-Durra Islamic Fund were the



Faisal Mansour Sarkhou

best performing in the conventional and sharia-compliant Kuwait equity funds categories, reporting returns of 22.27 percent and 22.79 percent respectively.

Income generating properties were acquired in the UK and US, raising the managed real estate value by \$145 million. The Special Situations Asset

Management team continued exit negotiations with several parties on behalf of clients and successfully completed the exit of a 24 percent stake in Al-Mazaya Holding worth approximately KD 10.5 million. In terms of new investment offerings available to clients, the Asset Management team worked diligently to launch several initiatives including leveraged fixed income and venture capital.

The Investment Banking team successfully played the role of Joint Lead Manager & Joint Bookrunner for five regional debt issuances worth \$2.15 billion across

Kuwait, Saudi and Oman, and the role of Fiscal and Principal Paying Agent for the redemption of KD 100 million subordinated T2 Capital Securities. The team also acted as issuance advisor and subscription agent to the rights issue of a listed company on Boursa Kuwait, exclusive buy-side advisor to an insurance group to acquire 66 percent of a non-listed insurance company, exclusive buy-side advisor to an insurance group to acquire 75 percent of a listed insurance company in Jordan and sell-side advisor to sell a minority stake of a listed company on Boursa Kuwait.

First Securities Brokerage Company, Kamco Invest's brokerage arm, continued to provide its services to clients without interruption, while increasing market share and attracting new clients through its online trading platform. The company successfully completed the MID3 test for netting, which now serves as a new revenue stream for the company.

During the period, Kamco Invest also managed to reduce its total liabilities by 3.3 percent or KD 2.1 million to reach KD 62.7 million.

The company enjoys a strong financial position with KD 57.3 million in shareholders' equity as of 30 June



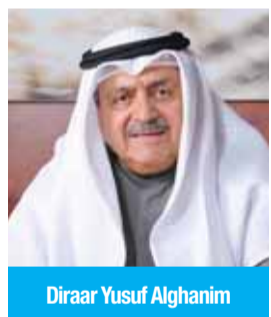
2021 (an increase of 14.5 percent in comparison to end of December 2020). In its most recent review in May, Capital Intelligence maintained its "BBB" long-term credit rating and "A3" short-term rating with a stable outlook.

Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer, said, "We are proud by the achievements reported since the beginning of the year, leveraging on the competitive performance of our products and services, and positive market sentiments. We further strengthened our financial position, enhanced our liquid assets, reduced our total liabilities and most importantly remained focused on the recurring fee-based income."

Markaz reports net profit of KD 10.41m in first half of 2021

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" reported its financial results for the first half of 2021 with total revenues of KD 19.06 million, as compared to a loss of KD 1.71 million in the same period last year. Markaz achieved a net profit of KD 10.41 million, as compared to a loss of KD 10.05 million in H1 2020, and earnings per share of 22 fils for the half year ended June 30, 2021.

Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Chairman stated: "I am pleased to report that Markaz has continued to deliver positive financial performance with improved profitability in H1-2021. The world economy is experiencing an exceptionally strong recovery. Global growth is set to reach 5.6 percent in 2021, its strongest post-recession pace in a long time, underpinned by the accelerated global movement to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. Markaz has successfully implemented its investment policy to face the circumstances of the regional and global markets, and is well poised to benefit from the post-COVID recovery, supported by our dynamic risk management and asset management strategies."



Diraar Yusuf Alghanim



Ali H Khalil

Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer stated: "implementing a conservative investment policy, and meeting the market needs for innovative financial services, Markaz's Asset Management fees has reached KD 4.53 million in H1 2021, a 39 percent y-o-y growth. Investment banking fees increased by 78 percent y-o-y to KD 0.46 million. H1 2021 real estate rental income increased by 20 percent to KD 1.72 million, reflecting the high quality of our real estate portfolio which was well poised to benefit from the markets recovery. Total revenues also include gains from investments of KD 11.45 million as compared to a loss due to the pandemic of KD 10.2 million in H1 2020. This solid and consistent financial performance is a result of the efficiency of our team, the diversity of our activities, prudent asset allocation, and research based investment selection. The Markaz balance sheet remains robust and liquid, our net debt to equity ratio is 0.37x, enabling us to seize arising attractive opportunities. Our Assets Under Management increased for a third consecutive quarter to KD 1,037 million at the end of June 2021."

Singapore turns sewage into ultra-clean water

SINGAPORE: Giant pumps whirl deep underground at a plant in Singapore that helps transform sewage into water so clean it is fit for human consumption while reducing ocean pollution. The tiny island nation has little in the way of natural water sources and has long had to rely principally on supplies from neighboring Malaysia. To boost self-sufficiency, the government has developed an advanced system for treating sewage involving a network of tunnels and high-tech plants.

Recycled wastewater can now meet 40 percent of Singapore's water demand—a figure that is expected to rise to 55 percent by 2060, according to the country's water agency.

While most is used for industrial purposes, some of it is added to drinking water supplies in reservoirs in the city-state of 5.7 million people. And the system helps reduce maritime pollution, as only a small amount of the treated water is discharged into the sea. This is a contrast to most other countries — 80 percent of the world's wastewater flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused, according to UN estimates. "Singapore lacks natural



Lexus Design Award 2022: Call for entries now open

KUWAIT: Lexus recently announced a call for entries to the Lexus Design Award 2022, an international design competition launched in 2013. Over the years, many distinguished leaders of the design world have generously contributed to the Lexus Design Award's mission of nurturing and supporting the next generation of creators. Now in its tenth year, the Lexus Design Award continues to evolve as a platform for design innovation that leads to a better tomorrow. Entries to the Lexus Design Award 2022 competition will be accepted until October 10, 2021.

Entrants will be expected to demonstrate how their creative ideas express three key principles of the Lexus brand: Anticipate, Innovate, and Captivate. Their designs should anticipate global challenges facing society and imagine engaging and innovative ways to contribute to a sustainable future, while seamlessly enhancing the happiness of all. Lexus is looking for captivating designs that intersect with thoughtful solutions and ideas that can truly create a brighter tomorrow for people and societies in diverse circumstances.

The Lexus Design Award distinguishes itself from other design competitions by inviting four of the world's foremost creators to serve as mentors to six finalists, providing a priceless, once-in-a-lifetime learning and mentoring experience. Through one-on-one dialogues with these esteemed mentors from various backgrounds and specializations, the finalists receive personalized guidance to build and evolve prototypes that bring out the potential of their ideas.

Over the past nine editions, the Lexus Design Award has showcased 190 creative works and celebrated the talents of 139 individuals and teams who are helping shape a better tomorrow through the power of design.

"We are pleased to announce the launch of the Lexus Design Award 2022 and extend our annual invitation to talented creatives to share their ideas with the world. This program offers a unique opportunity for the next generation of emerging designers to bring

resources and it is limited in space, which is why we are always looking for ways to explore water sources and stretch our water supply," Low Pei Chin, chief engineer of the Public Utilities Board's water reclamation department, told AFP.

One key strategy is to "collect every drop" and "reuse endlessly", she added. This is in addition to the city-state's other main approaches to securing water supplies—importing it, using reservoirs and desalinating seawater. At the heart of the recycling system is the high-tech Changi Water Reclamation Plant on the city's eastern coast.

Parts of the facility in land-scarce Singapore are underground—some as deep as 25 stories—and it is fed by wastewater that flows through a massive, 48-kilometre (30-mile) tunnel, linked to sewers.

The site houses a maze of steel pipes, tubes, tanks, filtration systems and other machinery, and can treat up to 900 million liters (237 million US gallons) of wastewater a day—enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool every 24 hours for a year. In one building, a network of ventilators have been installed to keep the air smelling fresh, although a putrid whiff still hangs in the air.

'Limited amount of water'

Sewage that arrives at the plant undergoes an initial filtering process before powerful pumps send it flowing to facilities above ground for further treatment. There, the treated water is further cleansed, with impurities like bacteria and viruses removed through advanced filtration processes, and disinfect-

their visions to life with the help of renowned industry experts and contribute to a better tomorrow," said Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation. "Going beyond the conventional to create amazing experiences has always defined Lexus' bold approach to design. Our esteemed panel of judges will also be looking for ideas that are grounded in sustainability and can create a positive impact on society. I would like to thank everyone involved in the Lexus Design Award for their continuous support, which ensures the award's success year after year in uncovering innovative solutions from the brightest young minds across the globe."

An elite judging committee will review the entries from around the globe, choosing six finalists to be announced in early 2022. The finalists' prototype development is funded by Lexus with a budget of up to JPY 3 million (over USD 25,000) each. In the spring of 2022, the six finalists will present their final proposals to the judges, who will then select one Grand Prix winner. Lexus will announce the names of the Lexus Design Award 2022 judging committee members and mentors later this year.



Last year LDA

ted with ultraviolet rays. The end product, dubbed "NEWater", is mainly used in microchip manufacturing plants—which are ubiquitous in the city-state and require high-quality water—and for cooling systems in buildings.

But it also helps boost drinking water supplies. During the dry season, it is sent to top up several man-made reservoirs and, following further treatment, flows to people's taps.

Singapore is expanding its recycling system. It will add an extra underground tunnel and a major water reclamation plant to serve the western half of the island, which should be completed by 2025.

Singapore will have spent Sg\$10 billion (US\$7.4 billion) on upgrading its water treatment infrastructure by the time the expansion is finished. One impetus to seek greater self-sufficiency are the city-state's historically fractious relations with key water source, Malaysia.

The neighbors have had stormy ties since Malaysia ejected Singapore from a short-lived union in 1965, and they have in the past had rows over water supplies.

Stefan Wuertz, a professor of environmental engineering at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, stressed the importance for other countries to treat wastewater more effectively, warning of serious long-term impacts otherwise. "There is a limited amount of water on the planet," he told AFP. "If we were to keep polluting the freshwater, at some stage we would reach the point where... treatment becomes extremely expensive." — AFP

Betting on a future 'Made in Cameroon'

YAOUNDE, Cameroon: She thought it was a "crazy gamble" at the time, but four years on, Gaele Laura Zambou Kenfack has never looked back since creating a firm to produce and sell "Made in Cameroon" items. Zambou returned to Cameroon at the end of 2016 after 10 years working as a consultant for BMW in Germany, the one-time colonial power in the central African country of some 25 million people, highly dependent on imports.

Other business leaders like her are betting on the "Made in Cameroon" (MIC) mark—a concept formally launched by the private sector five years ago to promote local production, processing and consumption. The goal is to overcome a long-standing weakness in Cameroon's economy: the lack of "value-added" activities that create jobs and generate money beyond the business of selling primary resources such as minerals, oil and timber.

Stores labeled "Made in Cameroon" have already opened in several cities across the country. "Five years ago, there was only one store dedicated to the MIC mark. We are now at 33," says Carine Andela, president of a group calling itself the Association of Ingenious Entrepreneurs of Africa (Asenia).

Andela has taken up fish farming. Aquaculturists have until now imported a lot of their fry — juvenile fish — from neighboring Nigeria, but "what is interesting is that some young people have started growing them themselves," she says.

'Not rocket science'

In Biyem-Assi, a popular district of the capital Yaounde, Zambou's company KENZA Market was one of the first MIC businesses to open. Spices, dried fruits and vegetables, vegetable oils for the skin, or marinades, line the shelves. One of the flagship products of the store is "spicy salt", a mixture of salt and several local spices. "Our concept is to promote MIC by highlighting local products because that is what makes the economy grow," said Zambou.

To ensure regular supplies for her shop, Zambou is in contact with a dozen local producers from whom she buys raw materials before processing them. She has another store in Douala, the main port and economic capital of Cameroon, and wants to open more shops quickly.

Samuel Safo Tchhoffo, a former oil industry engineer, has also taken the plunge in creating his own company. Its pilot pumpkin seed-shelling plant is located in Montee Jouvence, another working-class district of Yaounde. "It took 27 years of research to get to this factory," Safo says with a broad smile. The production line is made up of a chain of 11 machines assembled to convey, shell and sort the pumpkin seeds, then press the kernel to extract oil.

"The machines are totally made in Cameroon, and we made it a point of honor not only to process product locally, but also to show young people that it can be done — and that it is not rocket science," explains Safo, whose plant also produces soap and low-fat flour. "I am interested in the virtues of this oil," customer Juliette Mbango says during a local fair. "I've often heard about it. I came to buy some to discover it for myself."

For all the public interest in MIC, management consultant Edith Laure Pokam argues that the label suffers from major handicaps. "Many consumers are willing to buy what is made locally, but they have doubts about the quality," she says.—AFP



YAOUNDE, Cameroon: An employee of the Zenka Market Shop arranges an assortment of spices in Yaounde. — AFP

PACI applauds KFH e-services and continuous development

Al-Roshood: KFH, first bank in Kuwait to launch e-signature service for personal finance transactions

KUWAIT: The Director General - Public Authority for Civil Information, Musaed Al-Asousi praised the major technology development in KFH services, the continued efforts to achieve digitalization and benefit from the latest technological developments and their use in the field of banking business, thus achieving distinction in customer service. KFH was able, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to exhibit a remarkable level of performance and service through latest modern technologies, multiple applications, and its website kfh.com.

Al-Asousi said, during KFH Acting Group CEO- Abdulwahab Essa Al-Roshood, and executives visit to PACI head office - South Surra, to view PACI services and work mechanism, discuss the means of cooperation between the two entities, and provide more services and advantages to KFH customers, that PACI welcomes all efforts made by national companies and institutions to provide modern technologies. PACI is always ready to provide all support to achieve an electronic government and digitalization of the state official services. He emphasized that this goal would not be achieved without establishing a comprehensive system to comprise all main services including government and banking services under the umbrella of an advanced technology system that would provide users with the elements of safety, speed, and accuracy.

On his part, Al-Roshood valued the fruitful cooperation between KFH and PACI and praised the efforts exerted in the technical and technological arrangements which have resulted into the successful establishment of the electronic link

with the PACI at a high level of coordination and cooperation. This has given KFH the privilege to provide unique and distinguished services at the market level, namely those related to electronic signature applications.

Al-Roshood praised PACI efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic including the cooperation to establish electronic platforms for several government and private bodies including the issuance of permits during full and partial lockdown and making appointments with hospitals and cooperative societies and other entities. He expressed his thanks and gratitude to the authority for the significant role it played and its outstanding efforts in this field.

Al-Roshood reiterated that KFH has always endeavored to enhance its digitalization strategy to achieve customers satisfaction, enhance its market share, achieve targets, mitigate costs, enhance marketing services, attract new customers, and innovate new banking and investment products. He added that KFH aims to increase PACI machines to expand the E-Signature service at all KFH branches through KFH GO, which have reached 10 branches so far. Action is still in progress to increase the number of these machines and services. The first bank in Kuwait to launch E-Signature and digital finance application service. Al-Roshood indicated that KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch the E-Signature service for personal finance transactions including electronic processing of all paper transactions. The service enables customers to sign any required document electronically through any device at any place i.e., the finance application



Abdulwahab Essa Al-Roshood and Musaed Al-Asousi

could be completed in a fully automatic manner according to terms and conditions.

KFH has introduced the online bank account opening service to the new customers without the need to visit the branch. This service is the first of its kind at the market level. KFH has earlier applied the E-Signature project to its employees in cooperation with the PACI to save time and effort for the employees and cope with the transitional plans to the electronic ID era.

To enhance infrastructure and provide more e-services, Al-Roshood said that KFH has signed an agreement with Aion Digital, a specialized plat-

form for digital banking. The agreement aims to digitalize all banking services provided by the bank to retail and corporate customers. Several digital banking services were made available to KFH customers recently including bank transfers through SWIFT GPI, merging the account with the trading No. at the Kuwait Clearing Company, Smart cheque deposit service and card free withdrawal service through QR Code technique. Customers have also benefited from the electronic gold account opening service which enables customers to buy and sell gold online in addition to other services.

Gulf Bank launches cards summer campaign to reward 20 winners

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has launched its summer cards campaign, which gives all Gulf Bank cardholders the chance to win back their card spends when they use their Gulf Bank cards locally, internationally and for online shopping. During the course of the campaign, which is scheduled to run from August 8 until November 8, 2021 cardholders who use their Gulf Bank credit, debit or prepaid cards will automatically be entered into the final draw. For every KD 10 spent locally on a Gulf Bank prepaid or credit card, customers will receive one entry into the draw. For every KD 10 spent internationally using a prepaid, credit, or debit card, customers will receive three entries into the draw.

Gulf Bank will be announcing 20 lucky winners at the end of the campaign, each of whom will receive their card spends back with a maximum cashback of KD 1,000. The draw will take place on November 21, 2021 in the presence of a representative of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and the winners will be notified by text, phone call, and email.

Gulf Bank is constantly working to offer its customers the very best banking products and services, including the Bank's latest Win your spends back campaign for its prepaid, debit and credit cardholders. Throughout this campaign, cardholders can enjoy all the benefits of Gulf Bank's prepaid, debit and credit cards while being entered into the draw for the chance to win their card spends back.

Gulf Bank credit cards provide customers with a variety of travel offers and benefits which include discounts on hotel bookings, flights, and car rentals. Additionally, Gulf Bank credit card customers can also take advantage of complimentary airport lounge access at over 600 airports across the world. Moreover, Gulf Bank credit cardholders can also access the Gulf Points program, the fastest rewarding program in Kuwait that gives cardholders valuable points to use for free airline travel, hotel accommodation, and exclusive seasonal travel packages. To further ease the travel planning process, Gulf Bank credit card customers can also receive free travel insurance for themselves and their families, which can be used for the Schengen Visa application.

As customer experience and satisfaction are the primary focus of the Bank's products, a number of benefits have been added to Gulf Bank's Prepaid Card to enhance customer experience. These benefits include fraud protection with Gulf Bank 3D secure, online shopping, and instant discounts of up to 20 percent at over 300 renowned restaurants and coffee shops, and discounts of up to 25 percent at over 150 retail outlets in Kuwait across travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and lifestyle segments

Burgan Bank provides customers with special offer from e-market

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced an offer in collaboration with E-Market, one of the best local electronic gadgets' platforms is in line with the bank's commitment to continuously provide its customers with a variety of special and exclusive promotions that suit their needs.

The offer will be available at E-Market's Shuwaikh store from the 12th to the 14th of August,

or until stock lasts. Burgan Bank customers can get one free JCPal screen protector with a one-year warranty and can change it as many times as they want to, simply by showing any valid Burgan Bank card under the applicable terms and conditions. Burgan strives to provide its customers with an exceptional banking experience combining innovative products and services, cutting-edge digital services and payment solutions, as well as rewarding offers and promotions that meet their expectations.

To learn more about Burgan Bank's latest offers, products and services, you can visit any of the bank's branches or Burgan's Instagram account @BurganBankKuwait, or contact the Call Center or the WhatsApp service at 1804080.

Huawei MateView: Bringing a real color display

KUWAIT: Monitors have always been an essential part of any PC and while it originally was just a simple display to show information, up and coming technologies have allowed it to evolve into something more innovative. The traditional monitor comes in a bulky frame and the same design, barely distinguishable when compared to the competition.

Meet the Huawei MateView, a standalone monitor that puts special emphasis on its design without compromising on quality resulting in a display with pleasing aesthetics and performance. The Huawei MateView brings a forward-thinking approach that complements Huawei's Super Device experience, letting users enjoy seamless wireless collaboration across laptops, smartphones, and tablets.

Huawei MateView

Bring photos and videos to life with the real color display. The Huawei MateView features a 28.2-inch display with a 4K+ 3850 x 2560 resolution that brings incredible color reproduction. Its 3:2 aspect ratio means that users have more vertical room to see documents and web pages in a taller view. The ultra-thin bezels gives a more immersive feel, achieving an impressive screen-to-body ratio of 94 percent and a screen that's as thin as 9.3mm. The display manages to outshine its competitors thanks to its support for the DCI-P3 color gamut that covers the monitor with 107 colors and color accuracy. Additionally, the Huawei MateView brings support for high dynamic range (HDR) output perfect for deeper colors and increased contrast and brightness. In fact, the monitor support a maximum brightness level of 500 nits.

A super device experience

As part of the Smart Office experience, the Huawei MateView leverages technologies that allow it to take advan-

tage of multi-device collaboration. Real-time PC casting is supported via a wireless connection, saving you the hassles of connecting multiple wires. For instance, the 12.6-inch Huawei MateBook Pro's screen can be projected wirelessly to the Huawei MateView that can take advantage of the larger 3:2 display and the Huawei MateBook D15 can connect to the Huawei MateView via a wired USB-C connection.

Users can also utilize the Huawei MateView as an extended display while connected to a laptop like the Huawei MateBook D15. Once the screen is projected or the notebook display is connected, users have the ability to control the tablet and notebook interface and apps using a connected keyboard and mouse on the monitor.

Another cool feature is Onelap Projection, where a Huawei smartphone can use the bigger screen of the Huawei MateView with a single tap. Once a user has established a connection by tapping on the monitor's dock, it will automatically activate Desktop Mode where it combines the smartphone's computing power with the large screen experience of the Huawei MateView.

Huawei MateView

Pleasing looks and an aesthetic design that break tradition. The Huawei MateView was designed with futuristic aesthetics in mind that would not go out of fashion for years to come. The rectangular design of the monitor is composed of only vertical and horizontal elements that also features ultra-thin bezels for a borderless viewing experience. The Huawei MateView is crafted from aluminium to achieve the narrow bezel effect that help reduce visual distractions.

Be at the center of the action with an immersive sound experience

The Huawei MateView comes with two speakers that offer an impressive soundstage that put you in the center of the action. It supports a weighted maximum volume of 75dB and an actual maximum volume of 78dB.

The Huawei MateView's audio path includes an algorithmic adjustment module that can dynamically adjust the frequency response and timbre according to the device's characteristics. There is also a grill comprising 5,920 holes that not only help with the sound quality, but also with air intake for effectively



cooling the monitor. Also present is a dual microphone array for far-range sound pickup.

Simplify device connectivity

With USB-C support, the Huawei MateView effectively solves all the pains of having multiple cables with just a single one. The USB-C port allows data transfers as well as monitor input and charging all through the use of a single cable. The USB-C port on the monitor also supports 65W reverse charging that can also charge laptops without all the messy wires.

Unique to the Huawei MateView is the Huawei Smart Bar design, a world's first touch OSD design to be found on a monitor. It strips away all the cluttered physical buttons often found on traditional monitors to create a new touch bar experience. Hidden underneath the screen, all the monitor functions can be performed by simply tapping and touching the Huawei Smart Bar allowing for more convenient and intuitive operation.

Final verdict

More than just a standalone monitor, the Huawei MateView brings the best technologies with a wireless real color display along with a Smart Office experience elevated by a pleasing aesthetic design, making this one of the best choices for a desktop monitor.

CBK grants UPayments an electronic payment license

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has recently agreed to grant an electronic payment (e-payment) license to UPayments.com, a company specialized in financial technology, allowing it to provide financial services and enhance its leading role in this field. On this occasion, Co-founder and CEO of UPayments, Nasser Fawzi Al-Humaidi, revealed that the CBK, through its Resolution 430/44 of 2018, aims to regulate e-Payments and the work of companies operating in this important sector, through clear and explicit instructions specifying how to provide payment services in a safe and sustainable manner. The company's success in obtaining an e-payment license from the CBK is the culmination of a long journey of continuous development of information security programs and internal regulations in the company, in order to keep pace with the requirements of the CBK, which comes within the framework of the bank's belief in the importance of the financial technology sector.

Al-Humaidi said that complying with the CBK's requirements would strengthen the company's capabilities, providing more services that fulfill the aspirations of companies and customers in various fields. This step keeps pace with global changes in the e-payments sector, which have developed significantly,

especially in the recent period with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, where all business sectors moved towards electronic payment and embraced technological changes. In this regard, Al-Humaidi revealed a significant increase in the number of registered customers, and a subsequent increase in the number of payment transactions. The company provides innovative payment solutions to large, medium, and even small companies through payment links and e-commerce, through a website dedicated to facilitating the collection of funds. The company also provides an integrated system for paying and collecting rents, designed to help real estate owners and companies manage their properties professionally online, thus contributing to their growth and enhancing trust between the owner and the tenant, especially in these difficult circumstances. "This achievement comes as a result of great efforts made by the company's team under the guidance of the National Bank of Kuwait, which accelerated the company's accreditation and enhanced its leadership in this field," Al-Humaidi added.

He pointed out that the CBK's continuous keenness to support the payments and financial technology sector system, and raise the level of effectiveness and

flexibility of financial transactions, supports plans to enhance innovation in the provided financial services, in accordance with international standards, to ensure the stability of the financial sector and the fairness of its transactions.

Al-Hamidi stated that "UPayments" is keen to provide distinguished services in an ongoing basis to its customers through the latest online payment technologies, and through signing partnerships in various fields. Most notably, it has been linked with delivery, warehousing, and air freight companies, aiming to enable entrepreneurs and project owners to enter the e-Commerce market and reach customers globally with great flexibility. Al-Humaidi concluded that "UPayments" was ranked as the best financial technology company in Kuwait by Valuer.ai, stressing that this achievement indicates a merit and acknowledgment for all the entire staff of the company.



Nasser Fawzi Al-Humaidi

Burgan Bank announces winner of Al-Thuraya Salary Account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday Abdullah Khaled Al-Hajaj as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000

every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.



Lifestyle | Gossip



Teigen calls out 'haters' after being accused of deleting comments

Chrissy Teigen has called out "next-level haters" who have accused her of deleting negative comments on her social media posts. The 35-year-old model insisted people are "crazy" if they think she erases "angry comments" from her socials, but she tried to laugh off the accusations. She said: "Two things that I think are funny right now. "One: People in my comments that are mad that there's not enough angry comments in my comments. "They think that I delete them. But like, what? "That's like next-level hater, when you're mad that there's not enough hate. It's pretty ... you're crazy." Chrissy also admitted some social media users

get "all sorts of mad" at her if she leaves a positive comment on someone's post, because she is "alive". Speaking in a video on her Instagram Stories, she added: "If I leave a comment underneath somebody's photo, even if it's nice, 'You look great,' 'I love this outfit,' people get all sorts of mad. "Because ... I am alive." This comes after Chrissy admitted last month she felt "lost" and "depressed" after becoming a part of "cancel club". The 'Lip Sync Battle' star recently apologized for being a "troll" following bullying accusations from Courtney Stodden - who claimed Chrissy used to message her to tell her to take her own life - but she admitted the scandal has taken its toll on

her mental health. Alongside a photo of her own legs, Chrissy - who has children Luna, five, and Miles, three, with husband John Legend - wrote on Instagram: "Iiii don't really know what to say here...just feels so weird to pretend nothing happened in this online world but feel like utter s*** in real life. "Going outside sucks and doesn't feel right, being at home alone with my mind makes my depressed head race. But I do know that however I'm handling this now isn't the right answer. "I feel lost and need to find my place again, I need to snap out of this, I desperately wanna communicate with you guys instead of pretending everything is okay. I'm not used to any other way! "Cancel

club is a fascinating thing and I have learned a wholllllle lot. "Only a few understand it and it's impossible to know till you're in it. And it's hard to talk about it in that sense because obviously you sound whiney when you've clearly done something wrong. It just sucks. There is no winning. But there never is here anyhow."

Lopez and Ben Affleck house hunting in LA

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck have been house-hunting together. The 'On The Floor' hit-maker and the 48-year-old actor only rekindled their romance earlier this year, but it seems things are going from strength to strength between them as they were spotted looking at properties together in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California, on Tuesday. The couple were seen looking at a 12-bedroom, 24-bathroom mansion, which is listed on the market for \$85 million, that boasts an indoor sports complex with a basketball court and boxing ring, a massive pool, as well as a guest penthouse and a caretaker's house. They then reportedly drove over the hill to the San Fernando Valley where they viewed the late Bob Hope's former estate - which is currently owned by Ron

Burkle and priced at \$40 million - which is complete with five acres and a golf course. A source told TMZ that the couple is not just looking for a property for Jennifer and, instead, one for both of them and their families. The news that the pair are looking for a property together won't come as too much of a surprise to their friends as a source previously said they were planning to spend as much time with one another as possible. An insider explained: "Their friends wouldn't be surprised if they move in together and ultimately end up together. They're spending all of their free time together and making each other a priority." And, although things seem to be getting serious between them, the couple is not planning to tie the knot. A source said previously: "They are fully committed to each other ... They have been meshing their lives and families and don't feel the need to get engaged yet or even tie the knot. They have both been there and don't feel it's necessary. They are both very secure within their relationship and Ben worships her. It's truly meant to be and everyone around them thinks they are a perfect match." The 'Justice League' star has children Violet, 15, Seraphina, 12, and Samuel, nine, with his ex-wife Jennifer Garner, whilst the 50-year-old beauty has 13-year-old twins Emme and Max with her ex-husband Marc Anthony.



Normani felt 'overlooked' in Fifth Harmony

The 25-year-old singer has claimed she wasn't allowed to sing much when she was in the girl group - who announced an indefinite hiatus in 2018 in order to pursue solo careers - and that, in turn, has dented her confidence as an independent artist on the music scene. Speaking in the latest edition of Allure magazine, Normani said: "I didn't get to really sing in the group. "I felt like I was overlooked. That idea has been projected on me. Like, this is your place." The brunette beauty hasn't had the easiest of times recently as her mother, Andrea Hamilton, was diagnosed with breast cancer last year. Normani - who recently released her new single, 'Wild Side' - shared: "This past year, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. "For me, this work that I was able to put out into the world really saved me, to be completely honest. " Even just being on FaceTime with her as she's going through her chemo and her radiation, and just wanting me to update her on how this video is going, and how the music is coming, it really got her through that. It got my

family through the darkest time of our lives." The pop star has, at times, felt guilty about working amid Andrea's health battle. However, Normani - whose mother first underwent cancer treatment when she was just four years old - has been urged by her family to keep writing and recording new music. She explained: "For it to happen all over again, in such a pivotal and heightened moment for my career ... there are so many moments I was like, 'I need to be at home' and I felt guilty for not being able to be physically there with her. "I remember being in the doctor's office with her after she had her surgery in October. She's like, 'Baby, I'm gonna be fine. What I need you to do is focus. I need you to be Normani. I need you to be the best version of yourself. I need you to continue to work hard. We gotta get this music out. We have the world to impact.' She was just like, 'I'm gonna be fine.' Anything that my mom says, to be completely honest, I believe."

Seal dating former personal assistant

Seal is dating his former personal assistant Laura Strayer. The 58-year-old star - who split from former wife Heidi Klum in 2012 after seven years of marriage - is in a relationship with Laura, who was previously employed by Seal and Heidi in 2006, and now works in the music industry. Seal and Laura have been spotted looking loved up on a romantic getaway to France this summer. A family source told The New



York Post's Page Six: "I literally had no idea that Seal was dating Laura until I saw photos. "Of course, we all want him to be happy - but it's definitely ironic that he's dating the help when he had such strong feelings about Heidi seeing Martin [Kristen - Heidi's former bodyguard]." Seal memorably lashed out when it was revealed that Heidi was dating her bodyguard Martin after the marriage split. He fumed to TMZ at the time: "I would have preferred Heidi show a little bit more class and at least wait until we separated first before deciding to fornicate with the help, as it were ... But I guess you now all have the answer that you've been looking for over the past seven months." Heidi later said: "Yes ... he has a very unique choice of words. I'm used to them. I don't know. I don't love that. Obviously, it's not true. I've never looked at another man while I was with him. And it's hard when you think that he thinks that, you don't know ... He was hurt."



Kim Kardashian West trying to be 'stricter' on kids

Kim Kardashian West is trying to be "stricter" with her children. The 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star has admitted she's too soft on her four children North, eight, Saint, five, Chicago, three, and Psalm, two - whom she has with her estranged husband Kanye West - and usually gives into them when they ask for something, but she's determined to lay down some ground rules now that they are getting older. Speaking in September's Parent magazine, Kim said: "When my kids want something, typically candy, they give me this look directly in my eyes that cuts right through me. I usually give in and give them what they want.

I'm naturally very calm, which I think translates into my parenting. I don't get super stressed or impatient, which I think is definitely a superpower when you have three kids age five and under running



around." And the 40-year-old businesswoman loves that her children share such a strong bond because it reminds her of growing up with her siblings Kourtney, 42, Khloe, 37, and Rob, 34. She explained: "They get along so well and have so much love for each other. It reminds me of growing up with Kourtney, Khloe and Rob. There's something so special about having a big family, and I'm happy my babies get that experience the way I did. "It's so amazing to watch my kids grow and develop into their own people. I get the kids outside as much as possible, and I'm good at creating activities for them. They're always playing sports or working on projects." Kim is also trying her best to keep things amicable between her and Kanye - whom she filed for divorce from in February after almost seven years of marriage - for the sake of their young children. A source said recently: "Kanye and her have been co-parenting successfully and both of them want what's best for the kids."



Emmy Awards downsized due to COVID concerns

Not all Emmy nominees will be able to attend the awards ceremony. The 73rd annual Emmy Awards will take place on September 19, one week after the Creative Arts Emmys on September 11 and 12 but ceremonies for both have been scaled back, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emmys - which are set to be hosted by comedian and actor Cedric the Entertainer - will now take place outdoors and tickets have been limited. A statement on the Emmys website explained: "We are excited to be welcoming live audiences back to the Emmys this year. However, following discussions with health and safety experts for Los Angeles County and the Emmy ceremonies, the Television Academy has concluded that we must further limit the number of nominees attending the Creative Arts Emmys on September 11 and 12 as well as the 73rd Emmys on September 19. "Although invitations have just been mailed out, nominated teams of three or more will now be limited to no more than four tick-

ets per nomination. Unfortunately, this means not all nominees will be able to attend this year's awards. "We recommend those on nominated teams coordinate between themselves and identify how they will allot their four tickets prior to filling out the RSVP form. The Television Academy will reach out to any nominated teams who have already responded requesting more than four tickets." The decision to grant only four tickets to each production will mean that some nominees from shows including 'The Crown', 'The Mandalorian', 'WandaVision', 'The Handmaid's Tale', 'Saturday Night Live' and 'Ted Lasso', which all have 20 or more nominations, will miss out. To protect against the COVID-19 Delta Variant, the Emmys ceremonies will be held outside. The statement continued: "In addition, the Television Academy and CBS have decided to host all ceremonies, including the Creative Arts, on the Event Deck at L.A. LIVE, directly behind the Microsoft Theater. This will provide an opportunity to use an 'indoor/outdoor' setting and more socially-distanced audience seating. "The health and safety of our nominees is of paramount importance. Conversations are ongoing and we will be in touch with further information. Thank you for your understanding as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 Delta Variant." - Bang Showbiz



Jason Momoa bans his kids from acting

Jason Momoa has banned his children from going into acting. The 42-year-old actor may have a successful collection of blockbusters and TV shows under his belt, but he doesn't want his daughter Lola, 14, and son Nakoa, 12 - whom he has with his wife Lisa Bonet - to follow in his footsteps because he doesn't think they're "strong" enough to deal with the pressure and he will do whatever he can to ensure they don't pursue a career in the glamorous industry. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', he said: "Aw man, one of them wants to do it and I'm not a

fan. I don't want them to. I don't know. I'll try my damndest to keep 'em out of it. I love storytelling, I love theatrical things, I like directing and filmmaking, but I just want them to, you know, really to go for other things. If they [really] want to, maybe. But I don't want them to get into acting. It's very hard on people and I don't want them to have that pressure. I'm tough, I can handle it, but I wouldn't want to put someone I love [through] that." And the 'Aquaman' star is even trying to branch out from acting himself and, instead, land a few more directing roles. He explained: "I've been directing for a while now, so it's been a passion. I love to see the full project, not just be in one piece of it. But it's nice also to just do the actor stuff. I'm happy I can do both." But, although he's planning to focus more on directing, Jason - who is the stepfather of actress Zoe Kravitz - is determined to make a film with his friend Wayne 'The Rock' Johnson "one of these days."

Lifestyle | Gossip

STEFANI GETS TOUCHING NOTE FROM WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER WANG



Gwen Stefani received a touching note and a bunch of white roses from Vera Wang thanking the pop star for letting her design her wedding dresses. The 51-year-old singer shared an Instagram Story in which she showed off the large bouquet of flowers she received from Wang along with a message expressing the designer's joy at being able to contribute the gowns for her nuptials to Blake Shelton in July. The note read: "Dearest Gwen, what a pleasure to have shared in your happiness by choosing us to dress you, not once, but twice. "As an enormous fan, on behalf of me and my team, again thank you. Wishing you both a lifetime of happiness! XVERA." Gwen, 51, then posted a video thanking

Wang, 72, for her dresses and her sweet gesture. The No Doubt star said: "Wow Vera! Thank you so much for the gorgeous flowers, but the dress ... like, it was literally a dream come true to be able to work with you and get married to Blake in your gown. I love you so much. Thank you!" Gwen also shared a video which seemed to show one of her wedding dresses stored in a large white box with the words "My Wedding Gown" inscribed at the top and "Fragile. Handle with Care" on the side. Wang's two creations were inspired by Gwen's personality and music. The wedding dress that the 'Hollaback Girl' hitmaker wore on her big day when she said "I do" was a custom lily-white silk georgette gown with a plunging neckline,

cut away back, fitted bodice and high low hand tumbled tulle skirt. The dress that Gwen wore at her reception was a lily-white Italian silk crepe and hand tumbled tulle strapless mini-dress which featured a pair of hand-sewn love birds symbolizing Gwen and Blake's love for one another. Gwen and Blake, 45, tied the knot in a chapel set up in the back garden on the country singer's Oklahoma ranch on July 3 in front of 40 of their closest friends and family members, including her sons Kingston, 15, Zuma, 12, and Apollo, seven, who she shares with her ex-husband Gavin Rossdale.

Beyonce likes to match outfits on family vacations

Beyonce loves to "co-ordinate" her outfits with her kids on vacation. The 'Formation' singer - who has children Blue Ivy, nine, and Rumi and Sir, four, with husband Jay-Z - explained how she decided to add children's sizes to her IVY PARK x adidas collaboration because her own offspring like to "match" with what she's wearing so she had been putting them into the smallest garments available until now. She told Harper's Bazaar's Icon issue: "I'm excited that IVY PARK x adidas will now feature kids' clothing with this drop. "On our family vacations, we love to coordinate our outfits. My kids are usually on set with me for shoots, and we'd find ourselves putting them in extra-extras-small so we could match. So it is a natural progression for IVY PARK to introduce a selection of key silhouettes in children's sizing." The 39-year-old star has taken inspiration from her own childhood for the collection, as well as the "overlooked history" of Black American cowboys. She explained: "This collection is a mixture of my childhood growing up in Texas and a bit of American history. I grew up going to the Houston rodeo every year. "It was this amazing diverse and multicultural experience where there was something for every member of the family, including great performances, Houston-style fried Snickers, and fried turkey legs. "One of my inspirations came from the overlooked history of the American Black cowboy.



Many of them were originally called cowhands, who experienced great discrimination and were often forced to work with the worst, most temperamental horses. They took their talents and formed the Soul Circuit. "Through time, these Black rodeos showcased incredible performers and helped us reclaim our place in western history and culture. "We were inspired by the culture and swag of the Houston rodeo. We combined classic elements with the athleticwear of IVY PARK x adidas, adding our own spin, monogrammed denim, chaps, and cowhide."

Beckinsale to front scorpion venom-infused skincare line

Kate Beckinsale is the new face of a scorpion venom-infused skincare line. The 48-year-old actress has been unveiled as the spokesperson for Mv'l Skin Solutions and will help launch their range of six products - a recovery cream, hyaluronic cream, night cream, serum, eye cream and collagen mask - in the autumn. Mv'l's CEO, Rick Langley, is also the founder of the world's largest blue scorpion farm, and the company believe the blue scorpion venom has many benefits for the skin. Their website claims: "This peptide has been clinically proven to help stimulate natural collagen production, fight free radicals, help regenerate symptoms of damaged skin and smooth the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles." The products will retail between \$175 to \$250. Kate is no stranger to unusual beauty treatments as she previously credited her youthful complexion to a serum containing 'liquefied foreskins'. The 'Jolt' actress underwent a bizarre £465 facial that includes a special epidermal growth factor (EGF) serum - which uses stem cells from the cloned foreskins of South Korean infants - to revitalize her skin following a long-haul flight and said that the procedure was "amaz-



ing". Taking to Instagram to show off the results, she said: "After a long flight I do like to lie down and be covered in a mask of liquefied cloned foreskins-frankly who doesn't? "Thank you @georgialouisesk for an amazing facial. I especially liked you reassuring me it would be "light on pe***" as it was my first time x" (sic) And she is also a fan of the vampire facial, where a shot of Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) is injected into the skin. She recently said: "I do like PRP, when they take your blood [plasma and re-inject it into your skin]. That's a real thing, from your own body. But not with scary poisonous things!"

Sophie Anderton is married

The 44-year-old model and reality TV personality has finally tied the knot with Count Kaz Balinski-Jundzill, 52, after they were forced to postpone the ceremony three times during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sophie told the Daily Mail's Richard Eden last week: "Yesterday, I married my best friend, soulmate and lifetime partner in crime. I cannot believe after so many obstacles and date changes, I am officially Mrs Kaz Balinski." The pair wed in Ireland, where Kaz owns a 1,500-acre estate, Glendalough House, in County Wicklow. The couple now live in Wicklow, with Sophie previously explaining: "I moved here in July 2018. I was



travelling a lot back and forth there on in but I absolutely love it here in Ireland. "I was staying with Kaz, my fiance, for weekends and we just decided that actually we wanted to be together. "Even though it's an hour flight, the long distance was taking its toll so it's actually the best move I've ever made and I absolutely love it here. "Who knew? I'm a country girl at heart. "I think the backdrop actually outshines me because it's one of the most incredibly beautiful places I've ever lived." And she previously said Kaz - who was previously married to TV chef Lorraine Pascale - was "worth waiting for". Sophie explained: "I'm really looking forward to getting married and having children. I've been waiting for someone to be an amazing father to my children, and it was so worth the wait."

Tom Hardy dreamed of opening a cafe

Tom Hardy dreamed of opening a 'sourdough cafe' during lockdown. The 'Venom: Let There Be Carnage' actor - who has two children, aged five and two, with wife Charlotte Riley and a 13-year-old son from a previous relationship - enjoyed the "commitment" of making his own bread while isolating at home amid the coronavirus pandemic and it led to him imagining an alternative career for himself. He said: "Fifteen-minute workouts in the garden, home-schooling and making sourdough. I still have the leaven! You have to feed that every day. That's a commitment. I've actually managed to back it up so I've got two. "Just in case someone drops one on the floor or the jar explodes and it's like, 'That's a year-and-a-half's work!' "I was thinking I might open up a sourdough cafe?. Coffee and sourdough and jiu-jitsu and AA meetings. You can bring your dog." The 43-year-old star has had a lot of



time to reflect over the last year and has learned to care less about what people think of him. He told the new issue of Esquire UK magazine: "I had an opportunity to observe the world and my own

behaviors and how I lived my life and what's important and what isn't. I spent a lot of time fighting the concept of 'grown-up'. I think all the baddies and all those sorts of 'grrrr' characters that I've played, I'm not that. The whole acting thing has been kind of peacock-ish, counter to what I am. "What's most indelible on my memory are things that are shocking or scary so it's very easy to mimic them. It's actually much harder to mimic things that are soft and nice and intimate if you don't grow up in that way. "Now I'm getting older these things are becoming less scary. So it's not caring so much what people think." And Tom feels he has "less reason" to work now because he'd rather be around his family. He said: "I think there's less reason to work, ultimately, because the life-drive is to be with the kids and to be fit and healthy and eat well and stuff. If you've got a roof over your head and a bed underneath you and food in the

fridge, how much is enough? Because it's not a dress rehearsal, life, is it? It's going out live. This is one-time." The 'Legend' actor is fine with the idea of "disappearing" now because he has "established" himself and his career. He said: "I'm not so worried to disappear now. When I was a youngster you had to be heard, otherwise you'd be invisible. Once you've established yourself you can stop making that much noise. "Because you're here now, what are you going to do? And what is enough? What do you need? What do my family need? So that is very relevant. "I think everybody needs a little bit of their own thing that they do. I like jiu-jitsu and sourdough. That fulfills me." The Autumn 2021 issue of Esquire UK is on sale from 11th August.

Halle Berry 'surprised' offers didn't flood in after Oscar win

Halle Berry found it "surprising" that she wasn't overloaded with work offers after winning an Oscar. The 54-year-old actress made history as the first Black woman to take the Best Actress Academy Award in 2002 for her role in 'Monster's Ball' and she admitted the "fundamental change" she anticipated in her working life didn't happen. She told Entertainment Weekly: "It was surprising. Because I thought they were going to just back up the truck and drop them off at my house, right? "When you have a historic win like that, you think, 'Oh, this is going to fundamentally change.' It did fundamentally change me, but it didn't change my place in the business overnight. "I still had to go back to work. I still had to try to fight to make a way out of no way." The 'Bruised' star - who has children Nahla, 13, and Maceo, seven, from previous relationships - admitted she's sometimes had to take on

a film role just because it pays the bills as the dream roles she's looking for don't always come along. She said: "It's like, okay, that's a film I can't say I'm totally in love with, but this isn't a hobby. It's how I take care of my children. But I try to keep that sense of wonder and stay curious. Because being a black woman, I haven't always had parts that I absolutely love." And Halle illustrated her point by mentioning 'Catwoman', the superhero story which was widely panned and earned her a Razzie award. She said of the blockbuster: "For me it was one of the biggest paydays of my whole life, which, there's nothing wrong with that... I don't want to feel like 'Oh, I can only do award-worthy stuff.' What is an award-worthy performance?"



Christina Ricci is pregnant

The 41-year-old actress - who has six-year-old Freddie with former husband James Heerdegen - shared a photo of her sonogram on Instagram on Tuesday, a month after her divorce was signed off, as she celebrated the fact her life "keeps getting better". She wrote alongside the photo: "Life keeps getting better. [party popper emoji] (sic)" It has not been confirmed who the father of the 'Addams Family' star's baby is, however, according to TMZ, her hairstylist Mark Hampton shared the same photos and caption on his account. Christina filed for divorce from James - who she married in 2013 - a year ago following an alleged domestic battery incident. Six months later, she was granted a domestic violence restraining order, which means her estranged husband can't go within 100 yards of her. The actress stated the alleged abuse began in 2013 when she found out she was pregnant and she claimed James has also threatened to "kill" her on multiple occasions. She wrote in a declaration: "I began to feel extremely isolated." She also

recalled a family vacation to New Zealand where her spouse "said something that made me think" he "could kill me." She wrote: "He said the only way he could feel sorry for me is if I were dismembered into small pieces. "That night I hid all the knives in the cabin where we were staying. I feared for my life and the life of our son. I slept in a separate bedroom with Freddie, and I locked the door." The filmmaker's lawyer insisted at the time that his client "unequivocally denies all allegations of abuse made by Ms. Ricci as having occurred in 2020." James had also sought his own restraining order, in which he accused Christina of domestic violence and excessive drinking, but it was denied by the courts.



Lifestyle | Features



Actress/Singer Jennifer Hudson attends the Los Angeles premiere of 'Respect' in Westwood, California. — AFP photos



Actress/Singer Jennifer Hudson (right) and director Liesl Tommy attend the Los Angeles premiere of 'Respect'.



(From left) MGM Motion Picture Group Chairman Michael De Luca, MGM Board Chairman Kevin Ulrich, MGM Motion Picture Group President Pamela Abdy, Liesl Tommy, and Jennifer Hudson attend the premiere of MGM's 'Respect' at Regency Village Theatre.

JENNIFER HUDSON SHOULDERS ARETHA FRANKLIN'S DEMONS IN BIOPIC 'RESPECT'

Aretha Franklin decided Jennifer Hudson was the natural woman to play her in musical biopic "Respect," personally hand-picking the singer-actress a few years before her death in 2018. The late "Queen of Soul" shared not just a phenomenal vocal ability with the "Dreamgirls" star, but also a deep vein of personal tragedy. As the movie shows, Franklin's childhood was shattered at just nine years old by her mother's death, and her own pregnancy at the age of 12. She later battled a controlling father, a violent husband and alcohol addiction.

Hudson, who rose to fame on "American Idol" and won an Oscar at age 25, dealt with her own horrors when her mother, brother and nephew were murdered by her sister's estranged husband in 2008. "I needed to be in a certain place, and to have gone through what I've experienced in life, to be able to portray her," Hudson told a Los Angeles screening ahead of the film's release this Friday. "At least at this point that's how I feel." Hudson's own tragedy had not yet struck when she first nervously met with her idol Franklin to discuss the nascent film project some 15 years ago.

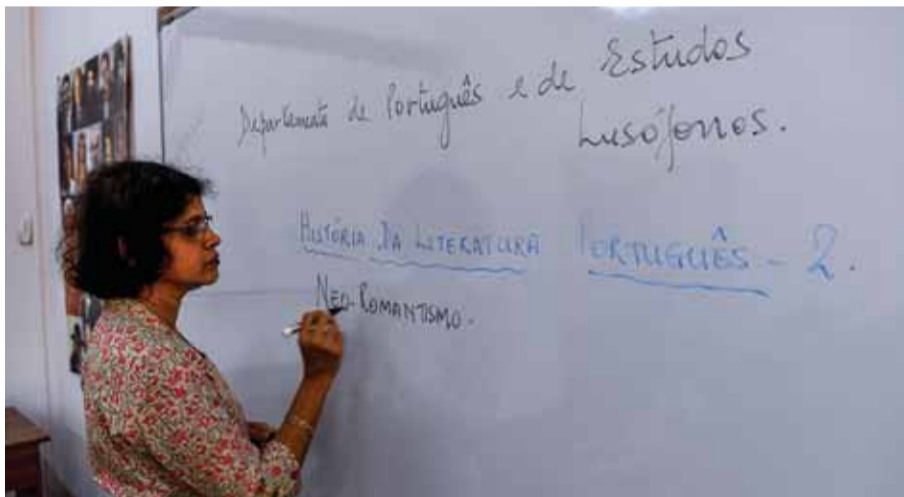
Eight years would pass before Franklin-having considered other contenders including Halle Berry-called and told Hudson she had the part. "To play the Queen of Soul is nothing you're ever going to get used to. I'm still taking it in doses," said Hudson. The choice of Hudson has been a hit, with her soaring performance already tipped for awards recognition, even if the film itself has drawn lukewarm early reviews. In a departure from most musical biopics, Hudson sang and recorded live on set Franklin's hits such as "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)," "You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman" and of course "Respect." Hudson also learned to play piano for the part, which involved 83 costume changes and 11 different wigs-including Franklin's signature beehive look.

which failed to land a single hit. Franklin was dropped by Columbia Records before finding her gospel-inflected voice through sessions at a remote Alabama recording studio during which she drew on her own dark past. "I think it was her ability to translate her pain for an audience of millions," the film's screenwriter Tracey Scott Wilson told AFP at its Los Angeles premiere.

"She was able to take her own personal pain and sing all types of songs about it-songs of empowerment, sexy-romantic songs. She was always able to live her life through her music." The movie also covers Franklin's long involvement with the civil rights movement, having grown up the daughter of an influential Baptist minister (played by Forest Whitaker) who

counted Martin Luther King Jr among his family friends. Franklin often sang at political rallies, and performed at King's 1968 funeral-just as Hudson would ultimately perform at the diva's own memorial.

"Being in her position at a time like that-being a Black woman, and then being as close as she was to Dr King-and then having to get out there and still lift everyone else up... think about the pain she was going through in that moment," said Hudson. "I think of moments like that," added Hudson, who-like Franklin-began singing in gospel choirs, and has credited her faith with helping her get through tragedy. "Because too often people forget icons and legends are human beings too and they have a life." — AFP



In this photograph Lorraine Alberto, professor of Portuguese language at Goa University, writes on a whiteboard as she leads an online class at Panaji in Goa. — AFP photos

After 60 years of Indian rule, Goa's disappearing Portuguese legacy

As Lorraine Alberto begins her Portuguese class at Goa University, students from the former colony are in short supply. Across Goa, a tiny coastal state once administered by Lisbon, there is little appetite for the territory's 450 years of European heritage after a few short generations of Indian rule. Ramshackle colonial homes and Bollywood's increasing cultural dominance portend the disappearance of local history in a place where speaking Portuguese was once a passport to status and power. "My children don't speak it at all," Alberto told AFP. "They just don't see the point of learning it."

enthusiasm has not been inherited by the next generation.

"My wife and I still speak Portuguese out of habit, but never with our children," Velho told AFP. Across the state, homes influenced by old Portuguese design trends are falling into disrepair or being pulled down to make way for apartment blocks. The gradual disappearance of covered terraces and mother-of-pearl shell windows-built to diffuse harsh sunlight-is not just a loss to architecture, said author Heta Pandit. These houses are evidence of Goan history, they are capsules of our culture," she said. Only a handful of traditional homes have been earmarked for protection from development or destruction, Pandit added.

'I just wasn't interested'

Some Goans have nonetheless found themselves drawn into a relationship with their heritage, even against their own early inclinations. At a recent outdoor concert in a coastal village, dozens of people gathered to listen to Goan singer Sonia Shirsat, an accomplished performer of traditional Portuguese fado music. The 40-year-old specializes in the melancholy, guitar-driven genre, which was born at the turn of the 19th century and was in recent years recognized by UNESCO for its "intangible cultural heritage".

Shirsat paused between songs to patiently explain the meaning behind each track, knowing many in the enraptured audience spoke little if any Portuguese. It's a role she is well-suited to play, tracing her own journey from a teenager who refused to learn Portuguese to a fado evangelist who is now training others to follow in her footsteps. "My mother tried to teach me the language, but I just wasn't interested," she told AFP. That changed when Shirsat met a Portuguese guitarist who told her that her rich, velvety voice was ideal for the genre.

She decided to move to Lisbon for training, becoming the first Indian to stage a solo fado concert there in 2008. Shirsat has since performed all over the world, sometimes incorporating a cross-cultural element with the use of Indian instruments like the sitar. All fado songs are infused with a sense of yearning for the past, but in Goa, they also serve as a bridge between two eras. "Fado doesn't just talk about what is lost, it also talks about what is to come," she said. "It has lived in Goa for over 100 years. If we don't preserve it, it is as if we are killing a part of ourselves." — AFP



In this photograph Lorraine Alberto, professor of Portuguese language at Goa University, speaks to her students during an online class at Panaji in Goa.

Those alive in 1961, when Indian troops marched into Goa and incorporated it into the rest of the country, recall an overnight transformation. India's exit from the British Empire in 1947 spurred many Goans to demand an end to Portuguese rule, but few expected so much to change so quickly. "It was a very strange feeling... The changes came so fast," said Honorato Velho, a retired school principal. The 78-year-old once lived next to the grandfather of Antonio Costa, Portugal's current prime minister, and he fondly remembers a childhood peppered with European and local influences. But his

Berlin throws a party to drum up vaccine tempo

It's a typical Berlin scene: A long line of sharply dressed people waiting round the corner to get into a club. The thud of music from inside the venue, strict entry controls and the chance of waking up with a headache the morning after are all familiar, too. Only, on a rainy evening in the east Berlin neighborhood of Alt-Treptow, the draw isn't just dance music but vaccines as well. The German capital renowned for its clubbing scene is throwing three vaccination parties this week, giving patrons jabs to the sound of electronic music. The site is Arena club-which had been transformed into one of Berlin's five main vaccination centers over the last year, after it, like other similar venues, was forced shut to curb coronavirus transmission.

After delivering well over a million jabs a day at its peak, Germany is now seeing the take-up for inoculation against the coronavirus slow dramatically, according to figures from the Robert Koch Institute for disease control and prevention. In a bid to incentivize more to take the jab, Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday agreed with regional leaders to end free COVID tests from October 11.

In the Arena club, the scene is like a high-school disco with very limited dancing. Patients who have just had their vac-



A DJ performs as people arrive to receive a vaccination against the coronavirus.

cines sit spaced out on chairs under strobing lights, while one of the DJs-some of them well known figures of Berlin's underground and some who have volunteered in the vaccination center itself-works away on a set of turntables. Some are in full party gear, others in their regular clothes. The idea to combine dance music and vaccines was hatched by Markus Nisch, the Arena vaccination centre manager for the German Red Cross. "We had relatively low expectations at the start," he says. "But the queue goes all the way down there," he adds, pointing to dozens of social-distancing people waiting in line. In all, about 420 people were vaccinated against the coronavirus at the Arena centre on Monday, the Berlin ministry for health said. The word was spread on social media. "I found it on Instagram, people were posting it widely," says Olga Kapuskina, 27, who recently moved to the

city. "It's a Berlin experience to get vaccinated at a party," she adds.

As of Tuesday, 52 million people in Germany-or 62.5 percent of the population-have had at least one dose of the vaccine. Reaching the remaining 37.5 percent of the population-many of them younger-is a key challenge for officials. Just vaccinating older citizens won't be enough, Dilek Kalayci, Berlin's minister for health, says outside the Arena center. "We need to reach younger people now and to motivate them, convince them to get themselves vaccinated." Compulsory vaccination is unlikely to be introduced. Instead, officials are resorting to more ingenious means to get doses distributed. Berlin has been offering vaccines at Ikea, as well as organizing the three nights' festivities at Arena. — AFP

Fareah Al-Saqqaf awarded the 'Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy'

Within a small reception ceremony held at the Italian Embassy in Jabriya, the Ambassador Carlo Baldocci, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Italy, awarded Fareah Al-Saqqaf the award of "Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy". In attendance were a number of LOYAC's and LAPA's board members, as well as Loyac's youth members. The ceremony included a speech by the ambassador, in which he expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of Fareah Al-Saqqaf during her

career since the establishment of LOYAC and her great efforts in strengthening the cultural and sports cooperation represented by the football school AC Milan, which she sought to establish with her team since 2009, which achieved remarkable success and became the most distinguished among football schools in Kuwait.

Ambassador Baldocci expressed his deep impression and admiration for Al-Saqqaf's interaction and sympathy with the tragic situation that Italy experienced due to the Corona pandemic in March 2020. He said: "Al-Saqqaf showed great sympathy with the suffering of the Italian people, and she responded to our idea of collecting messages from Kuwaitis in the Italian language that support the Italian people in their ordeal. Her response was quick and enthusiastic in a way that exceeded our expectations, as she was able to collect a large number of supportive and sympathetic messages from different spectrums of the Kuwaiti and Arab people and from different age groups in a

very short time. The video that we published with her help achieved great success and spread because of its spontaneity and honesty.

As for Christiana Baldocci, the Ambassador's wife, she said that from the first moment she visited LOYAC and met Al-Saqqaf, she felt the familiarity and belonging that she even volunteered at the FAD Arts Festival. She added: "What LAPA is doing under the leadership of Al-Saqqaf is a great work, and my experience with LAPA was unique and enjoyable. Al-Saqqaf is very interested in building bridges between cultures and she always looks forward to projects that bring the East and the West closer, which is what we also look forward to".

In her reply to the ambassador's speech, Al-Saqqaf expressed her appreciation and gratitude for the initiative of the ambassador to nominate her for this award, and her thanks for the President of the Republic of Italy for awarding her this reward, she said: "I thank Ambassador Carlo Baldocci for nominating me, and I also thank the President of the Republic of Italy for this appreciation that I would like to dedicate to every member of the LOYAC family, both present and absent, because this appreciation is for all of them, as each of them had a role in our success in strengthening the Italian-Kuwaiti relations". "There are still a lot of projects that we planned before the pandemic and that stopped because of it, but we are determined to implement them as soon as we return to normal life", she added.



Sports

Westbrook says Lakers role to 'make game easy' for James

LOS ANGELES: Star guard Russell Westbrook says his role with his new Los Angeles Lakers teammates will be simple — and it includes making things easier for superstar LeBron James. The Lakers landed the Westbrook in a blockbuster deal with the Washington Wizards with hopes of a "Big Three" lineup of James, Westbrook and Anthony Davis could push them back to the top in 2022 after they relinquished the NBA title in 2021. On Tuesday Westbrook was officially introduced, the Southern California native saying it was a "blessing" to land in Los Angeles where he had many memories of Lakers glory.

"I'm coming to a championship caliber team and my job is make sure that I'm able to make (James's) game easy for him, and I'll find ways to do that throughout the game," Westbrook vowed. "As it pertains to ball handling and all that, it really doesn't matter. There are many different ways you can impact the game without having the ball in your hands."

James and Davis led the Lakers to the 2019 NBA title, but their push for a repeat was hindered by injury. Westbrook was the 2017 NBA Most Valuable Player with Oklahoma City, where he played from 2008 through 2019. He was traded to Houston then traded last December to Washington, where he helped the Wizards reach the playoffs for the first time since 2018.

The Nine-time NBA All-Star, who won Olympic gold in 2012, has led the NBA in assists in three of the past four seasons and was the league scoring champion in 2015 and 2017. In 2017 he set a record with 42 triple doubles in a season — amassing double-digit stats in points,

assists and rebounds — in 42 games — and joined Oscar Robertson as the only players to average a triple double for a full campaign.

Westbrook managed the feat in three of the next four seasons as well, his record career tally of triple doubles now standing at 184. But despite the relentless Westbrook's all-around excellence, his teams have combined to win just one playoff series in the last five years. Some pundits have wondered how he'll mesh with James and Davis. Westbrook said that won't be a problem. "I'm always looking at the roster and seeing how I can make other guys better," he said.

Schroder joins Celtics

Elsewhere, German point guard Dennis Schroder said he is signing a one-year contract with the Boston Celtics, ending a one-year spell with the Los Angeles Lakers. "I'm proud to announce that for the 2021-22 season I'll be playing with the Boston Celtics!" Schroder wrote on Instagram on Tuesday. "This is one of the best franchises in NBA history and an honor to put on the green and white and do what I love! I'm going out there every night and leaving it all on the floor for the city!! Who's ready?!"

ESPN reported Schroder's free agent deal with the Celtics is for the \$5.9 million mid-level exception, and it comes after he reportedly turned down a four-year, \$84 million extension offer from the Lakers in March to see if he could do better as a free agent.

The 27-year-old arrived in Los Angeles in a trade from the Oklahoma City Thunder prior to last season. He averaged 15.4 points per game for



LOS ANGELES: (From left) General manager Rob Pelinka, Russell Westbrook and head coach Frank Vogel of the Los Angeles Lakers pose for a picture during a press conference at Staples Center on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

the Lakers in a season that saw him miss two weeks late in the campaign because of the league's COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

The Lakers, who won the 2020 NBA title in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, were

eliminated in the first round of the 2021 playoffs by the Phoenix Suns. In Boston, Schroder will bolster a Celtics team that traded four-time All-Star point guard Kemba Walker to Oklahoma City. —AFP

Foot injury fells Nadal as top seed Medvedev wins in Toronto

TORONTO: A nagging left foot injury forced Rafael Nadal out of the ATP Toronto Masters on Tuesday as top seed Daniil Medvedev rallied to reach the third round. Nadal, a five-time champion in Canada, pulled the plug on his participation before his scheduled second-round opener with plans to return to Spain for treatment of the injury which kept him from Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics.

"I've had this issue for a couple of months," he said. "It is not a happy situation after all the success that I had here in Canada. I need to go back (to Mallorca) and try to find a way to be better again. With this pain, I'm not able to enjoy (playing)."

"I believe that I am not able to compete at the level that I need because the foot doesn't allow me to move the way that I need," added Nadal, who was the second seed in the hardcourt tournament. Top-seeded Russian Medvedev opened his week in the second round after a bye and staged a fightback to overhaul Kazakh Alexander Bublik 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

The Russian came back a changed man after a second-set rain delay. "I was not playing well before the rain," he said. "I was not feeling the ball and was missing on returns. I just wanted to play better - I knew I had to if I was going to win. "When we got back on court, I felt much better from the first game."

Medvedev advanced with 27 winners and 28 unforced errors in the two-hour victory. New world number three Stefanos Tsitsipas cured an extended case of the jitters with a runaway third set to finally overcome Ugo Humbert 6-3, 6-7 (13/15), 6-1.

With the win he avenged a pair of previous losses to Humbert, including in the third round of the Olympics. The Greek wasted five match points in the second set while his French opponent held on in a 23-minute tiebreaker.

But after a speedy deciding set, Tsitsipas finally prevailed on his seventh match point, finishing with 37 winners including 16 aces. "It's all about the fighting spirit," Tsitsipas said. "I don't like to give up. It was not easy out there, I had to put in a lot of effort and give my best. It didn't work out for me in the second set but nothing could stop me in the third."

Sixth seed Casper Ruud made a smooth transition to hardcourt after winning three consecutive claycourt titles, knocking out Marin Cilic 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. The Norwegian, who has moved to 10th in the rankings, won his 36th match of the season. Kei Nishikori, runner up in 2016, carried his Tokyo Olympic and Washington momentum into a 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 first-round win over Miomir Kecmanovic.

Asia's leading player, who reached the quarter-finals at the Games and followed up by reaching the semi-finals in Washington, broke the 59th-ranked Serb five times in their match lasting for just over two hours.

"My level is good, I'm playing some of my best tennis so far this year over the last couple of tournaments," Nishikori said. "I'm back on track now." Olympic silver medalist Karen Khachanov defeated Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 with 10 aces, lining up a date with 15th-seeded fellow Russian Aslan Karatsev.

American John Isner, winner of a sixth Atlanta trophy earlier this month, pounded 19 aces in his 6-4, 6-1 thrashing of Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. Serb Dusan Lajovic put out Finnish qualifier Emil Ruusuvuori 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 while Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili beat Washington semi-finalist Jenson Brooksby 2-6, 6-0, 6-4. Brooksby erupted as he was aces on match point, firing his racket angrily into advertising hoardings at the side of the court. —AFP

Kuwait Shooting Federation honors Olympic medalist



KUWAIT: Abdullah Al-Rashidi (second left) shows off his bronze medal during a ceremony the Kuwait Shooting Federation held on Tuesday to honor him following his return from Tokyo, Japan where he participated in the 2020 Olympics. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Federation honored Olympic bronze medalist Abdullah Al-Rashidi and the delegation that took part in Tokyo 2020 Olympics. On the sideline of the ceremony Tuesday, the Federation's Head Duaij Al-Otaibi said that the Kuwaiti shooters faced various difficulties during their participation in the Games due to the spread of

the COVID-19 pandemic. Otaibi hailed the political leadership's sponsorship to the Kuwaiti athletes, praising the support of the Minister of Information and the State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. Meanwhile, Rashidi thanked the federation for their support and efforts in helping the athletes prepare for the Games. —KUNA

Dance, water cannon salute for Namibian teen Olympic medalist

WINDHOEK: Namibian teen athlete and their first woman Olympic medalist Christine Mboma was given a water cannon salute, songs, dance and a carnival street parade when she touched down on Tuesday from Tokyo.

Water cannons showered the commercial jet that flew back home the 18-year-old at Hosea Kutako International airport in Windhoek, to celebrate the country's second ever Olympic medal since independence three decades ago. She disembarked the plane to the sound of the Namibian and African Union anthem played by the national police brass band.

Outside the airport, traditional dancers, bikers and sports fans joined in the frenzied celebrations before she and fellow athletes were taken to the city in a convoy of hundreds of cars and bikes in a victory parade along the main Independence Avenue that culminated

in Katurura, the capital city's largest township. Along the route, locals, some waving the country's flag, blew whistles and screamed with joy at their hero who rode in an open fire-fighters' truck — waving at her compatriots that lined the streets.

Mboma clinched a silver, producing one of the most eye-catching performances of the Tokyo Games last week, surging through a star-studded women's 200m field to claim silver in 21.81 seconds, a new under-20 world record. She is Namibia's first woman Olympic medalist and the country's second after sprinter Frankie Fredericks, a four-time Olympic silver-medalist in 1992 and 1996.

"I feel proud of being Namibian, the land of the brave," she later told a news conference. But her victory reopened debate about track and field's complex rules regarding women born with elevated testosterone.

Fellow Namibian, 18-year-old Beatrice Masilingi, who finished sixth, also impressed by reaching the 200m final in her first major competition. Both Mboma and Masilingi are determined as having differences in sexual development (DSD) — or "intersex" athletes — with naturally high testosterone levels.

Under World Athletics rules, the two sprinters' rare

each innings-at Trent Bridge.

Ashwin has five Test hundreds to his credit but with left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja making a fifty at Nottingham in a match where India's tailenders added valuable runs, Kohli told reporters: "That already makes our batting a bit deeper and the lower order contributed with the bat as well."

Star batsman Kohli, out for a golden duck at Trent Bridge, added: "We are very comfortable as a batting unit and we don't feel we might be a batsman short if Shardul doesn't play." With high temperatures forecast, the pitch may favour spin bowling, but Lord's is also where Ishant Sharma took a Test-best 7-74 during India's 95-run win in 2014.

"For us it's about finding that perfect balance but if someone like Shardul is not available, we will definitely think first about how we pick up 20 wickets not plug-in another guy who can give us some runs with the bat," said Kohli. —AFP

Spence out of Pacquiao fight with eye injury

LOS ANGELES: Manny Pacquiao's anticipated showdown with Errol Spence is off after the unbeaten American suffered a torn retina in his left eye, organizers said Tuesday. World Boxing Association welterweight champion Yordenis Ugas will replace Spence and defend his title against the 42-year-old Filipino southpaw, an eight-division world champion, on August 21 in Las Vegas. Ugas had been scheduled to defend his title on the undercard.

"I'm very disappointed that I won't be able to fight Manny Pacquiao on August 21," Spence, the International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Council champion, said in a statement. "I was excited about the fight and the event. Unfortunately, the doctors found a tear in my left eye and said I needed to get surgery on it ASAP and that there was no way I could fight with my eye in that condition." Spence discovered he had a torn retina during a pre-fight medical examination by the Nevada State Athletic Commission in Las Vegas on Monday, organizers said. He has returned to his home in Texas for treatment. Pacquiao, 62-7 with two draws and 39 knockouts, last fought in July 2019 when he beat American Keith Thurman for the WBA version of the 147-pound division throne.

But the Philippine senator was stripped of the crown in January due to inactivity. While preparing for the bout with longtime trainer Freddy Roach in Los Angeles, Pacquiao insisted the layoff had "helped my body and my mind a lot. "This time around, I'm as excited as ever and feeling like I'm young again," he said. —AFP



TOKYO: Silver medalist Namibia's Christine Mboma celebrates during the medal ceremony for the women's 200m event during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on August 4, 2021. —AFP

physiology is deemed to give them an unfair competitive advantage in track events ranging between 400m and one mile. Neighboring South Africa's two-time Olympic 800m champion Caster Semenya, who is also classified as a DSD athlete, failed to defend her middle-distance crown in Tokyo following a requirement to lower her testosterone level. —AFP



LONDON: India's Rohit Sharma (left) gestures after a net session during training ahead of the second Test match between England and India at Lord's cricket ground in London yesterday. —AFP

Sports

Sancho, Varane arrivals raise expectations for Solskjaer at Manchester United

MANCHESTER: Manchester United ended last season with disappointment on the field and uprising among their support off it, but the rancor has dissipated as two major signings have allowed the Red Devils to look ahead to the new campaign with renewed confidence. Jadon Sancho's arrival at Old Trafford from Borussia Dortmund was a drawn out saga two years in the making, but United moved quickly to secure Raphael Varane from Real Madrid.

An outlay of over £100 million (\$139 million) has temporarily at least quelled the anger directed at the club's American owners, the Glazer family, for their attempt to form a breakaway Super League and a perceived lack of investment in the club since a controversial leveraged takeover in 2005. United's Premier League clash with Liverpool was postponed in May as fans stormed the pitch before kick-off at a time when they were still shut out from the stadium due to coronavirus restrictions.

With restrictions now eased, Saturday could see the first full house of 76,000 at Old Trafford for 17 months when Leeds visit on the opening weekend of the Premier League season. But planned protests against the Glazers have been muted with the focus instead on what Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men can

achieve once the action gets underway.

Better prepared

Despite defeat on penalties to Villarreal in the Europa League final in May to stretch United's wait for a trophy to four years, Solskjaer was handed a new three-year contract last month. The Norwegian has been rewarded for steady progress in his two-and-a-half years in charge.

For the first time since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013, United have finished in the Premier League top four in two consecutive seasons to secure the lucrative source of Champions League revenue that has allowed the English giants to continue making marquee signings like Sancho and Varane.

However, after a finishing second to Manchester City last season, the pressure is on Solskjaer to end an eight-year wait to win the title. "We've gone from third to second and a lot closer in points; we've gone from three semi-finals to a final and one kick away from winning, so it's about taking the next step now," said Solskjaer. "That's the challenge."

United are at least far better prepared for that challenge than they were 12 months ago. A rapid

turnaround between seasons caused by the pandemic and a lack of reinforcements contributed to three defeats in their opening six league games to leave a mountain to climb.

"Transfer-wise, we've done our business early and I'm very pleased with what we've done," added Solskjaer. "I felt we lost too many points early on (last season). From November 1 until the Leicester game in May, we only lost one league game. That's the consistency we want to see again."

A favorable opening run of Southampton, Wolves, Newcastle, West Ham, Aston Villa and Everton to follow Leeds' visit offers Solskjaer's men the chance at a flying start they will need to get the better of a strong pack of title contenders.

City have broken the Premier League transfer record to sign Jack Grealish for £100 million and could do so again before the end of the month in their bid to land England captain Harry Kane from Tottenham. Chelsea are set to add Romelu Lukaku to a squad that won the Champions League in May, while Liverpool are expected to bounce back after an injury-ravaged season.

Since Ferguson's departure sent United into a spiral, they have rarely boasted a squad with the



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

quality and depth to sustain a title challenge. Solskjaer has admitted he has been given everything he wanted, now it is time to deliver. — AFP

Monaco reach Champions League play-offs after Sparta Prague racism row

PARIS: Monaco beat Sparta Prague 3-1 on Tuesday to reach the Champions League's play-off round, a week after the Ligue 1 club's Aurelien Tchouameni suffered racist abuse during the first leg in the Czech Republic. On Monday, Sparta said in a statement they were "deeply saddened by the incident" during their 2-0 first leg loss when Tchouameni was the subject of monkey chants after scoring the opener in the Czech capital.

After his torrid first leg experience in Prague, 21-year-old Tchouameni was again in the starting line-up for Monaco, picking up a first half yellow card before Gelson Martins and Aleksandr Golovin gave the Principality outfit a comfortable lead by the hour mark. David Moberg-Karlsson closed the gap for the visitors with less than a quarter of an hour remaining before Sofiane Diop put Monaco within 180 minutes of the Champions League group stages.

Monaco will face Shakhtar Donetsk on August 17 before the second leg a week later. The Ukrainians beat Genk 2-1 on the night to complete



MONACO: Monaco's players react at the end of the Champions League match Q3 football match between AS Monaco and AC Sparta Praha at "Louis II" stadium in Monaco, on Tuesday. — AFP

a 4-2 win on aggregate. "We've passed the first test. It wasn't as easy as that," said Monaco coach Niko Kovac.

"They (Shakhtar) will be a formidable opponent, used to the Champions League, the favourites for our match," he added. Elsewhere, PSV Eindhoven cruised past Mitiyland 4-0 over the two legs to set up a play-off against two-time champions Benfica who eased past Spartak

Moscow 3-0 over two legs, Joao Mario scoring the opener in Tuesday's 2-0 win.

Malmö beat Scottish champions Rangers 2-1 for a 4-2 overall win while Greek champions Olympiakos lost 4-1 on penalties to Bulgarians Ludogorets. That match ended 2-2 on the night which last year would have been good enough for the Greeks to progress but UEFA has done away with the away goal rule this season. — AFP

Ronaldinho wishes Messi 'many moments of joy' after PSG move

SAO PAULO: Former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Ronaldinho wished Lionel Messi "many moments of joy" on Tuesday after the Argentina attacker joined the French club from the La Liga giants. Earlier PSG announced 34-year-old Messi had signed a two-year deal with the club, making the opposite move to the one the former Brazil playmaker Ronaldinho made in 2003.

Ronaldinho, who won his only Ballon d'Or at the Camp Nou in 2005, predicted a first Champions League success for the Qatari-owned Parisians with former Real Madrid and Spain captain Sergio Ramos also heading to the French capital.

Messi and Ronaldinho played together at Barca between 2004 and 2008. "It's a great joy to have played in these two clubs and now see my friend wearing this shirt, may there be many moments of joy Leo!" he said on Twitter.

"I'm also very happy with my partner @sergiogramos on the team and a super cast. I'm feeling Champions," he added. Elsewhere, Brazil will host Argentina on September in Sao Paulo, which could pit Messi against PSG's Neymar, in a qualifying game for the 2022 World Cup. — AFP



Ronaldinho

lucky to have the best player in the world in Paris." Constatino said he had received "many calls" from people wanting to meet Messi.

Argentina's football association produced an emotional video that was circulating on social media called "Chin up champion" that began with Messi's tears at his farewell press conference in Barcelona. "The most incredible thing is that no Argentine will ever desert you, go where you go," said the video that featured scenes from Messi's career and family life.

Last month, Messi inspired Argentina to victory in the Copa America to end the country's 27-year wait for a major trophy. "PSG is a team full of (major) figures and Leo keeps saying he wants to carry on achieving things, it's the ideal team for him," Elvio Paolorusso, a former physio with Argentina and Barcelona, told AM 550 radio station. — AFP

Argentines celebrate 'new stage' in Messi's career

BUENOS AIRES: Argentines reacted with joy and pride as their national idol Lionel Messi arrived in France on Tuesday ahead of his move to Paris Saint-Germain following two decades at Barcelona. The South American country may be 11,000 kilometers from Paris but Argentines were glued to their screens following the latest developments of the world's most famous No 10. "Messi and the day of the 10: he's arrived and revolutionized Paris!" said sports newspaper Ole, referring to the day of the month and Messi's shirt number.

While Barcelona fans may be crying at the loss of their star and PSG diehards rejoicing, Argentines viewed the six-time Ballon d'Or winner's move positively. "He's come to the end of the cycle at Barcelona and it's good to broaden your horizons," Jose Iturria, a 60-year-old health worker in Buenos Aires, told AFP. "The truth is he deserves the best because he's the best player in the world."

Messi is joining other stars in Paris such as France forward Kylian Mbappe, Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, Spain center-back Sergio Ramos and Brazil's Neymar. Dario Luque, 38, said his new club will give Messi "a change of air and as he'll be surrounded by more stars... it will be good for him and the team."

Speaking to Argentine channel C5N, Argentina's Ambassador to France, Leonardo Constatino said amongst Argentines in France "there is great pride. Everyone is delighted and it's very exciting. "We're

would return again on Thursday for a fourth straight day of questioning.

"It's a little grueling for him," Renggli told AFP. "He is always having to say the same thing. The prosecutor does not want to accept that there was an oral contract between Blatter and Platini. Mr Blatter is still optimistic but it is a bit tiring for him given his medical situation. But he will continue, he is fighting for his rights. This will continue today, maybe tomorrow."

Under the Swiss Code of Criminal Procedure, in lengthy and complex proceedings, suspects "are questioned one last time before the investigation is concluded", the OAG said. While Platini's final interview with the prosecutor was in March, Blatter's hearing was postponed to August due to the retired Swiss football administrator's health. He spent two months in hospital in December and January after undergoing heart surgery.

Joseph "Sepp" Blatter was forced to stand down as FIFA president in 2015 and was banned by world football's governing for eight years, later reduced to six, over ethics breaches for authorizing what prosecutors termed a "disloyal payment" to Platini — in other words, one made in his own interests rather than FIFA's.

"The criminal proceedings against Joseph Blatter



Sepp Blatter

are now being conducted on suspicion of fraud, breach of trust and unfaithful business management," the OAG said in a statement ahead of Monday's hearing.

In his own statement ahead of the hearing, Blatter insisted the payment to Platini, 66, was above board. "It was based on an oral contract that regulated Platini's advisory activities for FIFA between 1998 and 2002," he said. "The process was correctly declared as a late payment of wages." — AFP

Nagelsmann under pressure to land Bayern's 10th straight league title

BERLIN: The new Bundesliga season starts tomorrow with new Bayern Munich head coach Julian Nagelsmann under pressure to deliver a tenth straight league title for the Bavarian giants in his first year at the helm.

With predecessor Hansi Flick having left to take charge of Germany, 34-year-old Nagelsmann now faces the biggest challenge of his young coaching career. He proved his impressive ability with stints at Hoffenheim and RB Leipzig, who he guided to the semi-finals of the Champions League in 2019/20.

But keeping the egos in Bayern's star-studded squad in check, while maintaining the club's insatiable thirst for success, will test him fully. "If I don't win anything here, it's down to me," he bluntly told the club's magazine. His first competitive game is at Borussia Moenchengladbach tomorrow to kick off the new league campaign.

Nagelsmann is still chasing his first win with Bayern after three defeats and a draw from four pre-season friendlies. A 2-2 draw against Ajax came amid losses to Cologne, Moenchengladbach and Napoli, who won 3-0 in Munich against a near full-strength Bayern side.

Having only celebrated his birthday last month, Nagelsmann is a year younger than club captain Manuel Neuer and only 13 months older than star striker Robert Lewandowski. He will be measured in terms of titles at Bayern, where Flick set the bar high by winning the treble of Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup in 2019/20.

Bayern showed their faith by giving Nagelsmann a five-year contract after reportedly paying Leipzig 25 million euros (\$29 million) for his services. His most pressing job is to rebuild Bayern's back four after the departure of defenders David Alaba and Jerome Boateng.

He will have to quickly integrate new signings like France center-back Dayot Upamecano and England under-21 left-back Omar Richards. Bayern have won the Bundesliga every year since 2012/13 and landing a tenth straight German league title is mandatory for the fans and the board.

High demands

"At Bayern, success has to come very quickly," insisted Oliver Khan, the club's new CEO. "Our rivals are going to hunt us like never before, so we've got to be ready for that. We want to continue to belong to the top three in Europe," he added, even though Bayern went out in the quarter-finals of the Champions League last season.

Nagelsmann knows he will only be established "when I win titles. Only then will I have really arrived at Bayern". He is still waiting for the first major trophy as a coach after his Leipzig side lost last season's German Cup final to Borussia Dortmund.

However, Nagelsmann has a fierce desire to win everything — even down to a round of the family board game Ludo. "I can accept that I lose sometimes. But when I start to be able to lose, I'm no longer a winner," he explained.

Childhood dream

Nagelsmann hails from the Bavarian town of Landsberg am Lech, 60km west of Munich, and slept under a Bayern duvet as a child. He dreamt of playing in the famous red shirt until injury curtailed his career prematurely, so coaching the club is "very close to my lifelong dream".

He has already begun winning over Bayern's stars. "Nagelsmann can build something here," insisted Germany forward Thomas Mueller. Nagelsmann has a talent for nurturing talent, like Bayern midfielder Jamal Musiala, who only turns 19 in February. — AFP

Messi sets sights on Champions League 'dream' after PSG unveiling

PARIS: Lionel Messi has set his sights on more Champions League glory after being unveiled as a Paris Saint-Germain player yesterday as hundreds of fans gathered outside the club's stadium hoping to see their new idol.

The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar was presented to media from all over the world at a news conference at the Parc des Princes after arriving in the French capital the previous day and penning a two-year contract with the option of a third season.

PSG quickly emerged as the favorites to sign Messi following the shock of his departure last week from Barcelona and he arrives eyeing a fifth Champions League, with the most recent of his four victories with his old club coming in 2015.

"I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," Messi told reporters inside a packed auditorium, with the audience including his wife Antonella, their children, and his father and agent, Jorge. Messi and Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League last season by PSG, who went on to reach the semi-finals following their run to the final in 2020.

"Sometimes you can have the best team in the world and not win. That's football," Messi, who won 35 trophies in total with Barca, added as he prepares to team up with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in Paris. "We know how difficult the Champions League is but Paris know that too—they have come very close in recent years but it is a competition in which the best teams take part and the best team doesn't always win."

Messi-mania

PSG are reportedly paying 35 million euros (\$41 million) a year to Messi, who will wear the number 30 jersey-fans were already queuing up outside the club's different shops in the capital yesterday morn-

ing to buy the shirt with his name and number on the back.

Messi was given a hero's welcome when he arrived in Paris on Tuesday, greeting supporters at Le Bourget airport to the north of the city and waving from the balcony of the plush hotel where he is staying near the Champs Elysees.

Yesterday, he appeared unfazed as he emerged, immaculately turned out, to talk to media, although he did seem slightly uneasy at times, not least when one member of the audience started chanting his name.

Unlike when Zlatan Ibrahimovic signed for PSG in 2012 there was no glitzy unveiling in front of the Eiffel Tower, but Messi was photographed on the pitch before greeting the supporters who had waited at the stadium entrance, watching his press conference on a big screen. "I'm very proud to present Leo Messi as a PSG player," said Nasser Al-Khelaifi, the president of the Qatar-owned outfit. "It is an amazing and historic day for the club, for the football world."

Messi made no secret of his sadness at leaving Barca, the only club he has so far represented in his 17-year professional career, as he gave a tearful news conference at the Camp Nou last weekend.

'Can't wait to start'

However yesterday he said he was looking forward to getting started in his new home. "Everyone knows that my departure from Barca was very hard because I spent so many years there, but as soon as I arrived here I felt enormously happy," said the player who scored 672 goals in 778 games for the Catalans. "Now I can't wait to start training."

Messi has had no pre-season having been on holiday since winning the Copa America with Argentina a month ago. He is therefore unlikely to make his debut for PSG any time soon, and certainly not this weekend when Mauricio Pochettino's team play



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi salutes supporters gathered outside the Parc des Princes stadium after his first official press conference as a PSG player in Paris yesterday. (Inset) Messi speaks at a press conference during his unveiling at PSG's stadium in Paris. — AFP

Strasbourg at home in Ligue 1.

PSG are now even more obvious favorites to run away with the French title, a trophy they missed out on last season to Lille. However, despite concerns about a lack of competitive balance, French League president Vincent Labrune hailed the arrival of the six-time Ballon d'Or winner as "extraordinary news for the exposure of Ligue 1 internationally". "The arrival of Lionel Messi will increase the attractiveness

and visibility of our league on all continents," he said.

Attention, though, will now turn to the future of 22-year-old Mbappe, who has just a year left on his contract and has been strongly linked to Real Madrid. "Kylian is a Parisian, he's very competitive. He said he wanted a competitive team," Al-Khelaifi said. "Now there's no-one more competitive than us. He has no reason to do anything else," other than stay, he added. — AFP



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