



3 Kuwait struggling to get rid of world's biggest tire graveyard



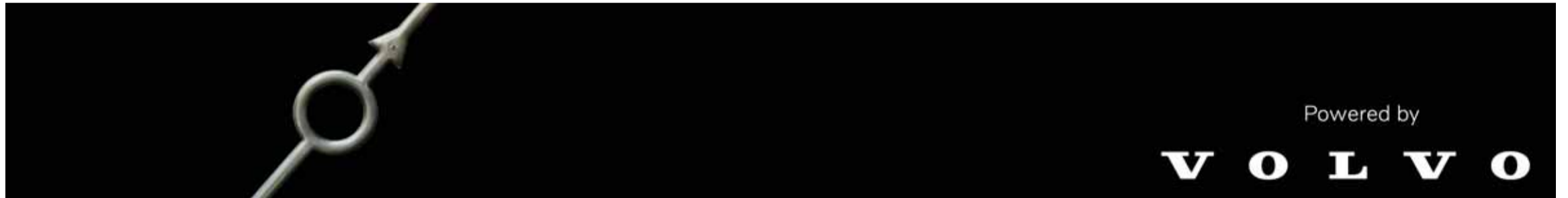
16 5-star Man Utd thrash Leeds, Chelsea and Liverpool cruise



INSIDE

Kuwait Times Special supplement

INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA



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2.6m people have received one or both vaccine doses

MoH: 68.4% of Kuwait's population has been vaccinated against COVID-19

Three workers killed in Abdaly blaze



KUWAIT: At least three Asian workers died and five others were injured in a fire that broke out at a workers' camp in Abdaly early yesterday. In a press release, Kuwait Fire Force said firefight-

ers rushed to the location of the blaze at the workers' residence, adding authorities will look into the accident to find out its causes and circumstances. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The number of people who have received one or both doses of the vaccination against COVID-19 amounted to 2,668,082 as of yesterday, Health Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad announced. In a statement to KUNA, Dr Sanad confirmed that the national campaign to vaccinate people will continue until it reaches its goal. The number of people who are vaccinated represents 68.4 percent of the population of Kuwait, he explained.

Dr Sanad valued the efforts of all medical and volunteer teams and various state agencies that participated in the campaign, pointing out that the ongoing efforts of the campaign were reflected in the noticeable improvement in the indicators of assessing the epidemiological situation in the country. The level of awareness as well as cooperation of people receiving the vaccine is needed in order to achieve herd immunity and return to normal life in the near future, he underlined.

On Thursday, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said the government expects to achieve herd immunity against the coronavirus pandemic by the end of September, when 70 percent of the population will be vaccinated. Over the past few weeks, Kuwait has seen a sharp decrease in the number of new coronavirus cases, the number of patients and those in intensive care units.

On Friday, Kuwait reported 417 new coronavirus cases, taking total cases to 405,859, while three more deaths took total fatalities to 2,383. On Thursday, Kuwait reported 555 new COVID-19 cases and one death. The sharp drop in cases has prompted the government to end almost all restrictions by completely lifting a partial curfew, opening restaurants, cafes and malls to vaccinated people and ordering civil servants to return to offices starting today.

The government on Wednesday announced a plan to completely reopen schools to students of all categories. Foreign schools will open their doors on Sept 26, while public and private Arabic schools are scheduled to reopen on Oct 3. Schools were shut down in the last academic year as part of government efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

Authorities also reopened Kuwait International Airport to expats from the beginning of August after a six-month closure, but imposed strict conditions on arrivals. Expats who hold legal residence in the country and wish to return must have been vaccinated with two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson jab. The Cabinet late Wednesday said it was pleased by the improvement of the health situation in the country. — Agencies

News in brief

Deadly quake strikes Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE: A powerful 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti early yesterday, causing at least 29 deaths and toppling buildings in the disaster-plagued Caribbean nation still recovering from a devastating 2010 quake. Residents shared images on social media of frantic efforts to pull people from the ruins of caved-in buildings, while screaming bystanders sought safety in the streets outside their homes. — AFP

July world's hottest month

WASHINGTON: July was the hottest month globally ever recorded, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said Friday, in the latest data to underline the climate crisis. The NOAA said combined land and ocean-surface temperature was 1.67 degrees Fahrenheit (0.93 of a degree Centigrade) above the 20th-century average of 60.4 degrees Fahrenheit, making it the hottest July since record-keeping began 142 years ago. — AFP

Iran tightens COVID curbs

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday announced new curbs to combat the spread of COVID-19 as deaths and infections surge and as the country tries to speed up its vaccination campaign. Iran's national coronavirus taskforce announced yesterday that government offices, banks and non-essential businesses must close their doors countrywide from tomorrow until the end of next Saturday. A ban on car travel between provinces will be in force from noon today until Aug 27. — AFP

US issues new terror warning

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security issued a new terrorism threat advisory on Friday ahead of the anniversary of the Sept 11 terror attacks. It said the US faces a "heightened threat environment" from both domestic terrorists "and those inspired or motivated by foreign terrorists and other malign foreign influences". It cited increased use of "online forums to influence and spread violent extremist narratives and promote violent activity." — AFP

Taleban close in on Kabul

KABUL: Afghanistan's beleaguered president vowed yesterday to prevent further bloodshed, as Taleban fighters closed in on Kabul after routing his armed forces over the past 10 days. In a recorded address to the nation - his first since the Taleban launched their sweeping offensive - Ashraf Ghani said he wanted to stop the violence "as a historic mission". "I will not let the imposed war on people cause more deaths," he said, appearing somber and sitting before an Afghan flag.

The president gave no hint he would resign or take responsibility for

the calamitous military collapse, but said the armed forces could be "remobilized" and consultations were taking place to try to help end the war. He offered few specifics on what his administration was planning, with government control over Afghanistan all but collapsed, but the presidential palace later said in a statement that "a delegation with authority should soon be appointed by the government and be ready for negotiation".

Ghani's speech came as US Marines were sent in to oversee an evacuation of embassy employees and thousands of Afghans and their families, who fear retribution for working for the United States during its 20-year occupation. With the country's second- and third-largest cities having

Continued on Page 2

8 die in plane crash as Turkey floods kill 44

ISTANBUL: Turkey battled disaster on two fronts yesterday with eight people dying in the crash a firefighting aircraft and rescuers racing to find survivors of flash floods in the north that have killed at least 44. In

Moscow, the defense ministry said all eight people on the Russian plane had perished on the fire-fighting mission.

The air tragedy came just as Turkey was gaining control over hundreds of wildfires that killed eight people and destroyed swathes of forest along the scenic southern coast. In Moscow, news agencies quoted the defense ministry as saying five Russian servicemen and three Turkish citizens were on board the Russian Be-200 plane that went down around 1330 GMT.

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In Lebanon, bread too is now scarce

BEIRUT: Michael Hamati emerged from a long queue at a Beirut bakery sweat dripping from his forehead, as Lebanon's economic collapse sparks increasing shortages including over bread. "There's nothing left in this country," said the 72-year-old, as dozens of people clamored behind him in the simmering heat for their turn.

Lebanese flocked to bakeries before dawn Friday, desperate to find affordable bread in a country where fuel and medicine are already in critically short supply. The rush came after the central bank on Wednesday said it could no longer afford to subsidize fuel in Lebanon. The country, struggling with political turmoil since 2019, has also been hit by the worst global economic crisis in 150 years, according to the World Bank.

At least 78 percent of the more than six-million-strong population lives below the poverty line and businesses can barely stay afloat.

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KABUL: Afghan schoolgirls walk through a pathway along the Qasaba cemetery yesterday. — AFP



This image grab taken yesterday shows a view of the wreckage of a Russian Bombardier Be-200 aircraft in Kahramanmaraş in southern Turkey. — AFP



BEIRUT: A woman leaves a bakery with a bag of bread as people wait for their turn in the neighborhood of Nabaa in the capital's southern suburbs on Friday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait airport passenger capacity 'quietly' increased to 7,500 a day?

High demand on limited seats puts passengers, airlines in trouble

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The price of return tickets to Kuwait are incredibly high, not only because it's the high season, but mainly due to the limited seat quota set for most airlines, not including local carriers. Passengers are facing a tough situation after many had their tickets canceled although the flight was not, despite their tickets being confirmed months ago.

This situation is the result of the restricted number of arriving passengers set by the Cabinet last year. After the pandemic situation in Kuwait started to improve positively, more businesses reopened, and people expected the airport to be fully operational as well.

The ministerial committee for coronavirus emergencies is in charge of increasing the maximum number of passengers arriving at Kuwait airport. On Aug 4, the committee met and decided to increase the number of arriving passengers from 5,000 to 7,500 daily, starting from Aug 8, 2021. Travel agencies confirmed the quota was increased for most airlines, but some agencies told Kuwait Times they haven't noticed that this decision has been applied yet, as there is still a great shortage of tickets on

flights arriving to Kuwait.

Ahmad from Waseet Agency said the problem of ticket cancellations is only happening with one particular airline. "Most airlines are now flying fully booked or almost fully booked since last week. But we are facing a problem of cancellation with one airline - and I personally had three cases of cancellation this week. These passengers can file a complaint against this airline at the Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA), which issued a statement in this regard last week," he told Kuwait Times.

The government is yet to make an official announcement to increase passenger capacity at Kuwait International Airport; which has been expected ever since Kuwait allowed the entry of residents fully vaccinated against COVID-19 on Aug 1. But according to an official from the DGCA, the decision to increase the number of arriving passengers is already in effect from Aug 8. "The division of this number among various airlines is done according to market demand. Till now no new flights have been added, so the number will mostly be divided among existing flights. This should relieve the pressure and avoid the inconvenience of further cancellations," he explained.



Foul play suspected in Amghara man's death

KUWAIT: Kuwait police opened a criminal investigation in the death of a person whose blood-stained body was found near a factory in Amghara, a local Arabic daily reported yesterday. Police and criminal evidence men headed to the scene in response to an emergency call, and found the body with traces of blood on the head, reported Al-Rai. No identification cards were found on the body, which was taken to the coroner for an autopsy.

The same newspaper had reported earlier that police opened an investigation into a woman's death after her disfigured body was found in her apartment. Preliminary investigations indicate the victim's pet cats had disfigured her face after she died when they were left without food. A relative of the woman, who lived alone in her apartment, had told police that he went to check on her after she failed to respond to his calls for days, only to find that she had died. The body was taken to the forensics department to identify the cause of death, as a case was filed for investigations.

In other news, two Kuwaiti policewomen were injured when a female motorist ran them over after she ignored orders to pull over in Abdullah Al-Salem. Instead of stopping her car, the motorist sped up and hit the cops with her vehicle in an attempt to escape, but was placed under arrest. Al-Rai reported yesterday. One officer sustained a broken leg, while the other was left with a broken hand, it said, noting that they were taken to the hospital for treatment. Meanwhile, the suspect was taken to the proper authorities for further action.

Separately, Al-Rai reported yesterday that a man was rushed to Jahra Hospital with severe injuries following a landmine explosion in Adairia. The Bangladeshi man reportedly lost his left hand as well as a leg in the incident. In another case, a three-year-old Egyptian boy was hospitalized in a critical condition after he consumed kerosene inside his family's apartment in Khaitan. Police escorted his father to the police station for questioning on child negligence charges.

Kuwait Defense Minister, US counterpart discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, received a phone call Friday from the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. During the call, both sides discussed bilateral ties between the two countries and the latest political developments globally and locally.

In a press release, the Kuwait Army Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations said that Sheikh Hamad expressed his appreciation to his American counterpart for this gesture, which reflected the keenness of the two countries to strengthen and develop the bilateral cooperation in various fields. — KUNA



Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Al-Sabah (right) and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Kuwait distributes eight tons of baby formula to refugees

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed Friday eight tons of baby formula as part of its efforts to support the Lebanese and Syrian refugees in need. In a statement to the press, KRCS delegation's head Dr Musa'ed Al-Enezi said that the society team and in cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross Society started a campaign to distribute baby formula in refugee camps and to the Children's Cancer Center in Lebanon. He also stressed that the KRCS was keen to provide this important product, especially during these difficult times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — KUNA



In Lebanon, bread too is...

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The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market in less than two years. Many bakeries have already closed down because they cannot afford the rising cost of fuel needed to power private generators as electricity cuts last for around 20 hours a day.

Those that remain open have rationed production to make the subsidized flour they receive from the state last longer, leading to shortages in stores and supermarkets. Hamati arrived at a Beirut bakery early in the morning, bracing for a long wait. "This is the

first time I come to this bakery. There isn't any bread left in stores," he told AFP. "Is there anything left at all in Lebanon?" he asked.

Lebanon has been gripped by a fuel crisis since the start of summer, with importers blaming shortages on a delay by the government in opening credit lines to fund imports. The authorities have accused distributors of hoarding stock to sell it at higher rates on the black market or across the border in Syria. "Bakeries don't have the means to secure fuel oil... and we don't know if we will receive any" from the state, said Ali Ibrahim, who heads the syndicate of bakery owners. "They just give us enough for two days... though bakeries and mills should be receiving enough for a month."

In Beirut's Nabaa district, Jacques Al-Khoury looked flustered as he tried to organize a queue of dozens of people waiting outside his bakery for bread. The line started as early as 3:00 am - just as

he started baking for the day. "All the bakeries in this area have closed and the pressure is all on me," he said. Khoury, 60, said he receives 36 tons of state subsidized flour per month - but with demand for bread increasing it only lasts a week.

In the northern city of Tripoli, Lebanon's poorest, many bakeries have been forced to close while supermarkets have stopped selling bread. The few Tripoli bakeries that have remained open are also struggling to keep up with demand. "We are rationing the amount of bread we distribute to stores," an employee at one of the city's largest bakeries said. "We are providing them with half the usual amount." In one bakery in the southern city of Sidon, residents were only allowed to buy one bag of flat white bread each. According to the United Nations, food prices have increased by up to 400 percent. The cost of a basic food basket for a single family is now five times the national minimum wage, the Crisis

Observatory at the American University of Beirut says.

"Once we've paid rent, we have no money left," said Mohammad Abdul Qader, a pastry shop employee who needs to provide for five children. He said food has become so expensive, he can no longer afford meat. "I gaze at the butcher's from a distance, and then go on my way," he said. "Yesterday, I ate stale bread" with onion and tomato, he added.

Lebanon's army seized fuel from gas stations yesterday to curb hoarding amid crippling shortages, as the central bank chief stood firm on his decision to scrap fuel subsidies. Compounding the country's crisis, a top private hospital said it may have to close due to power outages caused by shortages of diesel, warning this could cause hundreds of deaths. Lebanon is grappling with a financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worst since the 1850s. — AFP

Taleban close in on...

Continued from Page 1

fallen into Taleban hands, Kabul has effectively become the besieged last stand for government forces who have offered little or no resistance elsewhere.

As the Taleban closed in on Kabul, panicked residents formed long lines outside banks, hoping to withdraw their savings. Some branches appeared to have already run of cash. Insurgent fighters are now camped just 50 km away from Kabul, with the United States and other countries scrambling to airlift their nationals out of the Afghan capital ahead of a feared all-out assault.

Heavy fighting was also reported around Mazar-i-Sharif, an isolated holdout in the north where warlord and former vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum had gathered his virulently anti-Taleban militia. The only other cities of any significance not to be taken yet were Jalalabad, and Khost - Pashtun-dominated and unlikely to offer much resistance.

In Kabul, US embassy staff were ordered to begin shredding and burning sensitive material, as the first American troops from a planned 3,000-strong re-deployment started arriving to secure

the airport and oversee evacuations. A host of European countries - including Britain, Germany, Denmark, and Spain - all announced the withdrawal of personnel from their respective embassies on Friday.

For Kabul residents and the tens of thousands who have sought refuge there in recent weeks, the overwhelming mood was one of apprehension and fear. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply disturbed" by accounts of poor treatment of women in areas seized by the Taleban, who imposed an ultra-austere brand of Islam on Afghanistan during their 1996-2001 rule.

Days before a final US withdrawal ordered by President Joe Biden, individual Afghan soldiers, units, and even whole divisions have surrendered - handing the Taleban even more vehicles and military hardware for their lightning advance. The Taleban offensive has accelerated in recent days, with the capture of Herat in the north and, just hours later, the seizure of Kandahar - the group's spiritual heartland in the south.

Asadabad, the capital of Kunar in the east, and Gardez, also fell yesterday, as the Taleban tightened their grip. On Ghani's TV speech, Kabul-based analyst Sayed Naser Mosawi said it appeared the president was running out of options. "The president's message was not definitive enough to say he is willing to fight on to the end, but rather to me it sounds that he may be willing to give into some sort of settlement - if that doesn't mean surrender," he added. — AFP

8 die in plane crash as Turkey...

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Television footage showed a column of smoke rising from the remote mountainous zone in the south of the country.

Turkey's defense ministry issued a statement saying the aircraft on loan from Russia had taken off from Adana to help extinguish fires burning at Kahramanmaraş. A surveillance plane and a helicopter had been dispatched to the crash site, the ministry added. Russian consular representatives and a defense ministry commission were reportedly on their way to the area.

Turkey's official disaster agency AFAD said teams were combing through the rubble of dozens of homes that collapsed due to the floods that hit Black Sea regions on Wednesday after heavy rains. In the village of Babacay in the northern province of Sinop, 40 houses and two bridges were completely destroyed by the floods, according to state news agency Anadolu.

The latest official death toll published yesterday by AFAD stood at 44, with nine other people in hospital. Scientists believe such natural disasters are

becoming more intense and frequent because of global warming caused by polluting emissions. Turkey's emergence as a frontline country in the battle against climate change also poses a challenge to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan two years before the next scheduled general election.

As the initial shock of the floods faded, so questions and criticisms arose. Floods survivors accused local authorities of not giving them proper warning about the dangers of incoming storms. Criticism has also been levelled at the fact several buildings were built in flood zones. In Bozkurt in Kastamonu province, one eight-storey building constructed on the banks of the Eyzine river collapsed.

Footage shot by survivors showed furious river waters flooding the streets in just a few minutes, carrying off cars and traffic signs. The government has denied that the sudden rise in water levels was linked to a hydro-electric power station further up the river, after media reported its water-retention dam may have ruptured.

Erdogan sounded both mournful and hopeful as he attended a funeral on Friday for the first victims and led a prayer before a few hundred residents in the inundated city of Kastamonu. "We will do whatever we can as a state as quickly as we can, and rise from the ashes," Erdogan told the crowd. "We can't bring back the citizens we lost, but our state has the means and power to compensate those who lost loved ones." — AFP



KUWAIT: An aerial view of a tire landfill in Salmi, around 160 kilometers away from the capital Kuwait City, on August 12, 2021.

Kuwait faces tall task of removing 'world's biggest tire graveyard'

Millions of dumped tires pose environmental, health risks

KUWAIT: Kuwait still faces major challenges in its efforts to remove its huge used tire landfill, described as 'the world's largest tire graveyard', amid environmental and health hazards that scientists warn are created by their prolonged presence. Located in the Arhiya area, five kilometers (over three miles) south of the city of Jahra, the graveyard contained 50 million tires, according to previous statements by Kuwaiti activist Abdullah Al-Bunyan. The dumped tires, still to be disposed of, have been accumulated there over the past two decades.

Last April, a huge fire at a tire landfill on Salmi Road was brought under control as firefighters worked hard to isolate the fire from the rest of the tires and confined it to an area of 200 square meters. The Arhiya tire crisis was first recorded in April 2012 when a large fire broke out in the tire landfills, attracting the world's attention to the tire graveyard. The April 2012 tire fire was followed by another fire in November 2019 that took a long time to put out. In October 2020, another tire fire caused huge material loss.

Government acts

The Kuwaiti government is taking various



measures to curb the hazardous impacts of these dumped tires. Last March, the General

Administration of Customs approved a request for a company to export five million used tires at the

Arhiya site within nine months. It also initiated the establishment of five factories to cut, recycle and export these tires.

Abdul Karim Taqi, Director-General of the Kuwait Public Authority for Industry, had announced previously that 48 million out of 57 million tires were cut in Arhiya. The government is also shifting the remaining tires to the new site in Salmi, designated for collecting damaged and used tires.

"An area of two million square meters has been allocated for the establishment of tire recycling plants in Salmi," Hassan Kamal, a Kuwaiti Municipal Council member, told Anadolu Agency. "The designated site will include about 52 plants to recycle tires, paper, and plastic."

However, Hammoud Al-Anzi, head of the Jahra Committee in the Municipal Council, told Anadolu Agency that the efforts made so far do not match "the challenge of the huge number of tires." He called on the government to involve community volunteers to dispose of the tires, and invite major transport companies and heavy equipment companies to contribute within the framework of social responsibility to accelerate the pace of tires' disposal.



Local

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News in brief

Kuwait livestock firm suffers \$7m losses

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Livestock Transport and Trading Company (Al-Mawashi) incurred KD 2.1 million (around \$7million) in the first six months of 2021, in contrast to KD 1.8 million (\$6 million) profits posted in the corresponding period of 2020. Chairman Walid Al-Roumi, in a statement yesterday, attributed the losses to increase of operations' costs, livestock prices which are higher by 20 percent in the exporting countries, and increased costs of transportation, shipment and logistics due to rise of fuel prices. CEO Usama Boudai indicated that the losses were related to higher debts resulting from deductions of additional allotments estimated at KD 1.5 million (\$5 million) worth of government subsidies. The company had to stockpile on lamb during summer however it was surprised with demands for higher fees for freezers' rents. He mentioned other adverse factors, such as impact of the coronavirus and Australia's decision to stop exporting sheep during the summer. —KUNA

Kuwait condemns Houthis attacks

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry on Friday strongly condemned the continued Houthi attempts to threaten security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the latest of which was the foiled Houthi drone attack on the southern Saudi city of Khamis Mushiat. The continuity and escalation of these hostile actions against the security of the Saudi Kingdom and the stability of the whole region are blatant violations of the international law and international humanitarian law, the foreign ministry said in a statement. It added that this behavior necessitates swift and firm actions from the international community to stop the attacks and hold perpetrators accountable. The foreign ministry reiterated Kuwait's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia and support to all the measures it takes to defend its security, stability and sovereignty. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People swim in the Arabian Gulf waters as the Salmiya skyline is seen in the background. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Pakistan Embassy in Kuwait celebrates 75th Independence Day

KUWAIT: On the auspicious occasion of the "75th Independence Day of Pakistan", the Embassy of Pakistan organized a flag hoisting ceremony at the chancery. Adhering to restrictions on public gatherings owing to COVID-19, the occasion was restricted to members of the embassy.

Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider paid tribute to the forefathers of the nation, "who played a formidable role in realizing the dream of independent state for the Muslims of sub-continent into reality." The ambassador also highlighted the sacrifices rendered by the forefathers to protect and safeguard the made for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Ambassador Sajjad extended felicitations to the community members and urged them to work diligently on the guiding principles of "unity, faith and discipline". He emphasized on the role played by overseas community members in various parts of the world. He also paid tribute to the frontline health-workers and professionals as well as to "those sons of soil who sacrificed their lives while protecting the ideological and geographical boundaries of the motherland."



Owing to COVID-19 related restrictions, various interactive activities were undertaken in collaboration with the Pakistani community members to celebrate the Independence Day. In this regard, the ambassador was invited as a chief guest in a blood donation drive organized at Adan Hospital as well as an Independence Day function organized by 'Urdu Language Congregation', a Pakistani Christian Community in Kuwait. The embassy also participated in Webinars and Poetic Symposium organized by Pakistani community members from various spheres of life participated.

While reaffirming their resolve to make Pakistan economically stronger and prosperous country render services for the unity and prosperity of Pakistan, the Pakistani community swore to make strenuous efforts in economic prosperity of Pakistan.



'The Suicide Squad' hits big screen exclusively for Ooredoo customers



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, teamed up with VOX Cinemas, the Middle East's most innovative and customer-focused exhibitor, and the fastest growing cinema business in the MENA region, and rewarded its customers and employees who are fans of the fantasy world of movies by being one of the first to watch the highly anticipated movie 'The Suicide Squad' on MAX mega-screen.

Ooredoo Kuwait launched a series of exciting competitions on its social media pages which witnessed a huge interaction and engagement from the followers. Winners won complimentary cinema tickets to watch 'The Suicide Squad' at VOX Cinemas in the Avenues. 'The Suicide Squad' is produced by Warner Bros, directed by James Gunn, and the most prominent co-stars are: Margot Robbie, John Cena, Idris Elba, Sylvester Stallone, and Viola Davis. Hence, the film's premiere was on Thursday, August 5, 2021.

Fatima Dashti - Senior Manager, Public Relations, Internal Communications and Social

Responsibility, said: "The greatest value we can offer to our customers and employees is helping them in creating joyful meaningful moments. This step is in line with our values of communicating with the community and rewarding our customers with exclusive offerings."

"We feel that this step came at a time when people needed some good moments with their family and friends, outside their home especially after all the restrictions imposed by the government due to COVID-19," Dashti added.

Owned and operated by Majid Al-Futtaim, VOX Cinemas is the cinema arm of Majid Al-Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East and North Africa. VOX Cinemas is the Middle East's most innovative and customer-focused exhibitor, and the fastest growing cinema business in the MENA region. With more than 50 locations the region, including screens in the UAE, Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, VOX Cinemas is the Middle East's largest and most rapidly growing exhibitor in the entire region.



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Fire crews make headway as Algerians pray for 71 dead

Mocimboa da Praia: Mozambican ghost town



HERAT: A Taliban fighter holds a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) along the roadside in Herat, Afghanistan's third biggest city, after government forces pulled out the day before following weeks of being under siege. — AFP

Arms seizures 'massive boon' for Taliban

Afghan defense forces have shown little appetite for a fight

KABUL: The United States spent billions supplying the Afghan military with the tools to defeat the Taliban, but the rapid capitulation of the armed forces means that weaponry is now fuelling the insurgents' astonishing battlefield successes. "We provided our Afghan partners with all the tools—let me emphasize: all the tools," US President Joe Biden said when defending his decision to withdraw American forces and leave the fight to the locals.

But Afghan defense forces have shown little appetite for that fight and, in their tens of thousands, have been laying down their arms—only for the Taliban to immediately pick them up.

The Taliban's social media is awash with videos of Taliban fighters seizing weapons caches—the majority supplied by Western powers. Footage of Afghan soldiers surrendering in the northern city of Kunduz shows army vehicles loaded with heavy weapons and mounted with artillery guns safely in the hands of the insurgent rank and file. In the western city of Farah, fighters patrolled in a car

marked with an eagle swooping on a snake—the official insignia of the country's intelligence service.

While US forces took the "sophisticated" equipment with them when they withdrew, the Taliban blitz has handed the group "vehicles, humvees, small arms and light weapons, as well as ammunition", Justine Fleischner of weapons-tracking group Conflict Armament Research, told AFP.

'Massive boon'

Experts say such hauls—on top of unacknowledged support from regional allies such as Pakistan—has given the Taliban a massive boost. The weapons will not only help the Taliban's march on Kabul but "strengthen its authority" in the cities it has captured, said Raffaello Pantucci, senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies. With US troops all but gone, the Taliban now find themselves flush with American-supplied tools, without having to raise a single penny.

"It is incredibly serious. It is clearly going to be a massive boon to them," he said. Some of that

weaponry is now being brazenly paraded ahead of the US troops' 9/11 withdrawal deadline by insurgents who have maintained ties with Al Qaeda, the group behind the 2001 terror attacks.

Washington had prepared for the Taliban to claim its weapons, but the rapid fall of cities was its most dire scenario, Jason Amerine, who led US special forces in overthrowing the Taliban in 2001, told AFP. "The US equipped the ANA with the assumption that weapons and materiel might fall into Taliban hands," he said, referring to the Afghan National Army. "The current crisis was a worst-case scenario considered when making procurement decisions."

Propaganda

At Kunduz airport, a Taliban fighter on a red motorbike, head-to-toe in insurgent dress, was filmed staring at a military helicopter sitting on the tarmac. It is a picture of jubilation mirrored across insurgent-held territory. While the group will continue to show off these big prizes, the air-

craft at least will have no impact on the battlefield without pilots. "They will be for propaganda purposes only," former CIA counter-terrorism analyst Aki Peritz told AFP. More useful will be the light arms and vehicles used to navigate the country's rugged terrain.

Coupled with the army's dwindling morale, they will boost the threat the Taliban pose to the Western-backed government. As the crisis unfolds, Biden's administration says it will still equip an Afghan military that appears on the verge of collapse. Observers of the Middle East have seen this transfer of arms play out before.

After the US withdrawal from Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) group overran the Iraqi city of Mosul in mid-2014, seizing US-supplied guns and humvees. The jihadists used their gains to build an Iraqi-Syrian caliphate the size of Belgium. Like IS fighters in Mosul, joyous Taliban recruits are now posing for photographs with enemy munitions in the newly won cities in all corners of the country. "This retreat is turning into a rout," Peritz said. —AFP

Taliban tame the 'Lion of Herat', capture his city

HERAT: A month ago, one of Afghanistan's most famous warlords vowed to defend his city from the Taliban as he called for locals to join the fight. But on Friday Ismail Khan was in the Taliban's hands as militants patrolled the dusty streets of Herat, his longtime fiefdom and the nation's third-biggest city.

The "Lion of Herat" has been a huge figure throughout Afghanistan's tumultuous modern history, initially rising to be one of the most powerful mujahideen rebel figures fighting the Soviets in the 1980s and 1990s. From Herat, his vast militia then had a series of successes against the Taliban when the hardline Islamic group was rising to power. But he was forced to flee to Iran with thousands of his men in 1995 after an ally defected to the insurgents.

He was captured by the Taliban in 1997 when he returned to organize an uprising, then escaped from prison two years later and was at large until the

US invasion in 2001. Khan was then a minister in former president Hamid Karzai's government, though in recent years he was known for running Herat as his own territory.

Last month he was voicing defiance and anger as he vowed to defeat the Taliban. "We will soon go to the frontlines and with the help of God change the situation," Khan told a news conference. "We hope that men and women of Herat decide at this moment to support the resistance front to defend their freedom and safeguard their honor," Khan said. He blamed the government for the rapidly deteriorating situation and urged the military to show more backbone.

"We demand all the remaining security forces resist with courage." But on Friday morning, the people of Herat woke to new rulers, with no visible signs of battle in the streets and no more defiance from Khan. A group of insurgents pulled down an Afghan flag



KABUL: Afghan policemen stand guard at a checkpoint along the road in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

from a police station as cars and bicycles passed in seemingly normal traffic.

Others stood on the bonnet of a humvee vehicle that had been abandoned by retreating government troops. One insurgent gave the hint of a smile while looking into a camera, with a rocket-propelled grenade on his shoulder. The white flag of the Taliban waved through the air on a pole

pegged to a motorcycle. Like in other cities lost to the Taliban over the past week, authorities claimed they gave up to avoid bloodshed among civilians.

"We had to leave the city in order to prevent further destruction," a senior security source from Herat told AFP, adding that troops and city officials had retreated to army barracks outside Herat. —AFP

Biden faces blame for Afghan debacle

WASHINGTON: The Taliban's stunning advances in Afghanistan threaten to be a stain on President Joe Biden's record, but he has stood firm on withdrawing US troops and believes the public is with him. Twenty years of investment that cost \$2 trillion and nearly 2,500 US lives were disintegrating within days as the Islamist insurgents seized two of the largest cities with little resistance and closed in on the capital Kabul.

Republican rivals predictably attacked Biden but he also faced the most critical coverage of his presidency, with television networks juxtaposing images of Afghanistan's collapse with his remarks a little more than a month ago that "the Taliban overrun-

ning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely." In a scathing editorial, The Washington Post said that Biden had put at risk the real progress in Afghanistan since 2001 including education for girls, banned by the Taliban when they last ruled.

"Afghan lives ruined or lost will belong to Mr. Biden's legacy just as surely as any US dollars and lives his decision may save," the newspaper wrote. The United States was rushing back 3,000 troops—roughly the same number removed in this month's final withdrawal—to evacuate embassy staff and was flying out Afghans whose work with US forces puts them at risk.

But Biden, who through his decades in public life earned a reputation for empathy, has been unmoved when asked about Afghan losses and instead speaks of protecting US troops, a deeply personal matter as his late son Beau served in Iraq. Both the former vice president and US opinion polls have shared his

view for years. VoteVets, an advocacy group, hailed Biden for finally "having the strength to stand up to those who want endless war."

Biden argues that the United States long ago achieved its main goal of defeating Al-Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks and had done more than enough by training 300,000 Afghan troops.

"They've got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation," Biden said Tuesday. Administration officials say that delaying the pullout was only prolonging the inevitable. But Andrew Wilder, an Afghanistan expert who visited in June, said the administration could have devoted more time to preparing for the expected effects and that it was not "an orderly and responsible withdrawal."

"I think it's hard not to conclude that, not the US withdrawal, but the way in which we withdrew had a critical role to play in this," said Wilder, vice president for Asia studies at the US Institute of Peace. —AFP

Canada to take in 20,000 refugees targeted by Taliban

OTTAWA: Canada said Friday it will take in up to 20,000 Afghan refugees, including women leaders, government workers and others facing threats from the Taliban, as insurgents advanced across the country seizing major cities. "The situation in Afghanistan is heartbreaking and Canada will not stand idly by," Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino told a news conference.

The refugees will include "particularly vulnerable" Afghans still in the country or who've already fled to neighboring states, which in addition to female leaders and government employees also comprises human rights defenders, persecuted minorities and journalists.

Several plane-loads of asylum seekers have already departed with the first one landing Friday in Toronto, Mendicino said. As the Taliban advances on the capital Kabul, officials said Canadian special forces form part of a contingency plan to airlift Canadian embassy staff, but details were not provided due to the sensitive nature of the security operation.

Earlier Friday, many countries including Spain, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands announced the withdrawal of staff from their respective embassies. Canada has said it is monitoring the situation in Afghanistan "very closely" and working with its allies on the ground.

"Protecting the Canadian Embassy and our staff is our top priority," said Foreign Minister Marc Garneau. On Twitter, he said that Canada "owes Afghans a debt of gratitude and we will continue our efforts to bring them to safety." —AFP

International

Fire crews make headway as Algerians pray for 71 dead

Nationwide prayers held for the dead as anger mounts

ALGIERS: Firefighters made headway Friday against wildfires that have raged across northern Algeria for days but, as nationwide prayers were held for the dead, anger grew that the country was so ill-prepared. Fire crews backed by army engineers and civilian volunteers were still battling 51 wildfires across 16 provinces, emergency services said, but only three in the worst-hit province of Tizi Ouzou.

Blazes were still burning in some areas, including Bejaia, another province of the mainly Berber Kabylie region that extends along the Mediterranean coast east of the capital Algiers, and El Taref, a sparsely populated province that borders Tunisia. At least 71 people have died since Monday, according to the latest official toll. Authorities have said many of the fires were of "criminal origin".

In Tizi Ouzou province, where entire villages have been destroyed and terraced orchards reduced to charred timber and ash there was incredulity that a seasonal phenomenon had become such a deadly disaster. "In Larbaa Nath Irathen, the epicentre of the fires in Kabylie, the experts have only managed to identify 19 of the 25 charred bodies they recovered,"

the vice president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, Said Salhi, said. "Families are left still searching for their loved ones — that just piles pain on pain."

'Lost everything'

Larbaa Nath Irathen serves as the market center for some two dozen villages deep in the Kabylie mountains that were renowned for their scenery. All have been destroyed or blighted by the fires. "It's horrific — there's no other word for it," a villager in his 60s, who gave his name only as Djamel, told AFP by telephone. "The first rule of government is be prepared. Except here, where every time we do nothing until after the catastrophe, when the damage has already been done."

Another villager, Mohand, had driven to Algiers to find shelter for his family before heading back to help. "I've never seen anything like it in my entire life," he said. "There are families who have lost everything, absolutely everything. I can still smell the odor of charred flesh. It's unbearable. It just won't go away."

Many rural districts of Tizi Ouzou have been left without power, gas or telephone

lines. A family of five was killed when a petrol station in the village of Ain el-Hammam blew up, prompting other stations across the region to switch off their pumps and leaving motorists struggling to find fuel. The North African country was observing a second day of national mourning for those killed in the fires, with prayers held at mosques after the weekly Friday services.

'No firebreaks, no hydrants'

Seasonal wildfires are nothing new in Algeria. But this time high winds fuelled the rapid spread of flames in tinder-dry conditions created by a heatwave across North Africa and the wider Mediterranean. Meteorologists expect the regional heatwave to continue until the end of the week, after temperatures in Algeria reached 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit).

France and other countries have offered support, including firefighting aircraft. The death toll from this year's fires in Algeria — far higher than all other Mediterranean countries combined — has sparked growing criticism of successive governments' failure to invest in fire prevention and control.



TIZI-OUZOU, Algeria: An Algerian woman dressed in a traditional outfit stands amidst the charred debris of her home that burned down during wildfires in the Ait Daoud area of northern Algeria, Friday. —AFP

Bab Ezzouar University research director Abdelkrim Chelghoum said the country had failed to learn from a series of deadly disasters that hit the country in the early 2000s. A law detailing measures that needed to be put in place was adopted

in December 2004 but its provisions were never implemented, he said. "The emergency services are struggling on the ground because there are no forestry roads, no firebreaks, no hydrants," Chelghoum said. —AFP

Nigeria separatists suspend protest call

LAGOS: Separatists in Nigeria yesterday announced a suspension of a weekly protest over the arrest of their leader, a spokesman for the group said in a statement. The outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which wants a separate state for the ethnic Igbo people in the southeast of the country, had recently called on businesses in the oil-rich region to close every Monday.

The "sit-at-home" order from 6:00am to 6:00pm was to protest the arrest of their leader Nnamdi Kanu who is facing trial on terrorism and treasonable felony charges among others. Markets and shops heeded the group's call on Monday this week and streets were mostly deserted, residents said.

But IPOB spokesman Emma Powerful said they were suspending the protest until Kanu's court appearance scheduled for October 21. "The suspension of the sit-at-home... was as a result of a direct order from the supreme leader of this great movement (Mazi) Nnamdi Kanu through his lawyers," Powerful said in a statement.

"Our sit-at-home will in the meantime be observed on the date of our leader's court appearances." He said "the leadership will not hesitate to lift the suspension" if there were "any reason or directive from the IPOB highest command." Kanu, 53, is being held by the Department of State Services after his lawyers say he was arrested in Kenya in June and brought back to Nigeria to face trial. — AFP

Bill Cosby sex assault case to move forward in California

SAN FRANCISCO: A nearly seven-year-old civil lawsuit alleging Bill Cosby sexually assaulted a teen girl will move forward, a judge ruled Friday. The lawsuit, filed in December 2014, says the disgraced comedian—who was freed from prison in Pennsylvania in June—sexually assaulted Judy Huth in 1974 when she was 15 years old. Huth alleges Cosby assaulted her at the Playboy Mansion and that she suffered "psychological damage and mental anguish" as a result.

The case had been on hold as Cosby, 84, was facing aggravated indecent assault charges in Pennsylvania. After being convicted for drugging and sexually assaulting a woman 17 years ago, Cosby was freed from his prison sentence after the state's supreme court ruled he had been denied a fair trial. Now, a Los Angeles judge says the civil case against Cosby should proceed.

The court lifted the stay on Friday, except regarding whether Cosby must give a deposition, according to Huth's legal team. The stay on the deposition will remain in effect until September 30, as lawyers wait to see if the US Supreme Court will review the Pennsylvania decision vacating Cosby's criminal conviction, attorney John West told AFP. Huth's legal team said a trial date of April 18 had been set.

"We look forward to continuing battling for our very brave client," attorney Gloria Allred told reporters. Cosby's legal team did not respond to an AFP request for comment. The case is understood to be the last pending legislation against Cosby. Dozens of women have said they suffered sexual assault at the hands of the celebrity, but only Constand's allegations were tried criminally, due to expiring statutes of limitations. Cosby's release from prison—he had served more than two years of his three-to-ten year sentence—infuriated many advocates of the #MeToo movement. —AFP

Toddler among dead in UK's worst shooting for decade

LONDON: Police said on Friday they were investigating the background of a troubled loner who obtained a firearms license and shot dead five people including his mother and a three-year-old girl, in Britain's first mass shooting in 11 years. No motive has emerged for Thursday evening's bloodshed at the hands of 22-year-old gunman Jake Davison, who killed himself after the six-minute spree in Plymouth, southwest England, not far from western Europe's biggest naval base.

But ruling out terrorism, including with far-right groups, Devon and Cornwall Police confirmed that Davison's first victim was his 51-year-old mother, Maxine, at her house in a quiet residential area.

Davison then shot and killed toddler Sophie Martyn and her father, Lee, 43, on the street outside, before taking the lives of another man and woman nearby, the police said. Another two locals received "significant" but not life-threatening gunshot wounds, they said, adding that as of 2020, Davison held a valid firearms license. But as questions mounted over Davison's past, Prime Minister Boris Johnson thanked the emergency services, and expressed concern at the misogyny apparent in the gunman's social media accounts. He told reporters he was "appalled" at the sexism and said: "I think this is something that will undoubtedly be part of the investigation."

Gun permit probe

Home Secretary Priti Patel stressed the government was addressing online extremism in forthcoming legislation that seeks to hold social media companies to greater account. She said it would also look into how Davison obtained a gun permit, as independent police investigators opened a probe into the approval of a license in his case by the



PLYMOUTH: Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel (center) arrives with Chief Constable for Devon and Cornwall Police, Shaun Sawyer (left) and Labour MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, Luke Pollard (second right), to lay a floral tribute to the victims of the August 12 shootings in Plymouth, in North Down Crescent Park in the Keyham area, southwest England, yesterday. —AFP

regional force. Britain's police watchdog said it would investigate why Davison was handed back his shotgun and accompanying permit in July.

They had been taken away from him by police in December 2020 "following an allegation of assault in September 2020," the Independent Office for Police Conduct said in a statement. Churches and schools in Plymouth opened their doors for locals to mourn and receive counseling if needed. "We weep with those who weep," said Plymouth's Anglican bishop, the Right Reverend Nick McKinnel.

City leaders planned Friday evening to illuminate Smeaton's Tower, a local landmark, as "a beacon of light on a very dark, dark day for Plymouth". A single gun was recovered from the scene after Davison shot himself, but the police were unable to confirm witness accounts that it was a pump-action shotgun. Britain has some of the Western world's toughest gun controls and police are not routinely armed. Gun crime rates are among the lowest in the world.

According to the latest government figures, in the year to March 2020, 30 people were killed by shooting in England and Wales—the equivalent of

four percent of homicides in the 12-month period.

'YouTube rants'

Private ownership of handguns was outlawed in nearly all cases after a school massacre in the Scottish town of Dunblane in 1996, which claimed the lives of 16 young pupils and their teacher in Britain's worst mass shooting to date. But ownership of sporting rifles and shotguns is allowed, subject to strict licensing rules. Licenses last five years, and are meant to be granted only after thorough police background checks, including for mental illness. Britain's last mass shooting was in June 2010, when taxi driver Derrick Bird killed 12 people in Cumbria, northwest England. Davison's social media channels on Facebook, YouTube and Reddit indicated an interest in guns, right-wing libertarian politics and "shoot-em-up" video games. The content suggested a self-pitying loner, alienated from his family and hostile to women, identifying with the "incel" (involuntary celibate) subculture. Prior to being taken down, his YouTube content mostly showed him lifting weights in his home gym. —AFP

US authorizes COVID boosters for those with weakened immune systems

WASHINGTON: The United States authorized an extra dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people with weakened immune systems overnight Thursday to Friday, as the country struggles to thwart the Delta variant. Emergency use authorization for a third injection of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines was granted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulator.

"The country has entered yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the FDA is especially cognizant that immunocompromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease," said acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock in a statement. The FDA said the additional dose was for solid organ transplant recipients or those with equivalent weakened immune systems.

Some media reports suggest that one million Americans may have had unauthorized third doses in an attempt to increase protection against the coronavirus. "Individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine at this time," Woodcock said.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee voted in favor of the decision on Friday, with the agency subsequently publishing its recommendations for the administration of a third dose for use by healthcare professionals. However, the committee said people who received the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine, a minority of the US population, were not included in the decision due to lack of available data.

Booster moratorium call

Earlier this month, the United States rejected an



HARTFORD, US: In this file photo, pharmacist Madeline Acquilano inoculates a teacher with the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine at Hartford Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. —AFP

appeal from the World Health Organization for a moratorium on booster shots to help ease the drastic inequity in dose distribution between rich and poor nations. More than 619,000 people have died in the United States from COVID-19, with case numbers increasing sharply in recent months due to the spread of the Delta variant. The country's rapid vaccination program hit resistance in politically conservative regions in the South and Midwest, among those with lower incomes and racial minorities.

But officials this week hailed recent progress, with a half million people getting newly vaccinated every day, and improved take-up among teenagers and in virus hotspots such as Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. After the FDA ruling, Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said it was "promising" that studies demonstrated a third dose could help immunocompromised people. COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available in the United States, though only half of the total population is fully vaccinated. "Right now at this moment, other than the immune compromised, we're not going to be giving boosters to people," top US Covid-19 advisor Anthony Fauci told NBC on Thursday. —AFP

Senegal architects enraged after historic Dakar market is razed

DAKAR: Senegalese architects expressed their anger on Friday after bulldozers razed the famed Sandaga market, a sprawling hub of informal trade in the heart of Senegal's capital Dakar. An iconic establishment lying between the old French colonial quarter and more working-class neighborhoods, Sandaga has been one of Dakar's main trading centers for almost a century.

Frequented daily by residents of the capital, the market also drew people from the provinces and from the West African region. Many tourists came to hunt down artisanal carvings and other artefacts. The great hall, built in the Sudanese-Sahel tradition in 1933, housed hundreds of stalls selling merchandise of all kinds, from food to craft goods. It was shut down for public safety reasons after the edifice was weakened by several fires. The authorities had it pulled down in order to build a modernized replica. The architects voiced their anger just hours after that process was completed on Friday. "This is deeply regrettable," said Jean Augustin Carvalho, president of the National Order of Architects.

Sandaga is "a heritage and an identity of the city of Dakar. It was necessary by all means to see how to preserve it," he said adding "this building could still be standing with some renovation". Papa Dame Thiaw, another member of the architect's society, said that "technical solutions exist for the conservation of this heritage building." Fellow member Annie Jouga called the demolition "a scandal". "It is a bluff to say that we are going to rebuild identically. We cannot reconstruct a 1933 building identically with modern techniques," she added. Shopkeepers voiced opposition over the relocation last month, telling the government that they would lose customers at the new site far from Sandaga, a curiosity for tourists which drew large crowds. — AFP

International

Mocimboa da Praia: Mozambican ghost town after jihadists ejected

Al-Shabab campaign killed 3,100 people, uprooted 800,000 from their homes

MOCIMBOA DA PRAIA: Except for dozens of soldiers on patrol, Mocimboa da Praia, occupied by jihadists until just a few days ago, is a ghost town of abandoned and burnt-out buildings.

A few houses remain intact in the Mozambican port city, bearing signs that they were recently inhabited by the extremist militants. Some have Swahili inscriptions for "do not enter" or "do not destroy" on the doors. Rwandan and Mozambican soldiers have been on patrol since they forced out the militants last weekend, an AFP correspondent embedded with the military from the East African country, said.

The two armies announced on Sunday they had driven out jihadists who had been occupying the strategic city for the past year. A Rwandan army commander, who only gave his name as Frank, said the insurgents left after four consecutive days of fighting.

"The enemy was trying to attack us since his center of gravity was under fire, (but) at the end we managed to (oust) him," said the officer, speaking in English. The city lies around 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Palma, the hub of a \$20-billion gas exploration project. It was overrun by the jihadists in August 2020 — a watershed moment in their bloody campaign.

Mocimboa da Praia was where an obscure group, locally referred to as Al-Shabab, first launched its attacks October 2017. With its occupation, the town became the de-facto headquarters of the group,

which in 2018 declared its affiliation with the so-called Islamic State.

Mopping up operations

The group's campaign, focusing especially on remote villages, has killed at least 3,100 people and uprooted more than 800,000 from their homes. At the end of March, after a brazen attack on the coastal town Palma, the IS released a video said to have been shot in Mocimboa da Praia, showing more than 100 mostly young armed men, wearing fatigues and civilian shirts, with red bandanas tied around their heads. Government forces had struggled to regain control of the city until Rwanda sent in 1,000 troops—the first foreign country to deploy forces in Mozambique's fight against the extremists.

Mozambican army commander Cristovao Chume said there had been little resistance from the insurgents during the raid, with no deaths reported.

But the troops recovered an arsenal of abandoned weapons, including assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades. "Clean-up operations are taking place," said Chume. A partially torched military tank was seen abandoned on the roadside. Elsewhere stood a torched stack of rusty cargo containers. There is no water or electricity. The provincial government is starting to plan for the return of the population, who previously numbered around 120,000.

"We have to organize a way forward for the people of Mocimboa da Praia to return," Valige Tauabo, governor of Cabo Delgado province, said during a



MOCIMBOA DA PRAIA, Mozambique: A convoy of armored vehicles is seen patrolling in Mocimboa da Praia, northern Mozambique, Friday. — AFP

visit to the town on Thursday.

'Insurgents can blend with locals'

However, analysts consider it too early to even contemplate a return. "It is very risky to allow the population to return at this time because it will be difficult to distinguish the population from the insurgents," said Enio Chingotwane, a peace and security expert at the Center for Strategic and International

Studies in Maputo. The insurgents "can easily blend in with the population as normal people and then create instability," he said. According to Joao Feijo, a researcher with the Observatory of the Rural Environment (OMR) who studies the insurgency, the jihadists may have retreated strategically and could be lurking close by. "They may have dispersed and then blended with the population or be in trenches," he suggested. — AFP

2,000 evacuated after landslide in northern India

NEW DELHI: At least 2,000 people were evacuated on Friday after a massive landslide in India's ecologically fragile Himalayan north blocked a major river, officials said. The people were evacuated from 13 villages in the Lahaul area of Himachal Pradesh state as a "preventative measure" in case of flash floods, a senior district official told AFP.

Hundreds of tons of rocks and other debris slid into and partially blocked the Chenab—one of the biggest rivers in the region—blocking the flow of water for a few hours. This is the second landslide to hit the northern state bordering Tibet this week.

On Wednesday 12 people were killed after a bus and other vehicles travelling on a road were buried by rocks and mud. Sixteen people are still unaccounted for, according to local media reports. Thirteen others were pulled out of the rubble. Landslides are a regular danger in the region, particularly in the monsoon season, but experts say they are becoming more common.

Climate change is making the monsoon more erratic and melting glaciers, massive chunks of which can break off. Experts also blame construction work on hydroelectric dams and deforestation.

In February, a ferocious flash flood hurtled down a remote valley in neighboring Uttarakhand state, killing around 200 people. — AFP

UN raises alarm on 'mass rape' in southeast DR Congo

GENEVA: The United Nations raised the alarm on Friday over widespread, systematic sexual violence in the southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, saying women were reporting armed groups carrying out mass rape. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said its staff were hearing horrific testimonies from forcibly displaced persons in the DR Congo's Tanganyika Province.

The agency is "gravely concerned about incidents of widespread and systematic sexual violence against Congolese women and girls", spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo told reporters in Geneva. "In just the past two weeks, humanitarian partners in the Kongo and Mbulula health zones, have recorded 243 incidents of rape, 48 of which involved minors, in 12 different villages."

The actual figures are thought to be even higher as reporting of gender-based violence remains a taboo in most communities. "The attacks are reportedly being carried out by rival armed groups competing to maintain control over mining areas—especially gold mines—and as retaliation against government-led military operations," said Mantoo.

"Civilians find themselves trapped in the middle of intense confrontations between different groups. Our staff have heard horrific testimonies of extreme violence. Forcibly displaced persons have accused armed groups of carrying out mass rape as women attempt to flee their homes." She said some women and girls had been abducted and used as sex slaves, while ransoms have been demanded from families in exchange for their freedom. According to UN estimates, nearly 310,000 people have been uprooted by insecurity and violence and are currently displaced in Tanganyika Province.

Mantoo said more than 23,000 people had been displaced since May in the province's northern Kongo Territory alone, according to local authorities, with most having fled insecurity multiple times.

The UNHCR called on the authorities to scale up security in the so-called "triangle of death" in the wider region to protect civilians, allow humanitarian access, and launch investigations to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The agency said it had received 36 percent of the \$205 million needed for its operations in the DR Congo. Meanwhile, three Democratic Republic of Congo soldiers were killed in fighting with armed groups in the east of the country that also left eight militiamen dead, a military spokesman said on Friday. — AFP



BANGKOK: A pro-democracy protester uses a slingshot against police during a demonstration calling for the resignation of prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over the Thai government's handling of the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis, in Bangkok Friday. — AFP

Three injured as Thai police fire rubber bullets at Bangkok rally

BANGKOK: Three protesters were injured when Thai police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at a Bangkok rally Friday—the third time this week—as coronavirus cases soar and anger builds over the government's handling of the pandemic. The kingdom is grappling with its worst virus outbreak so far and registered a new daily high of 23,418 infections on Friday.

The sluggish rollout of Thailand's vaccination program and financial pain from restrictions is heaping political pressure on Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha's government. Protesters gathered in Bangkok at a major intersection by Victory Monument, defying a ban on public gatherings, and set fire to sacks of rotting fruit to symbolize the economic hardship of farmers. "These fruits can't be sold because of government failure (to manage the virus and the economy)," a female protester told a crowd of several hundred people. Demonstrators attempted to march on Prayut's residence inside a military barracks holding a large banner that read: "Prayut must get out immediately."

Police used barbed wire and rows of shipping containers to block their path while officers fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon. Deputy National Police spokesman Kissana Phathanacharoen said protesters targeted officers with ping pong

bombs, slingshots, bricks, and firecrackers. Fourteen motorbikes were impounded, he said. At least three protesters were injured including youth activist Thanat "Nat" Thanakitamnuy, an emergency medical centre said.

At protests on Tuesday and Wednesday in the same area, police used water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets and some demonstrators threw firecrackers at officers. Bangkok police, facing accusations of heavy-handedness, have insisted their approach is in line with the law and urged people not to jeopardize public health and safety.

"There is clear evidence that some people among the protest group have contracted COVID-19," Metropolitan Police Bureau chief Phukphong Phongpetra told reporters on Friday. A young protester who blew his own hand off while throwing a firework during Wednesday's rally has tested positive for coronavirus, local media reported.

Last year a youth-led pro-democracy protest movement began in Thailand that 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. But the movement lost momentum earlier this year as COVID-19 cases surged and its leaders were detained. — AFP

Police raid Nicaragua paper that branded govt a 'dictatorship'

MANAGUA: Nicaraguan police on Friday raided the premises of independent newspaper La Prensa, which had branded the government a "dictatorship" after being forced to suspend its print edition.

The publication announced the suspension on Thursday, blaming customs for refusing to release its paper imports. La Prensa was the only national independent daily newspaper remaining in circulation at a time when the government is accused of repressing opponents.

Nicaragua is gearing up for a general election in November but since the beginning of June, authorities had detained 32 opposition figures, including seven with aspirations of challenging President Daniel Ortega, who is seeking a fourth successive term. According to an official police statement, the newspaper's managers are being investigated for "customs fraud and money laundering."

Police took control of the premises at midday and said the newspaper's warehouses were in "custody."

During the raid, some of the paper's journalists said internet access and electricity were cut off, while officers prevented them from using their mobile telephones inside the building. Pro-government media published photos of La Prensa's warehouses on social media, claiming they



MANAGUA: In this file photo, a view of local La Prensa newspapers in Managua. — AFP

had no reason to halt their print version.

"In the warehouses of La Prensa newspaper, there is plenty of paper available so the company can continue printing its newspaper," Canal 4 posted on social media. However, La Prensa staff said that the amount of paper was not enough to print even one edition. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its special rapporteur for freedom of expression criticized the raid and condemned the "constant official persecution of the press in Nicaragua." — AFP

News in brief

BBC journalist can't re-enter Russia

LONDON: The BBC's Moscow correspondent said yesterday she was told by the Russian authorities that she "can't ever come back to Russia" after her visa was not renewed and she was effectively expelled from the country. Moscow told veteran correspondent Sarah Rainsford that she would have to leave the country when her current visa expires in August, at a time of simmering tensions between Russia and the West and a crackdown on independent media. "This is not a failure to renew my visa, although technically that's kind of what it is. I'm being expelled, and I've been told that I can't come back ever," Rainsford told BBC Radio 4. — AFP

Guatemala emergency over Delta

GUATEMALA CITY: Guatemala has declared a new state of emergency and will impose an overnight curfew from today to contain a surge in COVID infections due to the Delta variant, President Alejandro Giammattei said. The 30-day state of emergency is being implemented due to a rebound in cases attributed to the "more aggressive" Delta variant, Giammattei said in a televised address on Friday. "The Delta variant is highly contagious. It is causing new outbreaks and many governments have had to impose new restrictions on their populations as a mitigation measure. Guatemala cannot be the exception," he said. — AFP

Canada govt workers to get jobs

OTTAWA: The Canadian government announced Friday it will require all federal workers and most commercial rail, air and ship passengers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, amid a surge in virus cases due to the Delta variant. "We know that vaccines are the best way to end this pandemic," said Dominic LeBlanc, a government minister in charge of Canada's federal bureaucracy. "We expect federal public servants to want to comply with this mandatory requirement," he added. — AFP

Judge in Haiti steps down

PORT-AU-PRINCE: The judge named earlier this week to lead the judicial investigation into the assassination of Haitian president Jovenel Moise said Friday he would not take on the case. "We are removing ourselves from the said case for personal reasons and ordering its return to the dean of this court," judge Mathieu Chanlatte said in a letter to the Port-au-Prince Court of First Instance after being named on Monday. Moise was killed when a hit team burst into the presidential residence on July 7 and shot him dead. His wife Martine was wounded but survived. — AFP

US envoys press Tunisia on democracy

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied on Friday dismissed US concerns over threats to democracy in the North African country more than a month after he suspended parliament, raising charges of a coup. "There is no reason to worry about the subject of freedom, justice and democracy" in Tunisia, Saied said in a statement from his office during a visit by a high-level US delegation. The president said he took the "exceptional measures" in July in line with the constitution to "respond to the expectations of the people against a backdrop of political, economic and social crisis". — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021

Lebanon army deploys at pumps as CB chief firm on lifting fuel subsidies

Army raids gas stations, seizes petrol to curb hoarding

BEIRUT: Lebanon's army yesterday raided gas stations and seized petrol to curb hoarding as the central bank chief stood firm on his decision to halt fuel subsidies. Lebanon is gripped by one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850's, according to the World Bank, and is struggling with fuel, bread and medicine shortages.

On Wednesday central bank chief Riad Salameh said he would halt state subsidies on fuel imports to ease pressure on the bank's dwindling foreign reserves, sparking panic across the country.

Yesterday Salameh insisted he would not back down from his decision without a parliamentary vote, saying foreign reserves had fallen to \$14 billion. "I will not review the removal of subsidies on fuel unless the use of compulsory reserves is legalized" by a parliamentary vote, he told a local radio. The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value on the black market, and 78 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Crippling shortages of fuel and power cuts lasting more than 22 hours per day have left many businesses and homes without the diesel needed to power private generators, plunging the country into darkness.

They have also caused giant queues at petrol stations that are rationing gasoline supply, allegedly because of low stock. Fuel importers blame the crisis on a delay by the central bank in opening credit lines to fund imports. Salameh denied those charges yesterday, accusing importers and distributors of holding back fuel to sell it higher prices in the black market, or across the border in Syria.

"The importers are to blame," Salameh said, accusing them of squandering \$820 million the

lender had fronted for three months of imports.

Army deploys

To stem hoarding, the army on Saturday said it was raiding closed gas stations to seize gasoline and distribute it "free of charge" to the people. It shared pictures and video footage on its social media pages showing soldiers working pumps at gas stations and filling up car tanks.

An AFP correspondent saw soldiers deployed at several gas stations north of Beirut, where hundreds of vehicles had been queuing for long hours to fill up on petrol. Video footage posted online showed motorists cheering as the army raided gas stations. But some Lebanese remained bitter.

"The army's decision is too late," said one motorist who had been waiting for hours in the simmering heat.

After the army's deployment, many petrol stations across the country reopened after closing for several days. The police also announced yesterday they would dispatch patrols to gas stations believed to be hoarding fuel and confiscate it.

Political crisis

The central bank's funding of fuel and other basic commodity imports has contributed to foreign reserves falling by more than 50 percent from their pre-crisis level of more than \$30 billion.

Salameh blamed Lebanon's ruling class for the crisis. "Everybody was aware... they were aware in government, parliament and the president's office" that reserves were critically low, Salameh said, accusing them of inaction. Salameh has headed the central bank since 1993 and is suspected by many Lebanese of helping facilitate



BEIRUT: Lebanese soldiers are pictured at a petrol station in the capital Beirut yesterday after soldiers were deployed to force several stations to reopen their doors. —AFP

large transfers of money abroad by the political elite during mass protests that began in October 2019. He is under judicial investigation in Lebanon, Switzerland and France over several cases, including the diversion of public funds and illicit enrichment.

At home, many blame him for capital controls in place since 2019 that have trapped dollar savings and denied even the poorest segment of the population free access to their deposits.

But Salameh has pinned the blame on politicians who have failed to agree on a new government more than one year since caretaker premier Hassan Diab resigned in the wake of a monster explosion at the Beirut port. International donors who have pledged millions in humanitarian aid to Lebanon have conditioned assistance on the formation of a new government that can spearhead reforms and resume negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. —AFP

Apple defends child protection features over privacy concerns

CUPERTINO: Apple on Friday defended new child protection features that would check images uploaded to its cloud storage and on its messaging platform, rejecting concerns the updates pose threats to privacy. "We can see that it's been widely misunderstood," the US tech giant's software chief Craig Federighi said of the update rollout in an interview with the Wall Street Journal published Friday.

Last week, Apple unveiled two features to debut on iPads and iPhones in the United States. One can identify child sexual abuse images uploaded to its iCloud storage, while the other uses machine learning to recognize and warn children and their parents when receiving or sending sexually explicit photos on Apple's texting app, Messages, the company said in the statement.

Federighi said the new tools do not make Apple's systems and devices less secure or confidential. "We wanted to be able to spot such photos in the cloud without looking at people's photos," he said, adding Apple wanted to "offer this kind of capability... in a way that is much, much more private than anything that's

been done in this area before."

The company has also posted detailed explanations of the new features, saying in a technical paper that the technology, developed by cryptographic experts, "is secure, and is expressly designed to preserve user privacy." The company said it will have limited access to any violating images, which would be flagged to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a nonprofit organization.

In a briefing on Friday, Apple explained it would rely on trusted groups in multiple countries to determine what images to look out for to make sure searches weren't being manipulated for other purposes. It underscored that only images uploaded to iCloud are checked, with the system scanning for a digital version of a fingerprint that matches known child sex abuse images without seeing pictures.

Encryption and privacy specialists have said the tool could be exploited for other purposes, potentially opening a door to mass surveillance.

Others voiced concern the move could be a first step toward weakening encryption and opening "backdoors" that could be exploited by hackers or governments.

"We have faced demands to build and deploy government-mandated changes that degrade the privacy of users before, and have steadfastly refused those demands," Apple said in a post. "We will continue to refuse them in the future."

Apple was adamant it would not accede to

and high expectations about me. I will do my best," before he was driven away in a black limousine.

Lee was first jailed for five years in 2017, after Park's ouster, then walked free the following year when an appeals court dismissed most of his bribery convictions and gave him a suspended sentence.

But the Supreme Court later ordered Lee to face a retrial, which convicted and jailed him again. His parole is not the end of his legal travails: he remains on trial over alleged stock manipulation that effectively eased his path to take control of the family conglomerate—the same purpose for which he was convicted of bribing Park.

Song Won-keun, an economics professor at Gyeongsang National University, told AFP: "This is undeniably preferential treatment, especially given that a separate trial is still going on." There is a long history of top South Korean tycoons being charged with bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion, or other offenses.

But many of those convicted have subsequently had their sentences cut or suspended on appeal, with some—including Lee's father, the late Samsung chairman Lee Kun-hee, who was convicted twice-receiving presidential pardons in recognition of their "contribution to the national economy". The presidential Blue House insisted Lee's parole was a decision "made for the national interest".

Wealth a factor?

"We hope fellow citizens can also understand," a Blue House official told reporters.



any government's request to scan for anything other than images showing child sexual abuse. An online letter calling on Apple not to implement the features has been signed by more than 7,700 people, including former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, who leaked information revealing the US government's mass surveillance program.

"Apple's current path threatens to undermine decades of work by technologists, academics and policy advocates towards strong privacy-preserving measures being the norm across a majority of consumer electronic devices and use cases," read the plea posted at appleprivacyletter.com. "We ask that Apple reconsider its technology rollout, lest it undo that important work." —AFP

According to justice ministry data, only around 0.3 percent of all convicts who were released on parole from 2011 to 2020 served less than 70 percent of their jail terms. But a rule change recently came into effect cutting the proportion of their sentences prisoners must serve before being eligible for parole to 60 percent—a mark Lee passed a few weeks ago. The giant Samsung group is by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebols that dominate business in South Korea, the world's 12th largest economy.

Its flagship subsidiary Samsung Electronics—where Lee is vice-chairman—is the world's biggest smartphone maker. A company spokeswoman declined to comment on his release.

Lee's imprisonment has been no barrier to the firm's performance—it announced a surge of more than 70 percent in second-quarter profits last month, with coronavirus-driven working from home boosting demand for devices using its memory chips. Chaebol families often have only a small ownership stake in their empires, but maintain control through complex webs of cross-shareholdings between units.

Lee promised last year to end the line of family succession at the firm, saying he would not pass down his role to his children as he bowed in apology for multiple controversies. Regardless of the controversies, leaders of the country's top four conglomerates—SK Group, Hyundai Motor Group, LG Group and Samsung—in June met with President Moon Jae-in to press

Embraer returns to profit in Q2

SAO PAULO: Brazilian plane maker Embraer said Friday it returned to being in the black in the second quarter, as global air travel partially recovered from the pandemic. Beating expectations with a net profit that the company said came in at 438.1 million reais (\$87.9 million), Embraer's shares were up more than six percent in afternoon trading on the Sao Paulo stock exchange. Chief executive Francisco Gomes Neto said the "solid" results came partly thanks to strong commercial jet sales, which generated revenues of \$338.5 million.

That was more than triple the figure from the second quarter of 2020, when Embraer, the world's third-biggest plane maker, posted a net loss of \$315.3 million as COVID-19 brought the global aviation industry to a near-halt.

The company had posted a loss of \$89.7 million in the first quarter of 2021. Embraer said it had delivered 14 commercial planes for the April-June period, up from just four for the same period in 2020. It delivered 20 executive planes, up from 13 a year ago. The company was also hit hard last year when US aerospace giant Boeing ditched plans for a \$4.2 billion deal to buy the Brazilian company's commercial plane division. Embraer, the biggest plane maker after Airbus and Boeing, also announced plans Friday to make its operations carbon neutral by 2040. —AFP



UIWANG, South Korea: Lee Jae-yong (second left), jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group, walks out as he is released early on parole at the Seoul Detention Center in Uiwang Friday. —AFP

him to pardon Lee.

Polls also showed an increasing number of South Koreans in favor of granting him parole, with backing from more than 66 percent of respondents in a recent Realmeter survey. But Vladimir Tikhonov, a professor of Korean Studies at the University of Oslo, took a different view.

"Releasing him does not follow routine law-enforcement practice and suggests that his health could have been a factor," he told AFP. "This is a departure from the idea that everyone is equal before the law." —AFP

Jailed Samsung chief released on parole

SEOUL: The jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group walked free on parole Friday, the latest instance of South Korea's long tradition of freeing business leaders imprisoned for corruption or tax evasion on economic grounds. Lee Jae-yong—the 202nd richest person in the world according to Forbes, with a net worth of \$11.4 billion—was serving a two-and-a-half year prison sentence imposed in January for bribery, embezzlement and other offenses in connection with the corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

But calls for his early release from both politicians and business leaders grew in recent months over what they claimed was a possible leadership vacuum at the South's biggest conglomerate.

The justice ministry announced Monday he had been paroled—among around 800 early releases—citing concerns over the coronavirus pandemic's impact on the economy. Lee, 53, bowed to reporters waiting outside a detention center south of Seoul and told them: "I have caused too much concern to the people. I'm really sorry." Wearing a black suit, he added: "I'm listening carefully to your worries, criticisms, concerns,

Business

Gulf Bank collaborates with Balance Business Advisory

Bank to support vital SME segment, contribute to its growth in local economy

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is offering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) comprehensive business and transaction advisory services to support their business activity and growth, as part of a collaboration with Balance Business Advisory. Gulf Bank's latest initiative comes as part of its strategic aim to grow and expand its portfolio of products and transaction banking services, in addition to providing an unparalleled customer experience for corporate clients and support for the SME sector. To further encourage SMEs to take advantage of the latest services offered, Gulf Bank is offering its clients a 15 percent discount with Balance Business Advisory.

As part of Gulf Bank's collaboration with Balance Business Advisory, SMEs will be able to enjoy access to a range of competitive and useful services and products for the first time. These services include business valuations, transaction advisory, feasibility and case studies, cost management, pricing strategies, and a multitude of other advisory services.

The latest initiative by Gulf Bank aims to support the small business segment in light of what has undoubtedly been a challenging year for SMEs, expanding on the range of non-financing services offered to SMEs. As part of the new partnership with Balance Business Advisory, clients can also take advantage of post-pandemic advisory services, including capital restructuring, budget reevaluation, and turnaround strategies in hopes of making better

financial decisions and aligning their long-term financial goals.

Regarding this initiative, the Assistant General Manager of Corporate Banking at Gulf Bank, Meshal Al-Wazzan, "Although business advisory services have traditionally been limited to larger corporations in the past, Gulf Bank is proud to be the first local bank to offer these necessary services to the SME segment. It is no secret that SMEs play an increasingly crucial role in Kuwait's economic diversification, creating job opportunities for locals and raising the value of entrepreneurship.

By offering these vital services to an equally vital segment, Gulf Bank aims to support SMEs to not only overcome the unforeseen challenges of this past year, but to also ensure that their businesses are standing on ground that is more solid than ever moving forward. Through our latest initiative with Balance Business Advisory, we hope to assist and rescue SMEs that have been affected by the pandemic, in addition to offering a range of other advisory services tailored to the SME segment. Through these efforts and more, Gulf Bank aims to offer even more services that can assist the small and medium-sized enterprises that are partnered with Gulf Bank, and contribute to the growth of this vital segment in the country."

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is currently serving more than 7,000 companies through its business sector and across all branches. Gulf Bank



Gulf Bank Assistant General Manager of Corporate Banking Meshal Al-Wazzan during the signing of a contract with the representative of Balance Business Advisory.

currently offers companies the opportunity to conduct most of their corporate banking transactions online, including collection and payment services, employee salary transfers, point-of-sale services, payment gateways and payment links, in addition to the ability to open all kinds of accounts, issue debit

cards, and apply for SME financing solutions.

Earlier this year, Gulf Bank also launched a dedicated website through which SMEs can communicate with the Bank to inquire about commercial banking services and facilitate both financing and non-financing requests.

Malaysia slashes growth forecast after virus resurgence

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's central bank slashed its economic growth forecast for this year on Friday after authorities imposed a new lockdown to fight a coronavirus surge driven by the highly-contagious Delta variant. Like other parts of Southeast Asia, the country is battling its worst COVID-19 wave yet, reporting tens of thousands of cases and hundreds of deaths a day.

The new lockdown, imposed in June, has forced the closure of most businesses and dealt a heavy blow to an already teetering economy—but has so far had little success in blunting the virus surge. Citing the re-imposition of curbs, the central bank slashed its full-year growth forecast to between 3.0-4.0 percent, down from 6.0-7.5 percent previously.

However, Bank Negara added it expected "a gradual recovery in the fourth quarter this year, with higher global growth and sustained policy support providing a further lift to economic growth". Wellian Wiranto, an economist from OCBC Bank in Singapore, said the forecast downgrade increased the chances of the central bank cutting interest rates next month.

The central bank also reported gross domestic product rose a better than expected 16.1 percent



KUALA LUMPUR: The weaker outlook comes after COVID-19 cases peaked in January, forcing renewed travel curbs that weighed on the recovery. — AFP

in the second quarter compared to the same period a year ago, when the economy suffered a pandemic-induced collapse. However, GDP shrank from the previous quarter.

Malaysia, which largely avoided the pandemic's

quarterly results have helped buoy markets on both sides of the Atlantic. "This has been a common feature of the markets recently, small and steady gains that have seen European stocks push into record territory," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA.

The gains in Europe also have been driven by strong COVID vaccine programs that have enabled countries to loosen restrictions, Erlam said. But rising US infections from the Delta variant and mixed inflation data will turn attention to economic data next week, notably retail sales, for a better read on the prospects for the world's largest economy.

Further evidence of inflation pressures after mixed data this week, would likely prompt the Federal Reserve to start to roll back its massive stimulus program sooner than expected. Fed chief Jerome Powell is due to address the annual central banking conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming later this month, which could be the occasion for the first promised advance notice of a plan to taper the monthly pace of bond buying.

The worry is that tapering, along with an interest rate increase to contain inflation, could hamper the recovery. "Global investors are assessing the implications of the spread of the Delta virus, the possible tapering by the Fed, and China's clampdown," said Geir Lode, of Federated Hermes. In Asia, stock markets closed lower following a broadly positive week as the Chinese government tightens its grip on the world's second-biggest economy.

Crude prices extended their recent sell-off fueled by concerns that the Delta mutation would hurt demand, with the International Energy Agency warning as much in a report on Thursday. —AFP

initial wave last year, has now reported over 1.3 million virus cases and almost 12,000 deaths. But the country's vaccination rollout has picked up speed, with about 30 percent of Malaysia's 32 million inhabitants now fully inoculated. — AFP

Global stocks make modest gains after days of records

NEW YORK: US and European stock markets made modest gains on Friday after days of records as concerns about the pandemic sparked a surprise collapse in US consumer confidence. On Wall Street, the Dow and S&P 500 eked out a fourth consecutive record close and modest gains for the week amid thin summer trading.

European equities edged higher to cap the week, with Frankfurt's DAX 30 momentarily breaching the 16,000-point mark for the first time and Paris briefly reaching a 21-year high. US shares drifted higher at the open, but retreated after the University of Michigan reported its consumer sentiment index plunged to its lowest level in a decade as the Delta variant of COVID-19 continues to spread.

"There is little doubt that the pandemic's resurgence due to the Delta variant has been met with a mixture of reason and emotion" from consumers, the survey's chief economist, Richard Curtin said. The index fell 13.5 percent — one of the largest declines ever recorded — to 70.2 due to "dashed hopes that the pandemic would soon end," and the correct assessment that the economy will suffer, he added.

Healthy earnings

Earnings season is winding down but strong



NEW YORK: A woman exits from a Famous Footwear Store in Midtown New York. Stock markets were mostly lower Friday weighed down by a slump in oil prices over concerns about the economic impact of rising infections from COVID's highly contagious Delta variant. —AFP

Facebook encrypts Messenger calls in privacy move

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Friday began rolling out encryption for voice or video calls made through its Messenger texting app, ratcheting up privacy for users. The move comes as the sanctity of data on smartphones becomes an increasingly sensitive topic. Encrypting text chats on Messenger has been an option since 2016.

The number of audio or video calls made on Messenger has surged since then to more than 150 million daily, prompting Facebook to add the option of scrambling exchanges from one end to the other to prevent snooping. "The content of your messages and calls in an end-to-end encrypted conversation is protected from the moment it leaves your device to the moment it reaches the receiver's device," Messenger director of product management Ruth Kricheli said in a blog post.

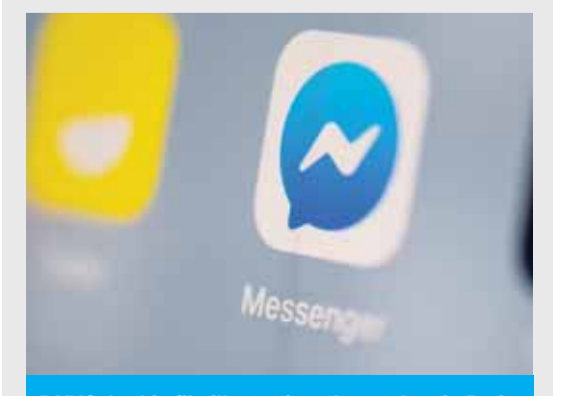
"This means that nobody else, including Facebook, can see or listen to what's sent or said."

End-to-end encryption is already widely used by apps including Facebook-owned WhatsApp and is becoming an industry standard. "People expect their messaging apps to be secure and private," Kricheli said. Facebook disclosed that it is testing encrypting group chats and calls on Messenger, as well as direct messages at its image-centric Instagram social network.

"We'll also kick off a limited test with adults in certain countries that lets them opt-in to end-to-end encrypted messages and calls for one-on-one conversations on Instagram," Kricheli said.

Apple's recent announcement that it would scan encrypted messages for evidence of child sexual abuse has revived debate on online encryption and privacy, raising fears the same technology could be used for government surveillance. The move represents a major shift for Apple, which has until recently resisted efforts to weaken its encryption that prevents third parties from seeing private messages. Apple argued in a technical paper that the technology developed by cryptographic experts "is secure, and is expressly designed to preserve user privacy."

Nonetheless, encryption and private specialists warned the tool could be exploited for other purposes, potentially opening a door to mass surveillance. The Apple move comes following years of standoffs involving technology firms and law enforcement. FBI officials have warned that so-called "end to end encryption," where only the user and recipient can read messages, can protect criminals, terrorists and pornographers even when authorities have a legal warrant for an investigation. —AFP



PARIS: In this file illustration photo taken in Paris, shows the logo of the instant messaging application of Facebook called Messenger. —AFP

Greek economy to grow despite COVID, fires: Minister

ATHENS: Greece's economy will weather the twin blows of the COVID-19 pandemic and massive wildfires this year, aided by better-than-expected tourism arrivals, the finance minister said Friday. "It's a good year compared to last year. Compared to our estimates...it's much better," Finance Minister Christos Staikouras told Mega TV, referring to tourism arrivals.

"Our estimate for 3.6-percent (economic) growth this year is absolutely feasible, and may actually be too conservative," he said. The budget had forecast 4.8 percent growth in 2021. In April, Staikouras had lowered the estimate to 4.2 percent, and to 3.6 percent in July.

Greek national output had plunged by 8.2 percent in 2020 as the pandemic shut down the global travel sector, one of the country's main sources of income. Greece had expected to recover only 45 percent of the pre-pandemic levels of revenue from 2019, but arrivals are currently at 70 percent, Staikouras said. Greece reopened to foreign travellers in May after a sustained campaign to vaccinate residents in islands and other tourism destinations.

The results have been mostly positive, with virus spikes limited in scope. The popular island of Mykonos went into curfew in July after a flurry of cases. Similar restrictions were imposed in Zakynthos and in two cities in Crete in recent days. Tourism is crucial to the Greek economy, as it accounts for 20 percent of GDP. Tourism revenue plunged to 4.3 billion euros (\$5.0 billion) in 2020 from 18 billion euros in 2019, while tourist arrivals fell 76.5 percent to just 7.4 million, according to the Greek Tourism Confederation Institute.

Greece has spent billions of euros propping up businesses during lockdowns since 2020, and additional spending will be required to sustain residents in areas devastated by wildfires over the past three weeks. Hundreds of homes and many businesses have been destroyed in Evia, Arcadia and the outskirts of Athens in the prolonged fire wave that struck Greece from late July and intensified last week, during the worst heatwave in decades.

Staikouras said the government would disburse an additional 500 million euros (\$586 million) this year in the wake of the fire disaster. — AFP

Al-Roshood: H1 positive results reflect financial strength of KFH

KFH earnings webcast H1-2021

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) held its H1-2021 earnings webcast. AbdulWahab Al-Roshood, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at KFH highlighted the Bank's financial performance during H1-2021 earnings webcast.

He said that KFH has, by the grace of Allah, reported a net profit of KD 102.2 million for KFH shareholders; that represents an increase of 79.5 percent compared to the same period last year.

Earnings per share reached 12.21

income is comparatively lower primarily due to the impact of decrease in local and international benchmark rates started from Q2-20.

Zahran indicated that the decrease in COF is mainly due to decrease in benchmark rates across the globe, and improvement in CASA deposits at Kuwait and group level. Net Operating income at KD 248.0mn decreased by KD 19.6 million or 7.3 percent compared to same period last year; the decrease is mainly from Investment income by KD 34.5 million offset by

amounted to KD 92.5 million an increase of KD 0.6 million from KD 91.9 million in H1 2020. The group has continued to adopt cautious approach towards provisioning and recorded precautionary general provision to address the COVID-19 related uncertainties.

Zahran pointed out that impairment related to investments and others reduced by KD 96.8 million with net recovery of KD 2.5 million recorded in H1 2021 compared to charge of KD 94.3 million in H1 2020. This decline is

age of total funding at 85.4 percent reflects healthy funding mix and shows robust liquidity. Zahran also highlighted that during the H1-21, KFH has completed issuance of AT-1 Sukuk of \$750 million at profit rate of 3.6 percent p.a. to further diversify source of funding and enhance capital and other regulatory ratios.

In the last slide looking at the key performance ratios which reflects improvement in profitability except to C/I ratio which deteriorated slightly as explained earlier.

and the third in the world with \$692.9 billion according to Forbes Middle East.

As of June 28th, over 3 million doses of the vaccine have been administered in Kuwait, which is enough to fully cover about 35 percent of the population, in line with the target of the ministry of health, to vaccinate 2 million of the 4.3 million population by September 2021, and the vaccination program will continue into 2022 in an attempt to inoculate the whole population.



Al-Roshood: KFH plays its role as a main pillar in supporting the national economy and the development plans in Kuwait and the region

fills; an increase of 79.3 percent compared to the same period of last year. Total operating expenses for the first half of the year stabilized to reach 152.1 million at the same level for the comparative period. He added that financing receivables reached KD 11.1 billion, an increase of KD 338.8 million or 3.2 percent compared to the year-end 2020, while investment in Sukuk reached KD 2.7 billion; an increase of 0.2 percent compared to year end 2020. Total assets reached KD 21.5 billion, while depositors' accounts reached KD 15.8 billion, an increase of KD 459 million or 3.0 percent compared to end of year 2020.

Al-Roshood pointed out that the first half positive results reflect the financial strength and creditworthiness of KFH, adding that the figures also confirm the efficiency of KFH's operational performance and its business model as well as the tangible improvements achieved by the bank in digital transformation and various strategic initiatives.

He indicated that KFH successfully issued \$750 million AT1 Mudaraba Sukuk, the largest issuance in Kuwait in terms of size, the received subscription orders reached USD 2 billion, close to three times the targeted issue size. That Mudaraba Sukuk aims to support KFH's Tier 1 capital, diversify its financing resources, increase its financial and investment capabilities, support the infrastructure projects and the local productive economic sectors as well as help customers with their expansion plans regionally and globally.

Al-Roshood confirmed that KFH plays its role as a main pillar in supporting the national economy and the development plans in Kuwait and the region by participating in project financing and providing a wide range of banking and financing solutions, including trade finance, contracts, SMEs, and business banking, in addition to large companies and development projects. Regarding the acquisition, he explained that KFH has disclosed to the regulatory authorities and the market the latest developments in this regard, adding that all these disclosures were published via the official website of Boursa Kuwait, and any new development will be updated as and when it comes available.

Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer

Meanwhile, Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer at KFH, highlighted the financial performance of H1-2021, indicating the Group has achieved net profit After Tax attributable to Shareholders for the period ended 30th June 2021 of KD 102.2 million higher by KD 45.3 million or 79.5 percent compared to H1-2020 of KD 56.9 million. The higher profits are mainly from lower provisions and higher FX income offset by lower investment income.

He added that net financing income has witnessed a slight decrease by KD 4 million or 1.3 percent compared to same period last year. Financing

the increase in Net gains from foreign currencies by KD 12.4 million and fees & commissions by KD 2.9 million.

He explained that the decrease in investment income by KD 34.5 million is mainly due loss on Islamic derivative transactions (mainly currency & commodity swaps entered by our subsidiary Kuwait Turk) partly offset by increase in other investment income. Despite the slight decrease in net financing income, contribution of net financing income to operating income increased from 70 percent to 73 percent.

Zahran added that non-financing income dropped from KD 124 million for same period last year to KD 108.3 million lower by 12.7 percent mainly due to lower investment income. Total Operating Expenses at KD 152.1 million has been maintained at same comparative period level due to rationalization of certain expenses on account of COVID-19 enforced changes to normal business activities.

He mentioned that the reduction in operating income resulted in an increase in Cost to income ratio to 38.01 percent (FY 2020 was 37.21 percent and H1-20 was 36.24 percent). At KFH-Kuwait, C/I ratio at 30.5 percent is still below both the local Islamic banks average of 42.6 percent and local conventional Banks average of 41.1 percent (calculated from published financials for Q1-21).

Zahran said that average Yielding Assets is up by 3.9 percent compared to both H1-20 and 2020, resulted mainly from the growth in financing receivables. (avg financing receivables is up by KD 0.4 billion compared to 2020 and by KD 0.7 billion compared to H1-20). Group NFM at 2.94 percent shows (28)bps decrease over H1-20 average of 3.22 percent. Average Yield decreased by (65)bps due to the

mainly due to reversal of expected credit losses on Sukuk portfolio of KD 22.4 million during the current period due to improvement in macro-economic factors. He highlighted that the current credit provisions level in KFH group books exceeds ECL required as per CBK IFRS 9 by KD 291 million as of June 2021. Total assets at KD 21.5 billion increased marginally by KD 0.1 billion or 0.2 percent in H1-21.



Financing receivables at KD 11.1 billion increased by 3.2 percent. Growth in financing receivables mainly in Kuwait in both; Corporate and Retail, while decline in Turkey mainly due to devaluation of Turkish lira. Overall growth in financing receivable without impact of TL devaluation was around 5.8 percent.

He added that investments in Sukuk at KD 2.7 billion is maintained at the 2020 level. Additionally, deposits for H1-21 at KD 15.8 billion are KD 0.5 billion or three percent above 2020 level. Growth in Deposits without impact of decline in Turkish lira was 4.2 percent. The group was able to maintain favorable deposits mix with

- ROAE increased from 5.80 percent to 10.90 percent
- ROAA increased from 0.67 percent to 1.28 percent
- C/I increased from 36.24 percent to 38.01 percent, and
- EPS increased from 6.8 fils to 12.2 fils

Zahran concluded that NPL ratio increased slightly to reach 2.22 per-

cent. For interest rates, the Central Bank of Kuwait kept interest rate at 1.5 percent after the last cut of 100 basis points on the 16th of March 2020. Further "KFH" enjoys a high creditworthiness, Fitch Ratings affirmed Kuwait Finance House Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A+' with a Negative Outlook as a result of revising the outlooks on 11 Kuwaiti banks to Negative from Stable, following a similar action

Zahran: KFH Kuwait dominates the saving accounts in the market

Al-Mukhaizeem: KFH has successfully contributing to strategic initiatives which reflected positively on society and the national economy

KFH successfully issued \$750 million AT1 Mudaraba Sukuk, the largest issuance in Kuwait in terms of size, the received subscription orders reached \$2 billion, close to three times the targeted issue size. That Mudaraba Sukuk aims to support KFH's Tier 1 capital, diversify its financing resources, increase its financial and investment capabilities, support the infrastructure projects and the local productive economic sectors as well as help customers with their expansion plans regionally and globally.

full impact of the drop in DR by CBK, Fed rates and market rates. However, average COF decline by 30bps due to increase in CASA deposits in the major entities of the group.

Looking at provisions and impairments, he said that group total impairment charge decreased by KD 96.2 million or 52 percent to reach KD 90 million for H1-21. Credit provisions charge net of recoveries for H1 2021

healthy contribution from CASA deposits at 53.3 percent of total group deposits as at the end of H1-21 as well as at YE 2020, and is up by 2.8 percent from H1-20 level of 50.5 percent.

It is also worth to mention that KFH Kuwait dominates the saving accounts with market share of 40.9 percent (as per CBK latest published reports, May-21). Customer deposits as a percent-

tion rates continue to climb quickly across the world, after the recession in 2020. According to the latest forecasts by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2021, Kuwait GDP will rebound by 0.7 percent in 2021 (up from negative 8.1 percent in 2020) and 3.2 percent in 2022.

He added that Kuwait's Sovereign wealth fund ranked the first in terms of asset value among the Arab countries

on Kuwait's sovereign rating on 2 February 2021, and Moody's assigned A2 long-term deposit rating with a Stable Outlook.

In addition, Al-Mukhaizeem said that KFH Group has recently been named as the Best Islamic Financial Institution in the World by Global Finance Magazine, the Bank of the year in the Middle East and in Kuwait by The Banker, and the Best Domestic bank in Kuwait by AsiaMoney.

He added that as a part of our sustainable development strategy, KFH has successfully contributing to different strategic initiatives which reflected positively on society and the national economy, such as the KD 20 million initiative to pay the debts of defaulting debtors, in addition to its excellence in various aspects of social responsibility. Al-Mukhaizeem explained that KFH keeps focusing on developing the products and services provided to its customers and is keen to continue adopting banking digitization in collaboration with FinTechs, employing Artificial Intelligence and robotics, and keeping pace with developments in the global banking industry.

He indicated that the digitization of banking operations contributes to raising the efficiency of performance, enhancing financial inclusion, increasing productivity, and reducing costs, and thus enhancing profitability. KFH is moving forward by investing in emerging technologies and FinTech companies, to maintain the lead on competitors and achieve customer's aspirations in such a rapidly changing and evolving environment. Al-Mukhaizeem said: "Although, KFH has launched a project to develop the sustainability strategy to integrate with business strategy of KFH, paying attention to the efficiency of risk management, developing human resources, enhancing the transparency and credit rating through the 7th sustainability report according to the latest global principles and criteria."

Business

NBK maintains its inclusion in 'FTSE4Good Index Series'

FTSE Russell's semi-annual review of the index

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) maintained its inclusion as a constituent of the leading Environment-Social-Governance (ESG) index "FTSE4Good Index Series", after FTSE Russell's semi-annual review of the index last June.



Maintaining the inclusion is a recognition of NBK's ESG achievements, as it is the only Kuwaiti bank to be included in this prestigious Index. FTSE Russell's FTSE4Good Index Series, widely regarded as one of the world's leading ESG indexes, is a key tool in helping investors identify companies and banks that meet globally recognized sustainability standards.

The FTSE4Good Index Series was launched in 2001 to provide investors with a benchmark index to track the performance of sustainable investment portfolios. The FTSE4Good Index Series is designed to measure the performance of companies demonstrating strong ESG practices, offering investors potential improvements to the risk reward ratio, whilst maintaining full allocation to the relevant equity market. NBK prides in the accomplishments made over the past years towards achieving its sustainability pillars, and looks forward to continue progress in making ESG standards a basis for dialogue with customers, and to embed sustainable finance in all its operations, and building sustainability as an integral part of its corporate culture. Additionally, the bank strives to strengthen its position as a leading provider of sustainable banking services, and it is committed to maintaining this approach. NBK has always defended the essential role of banking services in achieving the aspirations of individuals and companies, along with looking forward to embed ESG issues at the heart of its business.

Furthermore, ESG generally is becoming a top priority across the NBK Group and for its operations in various markets. In recent years, the bank has expanded its sustainability disclosures and has been issuing a detailed sustainability report since 2017.

The bank also expects to announce initiatives to better measure ESG impacts, with the highest priorities focused on assessing direct and indirect environmental impact, as climate change risks continue to emerge. It is worth mentioning that for the fifth year in



row, NBK issues a sustainability report highlighting the bank's social, economic and environmental initiatives and the implementation of corporate governance principles in accordance with the standards of Integrated Reporting (IR) Framework and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The bank's efforts in this

regard over the past years were recognized by inclusion in the FTSE4Good Index and the Refinitiv AFE Low Carbon Select Index in MENA, in which NBK ranked first among regional banks and Kuwaiti companies in terms of the index's weight. In 2020, NBK also maintained its MSCI ESG Index rating at BBB.

URC announces its financial results for first half of 2021

KUWAIT: United Real Estate Company K.S.C.P (URC), a leading real estate developer and investor in Kuwait and the MENA region, announced its financial results for the first half ended 30 June 2021.

The company recorded an increase in its net profits by 122.5 percent to reach KD 1.27 million for the first half of 2021, compared to a net loss of KD 5.65 million for the same period in 2020. Operating profits in the first half of 2021 were KD 6.45 million compared to KD 1.65 million reported in the first half of 2020. Operating profits in the second quarter of 2021 were KD 3.17 million compared to an operating loss for the same period of 2020 at KD 3.40 million.

During the second quarter of 2021, net profits were KD 139.9 thousand compared to a net loss of KD 7.31 million for the same period in 2020. Commenting on the results, URC Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer, Mazen Issam Hawwa said, "The Company's performance has significantly improved this year, despite the government-imposed health protocols and travel restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in net profits that URC has recorded resulting from growth in revenues from rental, hospitality, and real estate services. The Company also witnessed an improvement from associates share of income, in tandem with a successful outcome from its ongoing cost optimization initiatives, which achieved a decline in finance costs."

Hawwa concluded, "URC is determined to sustain its operating profits for the second half of this year, by further enhancing our operational performance in parallel with the ease of government policies on public health and safety restrictions, resulting from accelerating the national vaccination programs to combat the spread of coronavirus. Moreover, URC's ongoing developments in Hessa Al-Mubarak District have received significant interest from the local market, as we are keen to deliver a bespoke community and lifestyle experience."

KIB concludes sign language training program for its employees

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently organized a one-month sign language training program for its employees, conducted and held at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK). The program is the latest effort in the Bank's ongoing training and development program, which seeks to upskill staff across all areas of the Bank's operations, as well as provide specialized professional development opportunities to its team.

A key aim of the training program was to help bridge one of the most critical gaps that affect the deaf community in Kuwait-communicating with service professionals. The course was conducted by Dr Najat Mukhtar, a professional trainer at ACK. KIB staff were taken through the basics of how to interact, assist and initiate a conversation with a deaf customer using basic sign language. The program addressed a number of key topics such as: learning the names of areas with bank branches; being able to identify and assist with core bank transactions - including opening accounts, and being able to respond to common requests and run through the most frequently required procedure.

"There is an active segment of Kuwait's population that lives with disabilities and at KIB we are constantly

AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 11 August 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Ghaneemah Hasan Abdulrahman, Nasser Ghannam Al-Ajmi, Nasser Mohamad Al-Sayer, Saadah Helal Al-Shammari, Bader Saleh Al-Enezi, Ahmad Nasser Hameedan, Jaafar Sadeq Al-Iedani, Nawal Saud Al-Shatti, Manar Ali Al-Rubaian, Sarah Shafi Al-Mutairi, Faleh Mohamad Al-Azemi, Kareemah Khudhair Karam, Khalaf Bader Al-Bader, Al-Jouri Saad Abdulreda, Abdurouf Radhi Eissa, Ahmed Abdalaziz Ahmed, Sali Mohsen Krayem, Mohammad Jeaithen Al-Mutairi, Mohammad Abdulmohsen Al-Shemali And Ismael Ibrahim Nakhlah.

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

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



Feras Al-Dermi

striving to improve our services by creating a convenient and inclusive banking experience for every single customer that interacts with us," said Feras Al-Dermi, Deputy Manager of the Human Resources Department at KIB. He further added: "This training course was not a standalone initiative, as it comes as part of our expansive and comprehensive employee personal and professional development program. As an organization, we strongly believe in constantly and continuously investing in our employees - to ensure that we are always taking our banking experience to the next level for all customers."

Al-Dermi also noted that the sign language program comes in line with the directives and vision set forth by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). "Over the years, we have been pushing to create a more comfortable experience for persons with disabilities because we firmly believe that by empowering our community, we empower ourselves," concluded Al-Dermi.

It serves to note that since 2017, KIB has been offering several service and amenities across all touchpoints to furnish a more convenient and inclusive banking experience to people with disabilities. This includes the introduction of wheelchair friendly ATMs and ramps at branches, as well as having all terms and conditions for KIB's products and services recorded as audio and printed in braille to cater to customers who are visually impaired or deaf.

Summer surprises could be a bonanza for brand impersonators

By Werno Gevers

With the UAE in the middle of its annual peak shopping season - the Dubai Summer Surprises - online retailers and their customers need to remain on high alert for cyberattacks. Data from Mimecast indicates that top retail, fashion and lifestyle brands are being impersonated in cyberattacks designed to trick unsuspecting shoppers looking to get a great deal or buy that must-have item.

The Dubai Summer Surprises offers sales, special offers and prize draws across the city from July to early September. After what has been an immensely challenging 18-months, consumers are understandably excited to engage in some retail therapy and relieve some of the pressure caused by the pandemic.

However, cybercriminals lie in wait. As marketers at top retail and fashion brands aim to promote specials by sending the right message to reach the right customers at the right time, so do cybercriminals. Except when it comes to crooks, the objective is not to offer great deals, but to steal credentials, infect devices with malware and subvert the trust customers have in their favorite brands for their own monetary gain.

Data points to growing threat

Based on Mimecast threat intelligence, global brand impersonation emails directed at Mimecast customers rose by 44 percent in 2020 to reach an average of nearly 27 million emails per month. Since this only accounts for Mimecast customers, the actual scale of the problem is likely far worse.

The more popular the brand, the more likely it will be co-opted into cybercriminals' nefarious plans. Mimecast's State of Brand Protection report highlights how companies on the Brandz Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands 2020 index experienced a massive 381 percent increase in brand impersonation attacks during the two months of May and June 2020 compared to January-February, before the pandemic struck.

During the same period, the number of new domains suspected of brand impersonation spiked by 366 percent. The result? Customers are increasingly being duped, with monthly clicks on dangerous links by unsuspecting shoppers soaring by 84.5 percent over the course of the year.

In the UAE, 36 percent of respondents to the Mimecast State of Email Security 2021 Report saw an increase in brand impersonation via counterfeit websites, and two in five had a rise in malicious email

spoofing.

Greater efforts needed to protect shoppers

Brands are becoming increasingly concerned over the damage such attacks can have on their reputation and relationship with customers. Ninety-five percent said they would be concerned if a counterfeit website misappropriated their company's brand, up from 74 percent in 2020. These concerns are not without merit. Frost & Sullivan research shows that nearly half (48 percent) of respondents to its survey stopped using an online service when it had suffered a data breach.

Mimecast's Brand Exploit Protect web-scanning tool uncovered how various retailers on Kantar's top 100 brands list - such as Amazon, Zara, Chanel, and Adidas - have all been recent victims of brand impersonation. Meanwhile, a web scan created in the past six months of five of the top online retailers in the Middle East and North Africa picked up over 18 000 domains with a similar name to these brands. Over 5000 of these were created within the last six months, which is often a pretty good indication that something might not be right.

The popularity of these brands, especially during this peak shopping season, means consumers are often left vulnerable as they rush to get that one great deal or special offer. For these and other brands looking to regain lost revenue following the global economic slowdown of the past year-and-a-half, such attacks could not come at a worse time.

To protect customers against cybercriminals and fraudsters, brands need to deploy new tools and implement additional policies to maintain the integrity of their brands online. Marketers and security teams should work in close partnership: marketing teams can help security teams distinguish legitimate uses of their brand from bad actors, and security teams can help marketers gain greater visibility over the extent to which their brand is being exploited.

Security teams need to act quickly to take down spoofed domains. Brand protection services are invaluable here: tools such as DMARC help identify outgoing emails impersonating legitimate domains, while brand exploit protection tools can block brand attacks before they launch, and stop live attacks in their tracks. Brands also need to drive awareness of cyber threats among customers, equipping them with the knowledge to identify potentially fake or malicious brand impersonation attempts.

Finally, by integrating brand exploit protection services with email and web security solutions, organizations can strengthen their overall cyber resilience and be far better equipped to halt impersonation and other forms of attack before they affect customers, partners or employees.

Note: Werno Gevers is a cybersecurity expert at Mimecast

Rosneft profit up on higher oil prices

MOSCOW: Russian oil giant Rosneft on Friday reported a leap in second quarter earnings, benefiting from an increase in global crude price. The state-controlled company reported a net profit of 233 billion rubles (\$3.1 billion) in the second quarter, a 55 percent increase when compared to the first quarter.

The company-which is about one-fifth owned by Britain's BP-appears to be recovering after suffering losses in 2020, a year hit by an oil price crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

In a statement from the group, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin praised the achievement of "strong" results despite the "challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic". He said that the net profit recorded was "among the highest" in the history of the company, propped up by a recovery in crude oil prices.

Rosneft, whose quarterly revenue doubled year-on-



year to 2.2 trillion rubles, said it reduced its debts during the past quarter. Sechin also announced that Rosneft has launched construction of the main infrastructure facilities of the "flagship" Vostok Oil project in Siberia.

Sechin had previously described it as the "world's largest new hydrocarbon project". Production at the project is expected to start in 2024, with the aim of reaching an output of 100 million tons by the start of the next decade. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

In the footsteps of a woolly mammoth, 17,000 years ago

Walking the equivalent of twice around the world during a life lasting 28 years, one woolly mammoth whose steps have been traced by researchers has proven the huge beast was a long-distance wanderer. The findings, published Thursday in the prestigious journal *Science*, could shed light on theories about why the mammoth, whose teeth were bigger than the human fist, became extinct.

"In all popular culture - for example if you watch (the cartoon) 'Ice Age' - there are always mammoths who move around a lot," said Clement Bataille, assistant professor at the University of Ottawa and one of the lead authors of the study. But there is no clear reason why mammoths should have trekked great distances "because it is such an enormous animal that moving around uses a lot of energy," he told AFP.

The researchers were amazed by the results: the mammoth they studied probably walked around 70,000 km, and did not stay just on the plains of Alaska as they expected. "We see that it traveled throughout Alaska, so an immense territory," said Bataille. "It was really a surprise."

Readings on a tusk

For their study, the researchers selected the tusks of a male woolly mammoth who lived at the end of the last ice age. The animal - named "Kik" after a local river - lived relatively close to the time of the extinction of the species, around 13,000 years ago. One of the two tusks was cut in half to take readings of strontium isotope ratios.

Strontium is a chemical element similar to limestone and is present in soil. It is transmitted to vegetation and, when eaten, is deposited in bones, teeth... or tusks. The tusks grow throughout a mammal's life, with the tip reflecting the first years of life, and the base representing the final years. Isotope ratios are different depending on geology, and Bataille developed an isotopic map of the region.

By comparing it with the data from the tusks, it was possible to track when and where the mammoth had been. At the time, glaciers covered all of the Brooks Range of mountains in the north and the Alaska Range in the south, with the plain of the Yukon River in the center. The animal returned regularly to some areas, where it could stay for several years. But his movements also changed greatly depending on his age, before he eventually died of hunger.

During the first two years of his life, researchers were even able to observe



Mat Wooller, director of the Alaska Stable Isotope Facility, kneels among a collection of mammoth tusks at the University of Alaska Museum of the North. — AFP photos

signs of breastfeeding. "What was really surprising was that after the teenage years, the isotopic variations start to be much more important," said Bataille. The mammoth has "three or four times in its life, made an immense journey of 500, 600 even 700 kilometers, in a few months". Scientists say the male may have been solitary, and moving from herd to herd to reproduce. Or he could have been facing a drought or a harsh winter, forcing him to seek a new area where food was more plentiful.

Lessons for today?

Whether for genetic diversity, or due to scarce resources, it is "clear that this species needed an extremely large area to live," said Bataille. But, at the time of the transition from the ice age to the interglacial period - when they were extinct - "the area shrank because more forests grew" and "humans put quite a lot of pressure on southern Alaska, where mammoths probably moved much less."

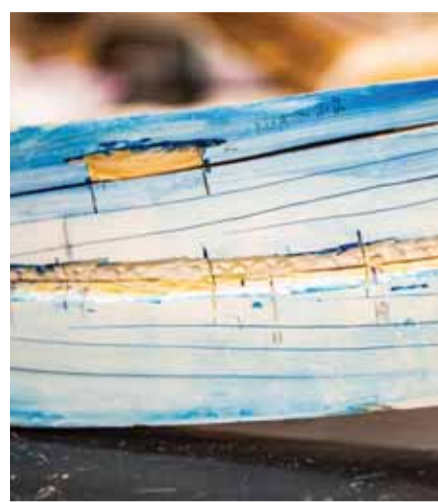
Understanding factors that led to the disappearance of mammoths may help protect other threatened megafauna species, such as caribou or elephants. With today's climate changing, and humans often restricting big species to parks and reserves, Bataille said, "do we want our children 1,000 years from now to view elephants the same way we view mammoths today?" — AFP

World-first footage reveals secret life of a dingo

A camera fitted to a dingo in Australia captured the wild dog's life on Fraser Island for the first time, as authorities work to protect the animal and people in the tourist hotspot. From posing for snap-happy onlookers to scavenging on the pristine sand of the world heritage site off Queensland's coast, the collar camera captured the daily life of the dog, whose species is also known as wongari, in close-up detail, according to the Queensland Department of Environment and Science.

"This is superb footage and shows us where the wongari goes, how and where he finds food and water and gives us an intimate view of the time he spends with his mate," Ranger in Charge Linda Behrendorff said. "We have never seen anything like this before, and it shows that wongari are opportunistic feeders, taking advantage of any food source they find."

The collar camera revealed the "secret life" of the dog over a month, following the animal across hundreds of kilometres in



This undated handout photo shows a close-up view of a split mammoth tusk, with the blue stain used to reveal growth lines, as samples were taken along the tusk using lasers and other techniques, allowing isotope analysis that provided a record of the mammoth's life.

the island's north, Behrendorff said. "Tracking collars are one of a number of management techniques we use to monitor wongari after increased risks of negative interactions or incidents with residents or visitors to the island," she said.

The program is part of increased efforts to track and manage dingoes after several children were bitten on the island in separate incidents earlier this year. Queensland's government in May announced it would install a new fence to prevent the animals from entering the biggest township, with authorities warning that some dogs on the island had lost a natural fear of humans after being fed or eating food scraps.

Fraser Island is also known as K'gari, which means "paradise" in the local Butchulla people's language, and is listed as a world heritage site for its rainforests, freshwater dune lakes and complex system of dunes that are still evolving. Native to Australia, dingoes drew international attention with the disappearance of baby Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru in 1980.

Although the baby's mother Lindy was convicted of murder and her father, Michael, as an accessory over the disappearance, the chance discovery of a piece of Azaria's clothing outside a dingo lair led their conviction to be overturned in 1988. A court ruling in 2012 found that a dingo snatched the baby from a tent. — AFP

Gorillas in our midst: DRC park fetes rare birth

DRC Congo's Kahuzi-Biega National Park is celebrating the birth of an eastern lowland gorilla, one of the world's most endangered species. "We have the pleasure of announcing the birth of a baby to the female Mwinja," the park announced on Facebook on Friday. "Our rangers were there and captured this moment of intimacy, on Saturday August 7. She seemed happy to be showing off her baby. Both are in very good healthy." The birth is "a sign of hope," the park's spokesman, Hubert Mulongoy, told AFP.

The park, located in a deeply troubled part of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, said the birth brought its tally of the apes - Gorilla beringei graueri - from 171 to 172. Mwinja has already had offspring but this is the first she has had with a well-known male called Nabiremo. The park's gorilla population includes two tribes who live in so-called habituation, meaning that they are used to human presence nearby.

Kahuzi-Biega covers around 6,000 sq km of mountains and rainforests near the western banks of Lake Kivu and the Rwandan border. It is a magnet for intrepid ecotourists, who are drawn to its unique landscape and rare species. The park is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site in danger because of the presence of armed groups and settlers, poaching and deforestation. — AFP

Mine's a barkarita: London bar for pampered pooches

The "After Bark" bar and cafe looks like any trendy watering hole in east London, with its neon sign and tables made of repurposed barrels and cable reels. But the menu is divided into "hounds" and "humans", with cocktails for regulars and "puptails" for their four-legged friends. The doggie drinks, specially made and placed on the floor, are made of natural, healthy ingredients but go by racy names such as "Sex on the b****h".

"The 'puptails' that we have here on the menu, they are made out of raw beets, raw carrots, teas made with dandelions and burdock," says founder and owner Jamie Swan. "Things that basically we would put in refreshing teas that are good for us, ginseng for instance, but that are also really good for them."

Meanwhile dog owners sitting at tables can order cocktails such as a "Barkarita" or a "Bloodhound Mary". Dogs mingle with one another and Mochi, a terrier in a mauve hooded top, clambers onto a table to take a snack from her owners, Rhema Moses and Jordan Barnes. "We've been to other dog-friendly places but none that we've let our dog run this freely everywhere, so it's new for us," says Moses.

At a year-old, Mochi missed out on puppy classes and early socialization during the coronavirus lockdown, says Barnes. "This has turned into a really cool place, just where she can meet other dogs, and interact with other humans as well." On the floor, dogs sample a £10 (\$14) taster menu of four pup-tails, served in glasses on a wooden stand. A cocker spaniel immediately snaffles the "lick and mix" snacks, while eying the drinks more warily.

Swan describes the venue as a "dogs and humans community center", offering both a chance to socialize in a relaxed way. "Especially in lockdown, there are a lot of dog owners that feel like they're by themselves," says the bar's dog daycare leader Bella Ryan. The bar allows people to meet each other and "just let their dogs run around and socialize in a more chilled setting, over a drink as well," she adds. — AFP

Volunteer vets tend to Greece's fire-hit pets

With balm and bandages for scorched paws, volunteers at a makeshift animal shelter north of Athens are doing what they can for cats and dogs, whether strays or left behind as their owners fled advancing wildfires. The volunteer vets have organized an "intensive care" area to monitor severely burnt animals under a tarpaulin in an abandoned quarry on the outskirts of the capital. "So far we have taken in 233 animals," Yannis Batsas, president of Action Volunteers Greek Veterinarians, told AFP.

And the animals keep coming. "We receive about 20 every day." The less severely affected four-legged survivors get baths every two to three hours to cool their burns. "It's time for a bath," one young volunteer said as she took hold of two small puppies, easing them into a small basin of water.



A picture taken on Aug 12, 2021 shows a dog recovering in a cage at a makeshift shelter where the animals injured in the wildfires are treated in Athens. — AFP

First victims

Many in the Athens area were evacuated at the start of August as advancing wildfires ravaged pine forests and homes some 30 km north of the capital. Along roads lined with the charred husks of pine trees, AFP reporters met groups of volunteers collecting abandoned animals in Efnides and other affected villages.

With strays common in the area, the animals are the first victims of the fires, the vets say, not to mention the many domesticated animals left in gardens as their owners fled.

The volunteers at the shelter do what they can to comfort the animals, circulating among cages where dogs with bandaged paws await their owners. In a cacophony of barking, the dogs, burnt on their paws or on their bodies, joyfully welcome the volunteers whenever they approach. Settled on sheets filled with ice cubes, about 20 of the canines are waiting for their owners to come and reclaim them or, failing that, a family to adopt them.

So far, nearly 90 animals have found their families, said Elena Dede, founder of nonprofit organization Dogs' Voice. Dede said more than 2,000 people showed up to volunteer, many agreeing to take dogs home for a couple of weeks to ease pressure at the shelter. "Instead of having 200 animals all in one place, you'll never have more than about 50, and that's because of the shelters and adoptions," said Batsas.

Outpouring of solidarity

Dede said the group had received donations amounting to about 10 tons of dog and cat food. "That will be distributed all over Attica, in areas affected by the fires and here of course," she said. The outpouring of solidarity in Athens is encouraging volunteers to open another center on the island of Evia, where wildfires continued to rage on Thursday.

"A team left for Evia to go and see the farms, the goats, the sheep that were burnt," said Batsas. "Evia is a different story. We have to be sure that we'll have the capacity to respond with the same efficiency that we have here," said Dede. Evacuating injured animals from Greece's second largest island is complicated. "They have to be transported by boat, which lengthens the journeys," said Irini Tapouti, director of the Chalkida veterinary clinic on Evia.

On the beach at Pefki, where deckchairs are now covered with ash, Roula Papadimitri and her daughter Eva are bringing first aid and comfort to a dozen dogs they saved from the flames. They were forced to abandon their house in the adjoining village of Artemisia on foot. "There is no way I'm leaving without them," Eva said. "How can you abandon dogs," asked her mother, incredulous. — AFP



Beekeeper Vakos Antonis checks his beehives near Voutas village on Aug 11, 2021 on the Greek island of Evia.

Greek beekeepers lament tradition lost to fire

On the scorched earth, dozens of blackened rings mark all that remains of beehives that dotted the once verdant hillsides outside the village of Voutas on Greece's Evia island. Pine, walnut and fig trees were among the rich plant life sustaining the bees in a region that produces 40 percent of Greece's honey. And those industrious workers were, in turn, a cornerstone of the local ecosystem, pollinating local farmers' crops.

"It's a whole way of life that we lost along with the forest," says Babis, 53, whose main source of income was his hives. "What are we going to find here next year? It's over. We've gone from heaven to hell." Bee colonies that have been bred over decades, with skills passed down through generations, have been wiped out in a fury of wild fires billowed by the forces of climate change.

'Too late for change'

Greece - along with Turkey, Italy, Spain and Algeria - has been hit by a savage fire season that Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis described as the "greatest ecological disaster in decades". "The climate crisis is a harsh reality and shows us that forests will become increasingly vulnerable and increasingly valuable for what they provide," says Dimitris Karavellas, managing director for WWF Greece. "The climate crisis is not an excuse to fail but must be a wake-up call for change."

But for the beekeepers of Evia, it's too late for change. "We lost our hives because we were running to save our villages," says Adonis Vakos, his cap pulled

down on his head as he surveys the ruins of the charred forest before him. Vakos, 49, the last representative of a family of beekeepers, says only 50 hives remain of the 130 he had before the fires swept across the island for nine days. "I have been in the culture of honey since I was 10. We will never have time to revive it, we will be dead before it grows back. It will take 50 years, if it ever comes back."

Until now, northern Evia has been one of the most popular areas in Greece for beekeepers. Its micro-climate, biodiversity and pine forests caressed by the etesian summer breeze offered ideal conditions for the production of exceptional honey. "Forty percent of the country's honey production takes place here," said Stathis Albanis, president of the local beekeepers' cooperative. Throughout the summer and up until November, thousands of Greek beekeepers brought their hives to the north of Evia island, says Panagiotis Gianakaras, a local beekeeper. He managed to save his 80 beehives. The colorful wooden boxes sheltering their thousands of bees now rest in the shade of olive trees.

But even for those fortunate enough to have saved their hives, the destruction of the forests - and the bees' food source - means they are forced to look elsewhere. "I am taking my beehives tomorrow to Pelion," a mountainous peninsula north of Evia, says Adonis Angelou, who managed to save his 150 hives by using a tractor to clear flammable material and creating a fire-break around them. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this photo taken on Aug 8, 2021, a stencil of children playing at being sailors is the subject of a graffiti artwork by street artist Banksy on the wall of a bridge in Everitt Park in Lowestoft on the east coast of England. — AFP photos



A cyclist rides past a Banksy stencil of a gull about to swoop down onto a carton of chips in Lowestoft.



A woman stands beside a Banksy graffiti artwork of a rat drinking a cocktail at North Beach in Lowestoft.

BANKSY SHOWS OFF HIS SEASIDE 'SPRAYCATION'

Banksy, Britain's most famous street artist, on Friday confirmed that many had already suspected - that he is indeed the author of a number of works that have appeared recently in British seaside towns. An Instagram video clip, just over three minutes long and entitled "A Great British Spraycation", shows the elusive artist taking a summer road trip in a beat-up camper van with cans of spray paint stashed in a cooler.

In one work on the concrete sea-defense wall of a British beach, a rat lounges in a deckchair, sipping a cocktail. In another, sticking to the seaside theme, a mechanical claw dangles above a public bench - as if anyone who sits there is about to be plucked up like a prize in an arcade game. Another shows a giant seagull swooping down to snatch some out-sized chips - French fries to US readers - from a waste skip or dumpster.

A fourth shows three children in a rickety boat. One looks ahead while another is busy bailing out water with a bucket. Above

them, appears the inscription: "We're all in the same boat." On the roof of a bus shelter, a couple also dance to the tune of a flat-capped accordion player, in a black and white painting evoking the faded, down-at-heel feel of many of the country's once-prosperous seaside resorts.

In recent years, the Bristol artist, who cleverly maintains the mystery of his identity, has kept the attention of the contemporary art world with his social commentaries and causes - migrants, opposition to Brexit, denunciation of Islamist radicals - as well as stirring the excitement of the moneyed art markets. Last March, a work honoring caregivers fetched a record £14.4 million (about \$20 million). The proceeds went to a hospital charity, Christie's auctioneers said at the time. — AFP

A man waits at a bus stop below a Banksy graffiti artwork of a couple dancing to an accordion player on a wall in Great Yarmouth on the east coast of England.



A woman looks at a Banksy stencil of a child digging in the sand in Lowestoft.



A couple take a selfie below a Banksy graffiti artwork of an amusement arcade grabber on a wall in Gorleston-on-Sea on the east coast of England.



Why a Hong Kong artist chose 'self-exile' in Taiwan

As he queued to board a flight out of Hong Kong to Taiwan last month, dissident artist Kacey Wong was painfully aware of the extra immigration officials brought in to scrutinize each departing passenger. Wong, 51, was one of the city's best-known provocateurs, an artist who specialized in satirizing and criticizing those in power.

But as China's crackdown on dissent gathered pace in Hong Kong, he decided he had to leave. But would authorities let him go? Multiple dissidents have been arrested at the airport and Wong wondered if he too was on a watchlist, especially when a group of extra immigration officials arrived as his flight was called.



This photo taken on Aug 5, 2021 shows Hong Kong artist Kacey Wong reading the last edition of Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper during an interview at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung, central Taiwan. — AFP

"About 20 steps away from the gate, they spread out as if they were playing American football, and just watched everyone who was boarding for a last-minute tackle maybe," he recalled. "I was able to come to Taiwan so that's good. But emotionally it's very scary," he added. "These were very, very intense moments."

'We'll meet again'

Wong announced his relocation last week with a black-and-white Facebook video in which he strolled along the city's famous harbor singing a rendition of Vera Lynn's wistful ode "We'll Meet Again". It struck a chord in a city where tens of thousands of families have fled overseas. "I left because I am seeking 100 percent freedom of artistic expression and that's why I came to Taiwan," he told AFP, speaking from the Taiwanese city of Taichung.

He used his time in quarantine to edit his farewell video. "I think the most important thing is when I come here, I can continue to advocate my beliefs and practice my art but I doubt I can do that in Hong Kong anymore." Hong Kong was once regarded as a bastion of free speech within authoritarian China - a place where artists, writers and residents could speak their minds without fear of prosecution.

But over the last year China has begun

remolding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image in response to huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019. A sweeping new security law, imposed on the city last summer, has criminalized much dissent. Prosecutors dusted off a colonial-era sedition law to target political opinions and an official campaign was launched to purge the city of anyone deemed unpatriotic.

'Time to go'

Cornell-educated Wong knew he probably did not fit the profile of a "patriotic" Chinese artist. In one famous 2018 performance-art piece called "The Patriot", he performed China's national anthem on an accordion while inside a red metal cage. Such a performance would be illegal now under new laws passed in Hong Kong last year that ban any "insults" to China's flag and anthem.

Wong said he was initially determined to stay and test boundaries. But the mass arrest of more than 50 prominent opposition figures earlier this year under the national security law set off a "big alarm". "My emotion says I will never leave Hong Kong but at the same time I am looking at the data of the battlefield always unfold almost on the daily basis ... The data tell me it's time to go," he said. "I will not return to Hong Kong any more. That's why when people ask me 'Why you are here?' I say I am in self-exile."

'Go underground'

Among the memorabilia Wong packed was the final issue of Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper and the accordion he used in "The Patriot". Apple Daily collapsed in June after officials arrested its senior executives and froze the company's assets using the national security law. Wong predicts that critical political art will slowly disappear from the city, taken over by "more and more decorative items".

"A lot of these Chinese communist proxies are trying to please Beijing so they will go to the extreme" to pursue anything deemed politically challenging. That's why people are saying this is like Cultural Revolution. It's happening. It's not as severe as in mainland China in the sixties but it's getting there," he said.

The advice he gives to artists in Hong Kong is to "go underground" and "keep the fire burning" by showing their work at home to friends and close contacts. He vowed to continue to "advocate for the freedom of Hong Kong" and urged others who have gone overseas to do the same. "I don't think I left Hong Kong. I think Hong Kong was being forced to leave me because Hong Kong was kidnapped," he said. "From now on Hong Kong will live inside my heart because the Hong Kong as I know it does not exist anymore." — AFP

How Yemeni fish became Djibouti's national dish

of Djibouti, it's a little memory."

'The chilli is most important'

Several times a day, fishermen deliver sea bream, mullet and other offerings to the many Yemeni fish restaurants or "moukbasas" dotting the port city, which is separated from Yemen by the Gulf of Aden. Then, it's time for the chefs to get to work. The fish is cut lengthwise and salted, before a paste made from mild red peppers-imported from Ethiopia-is applied using a paintbrush.



A cook bastes split fish with seasoning before searing it in a traditional open-flame clay oven.

"The most important thing is the chilli," says one of the cooks, beaded with sweat, as he secures the fish to a long metal rod, before plunging it into a traditional terracotta oven, which resembles an Indian tandoor. The finished dish - retrieved 15 minutes later - owes both its gentle heat and its intense red color to the peppers.

Across Djibouti City, Yemeni fish is eaten with pancakes and "fata", a paste made from bananas or dates, and usually sold for around 1,000 Djiboutian francs (\$5.60). Restaurateur Omar Hamdani credits his grandfather's "world-famous"

recipe for his establishment's enduring popularity, nearly a century after he emigrated to Djibouti from Yemen. Not much has changed at "Chez Hamdani" since then, but for the addition of a second floor.

Its walls are still adorned with earthenware and traditional moldings. A small dining room in the back is reserved for women who wish to dine alone. And the recipe remains the same. "My grandfather brought it back from Yemen, he opened this restaurant, then my father took over from him, and now it's my turn to take the lead," the bearded entrepreneur, who is in his late 30s, tells AFP.

Taste of home

The Yemenis are the third largest ethnic community in Djibouti, behind the Issa and the Afar. Migration and trade between the two countries have existed for millennia. But in recent years, their shared history has taken a tragic turn, with thousands of Yemenis crossing the Bab el-Mandeb strait to seek refuge in Djibouti and escape the war that has ravaged their country since 2014.

After fleeing Sanaa for Djibouti, former civil servant Amin Maqta set up a mouk-basa called "Le Kaaboul" with two other immigrants - a reflection of their desire for a fresh start and their longing for a taste of home. "As long as I am in this restaurant, I eat here, I am surrounded by my compatriots, I feel good. Because everything I had in Yemen, I have it here," the soft-spoken 45-year-old tells AFP.

He is both moved and amused by the local craze for Yemeni fish, which is only one among dozens of delicacies in his home country. In the end, "demand is stronger in Djibouti than in Yemen", he says with a smile. — AFP



Omar Hamdani, proprietor of one of the city's oldest restaurants, Chez Hamdani, serves up Yemeni fish to lunchtime customers at his restaurant in Djibouti on April 11, 2021. — AFP photos



Customers at Chez Hamdani enjoy Yemeni fish.



Kitchen staff knead ground flatbread before blending with either ripe banana or dates to make alternative delicacies that are a popular accompaniment for Yemeni fish.



Flattened dough and split fish are seared in a traditional open-flame clay oven.

Sports

Neymar, Messi set for World Cup qualifiers' showdown

BRASILIA: Neymar will face his new clubmate Lionel Messi in a South American grudge match after being named to the Brazil team on Friday for three World Cup qualifiers. Coach Tite also called up six members of the squad that retained the Olympic title by beating Spain in extra-time on August 7.

Dani Alves, who captained the Olympic squad, is joined by fellow gold medalists Matheus Cunha, who scored in the final, Richarlison, the tournament top scorer in Japan, Bruno Guimaraes, Guilherme Arana and Claudinho.

Brazil lead the 10-team South American World Cup qualifying group after six matches and face a busy week as the tournament tries to catch up after two rounds were postponed in March in the face of a coronavirus spike and international quarantine rules.

Brazil start with a trip to Santiago to play Chile on September 2, then take on Argentina in a re-arranged match in Sao Paulo three days later before travelling more than 2,200 kilometers north to Pernambuco to entertain Peru on September 9.

Since March, Argentina have beaten Brazil in the final of the Copa America in July at the Maracana and Argentine captain Messi has left Barcelona and joined Neymar at Paris Saint-Germain. Tite's team have won all six of their matches so far, conceding just two goals, but despite scoring 16 goals have rarely been exciting. They also looked lackluster as they struggled to score in the knock-out stages of the Copa.

Tite told a virtual press conference that while he

was disappointed with the final outcome, he was happy at the way the squad had developed in the Copa. He said Brazil "set some objectives in the Copa America, one of them was the title and we didn't get it, but there were 23 athletes who participated in the competition" and the squad "modified its basic offensive structure."

Of the Olympic call-ups, only the 38-year-old Alves, one of three permitted over-age squad members in Japan, is older than 24. Tite said he was happy to promote younger players to the senior team. "When we have integration with the lower age groups, there is a similarity in the way players handle themselves, in the way we see football," he said. "The young player who looks at the national team and sees the examples of the professionals is very important."

Tite called up 24-year-old Leeds attacker Raphinha for the first time. "We have been monitoring Raphinha for a while," said Tite. "He has a very strong dribbling technique, several important goals, he is a decisive player, he is what we call 'the key to the goal'."

Tite will name his captain before the games. Neymar has led Brazil in the past. Thiago Silva captained the team in the Copa America. Casimiro has also captained the side this year. FIFA has extended the September and October international windows by two days to allow teams to catch up, much to the chagrin of European leagues, who dislike the long absences of their South American stars. — AFP



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (left) and Brazilian forward Neymar attend a training session at the Camp des Loges Paris Saint-Germain football club's training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. — AFP

News in brief

Lorient upset Monaco

LORIENT: Lorient, who just escaped relegation last season, upset visiting Monaco 1-0 on Friday as Nigerian striker Terem Moffi converted a penalty he had won. Lorient made the most of opening the fixtures on the second weekend of the season by jumping to the top of the table with four points. Monaco, who finished third last season to earn a chance of a place Champions League, left a number of senior players on the bench ahead of their Champions League qualifying playoff first leg against Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday. Moffi was brought down by Monaco summer signing Ismail Jakobs after 31 minutes and took the penalty to score. Moffi was Lorient's top scorer last season with 14 goals, three of them against Monaco. — AFP

Italian league on YouTube

ROME: The clubs in Italy's Serie A football league agreed Friday to launch their own Arabic-language channel on YouTube to show matches in the Middle East and North Africa. The 20-member league "has decided to proceed with the creation of an Arabic-language channel on the YouTube platform", it said in a statement. It will show five matches for each match day, complete with their own commentary. The League agreed earlier this year for the bulk of its matches to be streamed by the DAZN platform. — AFP

Kuwait bags four medals

AMMAN: Kuwait's team has collected a single silver and three bronze medals at the fourth day of Arab the Table Tennis Championship, which will run until August 16. The Kuwaiti female players won the silver after beating Djibouti 3-0 and Qatar 3-2, while male players got the bronze by defeating Jordan 3-2. Kuwait's team is taking part in the game with 39 male and female players, in addition to teams from 15 Arab countries like the host Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Djibouti, Somalia and Comoros. The championship includes U-13,15,17 and 19 male and female players. — KUNA

Kuwait advances in qualifiers

MANAMA: Kuwait men's U-17 basketball team has moved into Asia cup qualifiers after winning the second place and the silver medal at the 16th Gulf basketball championship on Friday. Bahrain defeated Kuwait 59-53 today snatching the trophy. Vice President of Kuwait Basketball Association Khalil Ibrahim stressed keenness on backing the players to help them represent Kuwait in an honorable way in international arenas and make further achievements. He expressed appreciation to Bahrain, its government and people for hosting the championship on August 7-13. The event included Saudi Arabia and Qatar, along with Kuwait and Bahrain. — KUNA

Lewandowski strikes as Bayern draw Bundesliga season opener at Gladbach

MONCHENGLADBACH: Robert Lewandowski equalized as defending champions Bayern Munich were held to a 1-1 draw at Borussia Moenchengladbach in a hard-fought opening game of the new Bundesliga season on Friday. "It wasn't perfect football from us," Lewandowski told broadcaster Sat1. "We made a lot of mistakes, but the first game is over, now we can look ahead."

Gladbach deservedly took the lead when French striker Alassane Plea fired past Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer with just ten minutes gone. Lewandowski leveled just before the break from a corner, but both sides wasted second-half chances to grab the winner.

Only superb saves from home goalkeeper Yann Sommer repeatedly denied Lewandowski and the Bayern attack. At the other end, Gladbach substitute forward Marcus Thuram failed to connect with the goal at his mercy and later saw his appeals for a clear penalty waved away by the referee.

"There were fireworks from us in the first quarter of an hour," Gladbach captain Lars Stindl told DAZN and hailed Sommer's "world-class" performance. Bayern's new head coach Julian Nagelsmann is still waiting for his first victory after three defeats and a draw in pre-season friendlies. The 34-year-old is under pressure to deliver a tenth

straight Bundesliga title for Bayern in his first season.

'Crazy game'

"We have to live with the point, both sides had chances, it was a pretty crazy game for the fans to watch, not so easy for the coaches," Nagelsmann told DAZN. Borussia Park was a third full as Bundesliga clubs welcome back supporters on the opening weekend of the season.

Bayern were missing injured France defender Benjamin Pavard, whose place went to reserve left-back Josip Stanisic for only his second Bundesliga appearance. Gladbach tore open the Bayern defense after just six minutes when Patrick Herrmann sprinted clear and squared to Lars Stindl, who could not get a shot away.

Bayern fell behind when Canadian left-back Alphonso Davies lost the ball on halfway. The ball was moved to Stindl, who flicked his pass onto Plea, who was unmarked and fired past Neuer. At the other end, only a stunning reflex save by Sommer denied Lewandowski from point-blank range.

However, the Bundesliga's record goal-scorer for a single season struck just before half-time to make it 1-1 at the break. When Joshua Kimmich fired in a corner, Lewandowski slipped his marker and



MONCHENGLADBACH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (right) and German defender Niklas Sule acknowledge the fans after the Bundesliga match against Borussia Moenchengladbach in Moenchengladbach, western Germany, on Friday. — AFP

fired past Sommer, picking up when he left off last season when he scored a Bundesliga record 41 goals in 2020/21.

Bayern had a golden period approaching the hour mark when only more superb Sommer saves denied Davies, then Lewandowski in quick succession. Gladbach won 3-2 when the sides last met at Borussia Park in January and the hosts again put up a fight.

Neuer did superbly well with a diving save to deny Stindl after Gladbach midfielder Hannes Wolf broke down

the wing and squared inside. With just over ten minutes left, Thuram came within a whisker of restoring the hosts' lead when he just failed to connect with the goal at his mercy.

Referee Marco Fritz then waved away Gladbach's furious calls for a penalty when Thuram appeared to be brought down in the area by new Bayern signing Dayot Upamecano. New Gladbach head coach Adi Huetter received a yellow card on the sidelines for his impassioned protest. Kimmich fired wide in added time. — AFP

Easy start for Al-Ahly in CAF Champions League

JOHANNESBURG: Al-Ahly of Egypt will launch an attempt to win the CAF Champions League a record third straight time against either Gendarmerie Nationale of Niger or Le Messager de Ngozi of Burundi in October.

Neither the Niger nor the Burundi champions have progressed beyond the preliminary round in two attempts each and it would be a sensation if either were to eliminate the record nine-time African champions.

The pairing is among 38 in the preliminary and first rounds of the elite African club competition after the draws for 2021-2022 qualifying were made in Cairo on Friday.

By late October 16 clubs will have survived one or two home-and-away ties and booked places in the group stage, where prize money kicks in with qualifiers guaranteed at least 550,000 dollars

(465,000 euros).

The Champions League, formerly called the African Cup of Champions Clubs, has been staged every year bar one since 1964, but no club has managed to win three consecutive finals. After lifting the trophy in 2005 and 2006, an Ahly side including stars like goalkeeper Essam el Hadary, defender Wael Gomaa, midfielder Mohamed Abou Trika and forward Emad Meteb also reached the 2007 final.

But after forcing a goalless away draw in the first leg against Etoile Sahel of Tunisia, they suffered a stunning 3-1 home loss in a packed 73,000-capacity Cairo International Stadium. Ahly had another chance in 2014 to win the competition three times in a row, but suffered shock away and home losses to Al-Ahly Benghazi of Libya in the final qualifying round.

Personal reason

TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (twice), Enyimba of Nigeria and Esperance of Tunisia were other back-to-back champions who could not secure a third straight title. Apart from wanting to complete a historic treble, South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane has a per-

sonal reason for wishing to go all the way and win the single-match final next May.

Before guiding the Cairo Red Devils to success in 2020 and 2021, the 57-year-old won the Champions League with Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa five years ago. His three Champions League titles is a record for an African coach and puts him second overall behind four-time winner Manuel Jose from Portugal, all of whose triumphs came with Ahly.

Mosimane has been trying to strengthen his attack and Mozambican Luis Miquissone and South African Percy Tau have been linked with the Egyptian and African giants. Miquissone caught the attention of the South African when he starred for Simba of Tanzania in a shock group victory over Ahly last season and seems the likelier of the two targets to join the Red Devils.

Tau developed into a star under Mosimane at Sundowns and after several seasons in Belgium is now with English Premier League outfit Brighton, who have registered him for the 2021-2022 season. Most of the strongest challenges to Ahly could come from fellow north African clubs, particularly Moroccan sides Raja and Wydad, Esperance and Algerian team Entente Setif. — AFP

Valencia beat Getafe in season-opener

MADRID: Valencia overcame a third-minute red card to beat Getafe 1-0 in a bruising opening game in Spain's La Liga on Friday. Defender Hugo Guillamon was given a straight red for a dangerous tackle on Getafe's Serbian midfielder Nemanja Maksimovic.

After the referee consulted a video replay, it was the fastest sending off in the history of Liga season openers. The foul itself had been committed after just 39 seconds of the game. Eight minutes after

Guillamon's dismissal, Valencia were ahead. Russian winger Denis Cheryshev was brought down in the penalty area and Carlos Soler tucked away the spot-kick.

"It was not the game we wanted, because going a man down in the third minute is not the best situation," said Soler. "Hugo is not at fault. I don't know if it was a red. These are things that happen in football and you learn from them. When he left the pitch I told him that we were going to win for him, and we achieved that."

Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili, on loan from Dinamo Tbilisi, pulled off two fine saves late in the game to deny Getafe an equalizing goal. Getafe's misery was completed when Erick Cabaco was sent off for a second yellow card in the 76th minute. — AFP



VALENCIA: Valencia's Spanish defender Jose Gaya Pena (left) celebrates with Valencia's Georgian goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili at the end of the Spanish League football match between Valencia and Getafe at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Friday. — AFP

Sports

Kane's future hangs over Tottenham and Man City ahead of season opener

LONDON: Manchester City's defense of the Premier League title gets underway today away to Tottenham with both clubs still in limbo over the future of Harry Kane. The England captain returned to training with his Spurs teammates for the first time on Friday after arriving back late from his holidays in the United States and then having to quarantine.

Kane has made no secret of his desire to leave his boyhood club with City the obvious destination as they seek a successor to all-time top scorer Sergio Aguero, who has departed Manchester for Barcelona.

However, Kane's decision to sign a six-year contract in 2018 has backfired with Spurs chairman Daniel Levy set to demand a fee well in excess of the £100 million (\$138 million) Premier League record City spent on Jack Grealish earlier this month.

"Harry is an exceptional, extraordinary striker. There are no doubts about that. Of course we are very interested," City boss Pep Guardiola said last week. "But he is a Tottenham player. If they don't want to negotiate there is nothing more to say. If

they want it, we will try."

Kane claimed his third Premier League Golden Boot last season to go with the same accolade for finishing top scorer at the 2018 World Cup. But England's heartbreaking defeat on penalties to Italy in the final of Euro 2020 means at 28, he is still waiting for the first trophy of his career.

Big call for Nuno

Tottenham seem further than ever from matching his ambitions. Spurs find themselves out of the Champions League for the second consecutive season, instead facing a qualifier later this week just to reach the group stages of the new Europa Conference League.

A long and unconvincing search for a new manager will also have done little to inspire Kane's confidence. Nuno Espirito Santo was eventually named as Tottenham boss on July 1, nearly three months after Jose Mourinho was sacked.

The former Wolves manager immediately has a big call to make on whether to play Kane at the weekend, against the side he wants to join before the end of the month. "We have to think and we

have tomorrow to make the decision," Nuno said on Friday. "I don't have any concerns about trying to convince players to play for Tottenham. It's such a huge club, it's such a fantastic club. We should be proud of being here."

City's need for Kane may appear immaterial compared to Tottenham, where he has become a living legend. Grealish's arrival has already bolstered Guardiola's attacking options, which already featured Raheem Sterling, Kevin De Bruyne, Riyad Mahrez, Ferran Torres, Phil Foden, Bernardo Silva and Gabriel Jesus.

But City's ambitions are also much greater as they look to not only hold off Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool to defend their Premier League crown, but go one better than last season in Europe after reaching the Champions League final for the first time.

Chelsea have also broken their club record fee to re-sign Romelu Lukaku from Inter Milan for £97 million, while United's squad appears to be in the best shape since their decline began with Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 after signing Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane.



Harry Kane

Across the English Channel, Paris Saint-Germain have even overshadowed the annual arms race in the Premier League by signing Lionel Messi, Sergio Ramos, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Georginio Wijnaldum and Achraf Hakimi as they too look to end the wait for Champions League glory. That has set the bar for City and Kane is the best guarantee of the goals still on the market. —AFP

Brentford beat Arsenal to make flying start

LONDON: Brentford made a blistering start to their first English top-flight season for 74 years as goals from Sergi Canos and Christian Norgaard earned a 2-0 win over Arsenal in front of a first-ever full house at the Brentford Community Stadium on Friday.

The Bees spent the first season at their new home playing behind closed doors, but rose to the occasion as they were roared on by 17,000 fans in the first Premier League match at full capacity since March 2020. "What an atmosphere," said Brentford manager Thomas Frank. "The first time in the top-flight, we are opening the Premier League season and for our own fans, they can dream. We are top of the league. We are going to celebrate every win, but we want more."

By contrast, Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta is already under pressure. The Gunners have finished eighth in each of his first two seasons in charge and the Spaniard has a daunting task to turn things around before the September international break with title favorites Chelsea and Manchester City to come in Arsenal's next two games. "I don't think we deserved anything different," said Arteta in a damning indictment of his side.

Frank whipped up the crowd into a frenzy before kick-off and Arsenal were soon suffering under the relentless pressing his side became famous for in the Championship. Bryan Mbuemo drilled a shot off the outside of the post in the first warning shot from the home side before they took the lead on 22 minutes.

Ethan Pincock fed Canos on the Brentford left and he cut inside to unleash a powerful shot that beat Bernd Leno at his near post. Mbuemo then dragged another huge chance wide after turning Arsenal's new £50 million signing Ben White with ease.

The Gunners were without both Pierre-



LONDON: Brentford's Spanish striker Sergi Canos celebrates scoring the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Arsenal at Brentford Community Stadium in London on Friday. —AFP

Emerick Aubameyang and Alexandra Lacazette due to illness, handing Folarin Balogun his Premier League debut. Balogun made little impact, but was also unfortunate not to win a penalty as he was caught on the follow through after slicing wide just before half-time.

"A lot of young boys were doing everything they can. For some of them it was the first experience in the league - that says a lot," added Arteta, as he appeared to make a plea for more funds before the end of the transfer window. "What I can control and help, I'll put all my enthusiasm and work into that."

Arsenal started the second-half with far more purpose as Kieran Tierney and Emile Smith-Rowe finally forced David Raya into action. Bukayo Saka was then given a standing ovation by both sets of fans when he was introduced on the hour mark after

the racial abuse he suffered in the aftermath of missing the decisive penalty in England's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy.

But Brentford's players were in no mood to show any mercy and substitute Norgaard made sure of a famous night 17 minutes from time. Arsenal somehow let a long throw bounce inside their six-yard box and the Danish international gratefully headed into an unguarded net to double Brentford's advantage.

Smith-Rowe and Tierney were the only sources of comfort for Arsenal as they combined to set up Nicolas Pepe, who was denied by a stunning save by Raya five minutes from time. But a clean sheet rounded off a famous win for Brentford as they ended their first night in the Premier League on top of the table. —AFP

Real Madrid denies it wants to jump to Premier League

MADRID: Real Madrid yesterday denied reports in a Barcelona newspaper that the club had "studied the option" of leaving La Liga to join the English Premier League.

"In view of the information published today by the newspaper Mundo Deportivo, where it is said that our club has studied the option of leaving La Liga for the Premier League, Real Madrid wishes to make it clear that this information is completely false, as well as being absurd and impossible," said a Real Madrid statement. Real said the only purpose of this information "is to disrupt once again the daily life of our club."

Mundo Deportivo claimed on its front page yesterday that "Real Madrid studied the option of joining the Premier League", frustrated by the failure of the Super League project which its president Florentino Perez supports. Real are also upset by an agreement by the Spanish League, led by president Javier Tebas, to sell 10 percent of its rights for 50 years to investment fund CVC.

"Real Madrid's intention has been to find out if it would be possible to abandon the Spanish league to join another big league, because the club's managers are tired of the problems and sticks that Javier Tebas continually pokes in their wheels," Mundo Deportivo wrote.

"In this scenario, the competition preferred by Florentino Perez and his close associates is the English Premier League, although they have also gathered information about the options of joining the Italian Serie A or the German Bundesliga," the Catalan daily said. —AFP

Ancelotti pins faith on Real Madrid young guard

MADRID: Refusing to be drawn on whether the club might yet lure Kylian Mbappe from PSG, Carlo Ancelotti insisted Friday Real Madrid have plenty of young talent coming through. With French World Cup winner Mbappe out of contract next year, Real are widely believed to be ready to pounce should the striker decide partnering both Lionel Messi and Neymar in attack is not sufficient challenge. But Ancelotti preferred to bask in what he says is a hugely exciting crop of up-and-coming players as he embarks on his second spell in charge at the Bernabeu after leaving Everton.

"I'm sorry, I can't speak about this," said Ancelotti, when asked the inevitable questions about the possibility of landing Mbappe. "I don't like talking about players who aren't here" — though he observed the transfer window in any case does not shut until month's end. But I like this squad very much — there's a good mix of veterans and youngsters who are really up for it, very enthusiastic and very interesting. (There's) Miguel Gutierrez, Sergio Arribas, Victor Chust, Marvin."

"They can all be very important in the future but in the present too," said Ancelotti, who won the 2014 Champions League in his first spell in charge at Real which coincided with Wales veteran Gareth Bale's debut season. Bale has returned to Spain after a season loan back at Tottenham but Ancelotti said there was no reason why he could not rediscover his form of their first spell together.

"He is a great player who maybe didn't do so well recently but I rate him very highly and he has been training well. The pitch will be the judge, though, not the coach," said Ancelotti, insisting that the level of competition in the squad would serve to push all his players. Returning to his young emerging stars Ancelotti said he was in regular touch with former striker Raul, now coach of Real's reserve team La Castilla.

'Youngsters are ready'

"The youngsters will be ready — they are ready.



Carlo Ancelotti

We shall need them." But he said he was also pleased to see experienced faces raring to go, singling out Croatia veteran playmaker Luka Modric, as well as French striker Karim Benzema.

Coming in after Zinedine Zidane — his former assistant in his first spell — stepped down Ancelotti dwelt briefly on the transfer from Barcelona of Lionel Messi to Paris Saint Germain, where the Italian also spent two years in charge but failed to land the European glory that is now PSG's clearly stated target.

"That surprised me, of course, Messi had played for Barcelona since he was a child. But I have spent 42 years in the world of football," Ancelotti explained, insisting he "respects" the decision. "Barca are still Barca, one of the best teams in the world, with or without Messi. For us it changes nothing — what we have to do is win."

Asked if Real can beat the likes of PSG to European glory he would say only: "It's not impossible — Real have a very good squad, they can go toe to toe with any club in the world. I believe if we give it 100 percent then we can compete against any other team, no doubt about it." —AFP

Koeman says Barcelona can't live in the past as season starts

MADRID: Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said yesterday that he was "excited about the team" and urged them to avoid "living in the past" ahead of the first Liga match of the post-Lionel Messi era today against Real Sociedad. The departure of Messi "has been painful for all the Blaugrana fans, for everything Leo has done for this club, for the type of player he is," Koeman told a press conference. "We will miss him a lot because he was a very important player in the history of Barca. But you can't live in the past. Things change and I'm very excited about the team we have this year."

"When we get the injured players back, we will have a very strong team to achieve great things. The team is ready, we have a lot of experience and we are ready to play. The team is ready to go, we've had five weeks of preparation when Leo wasn't even present," said Koeman who is entering his second season on the Barcelona bench.

Barcelona said they had no choice but to offload Messi as they battle to slash a 1.2 billion-euro (\$1.4 billion) debt mountain. They also said their wage bill with Messi would have amounted to 110 percent of income, way over La Liga's Financial Fair Play limit.



Ronald Koeman

Barca said yesterday that four of the club's key players — Jordi Alba, Sergi Roberto, Gerard Pique and Sergio Busquets — had agreed to a salary cut. "We know perfectly well the economic situation of the club. It needs help, in every sense. So their gesture is to be commended," Koeman said.

He added that he still hoped to sign players. "We are a bit short on strikers, so we have talked about the possibility of recruiting a striker of a different profile," said Koeman. "But it will depend on whether we can sign anyone. It all depends on Financial Fair Play. If it's possible, it's likely we'll add someone up front." —AFP

Five-star Man Utd thrash Leeds

Dream start for Chelsea • Liverpool too good for Norwich on Van Dijk's return

LONDON: Manchester United enjoyed a dream start to the Premier League season as Bruno Fernandes scored a hat-trick in a 5-1 thrashing of Leeds in front of 73,000 at Old Trafford, while Chelsea and Liverpool also got their campaigns off to a winning start yesterday. Over 300,000 fans are expected to attend the opening weekend of the season with full crowds restored following the easing of coronavirus restrictions in England.

United were inspired by a raucous atmosphere as Fernandes and Paul Pogba combined to blow away Marcelo Bielsa's men. Fernandes walked away with the match ball, but Pogba was just as impressive as the Frenchman produced four assists for the Portuguese's first two goals and second-half strikes from Mason Greenwood and Fred.

"When you run down that end and you score four goals like we did second half, it's just the best feeling in the world," said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "To be reunited with the fans again is important. This is the real Man United." Luke Ayling's stunning strike early in the second-half briefly brought Leeds level, but it was another Old Trafford trip to forget for them after also being thrashed 6-2 last season.

Chelsea cruise

After seeing United display their title credentials, European champions Chelsea dispatched Crystal Palace 3-0 in Patrick Vieira's first match in charge of the Eagles with ease to make their own case. Marcos Alonso's free-kick and Christian Pulisic's scuffed finish gave Thomas Tuchel's men a commanding 2-0 lead before half-time.

Centre-back Trevoh Chalobah then marked his Premier League debut with a long-range strike to round off the scoring. "We have to hunt the others from day one," said Tuchel. "This is what we want to do, this is our mentality and we are never shy to fight for the best outcome possible but the reality is we are not the favourites right now."

Van Dijk makes winning return

Liverpool were also 3-0 winners away to promoted Norwich thanks to goals from Diogo Jota, Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah. Virgil van Dijk was restored to the Reds defense for the first time since his cruciate knee ligament injury derailed Liverpool's title defense last October.

The Dutchman looked like his old self as he strolled through the 90 minutes and Jurgen Klopp's men needed just a few moments of attacking inspiration to see off the Canaries. Jota pounced to fire through the legs of Tim Krul on 26 minutes before making way for Firmino on the hour mark. The Brazilian took just five minutes to double Liverpool's lead from Salah's unselfish cross before the Egyptian blasted home to score on the opening day for the fifth consecutive season.


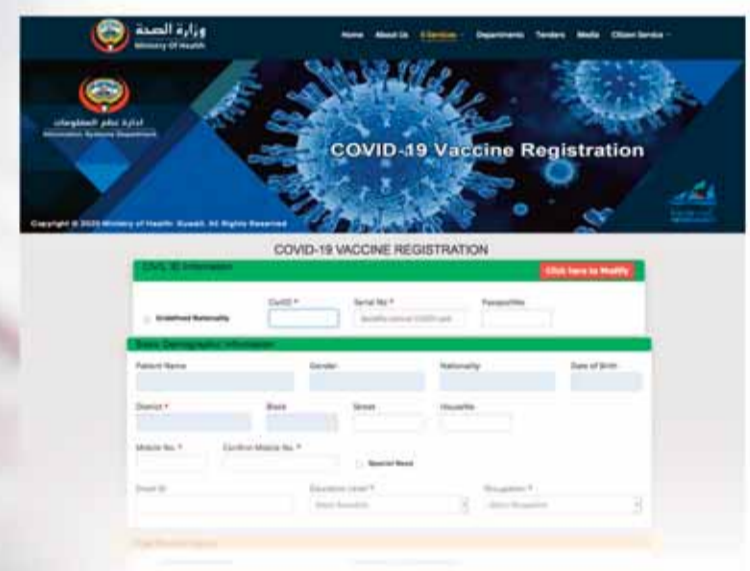
Elsewhere, Rafael Benitez went a long way to quieting his doubters at Everton as the Toffees came from behind to beat Southampton 3-1. Adam Armstrong's opener on his debut for the Saints saw Benitez's men booed off at half-time at Goodison Park with many of the home fans still unhappy at the appointment of the former Liverpool manager.


But the mood was lifted straight after half-time by Richarlison's equalizer before Abdoulaye Doucoure and Dominic Calvert-Lewin ensured Benitez got off to a winning start. Leicester also secured all three points as Jamie Vardy's deft flick proved the difference in a 1-0 win over Wolves. Life for Aston Villa without Jack Grealish got off to a terrible start as Watford celebrated their return to the top flight with a 3-2 win at Vicarage Road.

Goals from Emmanuel Dennis, Ismaila Sarr and Cucho Hernandez had the Hornets cruising towards victory. John McGinn pulled a goal back and Danny Ings netted from the penalty spot on his debut, but it was too little, too late for Villa. Brighton bounced back from conceding inside two minutes at Burnley to win 2-1 at Turf Moor thanks to second-half goals from Neal Maupay and Alexis MacAllister. — AFP



NORWICH: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (left) and Norwich City's English midfielder Todd Cantwell (right) vie for the ball during an English Premier League football match at Carrow Road yesterday. — AFP



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