



4 Firefighters put out fire that engulfed trees in Abu Halifa



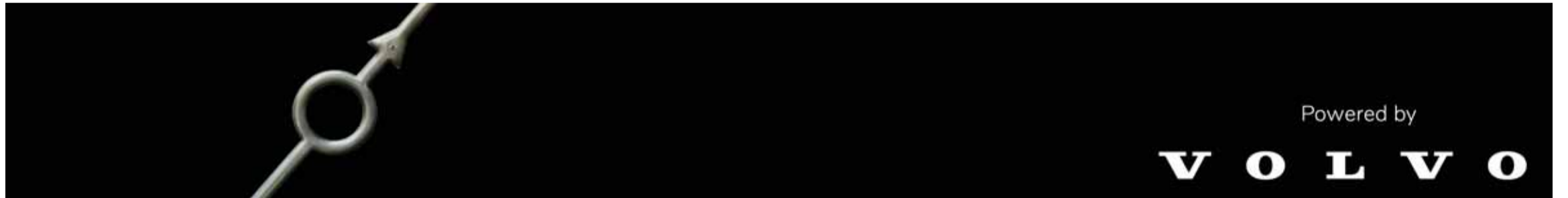
5 Iran COVID deaths top 600 in new daily high



8 Multibillion-dollar reconstruction projects await in post-war Libya



16 Man City shocked 1-0 by Kane-less Tottenham



Kuwait goes back to work as COVID cases decline

Security personnel ensure traffic flows smoothly during rush hours



KUWAIT: All public sector employees returned to work yesterday, as did traffic jams. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Government departments yesterday witnessed a return to official working hours with 100 percent employee capacity, a year and a half after the coronavirus outbreak prompted authorities to reduce the number of civil servants showing up to work as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. Employee turnout was gradually upped as measures were eased after indicators showed dwindling numbers of coronavirus infections and deaths amid an intensive national campaign to immunize as many people as possible. It is expected that 70 percent of people in Kuwait will be vaccinated by the end of summer.

Only 306 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Kuwait in the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 406,540, while three more fatalities took the death toll to 2,389, the health ministry said yesterday. Official ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 606 more people recovered from the virus, taking total recoveries to 397,247. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 446, of whom 205 are in intensive care.

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Ghani flees as Taliban enter Kabul

KABUL: President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan yesterday, a top official said, effectively ceding power to the Taliban as they reached the capital Kabul to seal a nationwide military victory in just 10 days. "The former Afghan President has left the nation, leaving the people to this situation," Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the peace process, said in a video on his Facebook page. "God hold him accountable, and the people will have their judgement."

He gave no indication where Ghani was

going, but leading Afghan media group Tolo news suggested he was heading to Tajikistan. Ghani's departure from office was one of the key demands of the Taliban in months of peace talks with the government, but he had stubbornly clung to power. In just over a week, the Taliban have carried out a lightning sweep of the country, with troops incapable of holding onto territory without US military support.

The insurgents said they want a "peaceful transfer" within the next few days, two decades after US-led forces toppled it in the wake of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks. The group ordered its fighters earlier yesterday not to enter the capital, saying the remnants of the government's forces were responsible for security. But later, a spokesman tweeted that Taliban forces should enter areas deserted by

Afghan forces in order to maintain law and order.

"God forbid the common thieves and robbers in Kabul do not mix, the abusers do not harm the people, the Islamic Emirate ordered its forces to enter the areas of Kabul from which the enemy went," a statement by the Taliban said. "There is a risk of theft and robbery." There are fears of a security vacuum in the capital as thousands of police and other armed services members have abandoned their posts, uniforms, and even weapons.

The United States began moving its citizens and Afghan staff to Kabul airport, with the help of thousands of troops deployed to the capital to assist with the evacuation. However, Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday dismissed

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Taliban fighters are seen in a town in Laghman province yesterday. — AFP

German football legend Mueller dies aged 75

BERLIN: Legendary German striker Gerd Mueller died in the early hours of yesterday at the age of 75, his former club Bayern Munich announced, as tributes were paid to the footballer nicknamed "The Bomber". "Today, the world of FC Bayern stands still," the Bundesliga giants wrote on their website with the famous club logo colored black.

During a glittering career, Mueller scored a record 365 goals for Bayern in the Bundesliga during the 1960s and 70s, as well as scoring 68 times for West Germany in 62 internationals. "Today is a sad, black day for FC Bayern and its fans," said Bayern president Herbert Hainer. "Gerd Mueller was the greatest striker there has ever been - and a fine person, a personality in world football. "Without Gerd Mueller, FC Bayern would not be the club we all love today. His name and the memory of him will live on forever." — AFP (See Page 14)



Gerd Mueller

28 killed in Lebanon fuel tank blast

BEIRUT: A fuel tank blast in Lebanon early yesterday killed 28 people and injured nearly 80, authorities and medics said, burning a crowd clamoring for petrol in the crisis-hit country. The tragedy in the remote north overwhelmed medical facilities and heaped new misery on a nation already beset by an economic crisis and severe fuel shortages that have crippled hospitals and caused long power cuts.

It revived bitter memories of an enormous explosion at Beirut port last August that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital. An adviser to the health ministry said the death toll from the blast in Al-Tleil village in the Akkar region had climbed to 28. The Lebanese Red Cross said 79 others were injured. The military said a fuel tank that "had been confiscated by the army to distribute to citizens" exploded just before 2:00 am (2300 GMT). Soldiers were among the victims.

The army began raiding petrol stations Saturday to curb hoarding by suppliers following a central bank decision to scrap fuel subsidies. The official National News Agency (NNA)

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Smoke billows from the reported home of the lot owner where a fuel tank that exploded was placed in the village of Tleil in Lebanon's northern region of Akkar yesterday. — AFP

Death toll in massive Haiti quake hits 724

LES CAYES, Haiti: The death toll in Haiti's powerful earthquake jumped to over 700 yesterday as crews desperately dug through collapsed buildings for survivors in the Caribbean nation still reeling from its president's assassination. In Les Cayes, as in other

hard-hit cities on the southwestern peninsula, most of the population spent the night sleeping outdoors in front of their houses - or what remained of them - amid fears of new aftershocks.

The streets there were filled with the grinding sounds of heavy equipment lifting debris from collapsed buildings, as well as the quieter sounds of people pulling away rubble by hand in desperate searches for the missing. "Thanks to God and also to my phone, I'm alive," said Marcel

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LES CAYES, Haiti: People search through the rubble of what used to be the Manguier Hotel after the earthquake struck on Saturday. — AFP

Local

Photos of the Day



KUWAIT: These photos taken by Kuwaiti astrophotographers Mohammad Awad Al-Obaidi (left) and Abdullah Al-Harbi show the Perseid meteor shower as seen in Kuwait City.

Kuwait mulls KD 1,000 visa fee for 60+ residents

KUWAIT: Today is the first anniversary of a controversial decision by the Director of Public Authority for Manpower (520/2020) on the rules and procedures for granting work permits, which included a ban on issuing permits to those who reach the age of 60 and do not hold a university degree. But the Cabinet is strongly behind a humanitarian solution to the problem that was created by the above-mentioned decision, according to government sources.

The same sources, who were quoted anonymously by Al-Qabas Arabic newspaper yesterday, said the decision the Cabinet supports will reduce the fees on this category of residents by 50 percent, so the maximum annual fee will be KD 1,000 per individual instead of KD 2,000. This will include the state's fee expected to be not more than KD 500, and the same or less for insurance that will cover all medical treatments in the private sector.

They said the KD 500 cost for the

insurance policy is due to the high medical costs of the age groups of 60 and above, in addition to the types of treatment private hospitals will offer through this category of insurance.

Ministry of labor?

In other news, the same newspaper reported yesterday that the government is contemplating establishing a new ministerial portfolio called the "ministry of labor". Government sources quoted in the report

said the ministry would oversee the local labor market and employment of Kuwaitis in the public and private sectors. The sources said the study for establishing the portfolio seeks to adopt one of two options - both aiming at employing Kuwaitis.

They said the first choice is to include the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) while maintaining the administrative structures of both entities to organize the work-

force, while creating cooperation in their plans towards organizing the local market-place. This option was discussed previously but was not approved, and it has surfaced again lately.

The second option is to include CSC, PAM and the higher education ministry. The sources said the portfolio will be under one minister, adding this option will be the cornerstone for organizing the local labor market and having higher education graduates that can meet its needs.

Kuwait sets mechanism to study COVID-19 vaccine exemptions

KUWAIT: The health ministry has prepared a precise mechanism for submitting exemption requests from the COVID-19 vaccination through a specialized technical committee that considers the applications according to specifications to make it easy for citizens and residents whose health conditions prevent them from taking the vaccine.

The ministry said in a press release that the committee is a specialized technical committee that includes an elite group of consultants in various medical specialties, as some cases need certificates that exempt them from taking the jab

based on the committee's evaluation.

The steps include that those concerned should register online as a first step, make sure about the identity of the applicant through a PIN code sent through email, then upload the necessary medical reports. The specialized committee will look into applications that meet the stipulations and categorize them according to the nature of illness. Several consultants then will decide the final position on the exemption. The attached medical reports must be issued by a government health center and include a clear reason for the exemption.

Kuwait goes back to work...

Continued from Page 1

care units, in addition to 6,904 active cases, he said. Some 10,757 swab tests were conducted over the past day, taking total tests to almost 3.6 million. Dr Sanad added, saying the positive case-to-swab test ratio stands at 2.84 percent.

His Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Thursday affirmed that by the end of September, the vaccination rate will reach 70 percent of the country's population, "thus we will achieve community (herd) immunity that will enable us to resume normal life". Until now, 2.6 million people in Kuwait have been vaccinated, equivalent to approxi-

mately 66 percent of the population, the prime minister affirmed.

The Cabinet on Aug 4 announced resumption of regular official work hours at all public departments and sectors as of yesterday after Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah informed the ministers that the number of coronavirus cases in the country has been declining, along with the occupancy rate at hospitals and intensive care wards.

The Civil Service Commission has declared its commitment to the Cabinet decision, affirming that civil servants are no longer allowed to remain absent without legal grounds. Therefore, work is back to seven hours per day, the regular schedule. Dr Sanad recently declared that epidemical indexes showed a decline in the number of cases compared to swab tests, in addition to cases in intensive care units, lauding relentless efforts on the part of citizens and expatriates in the fight against the virus.

The decrease in cases coincided with rising vaccinations as part of the national immunization campaign covering both citizens and residents. Government departments resumed work after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday at 60 percent capacity. Only the health ministry had maintained 100 percent employee attendance since the outbreak of the pandemic in the country, while the proportion of employees at other public sector bodies did not exceed 30 percent.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry said in a statement yesterday that based on instructions by Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah and Undersecretary Lt Gen Issam Al-Naham, security personnel were deployed throughout the country to ensure the smooth flow of traffic during the daytime rush hours. The ministry deployed patrols and troops on main roads to ensure that civil servants and employees reach their workplaces without delay. — KUNA

Ghani flees as Taleban...

Continued from Page 1

comparisons with the chaotic American departure from Saigon in 1975. "The fact of the matter is this: We went to Afghanistan 20 years ago with one mission in mind," he said. "That was to deal with the people that attacked us on 9/11. That mission has been successful."

The Taleban's imminent takeover triggered fear and panic in Kabul among residents fearful of the group's hardline brand of Islam. The scale and speed of the insurgents' advance have shocked Afghans and the US-led alliance that poured billions into the country over the past two decades.

President Joe Biden ordered the deployment of an additional 1,000 US troops to help secure the emergency evacuation from Kabul of embassy employees and thousands of Afghans who worked for American forces and now fear Taleban reprisals. That was on top of the 3,000 American soldiers deployed in recent days, and 1,000 left in-country after Biden announced in May that the final withdrawal of the US military presence in Afghanistan would be completed by Sept 11.

That decision has come under increased scrutiny given the collapse of the Afghan armed forces, but he insisted Saturday there was no choice. "I was the fourth president to preside over an American troop presence in

Afghanistan - two Republicans, two Democrats. I would not, and will not, pass this war onto a fifth," Biden said.

Ghani's government was left completely isolated yesterday after the insurgents overran the anti-Taleban northern stronghold of Mazar-i-Sharif and the eastern city of Jalalabad. Like with most of the other captured cities, the seizure of power came after government forces surrendered or retreated. Videos posted on pro-Taleban social media accounts showed the group's heavily armed fighters in cities across the country, waving white flags and greeting locals.

Most of the fighters appeared young, suggesting they were most likely infants or unborn when the Taleban was toppled from power in 2001. As the Taleban closed in on the capital, panicked residents swarmed banks for a second straight day, hoping to withdraw their savings. Many were already resigned to the Taleban taking power. "My only wish is that their return leads to peace. That is all we want," said Kabul shopkeeper Tariq Nezami.

A worker was seen yesterday white-washing advertising billboards on a beauty parlor featuring a glamorous bride. For the tens of thousands who have sought refuge in Kabul in recent weeks, the overwhelming mood was one of apprehension and fear. One doctor who arrived in the capital with his 35-strong family from Kunduz said he planned to return. "I am worried there will be a lot of fighting here. I would rather return home, where I know it has stopped," he told AFP, asking not to be named. — AFP

Death toll in massive Haiti...

Continued from Page 1

Francois, who was rescued from his collapsed two-story home in hard-hit Les Cayes.

His younger brother Job Francois said a desperate-sounding Marcel had called to say, "Come save me, I'm under the concrete" ... He told me he couldn't breathe, that he was dying." The neighbors and Job spent hours freeing him and his 10-year-old daughter from the heavy debris. But at least 724 people were killed in the 7.2-magnitude tremor that struck Saturday about 160 km to the west of the densely populated capital Port-au-Prince, which was devastated in a massive 2010 quake.

28 killed in Lebanon fuel...

Continued from Page 1

said the blast followed scuffles between "residents that gathered around the container to fill up gasoline" overnight.

Hospitals in Akkar, one of Lebanon's poorest regions near the border with Syria, and in the northern port city of Tripoli said they had to turn away many injured because they were ill-equipped to treat severe burns. "The corpses are so charred that we can't identify them," said Yassine Metlej, an employee at an Akkar hospital. "Some have lost their faces, others their arms," Metlej told AFP.

A security source told AFP DNA testing would start "soon" to identify victims. Health Minister Hamad Hassan said he was in contact with countries including Turkey, Kuwait and Jordan to evacuate serious cases abroad. Ismail Al-Sheikh, 23, burned on his arms and legs, was driven by his sister Marwa to

Beirut's Geitawi hospital, some 80 km away. "We were informed that the army was distributing gasoline... so people flocked to fill it in plastic containers... straight from the tank," Marwa told AFP.

Some said a lighter sparked the blast, she said; other witnesses claimed shots were fired. The explosion was widely seen as a direct consequence of official negligence that had pushed the country deeper into free fall. "The dead are victims of a careless state," Marwa told AFP. Sawan Abdullah burst into tears at Geitawi hospital when a doctor told her that her son, a soldier, was in a critical condition. He had only been looking for petrol so he could go to his job in the army, she told AFP. "He's my only son!" Abdullah yelled, falling to the floor.

Lebanon, hit by a financial crisis the World Bank says is probably one of the planet's worst since the 1850s, has been grappling with soaring poverty, a plummeting currency and dire fuel shortages. The central bank this week said it could not afford to fund fuel subsidies because of dwindling foreign reserves, and accused importers of hoarding fuel to sell at higher prices on the black market or in Syria.

teams. And Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru and Venezuela also offered help, as did the United Nations. "We want to plan a better adapted response than in 2010 after the earthquake - all aid coming from abroad should be coordinated by the Civil Protection agency," said Haiti's Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

A 7.0-magnitude quake in Jan 2010 left much of Port-au-Prince and nearby cities in ruins, killing more than 200,000. More than 1.5 million Haitians were made homeless in that disaster, which also destroyed 60 percent of Haiti's healthcare system, leaving island authorities and the international humanitarian community with a colossal challenge. The latest quake comes just over a month after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated in his home by a team of gunmen, shaking a country already battling poverty, spiraling gang violence and COVID-19. Police say they have arrested 44 people in connection with the killing. — AFP

Fuel shortages have left many with just two hours of electricity a day. The American University of Beirut Medical Centre, Lebanon's top private hospital, said it would close by today morning if it did not secure diesel to power generators, risking hundreds of lives. President Michel Aoun ordered a probe into the blast and chaired an emergency meeting of the defense council, his office said.

The meeting agreed to provide hospitals with the diesel they desperately need to power generators, said a statement. The council also called on the government to task security forces with monitoring the storage and distribution of fuel to prevent further incidents. Angry Akkar residents raided and torched a vacant house believed to belong to the owner of the plot where yesterday's explosion took place, the NNA reported.

The blast comes less than two weeks after Lebanon marked the first anniversary of the Beirut port explosion. Despite the economic crisis, political wrangling has delayed the formation of a new government after the last cabinet resigned in the wake of that blast. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir receives Crown Prince, senior state officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. He also hosted His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (Integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Yousef Al-Roumi.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Seif Palace yesterday. Furthermore, His Highness Sheikh Mishal received ministers Sheikh Hamad and Roumi, as well as Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha Enhancement Abdullah Yousef Al-Roumi.



(From right) His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets ministers of defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and foreign affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Kuwait trainees urged to build 'diplomatic personality'

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah stressed yesterday the importance of building a comprehensive diplomatic personality. His remarks came during his meeting with the 7th batch of trainees at Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute, in preparation to join the diplomatic and consular corps at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser pointed out that the diplomatic personality relies on proficiency, discipline, giving,



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah poses in a group picture with the 7th batch of trainees at Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute yesterday. — KUNA

keeping pace with the variables of political events and being fully aware of the escalating and accelerating challenges around the world. The Kuwaiti top diplomat also reviewed during the meeting

features of the country's foreign policy, which is based on balance, moderation, cooperation, strengthening security and peace in the world, and serving humanitarian work.— KUNA

Ambassadors mark 54th anniversary of ASEAN Day

KUWAIT: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Cambodia and Chairperson of ASEAN Committee in Kuwait Hun Han released a speech to celebrate the 54th anniversary of ASEAN Day. The following are excerpts from the speech read during a ceremony held recently at the Embassy of Malaysia:

"First of all, on behalf of the ASEAN Committee in Kuwait, please allow me to express my profound gratitude to Ambassador Ali Sulaiman Al-Saeed, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, who is able to join with us as the guest of honor on this meaningful occasion.

"Today, it is a real great pleasure with an utmost importance gathering to celebrate of the 54th anniversary of ASEAN Day for commemorating its founding in 1967, until now is 54 years ago. Since last year, all ASEAN countries and all countries around the world are still facing with the COVID-19 and new COVID-19 Delta variant pandemic. As you aware, not only in Kuwait, but also in our ASEAN countries, there were many official events and conferences planned several months in advance in different parts of the world, which have been cancelled or postponed out of fear of the spread of this bad virus.

"Indeed, our ASEAN Community is being a big family of 650 million people with a combined GDP of \$3 trillion and we also embrace 10 brotherly nations, which has turn Southeast Asia from a land of discord to a land of concord, from confrontation to good comprehensive cooperation, and from poverty to dynamic development together for many years ahead.

"Under strong wise leadership of our ASEAN head of states and governments, with shoulder to shoulder, we can rise above any challenges and move ASEAN forward in useful potential. Therefore, we should redouble our efforts to strengthen our community, and effectively promote our relations with the dialogue's partners. Based on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact around the world, a cohesive and responsive unit of ASEAN leaders has taken well-coordinated measures to protect the health of our peoples and revive our economies. ASEAN has led regional efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, innovated our operations, and especially further deepened our external ties, thus elevated our ASEAN international standing as well.

"Moreover, beside of our good cooperation and solidarity among ASEAN countries, ASEAN also has good friendship and strong relationship with the State of Kuwait in all fields. On the other hand, all ASEAN member states need Kuwait's full support, and appreciate its stand with us in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in this difficult time. In capacity of the Chairperson of the ASEAN Committee in Kuwait, I would like to emphasize that there will be strong political and economic ties between Kuwait and all ASEAN countries, including the world's largest Islamic countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Brunei."



Indian Ambassador Sibi George addresses the Indian diaspora



Indian Ambassador Sibi George pays floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi.

Indian embassy celebrates 75th Independence Day

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Indian Embassy in Kuwait celebrated the 75th Independence Day of India yesterday marking a significant milestone in the history of the country. In view of the prevailing pandemic situation, the celebrations were held in consonance with the COVID-19 health and safety guidelines and were live-streamed on the embassy's social media handles.

The official celebration, titled '#AzadiKaAmritMahotsav', commenced at 8:00 am at the embassy premises with Indian Ambassador Sibi George paying floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. It was followed by unfurling of the Indian national flag and singing of the national anthem. The ambassador also paid homage at the bust of Mahatma Gandhi at the India House and launched a tree plantation drive.

The ambassador read out Indian President Ram Nath Kovind's message to the nation on the occasion. He also addressed the community, including the thousands who joined the event on the virtual platform. In his address, the ambassador thanked the leadership and government of Kuwait for the continued support in further strengthening India-Kuwait bilateral relations, for taking special care of the Indian community in Kuwait

especially during the pandemic's period, and for the assistance and support in supplying the much-needed medical oxygen to India.

"The 75th Independence Day is a significant milestone in the history of our nation. We, Indians in Kuwait, celebrate this anniversary along with the 60th anniversary of establishment of our diplomatic relations. During this special anniversary year, we will work towards further strengthening our relationship with Kuwait, which is an important country in our extended neighborhood," the ambassador said.

George reiterated the invitation to the diaspora members in Kuwait to join hands with the embassy to celebrate the two important milestones: 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait and the 75th anniversary of Indian Independence.

On the occasion, he highlighted the efforts undertaken by the embassy on various fronts, including facilitation of high-level political exchanges, trade, investment, culture and tourism promotional efforts, expansion and deepening of institutional cooperation in different domains, and numerous measures to ensure the welfare of the Indian community in Kuwait.

In the run-up to the Independence Day celebrations, the embassy organized a variety of programs including competitions for school students and the general public; all of which witnessed overwhelming participation from the community. Marking the occasion, buses showcasing the multi-faceted culture of India were driven through the picturesque streets of Kuwait; an initiative by friends of India in Kuwait on the confluence of milestones.

Tunisia thanks Kuwait for critical COVID aid

TUNIS: Tunisia appreciates continuous flow of Kuwaiti aid, Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi said yesterday. As the North African nation's healthcare system continues to be under severe strain from a surge in COVID-19 cases, "Kuwait was quick to come to our aid during a very critical point," the minister said, thanking His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for the gracious gesture. The latest batch of aid, consisting of 20 tons of oxygen, is very significant since it provides life-saving assistance to patients hospitalized with the virus, added the minister, expecting the Kuwaiti aid to serve as a catalyst for better bilateral ties. Tunisia's Health Minister Ali Mrabet was equally grateful for the Kuwaiti aid, saying it will help "save lives" across hospitals nationwide, while such benevolent acts have become synonymous with Kuwait, he underlined. Kuwait has sent copious amounts of aid to Tunisia to help the country cope with a spike in COVID-19 cases, dominated by the Delta variant. — KUNA



TUNIS: A Kuwait Air Force plane carrying 20 tons of oxygen is seen shortly after it arrived in Tunisia yesterday. —KUNA

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Kuwait sympathizes with Lebanon

KUWAIT: Kuwait expressed sympathy and solidarity with Lebanon over the tragic fuel tank explosion that hit the northern city of Akkar yesterday. In a statement released by Kuwait's Foreign Ministry yesterday, an official source expressed heartfelt condolences, praying to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon the dead and wished speedy recovery for the injured.

Separately, Kuwait's Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said on Saturday it sent some eight tons of medical aid to Lebanon as part of efforts to help the country cope with worsening health conditions, driven by a rise in COVID-19 cases. The aid encapsulates Kuwait's unflinching resolve to stand alongside the Lebanese people in these trying times, KRCS Director General Abdulrahman Al-Oun said, adding that the supplies would be distributed across hospitals nationwide. The aid, which runs the gamut from baby milk to COVID-19 vaccines, comes a year after a devastating port blast left much of the Lebanese capital Beirut in tatters, he underlined.

In other news, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Saturday phoned his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. During the telephone call, the Kuwaiti top diplomat conveyed sincere condolences of Kuwait's leadership and government to Turkey following the floods engulfed some parts north of the country and left many casualties. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy on the souls of the deceased, wishing a rapid recovery to those injured. He stressed Kuwait's solidarity with, and support to, Turkey to overcome this painful disaster.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the latest Houthi attempts to threaten security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Najran. A ministry statement said those terrorist attacks represent a threat to the security of Saudi Arabia and the region's stability, as well as they pose challenge to the international community's efforts to put a stop to the conflict in Yemen. It added that this behavior necessitates swift and firm actions from the international community to stop the attacks and hold perpetrators accountable. It underlined Kuwait's total support for all measures assumed by Saudi Arabia to ensure its security, stability and sovereignty. — KUNA

Philippine embassy in Kuwait clears up misunderstanding on recruitment fees

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: There is a lot of misunderstanding about the fees being charged from sponsors for bringing a domestic worker to Kuwait from the Philippines. Kuwait Times spoke with several recruitment agencies and the union of recruiters to learn the facts.

As of now, would-be employers must pay a recruitment agency KD 890 to hire a domestic worker from the Philippines. In addition, would-be employers must pay KD 400 to KD 500 for the 14-day quarantine of the domestic worker. This additional fee is paid not to the recruiter but to the quasi-government Belsalama Company.

"Recruitment agencies cannot increase charges until another discussion is made between agencies and the Public Authority for Manpower," explained Mariam Macapudi, President of the Filipino Association of Secretaries of Employment Agencies in Kuwait (Fil-Aseak), a group comprising of 200 licensed recruitment agencies. "We are uniformly charging employers the KD 890 agreed price for the recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers as

mandated by the manpower authority," she said.

The KD 890 fee recruiters are charging is for all nationalities, not just Filipinos. "The KD 890 fee covers processing and other documents as well as the medical test, training, Kuwait Embassy (in Manila) processing and National Bureau of Investigation clearance, with the remaining amount being the profit of the recruitment agency," she noted.

Recently, sponsors pushed back at the fees due to the additional cost required to cover the quarantine. Belsalama Company books the air tickets and hotel accommodation for all recruited domestic workers, who must spend 14 days in quarantine and undergo two PCR tests.

New Filipino domestic helpers and those who are returning to their old employers continue to arrive in Kuwait as demand for Filipino housemaids has increased. Last week, local dailies reported that some recruiters were charging higher fees, especially for Filipino domestic workers, who remain popular in Kuwait.

The reopening of domestic helper recruitment to Kuwait began in May with two flights from the



Philippines, four flights in June, eight in July and 13 in the current month, while 10 flights are scheduled for September. The Philippine Embassy declined to comment on the matter, saying they are not involved in negotiating the fees. As of December 31, 2020, there were 668,615 domestic workers in Kuwait, including 319,333 from India and 142,544 from the Philippines.

Fire guts trees in Abu Halifa



KUWAIT: Firemen put out a blaze that broke out in trees in an open area in Abu Halifa yesterday. Firemen established a barrier to keep flames from spreading due to strong winds, Kuwait Fire Force said. No injuries were reported, it indicated, noting that an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.

Kuwait to put up causeway islands for investment

KUWAIT: A circular issued by the Cabinet revealed the project to invest in Jaber Causeway sites (two islands and two banks) that will be offered by the finance ministry. The investment period must be for 35 years, and the municipality should approve the land use and area usage percentages.

The project advisor explained the conditions that must be met, including habitation, private,

technical and financial conditions. The bidder must be a Kuwaiti company listed on the bourse or owned by the government with a stake of at least 50 percent. It can be a foreign firm, but must sign an agreement with a Kuwaiti company that meets the financial qualification standards.

Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi sent the technical report and municipal approval for bidding for the four sites to the Municipal Council for final approval. Manfouhi said based on the instructions of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, coordination is being made between the Cabinet's team and the Municipality to hasten the approval by the Municipal Council, adding that the Municipality has decided the area usage percentages, height and permitted activities.

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KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing heavy traffic at various roads around Kuwait yesterday as work returned back to 100 percent at state departments for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. —KUNA photos



Tigrayans fear the worst as bodies wash up in Sudan river

‘No jab, no job’: COVID vaccines made compulsory for Fiji civil servants Page 7

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Taliban fighters and local residents sit over an Afghan National Army (ANA) humvee vehicle along the roadside in Laghman province yesterday. —AFP

Taliban show off US-made war spoils

Fighters now flush with American-supplied arms and equipment

KANDAHAR: The Taliban have released footage showing captured US-made Afghan military helicopters at Kandahar airport, until recently one of the most important US bases in the country. The insurgents have been quick to show off their war spoils in the southern city - their spiritual birthplace and now one of the biggest prizes in a nationwide blitz that has left the capital Kabul surrounded by Taliban fighters.

The fall of Kandahar - Afghanistan's second-biggest city - on Friday meant the insurgents once again had full control of their ethnic Pashtun heartland. In footage posted on Taliban social media accounts Saturday, an insurgent is seen walking around a US-made Black Hawk military helicopter, which is in

brown-green camouflage with Afghan Air Force markings, purportedly at a Kandahar airport hangar. He then walks out and another Black Hawk is seen in the distance on the tarmac. As he walks to the side of the hangar, two Russian military helicopters are seen as another person is heard saying "mashallah" - an Islamic term of praise. It was not clear if any of the helicopters were airworthy.

The Black Hawk inside the hangar was seemingly in storage, with a black sheet covering its windshield and its left engine apparently missing. The two Russian helicopters outside the hangar were missing their blades, with a sheet covering the front of one airframe. One of the fighters is heard claiming there are five military helicopters

at the airport, and several jets. AFP could not independently verify the number of helicopters and planes at Kandahar airport.

While the Taliban have been able to deploy other equipment on the battlefield, experts have cast doubt about the utility of captured helicopters and planes - if they are not just husks. The Taliban are not known to possess the pilots or technical personnel needed to fly them. But their capture is a symbolic boon for the insurgents and an embarrassment for the Western coalition ahead of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the deadline for the American withdrawal.

The Kandahar video was released just a day after the Taliban captured the city

from Afghan forces, which have lost all major cities except Kabul. Images such as these have emerged from cities across Afghanistan that have fallen to the Taliban, showing insurgents posing with captured weapons and patrolling in vehicles once used by Afghan spies and elite forces.

Taliban fighters have also seized tactical vehicles, humvees, small arms and ammunition. Washington supplied much of that hardware to the Afghan military, to the tune of \$88 billion since 2002. With US troops all but gone, Taliban fighters are now flush with American-supplied arms and equipment - often left by retreating Afghan forces. —AFP

Iran's daily COVID deaths top 600

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday reported over 600 daily COVID deaths for the first time, ahead of tightened curbs to contain the spread of the virus. The country also registered 36,736 new infections in 24 hours, taking the total since the pandemic started to 4,425,821, the health ministry said. The latest 620 deaths raised the total number of fatalities to 97,828, it added. Health authorities acknowledge the official figures underestimate the country's real toll.

The Islamic republic is struggling to contain what officials have called a "fifth wave" of the virus driven by the highly infectious Delta variant. Numbers have broken daily records several times this month. Authorities have mandated government offices, banks and non-essential businesses to close nationwide from today until the end of next Saturday. A ban on car travel between provinces started yesterday and is due to run until August 27.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on its 83-million-strong population, instead resorting to piecemeal measures such as temporary travel bans and business closures. Authorities have tried to speed up the country's inoculation campaign amid criticism that it began too late and as Iran's exhausted health system struggles to cope with rising COVID cases. Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran says it has struggled to import vaccines.

More than 15 million people have received a first vaccine dose, but only around 4 million have had the required second jab, the health ministry said yesterday. As well as China's Sinopharm, Iran is administering Russia's Sputnik V, India's Bharat Biotech and the AstraZeneca vaccines, according to the health ministry. Authorities have also approved the emergency use of two locally made vaccines, but the only mass-produced one, COVIran Barekat, is in short supply. —AFP

Warlords give up to Taliban with surprising ease

KABUL: Afghanistan's warlords vowed defiantly to defend their strongholds from the Taliban and crush the insurgents. But, like the government's forces, they too gave up with surprising ease. As the insurgents swept through the north in a surprise offensive targeting Afghanistan's anti-Taliban bastion, President Ashraf Ghani called for a national mobilization of militia forces.

Despite Ghani's chequered history with the country's warlords, the beleaguered president was hoping they could help turn the tide. In the besieged northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Ghani was looking to longtime strongman Atta Mohammad Noor and ethnic Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum. Both were known for their dogged defense against the Taliban in the 1990s, and had remained influential figures during the past two decades of war.

In the days leading up to their defeat, the greying commanders appeared to be the fearsome figures from their younger years. "The Taliban never learn from the past," Dostum told reporters last week after flying back to Mazar-i-Sharif, while

offering a not-so-subtle reference to the alleged massacre of the insurgents by his fighters in 2001. "The Taliban have come to the north several times but they were always trapped. It is not easy for them to get out," Noor took to social media to issue his own warnings, posting graphic pictures of Taliban killed by his troops while promising to fight to the death. "I prefer dying in dignity than dying in despair," wrote Noor on Twitter, alongside other defiant posts vowing to "defend the nation". In a video posted to Facebook on Saturday, Noor spoke calmly to camera dressed in military fatigues while rifle fire could be heard close by.

'Cowardly plot'

Ultimately, bravado did not beat back the insurgents. Late Saturday, both men's militias were routed after the Afghan military units they were supporting surrendered to the Taliban. Dostum and Noor fled across the nearby Uzbek border. Noor claimed they had been the victims of deep-seated betrayal, saying on Twitter their resistance came to an end "as a result of a big organized & cowardly plot". He offered no other details.

Video posted on pro-Taliban social media accounts, meanwhile, showed a group of young Taliban fighters combing through Dostum's gaudy residence, digging through cabinets and testing out overstuffed furniture. Their rout came days after fellow strongman Ismail Khan was captured by



Abdul Rashid Dostam

Taliban fighters in the western city of Herat.

Khan had in the lead-up to his defeat sounded like the same powerful figure who had ruled his fiefdom with such authority for decades that he earned the nickname "Lion of Herat". "We demand all the remaining security forces resist with courage," Khan said last month. But with a look of resignation, Khan was on Friday forced to pose for pictures with Taliban fighters and give an interview to an insurgent media outlet. After all the hefty promises and chest thumping, it was a humiliating end. —AFP

Burns, tears as Beirut medics treat fuel blast victims

BEIRUT: Anger and grief collided in a crowded Beirut hospital yesterday as relatives of burn victims from a fuel tanker explosion in north Lebanon waited breathlessly for news of loved ones. Geitawi hospital, which has one of the country's two burn centers, saw an influx of patients injured in the overnight blast that killed at least 28 people in the Akkar district village of Al-Tleil.

Dozens of people had flocked to the village to get petrol, a scarce and increasingly costly resource the army was distributing after confiscating it in efforts to combat stockpiling by distributors. The official National News Agency said the explosion followed scuffles between residents clamoring to get some petrol, but the exact cause of the blast remains unclear. The burns unit in Beirut, some 80 km south of the blast site, was seen as a last hope for families turned away from overstretched medical facilities in the north. Sawsan Abdallah tracked down her son, a soldier, as he was transferred from one hospital to another for treatment after being caught up in the explosion. She burst into tears at Geitawi hospital when a doctor informed her that



TRIPOLI: A man covered in sterile gauze to treat burns suffered as a result of a fuel tank explosion in Lebanon's northern region of Akkar lies in bed at the As-Salam Hospital yesterday. —AFP

her son was in a critical condition.

"You told me he was okay! I want to see him. I only have him, he's my only son!" she yelled, falling to the floor as relatives rushed to help her. Speaking to AFP afterwards, she said her son had only been looking for petrol so he could go to his work in the army.

"We live in a failed state, which loves neither its people, nor its soldiers," said Sawsan, whose husband, who was also a soldier, died in clashes with an Islamist group in north Lebanon in 2000. Lebanon is grappling with an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worst in modern times, and has been hit by severe fuel shortages since the start of summer. —AFP

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International

In Sudan, Tigrayans fear worst as bodies still wash up in river

Allegations of atrocities, ethnic cleansing and mass killings in Humera town

WAD AL-HILIOU, Sudan: In an east Sudan town, Tigrayan Gabratansay Gabrakhristos panics whenever his phone rings: it could be grim news of yet more bodies washing up on the banks of a river bordering Ethiopia. Gabratansay says he has been receiving such phone calls since late July, when Sudanese villagers found the first corpse floating down the Setit River, known as the Tekeze in Ethiopia.

Since then, he says, a stream of calls has followed, bringing news of even more gruesome discoveries of bloated and deformed bodies with bound hands and severe wounds.

"It has been the case for weeks now. Once a new body is found, they call me and other Tigrayans here," Gabratansay told AFP at Wad Al-Hiliou, a village in the eastern Sudanese state of Kassala.

"We may not know them personally, but they are the bodies of our people," says the 40-year-old farmer. Gabratansay and others like him who recover the bodies fear they are evidence of mass executions by government-allied troops in Tigray, a small but historically powerful region of northern Ethiopia that has been ravaged by more than nine months of fighting between the army and battle-hardened local forces.

Allegations have swirled of atrocities, ethnic cleansing and mass killings, including a massacre in the town of Humera, in western Tigray. All have been dismissed by the Ethiopian government as "fabricated". Along with other Tigrayans, Gabratansay says he has helped to retrieve and bury some 50 bodies found in the river, including five women.

Many of the corpses bore gunshot wounds, others appeared to have suffered burns, deep slashes, or had body parts missing, and almost all had their hands tied behind their back, he says.

'Hands tied'

Gabratansay says that based on information received from Humera, "around 150 Tigrayan pris-

oners were executed by federal forces with their hands tied behind their back". These accounts came from Tigrayans who fled Humera as well as people still in the town who spoke of hearing "screams and gunshots", he says.

"We think there are more bodies in the river but we have not found them yet," Tigrayan Kahsay Gabrseley, who took part in the search for bodies, believes they belong to the Tigrayans allegedly executed in Humera. "We have heard that federal forces killed dozens of Tigrayan prisoners... and threw them in the river," he says. "We think these are their bodies."

Although the men have little evidence to support their claims, they say some of the bodies had tattoos written in their language—Tigrinya. "One body had a tattoo of the words 'I love you' on his arm, and another had the name of his beloved carved on his arm as well," says Tigrayan Gebremaden Gabro.

Tigray has been wracked by violence since November, when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent in troops to oust the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, a move he says was in response to TPLF attacks on army camps. Thousands have been killed, and tens of thousands forced to flee into Sudan. Weeks into the fighting, Abiy—winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize—declared victory after his forces captured the Tigray capital, Mekele.

In June, a stunning turn of events unfolded when the TPLF regained control over Mekele and much of Tigray. The fighting spread, however, as western Tigray remained under the control of allied government forces, and the TPLF pushed east and south into the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions.

Shallow sand graves

The men shared with AFP images of what appeared to be several bodies floating on the surface before being carried away on mats and buried in shallow sand graves on the banks of a river. "We



KASSALA, Sudan: A boat sails along the Setit river bordering Ethiopia, at Wad Al-Hiliou, a village in the eastern Sudanese state of Kassala. Tigrayan refugees who recover bodies washing up on the banks of the river, fear they are evidence of mass executions by government-allied troops in Tigray. —AFP

wished we could take them somewhere better to be buried, but we couldn't," Gabratansay says, pointing to large stones he placed atop the grave of the first body he buried. "The bodies were too decomposed and smelled and we had little means to carry them."

The UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, confirmed the discovery of one body and several fresh graves but said it could neither confirm the identity of those buried nor how they died. The UNHCR, like other aid agencies, said in early August that it had "no access to the Ethiopian side of the border."

Humanitarian needs have swelled in Tigray with aid workers struggling to reach people who have become stranded by the conflict. In July, the UN warned that 400,000 people had "crossed the

threshold into famine", with another 1.8 million on the brink of following them.

Amnesty International this month accused forces allied with Addis Ababa of hundreds of cases of sexual violence and rape, some involving sexual slavery and mutilation.

Ethiopia accused Amnesty of bad methodology and waging "sensationalized attacks and smear campaigns" against it. But Tigrayans living in Sudan fear the worst for their families trapped in the region. "My family was unable to escape since they live in a village far from the border," says Legese Mallow who hails from Adigrat in Tigray.

"We just wish the war would stop so we can go there and see who died and who is still alive." —AFP

Pandemic tests Florida governor's lofty ambitions

MIAMI: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has clashed repeatedly with the media and his Democratic opponents over the coronavirus pandemic, which has seen a recent spike in the state—a surge that some say could threaten his future presidential ambitions.

From the beginning the Republican refused to mandate mask-wearing while promoting a rapid re-opening of the southern state's economy and quickly dropping nearly all safety requirements for employers. By presenting such measures as a defense of individual freedoms in the face of restrictions imposed by US public health authorities, DeSantis found a strategy that paid off—at least at first.

The governor became a rising star in the Republican Party with Florida's mortality rate remaining no worse than the national average (despite a high number of COVID-19 infections) and its economy also taking off. But the recent sharp surge in COVID-19 appears to be taking away some of the governor's luster.

Only the state of Louisiana now has a higher per capita infection rate. And Florida this month has broken daily hospitalization records almost every day. "I definitely think the current surge of COVID can hurt his political future," said J. Edwin Benton, a political science professor at the University of South Florida, in Tampa.

"He has lost the advantage he had a few months ago, and most of this is due to his controversial stance on the coronavirus." While the governor denies holding presidential ambitions, the press, analysts and his political rivals say they have no doubt he will pursue the party's nomination in three years. In the shorter term, a survey in March by local pollster St. Pete Polls had DeSantis leading among likely gubernatorial candidates in 2022, but a more recent poll has him slipping to second, behind Democrat Charlie Crist.

Trump 2.0

Despite mounting criticism, the governor has doubled down. In the space of a few days, he threatened to withhold state funding from school districts requiring masks, tried in vain to prevent cruise lines from demanding passengers' proof of vaccination, accused the press of "hysteria" and tried to blame the outbreak on President Joe Biden. The man described by political analyst Larry Sabato as "smarter than Trump, and a bit more careful and coldly calculating" seems unwilling to change course.

If his tough-sounding declarations are more than a little reminiscent of former president Donald Trump's aggressive rhetoric from the White House, it is no coincidence. The Floridian, who was born into a working-class family but graduated with honors from Yale and Harvard, knows as well as anyone the huge influence the former president retains among Republican voters.

As an almost unknown congressman in 2018, when few were betting on him, DeSantis managed to draw the then-president's support in a run for the governorship. Now, DeSantis trails only Trump as the party's favored candidate in the 2024 presidential election, according to a recent survey by Republican pollster Tony Fabrizio. "DeSantis will appear to be Trump 2.0 because that's where the Republican Party is, and he wants to be the party's presidential nominee," said Sabato, who heads the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "DeSantis is smarter," he added, "but not nearly as good a public speaker and performer." —AFP

Canada snap polls coming as Trudeau seeks new mandate

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was expected to call snap elections for September 20 to seek a new mandate to steer the nation's pandemic exit, much to the dismay of his rival parties.

Trudeau and opposition leaders have been crisscrossing the country in recent weeks, making election-style announcements in anticipation of an early vote. The prime minister was due to visit Governor General Mary Simon at 10 am local time (1400 GMT) to ask her to dissolve parliament, triggering a general election that polling shows is likely to return his Liberals to power. Despite rolling out massive pandemic aid, passing a federal budget and other key legislation with opposition backing over the past year, Trudeau—in office since 2015 — has

Evicted by fire, Greek family recalls narrow escape

ATHENS: In recent years, the pines had grown so much that the Haniosakis family could no longer see the Acropolis from their charming garden in Drosopigi, a small hamlet overlooking Athens. "And now there she is again, because everything has gone up in smoke," Betty Haniosakis, 77, acknowledges bitterly, sitting on a bed in a nearby municipal summer camp where her family sheltered from the flames.

When the fire reached her home last week in a wave of blazes that would later engulf the island of Evia in the east and parts of the Peloponnese too, the danger did not seem too imminent at first.

The fire "came very slowly, there was not a bit of wind," recalls American-born Betty. Residents of the sparsely-populated community had already received warning messages by cell-

phone from the civil protection authority to evacuate.

The police drove by once, twice. The third time they came over, there was no more time to dither. "You need to leave. Now," they said," recalls Haniosakis' daughter Eleni, a 45-year-old teacher.

"That's when we knew it was very serious." They were among hundreds forced to abandon their homes that week, unsure of whether they would see them again.

'Mega fires'

That week, Greece battled around 600 blazes, some of them "mega fires", Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis later explained. With conditions on the ground bone-dry in the worst heatwave in decades, a fire in the forest of Varibobi near Athens roared back to life after being nearly subdued and spread to neighboring Drosopigi.

Betty wanted to take refuge in the basement, shutting the doors and hiding under soaked blankets. But her daughter persuaded her to flee alongside their three cats and three dogs. Her elderly husband Giorgos, 89 and in a wheelchair, had already left a day earlier.

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more rapid formation of the sub-glacial water flow, an important underground circulation of water," Valerio Segor, the Aosta Valley region's director of natural risk management, told AFP.

In years past, the Planpincieux glacier was lodged in a more stable position on the rock, and was thicker with fewer fractures, said Paolo Perret, a glacier expert at the Courmayeur-based Safe Mountains Foundation. But due to rising temperatures caused by climate change, "the glacier withdrew to a smooth and steep surface which causes it to be in an unstable position," Perret said.

The movements are not insignificant, with the glacier in extreme cases slipping as much as 150 cm in a day, he said. By contrast, the Whymper serac, a polar glacier above it looming nearly 4,000 m above sea level, can slide between two and 20 cm per day, said Perret, resulting in "imminent collapses". A massive block of ice from the Whymper serac measuring 15,000 sq m tumbled to the ground last October, a day after authorities had prohibited access to paths underneath.

Movements of the Planpincieux glacier - and



OTTAWA: Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (center), his wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau (second left) and children Ella-Grace (left), and Hadrien arrive at Rideau Hall to ask Governor General Mary Simon to dissolve Parliament yesterday in Ottawa. —AFP

sities in two weeks, COVID cases will inevitably go up," Felix Mathieu, political science professor at the University of Winnipeg, said. —AFP



ATHENS: Betty Haniosakis (left), 77 year-old, stands next to her husband at a shelter for fire stricken residents in Nea Makris, near Athens. —AFP

The family found temporary lodgings in a summer camp for children that had been closed owing to the pandemic, and there they remain. A groundswell of donations from around the country, from organizations and private citizens, poured in—food, water, clothes, even free accommodation offers from hotels.—AFP



COURMAYEUR, Italy: A cow grazes near the Planpincieux Glacier (center) on the Mont La Sax in Courmayeur, Alps Region, north-western Italy. —AFP

those above it - are closely monitored via radar, and the region's safety plan anticipates a variety of potential scenarios. The "extreme scenario" would be the fall of an 800,000 cu m of ice to the village and road below, said Segor. —AFP

International

Hong Kong group behind huge democracy rallies disbands

Sweeping clampdown on dissent cited reason

HONG KONG: The Hong Kong protest coalition that organized record-breaking democracy rallies two years ago said yesterday it was disbanding in the face of China's sweeping clampdown on dissent in the city. The dissolution comes as China remolds Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image and purges the city of any person or group deemed disloyal or unpatriotic.

The Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) was a major player in the months of democracy protests that convulsed Hong Kong in 2019. But the group said Beijing's subsequent crackdown on democracy supporters and a de facto ban on protests had left it with little future.

"All member groups have been suppressed and civil society is facing an unprecedented severe challenge," it said in a statement announcing why it was disbanding.

Its remaining HK\$1.6 million (\$205,000) in assets would be donated to "appropriate groups", the statement added. The 2019 protests began in response to a deeply unpopular law that would have allowed extraditions from the semi-autonomous city to authoritarian mainland China.

But they soon morphed into calls for greater democracy and police accountability after huge crowds were dispersed with tear gas and rubber bullets. The CHRF, founded in 2002, espoused non-violence and routinely got crowds of hundreds of thousands strong onto the streets.

Some estimates said more than a million people marched at some rallies, in a city of 7.3 million residents. But the deliberately leaderless democracy movement became increasingly fierce as clashes escalated between riot police

and smaller groups of more hardcore, often young, protesters.

Security law

China's response to protesters has been to dismiss their demands and portray them as part of a foreign plot to destabilize the motherland. A sweeping national security law was imposed on the city last year that criminalized much dissent and has seen many of the city's democracy leaders jailed or fled overseas. More than 30 civil society groups have already disbanded, fearful that national security police will come for them next, according to an AFP tally.

Earlier this week the city's biggest union—the Professional Teachers Union (PTU) — said it was shutting down after nearly 50 years of operation.

Most of the CHRF's prominent activists, including former leaders Jimmy Sham and Figo Chan, are already behind bars for organizing the protests or on national security charges.

But a small group of activists had kept the organization going at least in name. National security police had already begun an investigation into the umbrella group over its finances and whether it was properly registered.

Earlier this week police chief Raymond Siu also told a pro-Beijing newspaper the CHRF might have broken the national security law with its 2019 rallies. Those comments caused alarm because the law enacted on June 30, 2020 — is not supposed to be retroactive.

"Crimes made by a group and its members will not be wiped out due to it disbanding, or members quitting," police said in a statement reacting to the CHRF's dissolution. Both the CHRF and the PTU



HONG KONG: In this file photo, protesters gather for a rally in Victoria Park in Hong Kong, in opposition to a planned extradition law that had morphed into a wider call for democratic rights in the semi-autonomous city. —AFP

decisions to disband came after multiple pieces were run in China's state media attacking the organizations and calling for Hong Kong authorities to do more to dismantle them.

State media have also singled out two other organizations in recent weeks. They are the Hong

Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China—which has historically organized the city's now-banned vigils marking Beijing's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown—and the city's biggest pro-democracy labor coalition the Confederation of Trade Unions. —AFP

Japan braces for more rain after floods, landslides

TOKYO: Japan braced for further downpours yesterday as rescuers sifted through flood and landslide damage after record rain that left at least six dead. Residents returned to check on their mud-covered homes in the country's southwest, where nearly two million people were urged to seek shelter on Saturday as dozens of rivers overflowed.

Showers eased in the hard-hit region yesterday, with the weather agency downgrading alerts from the top level, but more rain was expected from the evening. "It is still possible that extreme, severe rain will continue in many areas across the nation," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said at an emergency cabinet meeting. "Because it has been raining so much, ground soil in many areas is becoming looser, and large-scale disasters could happen at any time," he said, advising residents to exercise caution and stay in shelters.

'No job, no job' policy for Fiji civil servants

SUVA: A "no job, no job" coronavirus policy went into effect in Fiji yesterday with unvaccinated public servants forced to go on leave as the Pacific nation joined a number of countries in imposing similar mandates. A stubborn outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant that started in April ended a yearlong spell of no community transmission of COVID-19, and has overwhelmed Fiji's healthcare system with more than 40,000 cases.

The government has argued that mandatory vaccinations are necessary to raise immunization rates and end the outbreak. After a period of forced leave starting yesterday, Fiji's public servants who remain unvaccinated by November will be dismissed. In addition, employees at private firms could face fines and companies could be forced to stop operations over vaccine refusals.

A growing number of nations are making shots

Scientists say climate change is intensifying the risk of heavy rain in Japan and elsewhere, because a warmer atmosphere holds more water.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has called the recent rainfall levels "unprecedented".

Just over one meter (three feet) of rain was seen over four days in Ureshino, a town in Saga prefecture. The same town recorded 3.3 meters of rain in the whole of 2020, and 2.3 meters in 2019.

Two women in their 70s were confirmed dead after they were found in a drainage canal, Hironori Fujiki, a Saikai city official in Nagasaki prefecture, told AFP. It came after a 59-year-old woman died in a landslide that swept away her house in Uzen, Nagasaki, on Friday. Rescue workers were still combing the wreckage for two of her family members.

Landslide warnings have been issued in 372 municipalities across Japan after 44 were detected—a quarter of them in Nagasaki—the land ministry said. In the Nagano region of central Japan, a 41-year-old woman and her two sons, aged 12 and 7, died in a landslide, a local official told AFP.

An elderly resident of Kanzaki in Saga told public broadcaster NHK about a landslide she witnessed that had no casualties. "So many logs tumbled down and crashed into this area" from nearby

mountains, she said. "It was so, so scary... you absolutely have to leave when it rains."

Strong rain last month caused a devastating wave of landslides in the central resort town of Atami that killed 23 people, with four still missing.

And in 2018, floods and landslides killed more than 200 people in western Japan during the country's annual rainy season. —AFP

compulsory in critical sectors such as health and public services. From Canada and the United States to Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia, authorities in a growing number of countries have moved to require workers in hospitals, schools, travel and public services to get a shot or face varying levels of disciplinary action.

Despite intense political opposition in some nations such as France, governments and experts say mass vaccination is one of the most potent weapons to help end the pandemic and end the economic suffering brought by restrictions such as lockdowns. Legal expert and former head of the Fiji Human Rights Commission Imrana Jalal said other countries had mandated compulsory vaccinations in various critical sectors, but not on the sweeping scale imposed in Fiji.

The island nation's economy has been hammered by the pandemic-induced collapse of the tourism industry, with unemployment soaring as a result. The government has dismissed the lockdown option because of its high economic cost and rising poverty in the nation of 930,000.

With more than 24,000 still-active cases and 358 deaths, its resources are stretched as military-style field hospitals handle the overflow of

patients—especially after the virus swept through densely populated squatter settlements. Despite the crisis, authorities are facing deep vaccine skepticism fuelled by misinformation spread on social media and by some religious leaders.

They have also been criticized by some opponents who argue that a vaccine mandate is a violation of their rights. —AFP

Japan ministers visit controversial shrine on WWII anniversary

TOKYO: Three Japanese cabinet ministers visited a shrine seen by neighboring countries as a symbol of Tokyo's past militarism yesterday, the anniversary of the nation's World War II surrender.

It came after two other members of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's cabinet, including the defense minister, visited Yasukuni Shrine on Friday, drawing angry reactions from China and South Korea. The shrine in central Tokyo honors 2.5 million war dead, mostly Japanese, who have perished since the late 19th century.

But it also enshrines senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes by an international tribunal. Last year, four top ministers paid their respects at the shrine on the anniversary—the first such visit since 2016.

But a Japanese prime minister has not appeared

there since 2013, when Shinzo Abe sparked fury in Beijing and Seoul and earned a rare diplomatic rebuke from close ally the United States. Suga became leader in September and has so far stayed away from Yasukuni, instead sending ritual offerings to the shrine on key dates.

Yesterday, he reportedly gave a traditional cash offering and also laid flowers at a secular national cemetery nearby. At a small state ceremony to mark the 76th anniversary of Japan's defeat, Suga said the country would not repeat the horrors and suffering of its past wars.

But the nation, he said, stands ready to help solve various global issues "under the banner of proactive pacifism". Around 200 people participated in the ceremony, which usually gathers 6,000 and was scaled back because of the coronavirus.

On Friday, Beijing expressed "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi's visit to Yasukuni. Kishi is a brother of former prime minister Abe, who also visited the shrine yesterday. South Korea summoned the Japanese embassy's deputy chief of mission to protest Friday's visits, according to Japanese media.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua



TAGAWA, Japan: Workers stand at the site of a landslide caused by heavy rain in Tagawa District, Fukuoka prefecture yesterday. —AFP

News in brief

19 trapped miners in China rescued

BEIJING: Rescuers in northwestern China worked yesterday to free 19 trapped coal miners, hours after their site was flooded by mud in an accident that has already killed one worker. The flooding happened around noon Saturday at the Chaidai'er coal mine in Qinghai province, state media reported. Mining accidents are common in China, where the industry has a poor safety record and regulations are often weakly enforced. At Chaidai'er, 21 people were working underground at the time of the accident, and one person was rescued with injuries. China's emergency management ministry said. Another was found dead, with the remaining trapped in the mine.

Eight die in Hungary bus accident

BUDAPEST: Eight people were killed and dozens injured when a passenger bus crashed into the pillar of a motorway overpass near Budapest early yesterday, Hungarian police said. The MTI news agency eight people were seriously injured and 40 suffered minor injuries in the crash, which police said occurred at 4:55 am (0255 GMT) some 70 kilometers (40 miles) southwest of the capital. The injured were taken to hospitals in the region and in Budapest. In a statement, the police said that the exact cause of the crash was not yet known and no details were currently available regarding the age or identities of the victims.

Thousands demonstrate in Montreal

MONTREAL: Thousands gathered Saturday in the streets of Montreal to protest against the province of Quebec's COVID-19 vaccine passport, which will go into effect early next month. Holding signs that said "Freedom!" and "We are not laboratory rats," the demonstrators, many of whom came with their families, paraded peacefully under a blazing sun in downtown Montreal. Quebecers wanting to eat at a restaurant, go to a bar, exercise at the gym or attend a festival will need to present proof of vaccination against the coronavirus beginning September 1, under a measure introduced by the province earlier this week.

First vaccinated COVID death in Greece

ATHENS: Greece has recorded the first death of a fully vaccinated patient from COVID-19 without underlying symptoms, an official at one of the country's leading hospitals said yesterday. "We have the first death of a fully vaccinated patient... it was the first among (about) 13,000 deaths in Greece," Nikos Kapravelos, director of one of the intensive care units of Thessaloniki's Papanikolaou hospital, told Open TV. The man, described by Greek media as a 70-year-old dentist, had no underlying health symptoms, Kapravelos said. The man had followed all precautions and his wife and children had also been vaccinated, he said. Over 13,200 people have died of the virus in Greece, with an average age of 78 years.

Nigeria imposes partial curfew

LAGOS: Nigerian authorities yesterday imposed a curfew in parts of central Plateau state, a day after a suspected Christian militia attacked a convoy of 90 Muslims, killing at least 23. Northwest and central Nigeria have for years struggled with violence between mainly Muslim nomadic herders and Christian farmers over control of resources, water and land. Condemning the attack, President Muhammadu Buhari said in a statement that this was "not an agriculturalist-on-pastoralist confrontation-but rather a direct, brazen and wickedly motivated attack." On Saturday, "a group of attackers suspected to be Irigwe youths (predominantly Christian)... attacked a convoy of five buses with Muslim faithful," said police spokesman Ubah Ogaba. —AFP



SUVA: In this file photo taken on August 9, 2021, a health worker administers a first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to a woman in Suva. —AFP

They have also been criticized by some opponents who argue that a vaccine mandate is a violation of their rights. —AFP



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga lays a flower during a memorial service marking the 76th anniversary of the end of World War II in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Chunying also reacted angrily to yesterday's visits. "The actions of some Japanese politicians on the issue of the Yasukuni Shrine are a blasphemy of historical justice and serious injury to the feelings of the people from victimized countries in Asia, including China," she said. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 2021

As new variant delays return to offices, many in US don't mind

More and more people across US settle in for a second year of telework

WASHINGTON: When Romain Daubec and his wife Monica left San Francisco last summer for Denver, Colorado, they thought their telework hundreds of miles from their offices would last no more than a half-year. But the stunningly rapid spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 has them settling in for a new way of life that now, they say, feels more "natural."

Across the United States, a growing number of companies are delaying their employees' return to the office out of concern over the new wave of disease. But like the Daubecks—he is French, she is American—more and more people across the country have settled in for a second year of telework-willingly this time, with little desire to return to the office, content and comfortable with their new personal and professional lifestyle.

The Delta variant, now dominant in the United States, has taken a heavy toll. An average of nearly 113,000 new daily cases of COVID-19 were registered over the previous seven days—a 24 percent increase over the prior week, Rochelle Walensky, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said Thursday. One employer taking note was Facebook, which on that same day announced that it would not require

workers to return to the office before January 2022.

"Data, not dates, is what drives our approach for returning to the office," a Facebook spokesperson said in response to an AFP inquiry, saying the company's prime concern was "everyone's safety." Only weeks earlier, the popular social network had been pushing for a quicker return to normal, saying it would completely reopen its offices by October—while requiring all employees to be masked and vaccinated. Facebook thus joined Microsoft, Amazon, American Express and NBC in delaying, to October or January, the full reopening of offices.

Lower wages but also taxes

For 34-year-old Romain Daubec, a financial analyst for a subsidiary of French bank BNP Paribas, and Monica, who works for Facebook, a return to the office is no longer an option. While Monica saw her earnings cut by 10 percent because of the move, "that was largely compensated for" by a greater quality of life and more affordable housing—less than half as expensive in Colorado as in California—as well as by lower taxes, Romain said.

Above all, Monica no longer has to spend three hours on a bus every day.

For Oren Klachkin, an economist with Oxford Economics, it took a bit longer to make the decision to leave New York for Boulder, Colorado. But when a new wave of COVID-19 struck last fall, he saw the silver lining: It was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live somewhere else, maintain our jobs, try living in a different place," he said. Space was a big draw: He and his wife Nicole, a 35-year-old consultant, had been sharing a cramped Manhattan apartment. In Boulder, not far from Denver, the couple now has a "small house" where each has a separate room for work.

"I like the new life that I have here," Klachkin said, especially "having access to outdoor activities" in a scenic region near the Rocky Mountains. Telework in Colorado has allowed him to strike a better balance between work and home life and saved him from having to "waste" up to two hours a day in the subway, he said. But "there are certain downsides, of course," Klachkin added, notably the inability to interact in person with colleagues.

That is partially offset by "the availability of different online software to essentially allow us to see each other... even though we're not physically in



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo shows a person working on their laptop from a home office in Los Angeles. — AFP

the same space."

A tacit deal

To Romain Daubec, where one works matters less than how one works. "As far as I'm concerned, I just need a good internet connection and have to work on San Francisco's time zone," he said, while acknowledging that not every job lends itself to distance work. Fundamentally,

Daubec added, telework succeeds when built on a basis of trust between employer and employee: Companies allow telework because they save on fixed costs like office rent, while workers tacitly agree to work as seriously as if their boss were standing in the same room. Klachkin, for his part, says he is more productive than ever—no longer having to spend long, wearying hours commuting every week. — AFP

Big Tech rolls on as investors shrug off regulatory pressure

SAN FRANCISCO: Pressure is rising on Big Tech firms, signaling tougher regulation in Washington and elsewhere that could lead to the breakup of the largest platforms. But you'd hardly know by looking at their share prices.

Shares in Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Google parent Alphabet have hovered near record highs in recent weeks, lifted by pandemic-fueled surges in sales and profits that have helped the big firms extend their dominance of key economic sectors. The Biden administration has given signs of more aggressive regulation with appointments of Big Tech critics at the Federal Trade Commission.

But that has failed to dent the momentum of the largest tech firms, despite tough talk and antitrust litigation in the United States and Europe, with US lawmakers eyeing moves to make antitrust enforcement easier. Big Tech critics in the United States and the EU want Apple and Google to loosen the grip of their online app marketplaces; more competition in a digital advertising market dominated by Google and Facebook; and better access to Amazon's e-commerce platform by third-party sellers.

One lawsuit tossed out by a judge but in the process of being refiled could force Facebook to spin off its Instagram and WhatsApp platforms, and some activists and lawmakers are pressing for breakups of the four tech giants. All four have hit

market valuations above \$1 trillion, with Apple over \$2 trillion. Alphabet shares are up some 80 percent from a year ago, with Facebook up nearly 40 percent and Apple almost 30 percent. Amazon shares are roughly on par with last year's level after breaking records in July.

Microsoft, with a \$2 trillion valuation, has largely escaped antitrust scrutiny, even as it has benefitted from the cloud computing trend. The surging growth has stoked complaints that the strongest firms are extending their dominance and squeezing out rivals.

Yet analysts say any aggressive actions, in the legal or legislative arena, could take years to play out and face challenges.

Fast-moving environment

"Breakup is going to be nearly impossible," said analyst Daniel Newman at Futurum Research, citing the need for controversial legislative changes to antitrust laws. Newman said a more likely outcome would be multibillion-dollar fines that the companies could easily absorb as they adjust their business models to adapt to problematic issues in a fast-moving environment.

"These companies have more resources and know-how than the regulators," he said. Dan Ives at Wedbush Securities said any antitrust action would likely require legislative change—unlikely with a divided Congress. "Until investors start to see some consensus on where the regulatory and law changes go from an antitrust perspective, it's a contained risk, and they see a green light to buy tech," he said.

Other factors supporting Big Tech include a massive shift to cloud computing and online activities that allow the strongest players to benefit, and a crackdown in China on its large technology firms.



NEW YORK: In this file photo illustration, a smart phone screen displays the logo of Facebook on a Facebook website background in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

"The China regulatory crackdown has been so massive in scale and scope, it has driven investors from Chinese tech to US tech," Ives said. "Even though there is regulatory risk in the US, it pales in comparison to the crackdown we're seeing from Beijing." Analysts say the big tech firms are also well-positioned to deal with tougher regulations.

Tracy Li of the investment firm Capital Group, in a recent blog post that the tech giants face major risks in regulation around privacy, content moderation and antitrust. "Concerns related to privacy or content may actually strengthen, rather than weaken, the moats of the largest platforms," Li said. "These companies often boast well-established protocols and have more resources to tackle privacy and legal matters." — AFP

Lebanon bank chief vows no forex raid to fund fuel

BEIRUT: Lebanon's central bank governor vowed Saturday not to reverse his decision to stop subsidizing fuel imports, unless parliament votes to force the monetary authority to raid its compulsory foreign reserves. The country is gripped by one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850's, according to the World Bank, and is struggling with shortages of fuel and other necessities, amid a black market plunge in the local currency of more than 90 percent.

Foreign exchange reserves have dwindled in recent months to now stand at \$14 billion—approaching the minimum the bank is required to hold—according to governor Riad Salame. In a bid to ease this pressure on reserves, the central bank said on Wednesday it would no longer subsidize fuel imports.

"I will not review the removal of subsidies on fuel unless the use of compulsory reserves is legalized" by a parliamentary vote, Salame told local radio on Saturday. Crippling shortages of fuel, existing alongside power cuts lasting more than 22 hours per day, have left many businesses without the diesel needed to power generators, and forced some premises to close.

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. Politicians have hit out at Salame's move, which means fuel has to be bought at the black market exchange rate—making it unaffordable to many.

But Salame hit back on Saturday. "Everybody was aware...they were aware in government, parliament and the president's office" that reserves were critically low, Salame said, accusing the ruling class of inaction. "There is a simple solution... a session in parliament to approve the use of mandatory reserves" to fund fuel imports, he added.

The central bank chief also took aim at local traders, accusing them of holding back fuel from the local market so as to force prices higher, and also selling onto neighboring Syria's black market.

"The central bank seeks to finance Lebanon, not another country," Salame said. Salame has headed the central bank since 1993 and is suspected by many Lebanese of helping facilitate 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. — AFP

Multi-billion-dollar reconstruction projects await in post-war Libya

TRIPOLI: A decade after Libya descended into chaos, a host of countries are eyeing potential multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects in the oil-rich nation if stability is assured.

Economist Kamal Mansouri expects Libya's reconstruction drive to be one of the biggest in the Middle East and North Africa. He estimates "more than 100 billion dollars" are needed to rebuild Libya, which has been gripped by violence and political turmoil since Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in a 2011 uprising. Former colonial power Italy, neighboring Egypt and Turkey are tipped to be awarded the lion's share of reconstruction deals.

In the capital Tripoli, dozens of rusted cranes and unfinished buildings dot the seafront, testimony to hundreds of abandoned projects worth billions of dollars launched between 2000 and 2010.

After Gaddafi's overthrow, Libya fell under the control of a complex, ever-shifting patchwork of militias and foreign mercenaries backing rival administrations. While Turkey has supported the Tripoli government, eastern-based strongman

Khalifa Haftar, who battled but failed to seize the capital, has had the backing of Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

But a UN-backed ceasefire was agreed last October, paving the way for the establishment in March of an interim administration. The new government led by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah is tasked with organizing presidential and parliamentary elections in December if a legal framework is agreed on time.

Courted by business teams

The new administration has been courted by Western and regional leaders who have visited Libya with large business delegations in tow. Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio was accompanied by the chief of Italian energy giant ENI. In May, Dbeibah, an engineer and businessman, visited Rome and agreed with his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi to expand collaboration on energy projects.

Italy aims to defend its commercial interests in the nation with Africa's largest oil reserves, an energy sector where ENI has been the leading foreign player since 1959. The firm



TRIPOLI: Unfinished buildings, after their construction was halted in 2011, in the coastal Mitiga area of the Libyan capital Tripoli. — AFP

reportedly proposes building a photovoltaic solar plant in southern Libya. In June, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez also visited with a business team, while Dbeibah has travelled to Paris.

As Dbeibah's administration takes part in several business forums, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria are also in the running for lucrative contracts. A delegation from Russia's energy group Tatneft visited Tripoli in June to study oil exploration projects.

Questions over funding, stability

"Libya hasn't built a thing in 10 years," said Global Initiative senior

fellow and Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui. "It's a rich country which hasn't maintained its infrastructure." A decade of violence has ravaged its airports, roads and the electricity network. While there is no shortage of major projects and international suitors, questions remain over funding and whether instability will return.

Divisions have devastated Libya's economy and complicated management of its oil revenues, weakening its foreign currency reserves. On the political and economic fronts, a 2021 budget has yet to be approved and UN-led efforts to organize elections appear to be floundering. — AFP

Business

Dollar dominance back on agenda in DR Congo

KINSHASA, DR Congo: DR Congo has revived a long-standing dream of promoting the national currency and sidelining the dollar to regain control over key economic levers. The Democratic Republic of Congo's economy became informally "dollarized" several decades ago under the dictatorship of Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko, whose chaotic rule bred four-digit inflation.

Today, the Congolese franc and the US dollar co-exist, but the greenback remains massively dominant. The dollar is used in major contracts, business transactions and the bank accounts of the well-heeled, and even accepted by shopkeepers and in cash machines.

"The US dollar is the common currency, just as English is the common language," said a vendor in "Le Chateau", the nickname for a small street in Kinshasa's business district studded with the umbrellas of money-changers. The use of the dollar tamed hyperinflation, but also sapped the government's room to shape fiscal policy and spending, which are the basic tools of economic management.

Foreign currencies are believed to account for more than 90 percent of the money supply in this sprawling country of more than 2.3 million square kilometers (888,000 square miles).

Presidential push

Now, the authorities are once again mulling how to boost the standing of the Congolese franc, although thinking is still at an early stage. President Felix Tshisekedi has called on the government to carry out "deep reflection on making the Congolese franc a strong and stable currency", according to minutes of a cabinet meeting on August 6.

Strengthening the franc would improve the public's purchasing power and help to "accelerate the de-dollarization process," the report said. The way of achieving this would be through "a series of measures aimed at using the Congolese franc as the unit of account for all transactions," the report said.

Several attempts at "de-dollarization" have been made before. Measures brought through at the end of the 1990s fell short because of a recession linked to war in the east of the country and a flourishing black market in foreign exchange. Conflict in the east, pitting armed



KINSHASA, DR Congo: This general view shows currency traders, cabins at 'Kintambo Magasin' market in Kinshasa. —AFP

groups against each other and the army, persists to this day.

Another bid was launched in 2012, when the government had high hopes for growth and new high-denomination bills of Congolese francs. But that too failed. Almost 10 years later, the government and the new head of the country's central bank, Malangu Kabedi-Mbuyi—a former International Monetary Fund official (IMF) — are under orders to find a new solution.

Words of caution

No details have been released on how they plan to proceed, but advice and warnings are not lacking. "Talk of the de-dollarization of national life... should not be a slogan or a roll-call of glib intentions," the daily Le Potentiel warned this week. It urged the state "to preach by example, through its various services, from the bottom to the top."

Economist Michel Nsomue said the government was hobbled by a fundamental problem. "The international financial institutions have been demanding a clampdown on inflation, and this has been used as the pretext to restrict issuance of the Congolese franc," he said. The result, he said, has been to open the gates to a "massive and disorderly" influx of foreign currency.

Such priorities were wrong, he said. In a country immensely rich in minerals of all kinds, but where more than two-thirds of the 80 million inhabitants live in poverty, "the fight against unemployment (and) the development of resources" should take precedence over tackling rising prices, he said.

"You don't import development, you create it from within," said Nsomue. The government has been given some help with the latest inflation figures. Monthly inflation at the end of July was 0.42 percent, against 2.95 percent a year earlier. And the Congolese currency has recently enjoyed a very relative stability, of around 2,000 francs to the dollar. But many Congolese are skeptical. They have known too much hardship and disappointment to believe that the situation will change at the wave of some magic wand.—AFP

This announcement is prepared for promotional purposes and does not omit any essential information related to the investment in the financial security subject of this announcement

Announcement invitation to participate in the increase of the share capital of Gulf Insurance Group K.S.C.P.

The Board of Directors of Gulf Insurance Group K.S.C.P. (the "Issuer") would like to invite the shareholders who are registered on the share register of the Issuer at the end of trading on 18 August 2021 ("Record Date") and the holders of the pre-emption rights who received the pre-emption rights ("Pre-Emption Rights") during the subscription period to subscribe in the increase of the Issuer's share capital by 83,333,333 new ordinary shares (the "Issue Shares") with a nominal value of KWD 8,333,333 at an Offer Price of 600 fils per Issue Share (including the nominal value and the issuance premium) during the Offering Period commencing on 19 August 2021 (inclusive) and closing on 2 September 2021 (inclusive) according to the following terms:

Overview of the offering

Issuer:
Gulf Insurance Group K.S.C.P.
Commercial Registration No:
9390
Total Value of the Offering:
KD 50,000,000

Offering Price:
600 fils per share (including the nominal value of 100 fils and the issuance premium of 500 fils).

Eligible Shareholder:
Shareholders who are recorded in the shareholder register of the Issuer as at close of Record Date ("Eligible Shareholders") and the holders of the pre-emption rights who received the pre-emption rights ("Pre-Emption Rights") during the subscription period set forth above. In the event a shareholder does not subscribe, the right to subscribe shall be deemed waived for the benefit of existing or new shareholders and the holders of Pre-Emption Rights may transfer their rights during the subscription period to shareholders or to others with or without consideration and the transfer may be full or partial. The holders of the Pre-Emption Rights may sell their rights in Boursa Kuwait from the date of the opening of the subscription period until five (5) business days prior to the closing of the subscription period and they may waive it without consideration to existing shareholders or to others during the subscription period.

Subscriber:
Eligible Shareholder and Holder of Pre-Emption Right

Entitled Shares:
Eligible Shareholders will be entitled to 414 Issue Shares for every 1000 existing shares that they hold.

Minimum Subscription:
One (1) share

Subscription Agent:
Kamco Investment Company K.S.C. (Public) - "Kamco Invest"

Clearing and Depository Agent:
Kuwait Clearing Company K.S.C.

Subscription for Additional Issue Shares:
Subscribers have the right to subscribe to additional Issue Shares in addition to their entitled Issued Shares and such subscription shall be made at the Offering Price

Offering Period:
The Offering Period will commence on Thursday 19 August 2021 during normal business hours Sunday through Thursday and shall close on Thursday 2 September 2021 at 1:00 pm Kuwait local time.

Pre-Emption Rights Trading Period:
Commences on Thursday 19 August and ends on Thursday 26 August (inclusive)

Pre-Emption Rights ISIN Code:
KW0EG0360010

Risk Factors
There are some risks related to investing in the Offer Shares, such as risks related to the activity of the Issuing Company and its operations - developing markets are exposed to greater risks than those exposed to developed markets, including political, social and economic risks - risks related to insurance activity - risks related to disruptions in financial markets - Risks related to renewal of licenses required - Risks related to contracts with related parties - Risks related to contracts with other parties - Risks of reliance on intermediaries and agents - Risks of reliance on key employees - Risks related to employee misconduct and mistakes - Risks related to insufficient capital and minimum requirements - Capital - Risks of obtaining adequate financing - Risks related to liquidity and investments - Risks related to adequacy of provisions and reserves - Risks related to acquisition of insurance portfolios - Risks related to business concentration - Risks related to reinsurance - Risks related to miscalculation of risks - Risks related to cancellation or failure Renewal of insurance policies - related risks Board committee duties and meetings - Risks related to operating systems and information technology - Risks related to credit rating - Risks related to counterparties - Risks related to risk management policies - Risks related to disputes and litigation - Risks related to non-development and expansion - Risks related to an increase in doubtful debts - Risks Related to brand protection - Risks related to zakat differences - Risks related to the vacancy of key positions in the company - Risks related to currency exchange rates - Risks related to changes in accounting standards and the issuance of new standards - Risks related to the region in which the company operates - Legal systems continue in the State of Kuwait and other countries The other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in development, and this creates an unstable environment for investment and business - Risks related to the growth of the insurance market - Risks related to competition - Risks related to consumer confidence - Risks related to the role of insurance business - Risks related to weak price control - Legal and regulatory systems - Bankruptcy in Kuwaiti legal - Force Majeure - Risks related to offering shares - Investing in securities in developing and emerging markets generally includes a high risk ratio - Appropriateness of investment - Liquidity and fluctuations in stock prices - Paying dividends - Reducing the ownership of existing shareholders - Risks related to the possibility of issuing new shares - Risks related to non-exercise of rights by major shareholders - Risks relating to the Exercise of Pre-Emption Rights- Risks of Taxes on payment of offering shares - Risks of Income tax can be applied to companies and other bodies in Kuwait and value added tax applied - change of law - Risks of taxation on dividends - Risks of the GCC countries may enter into a monetary union.

For further details on any such risk factors, please refer to the downloadable/printable version of the Prospectus relating to the offering on the Issuer's website (www.gulfinsurancegroup.com), Kamco Invest's website (www.kamcoinvest.com), www.ipo.com.kw, or www.boursakuwait.com.kw.

For Inquiries, please contact:
Call Centre: +965 2233 6751
Email: gigri@kamcoinvest.com

Subscription Instructions

Subscribers may subscribe to the Issue Shares by following the below instructions:

First: Subscription through the Subscription Website for shareholders only for 16,666 (Sixteen Thousand, Six Hundred and Sixty Six) shares, equivalent to KD 10,000 (Ten Thousand Kuwaiti Dinars) or less:

The Subscription Website allows subscription in the capital increase for subscription to 16,666 (Sixteen Thousand, Six Hundred and Sixty Six) shares, equivalent to KD 10,000 (Ten Thousand Kuwaiti Dinars) or less, whereby payment shall be made by K-NET service.

The Subscriber shall:

1. Login to the Subscription Website via the link: <https://www.ipo.com.kw>
2. Register the civil ID number, thereafter the system shall verify whether the subscriber is eligible to the subscription or not.
3. Record the number of shares to be subscribed for.
4. Be transferred to the payment portal via the K-NET service, where the Subscriber can pay from his/her/its own account (no other person may pay on behalf of the Subscriber except in the cases provided for under law - Required documents shall be reviewed when submitting the Subscription Application. The Subscriber shall bear all legal consequences in case of violation).

Second: Subscription through referral to the Kuwait Clearing Company office for corporates or to subscribe in number of shares exceeding 16,666 (Sixteen Thousand, Six Hundred and Sixty Six) shares:

1. The Subscriber shall login the link <https://www.ipo.com.kw> to print the Subscription Document, including but not limited to the name of the subscriber, the civil ID number in the event that the Eligible Shareholder is an individual and commercial registration number in the event that the Eligible Shareholder is a corporate, the number of shares to be subscribed and their value.
2. The Subscriber shall visit his/her/its own bank and submit a copy of the Subscription Document printed from the above link and transfer the amount required to the Bank Account by way of electronic funds transfer (net amount without any charges by the transferring bank and the receiving Bank) stated below:

a. Beneficiary name:	GULF INSURANCE GROUP
b. Beneficiary address:	Sharq, Building 1, Block 5, Floor 40, Office 1, Kuwait City, Kuwait - P.O. Box 1040 Safat 13011
c. Beneficiary account number:	023160025980014600001
d. Beneficiary IBAN:	KW96BRGN000000000006002598007
e. Beneficiary bank:	Burgan Bank
f. Beneficiary bank branch:	Corporate Office
g. SWIFT:	BRGNKWKW
h. Purpose of payment/ description:	Capital Increase of Gulf Insurance Group + Subscriber Trading Account Number + Subscriber contact number
3. The Subscriber shall get an original deposit voucher of the amount transferred from his own bank and then refer to the Clearing and Depository Agent to complete the remaining procedures.
4. The Subscriber shall go to the headquarters of the Clearing and Depository Agent located at the Arabian Gulf Street, Ahmad Tower, the Fifth floor to submit the documents listed in the «Documents Required when Submitting Subscription Application» in the Prospectus during normal working hours Sunday through Thursday and fill in the Subscription Application form.
5. The Clearing and Depository Agent shall provide the Subscriber with a deposit receipt of the Subscription.

Documents required for subscription

The Subscription Application Form must be accompanied by the following documentation, as applicable, and the IBAN number of the bank account he/she wishes to subscribe through. Staff at the offices of the Clearing and Depository Agent will compare copies with originals and return originals to the Subscribers:

General Requirements:

- Copy of the notice issued by Kuwait Clearing Company containing the name, shareholder identification and the number of shares owned by an Eligible Shareholder; and
- Transfer receipt of the Subscription Monies along with the Subscriber's IBAN number

Individual subscribers

- Original and copy of personal civil identification card (residents of the State of Kuwait and minors);
- Original and copy of passport for non-residents of the State of Kuwait;
- Original and copy of special legal proxy for subscribing in shares (for proxy subscriber);
- Original and copy of Certificate of Guardianship for orphans/minors;
- Original and copy of a Limitation of Succession Deed for beneficiaries; and
- In the event that the subscriber does not appear in person, the original authorization issued by the subscriber to the person authorized to conduct administrative transactions regarding the subscription application (provided that the signature contained in the authorization is attested by the subscriber's bank).

Non-Kuwaiti subscribers

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KAMCO Oil Market Monthly Report

Oil gains face headwinds as Delta variant dents demand prospects

KUWAIT: Crude oil prices remained under pressure since the start of August-2021 and traded within a tight range around the \$70/b mark as the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 coronavirus led to lockdowns and restrictions in several countries globally. However, the declines were intermittently offset by news of higher expected demand in the US and Europe, weaker USD as well as expectations of continued constrained supply even outside of OPEC+, especially in the US.

The start of August-2021 saw restrictions being placed in China for the first time in more than a year after cases hit a 7-month high. With road traffic down in double digits, Chinese authorities worked aggressively to bring cases under control by announcing port shutdowns as well as city-wide testing for the coronavirus. The suspension of around 12.2 percent of scheduled flights in China affected demand for jet fuel. As per Bloomberg, the suspension would affect 0.13 mb/d of jet fuel demand in China, while the global demand for jet fuel remained 0.225 mb/d lower than normal. Stricter restrictions were also announced or mulled in Philippines, Australia, South Korea and Japan after witnessing a surge in daily coronavirus cases.

Nevertheless, despite the recent warning signs, the oil market continues to remain in backwardation indicating expectations of demand outpacing supplies. On the oil demand front, road miles travelled in the US reached pre-pandemic levels during last week and remained elevated in line with recent levels. This was reflected in the fourth straight week of decline in gasoline inventories in the US. In its monthly report, the EIA said that the job growth in the US and increasing mobility has resulted in higher gasoline consumption in the country, although the yearly consumption is expected to remain below 2019 levels during 2021 as well as in 2022. The approval of the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill in the US and steps towards complementing this with a \$3.5 trillion spending plan, added to the promising demand expectation from the US.

Meanwhile, oil demand in China could decline by 5 percent in the short term due to the virus, according to a research from China's CNPC. The IEA, in its latest monthly report, also viewed that oil demand growth in China could slump during Q3-2021 from 1 mb/d y-o-y growth in Q2-2021 to around 270 tb/d y-o-y growth in Q3-2021. The agency also predicted a y-o-y decline in demand in Indonesia and Malaysia during Q3-2021.

In a significant move on the supply front, the US once again urged the OPEC countries to increase output by reversing the cuts to reign in prices. A number of other comments and steps by the US administration were aimed at controlling the price rise. More importantly, the move also highlighted that US may not increase production at a pace seen before the pandemic as the administration has not called upon US producers to increase production.

India Utsav at LuLu Hypermarket

KUWAIT: In celebration of India's 75th Independence Day on 15 August, LuLu Hypermarket held a week-long 'India Utsav' promotion at all its outlets in Kuwait. The 'India Utsav' (India Festival), which was organized from 11 to 17 August, was inaugurated at the hypermarket's Al-Rai outlet on 12 August by Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George, in the presence of top management of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait.

A major highlight of the promotion was a special 'Indian Handloom-Week' exhibition that showcased the best of handloom products from across the

country, including sarees, churidars, kurtas, stoles, dhotis, sherwanis, and an array of other colorful handloom products.

Following inauguration of the seven-day exhibition, the Indian Ambassador toured the various handloom stalls erected at the hypermarket and admired the exquisite artistry of the hand-woven products on display. He praised LuLu Hypermarket's initiative in organizing the Handloom-Week exhibition, which provided citizens and expatriates in Kuwait an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the rich tradition of hand-weaving in India.

The week-long 'India Utsav' also featured special offers on a range of high-quality branded products from India in various categories, including groceries, fruits and vegetables as well as non-food items such as garments, electronics and toys. During the festival, hot food counters at the hypermarket presented popular Indian snacks



Indian Ambassador Sibi George tours stalls at the LuLu hypermarket with the management team

and foods, while colorful fruit and vegetable displays, and large cutouts and images exhibited major Indian monuments and venues that added to the lure of the India Utsav celebrations.

The India Utsav promotion is an extension of LuLu Hypermarket's



KFH: Abeer Al-Deeb wins a 21-ft boat in summer campaign

KUWAIT: KFH announced the winners in the "Ready for Summer" campaign for the holders of KFH Visa cards, giving 13 customers the opportunity to win Sea Ray or Fliteboard boats when using KFH visa credit or prepaid cards as follows: 1 chance to enter the draw for every KD 1 of total local purchases, while debit, credit and prepaid VISA card holder will get 10 chances to enter the draw for every KD 1 of total international purchases (including online purchase transactions in foreign currency).

KFH held a monthly draw on a 21 ft Sea Ray

Oil prices

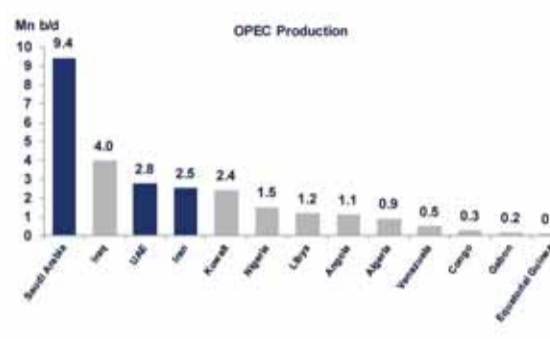
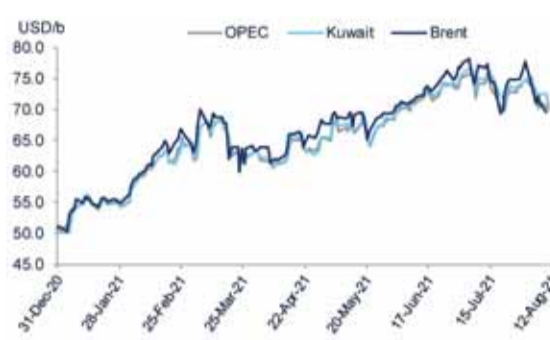
Oil market witnessed the biggest weekly decline since October-2020 for the week ended 6-August-2021 after demand expectations came under pressure due to the rising COVID-19 cases globally. Restrictions and lockdowns were implemented in a number of countries that mainly affected demand for jet fuel and gasoline. This was evident from world PMI that reached a four-month low during July-2021 reflecting softening manufacturing activity growth across key countries. Crude oil traded around the \$70/b mark after witnessing consistent declines since the start of August-2021. Prices briefly dipped below \$70/b but soon recovered after data showed continued strong demand in the US and recovery in the Europe partially offset by weakening economic trends especially in Southeast Asia. Geopolitical issues in the Middle East also lent an underlying support to oil prices.

The latest weekly inventory report from the EIA showed a decline in US commercial crude stocks by 0.45 million barrels during the week ended 6-August-2021 marking 10 weeks of declines in the last 12 weeks. The decline also reflected higher refinery utilization in the US that reached 91.8 percent as gasoline demand remained strong with the corresponding inventory declining by 1.4 million barrels. Gasoline stocks in the US reached the lowest since November-2020 and 3.7 percent below the five year average, according to a report from Platts. Oil production in the US increased by 0.1 mb/d during the week ended 6-August-2021 to average at 11.3 mb/d, however, drillers continue to show restraint in terms of investment in new exploration. This can be seen from the slow and gradual increase in oil rig count in the US that reached 397 oil rigs last week.

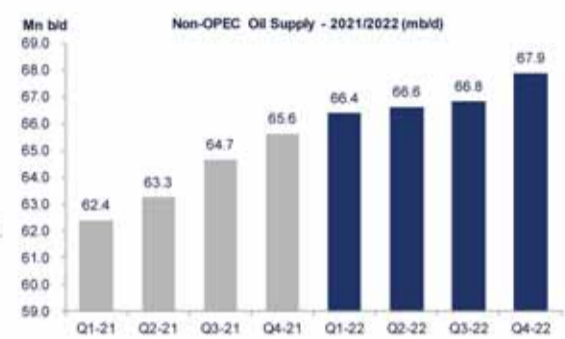
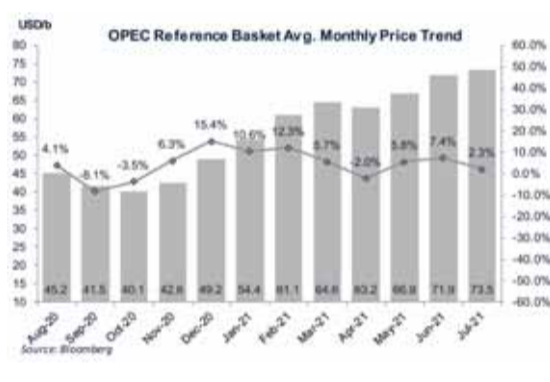
Crude oil benchmarks averaged above the \$70/b mark in July-2021 and reached almost 3-year high levels. Brent crude oil basket monthly average increased by 2.8 percent to reach \$75.0/b during July-2021, the highest since October-2018, after seeing three consecutive months of increase. The increase in OPEC crude and Kuwait crude grades was almost similar at 2.3 percent and 1.7 percent to average at \$73.53/b and \$73.8/b, respectively for the two crude oil grades.

World oil demand

OPEC kept its world oil demand growth forecast unchanged for 2021 at a growth of 6 mb/d to average at 96.6 mb/d but raised its expectations of economic growth, especially for non-oil-intensive sectors during the year. That said, there were revisions made to demand estimates for Q1-2021 that turned out to be lower-than-expected at 92.61 mb/d vs. 92.81 mb/d in its previous forecast mainly in the OECD Americas region. Demand during the quarter was affected by lower-than-expected demand for gasoline due to COVID-19 restrictions. This downward revision was offset by an equivalent upward



Sources : OPEC, EIA, Bloomberg



demand growth in the OECD Asia Oceania region.

OPEC oil production & spare capacity

Crude oil production changes by OPEC producers remained mixed during July-2021, although the aggregate production for the group continued to show growth. Production was up for the third consecutive month and showed an increase of 0.42 mb/d to average at 26.82 mb/d in July-2021, according to data from Bloomberg. OPEC secondary source showed a higher production growth of 637 tb/d during the month to an average of 26.66 mb/d. Saudi Arabia showed the biggest monthly increase in production as it continued to unwind its voluntary cuts for the final month in July-2021. The Kingdom increased production by 0.5 mb/d during the month and produced at 9.4 mb/d. Production changes for the rest of the OPEC producers were marginal during the month. Notable changes included Nigeria and Venezuela that lowered production by 50 tb/d each while Iraq, Iran and Kuwait raised production by 30 tb/d each. After the increase in production during July-2021, the spare capacity with OPEC producers stood at 7.7 mb/d. Saudi Arabia continued to boast the biggest spare capacity of 2.1 mb/d followed by UAE and Iran at 1.45 mb/d and 1.31 mb/d, respectively. Oil production in Iran averaged at 2.5 mb/d after seeing marginal increase in production over the last three months. Crude exports from the producer witnessed a steep decline due to the sanctions and according to reports, the recent geopolitical issues in the region would further delay the restoration of production and exports from Iran.

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Ratna Mohan Prasad
2. Sadeq Hamzah Al-Salman
3. Wael Husni Baidas

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.



Al-Arbeed and Al-Saad during the program

The campaign participates in the promotion of the usage of cards in the local market, activation of merchants' sales and represents the continued efforts, in cooperation with Visa company, to achieve customer satisfaction, increase usage ratios and expand KFH market share in the field of banking cards.

Latvians TAKE TO THE WATER FOR DISTANCED CONCERTS

Latvians are taking to the country's waterways for a socially distanced musical experience this summer, boarding kayaks, dinghies and motor yachts to enjoy some music—even if unvaccinated. At a concert on Juglas Lake near the Latvian capital Riga on Saturday, hundreds of boats could be seen bobbing to rock, folk and heavy metal. "The idea... is so great," said Vladimirs Kravchenko, a heavy metal fan who has been attending hard rock festivals since the 1990s. "I hope festivals on lakes like this will continue even after the virus is over," Kravchenko said. Organizers said there were around 1,500 people on the water, and 3,500 more watching from the shore.

The stage was located on the shore and two floating bars in the lake sold beer and cocktails. Only people with COVID-19 vaccinations were allowed to attend the concert on the shore while the lake was also open to those without a vaccine. "This is simply a brilliant idea for how to hold a festival and ensure social distancing for the unvaccinated at the same time," Anna Berzina, who was rowing a kayak with her husband, told AFP. The Baltic state has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the European Union—around 43 percent. The government has imposed restrictions for unvaccinated people in a bid to encourage more Latvians to get vaccinated—including threatening soldiers with dismissal if they do not get the jab.

For live events, the rule is that there must be two separate zones for vaccinated and unvaccinated spectators, creating a headache for organizers. Saturday's concert was the second in a series designed by Dagamba, a classical and rock music crossover band, which came up with the idea of lake concerts during last year's lockdowns. The concerts are called LAIVA—a play on the English word "live" and the Latvian for "on a boat".

At the concert, the sight of the flotilla in front of him inspired Peteris Kvetkovskis, the frontman of black and folk metal band Skyforger. "Seeing so many boats in front of us, we will play a song about a Viking raid being launched," he told the audience from the stage, before launching into the number called "To the Northern Shores". —AFP



People in a boat listen to Latvian band Dagamba performing during a concert of the crossover music festival Laiva on Juglas Lake near the Latvian capital Riga. —AFP photos



Festival attendees standing in two lines (left side for those, who wants go with a boat and also unvaccinated persons, right side - vaccinated persons) as they arrive to listen to a concert.



People listen to a concert of Latvian folk/pagan metal band Skyforger at the crossover music festival Laiva.



A fan does headbanging during a concert.



A fan enjoys a concert of Latvian folk/pagan metal band Skyforger.



People listen to a concert of Latvian folk/pagan metal band Skyforger.



Members of the Latvian band Dagamba perform during a concert of the crossover music festival.

HUAWEI PARTNERS AGAIN WITH YARA IN A MUSIC VIDEO FEATURING THE NEW HUAWEI FREEBUDS 4

Huawei collaborated once more with the Lebanese star Yara through the Studio-quality Open-fit ANC earphone with air-like comfort - the new Huawei FreeBuds 4. These pair of beautifully designed earphones provide studio-quality sound, open-fit noise cancellation, air-like comfort, and they do not put any pressure on your ears while using them! Yara expressed her admiration of design, studio-quality sound and comfort of the new Huawei FreeBuds 4, and chooses them as her day to day companion for leisure, work and communication. This is not the first-time that the iconic technology brand and Yara are joining hands to bring to all fans a surprise track release. They worked together on a popular track release back in April that featured Huawei FreeBuds 4i.

Yara found success after winning the LBC music competition "Kass el-Nojoum" in 1998 by performing "Awedak". Since 2004, she has released five hugely popular albums including: "Twassa Feyi" and "La'ale' Khaleejjya". And her fan base has been growing ever since. Huawei's newest earphones - the Huawei FreeBuds 4 come fitted with a fully upgraded 14.3 mm driver unit with a wide frequency range of up to 40 kHz providing you with impressively deep bass, silky treble, clear vocal and rich details of every melody. They feature a dual-microphone noise cancellation technology to deliver upgraded noise cancellation performance and ensures that the microphones pick up the noise surrounding you with far greater accuracy.



The Huawei FreeBuds 4 is loaded with smart and personalized cool features like dual-device connectivity and smart personalized controls where you can effortlessly enable active noise cancellation, adjust the volume, answer calls, press play, and switch songs right from the earphone stems, with simple

Swipe/Double tap/Long press touch controls! It is also compatible with all the smartphones in the market across all OS platforms. The Huawei FreeBuds 4 are available in the Kuwait in two color ways including super cool Silver Frost and clean Ceramic White, and will be available for pre-orders at price of KWD



44,900. The Pre-orders come with Huawei Mini speaker, 3 months Huawei Music VIP subscription and a special one year subscription to Huawei Loss Care FreeBuds Service. The Huawei FreeBuds 4 will be available at Huawei Experience Stores, e-commerce and select retailers starting August 12th.

Lifestyle | Features

CHINA'S YOUTH REACT TO GAMING CURBS WITH ANGUISH AND CUNNING

It is Zhang Yuchen's last summer break before high school, but events have taken an unwelcome turn—the 14-year-old's game time has been decimated as China's tech firms try to dispel accusations that they are selling "spiritual opium" to the country's youth. An edict by gaming giant Tencent means players under 12 can no longer make in-game purchases in multiplayer battle smash-hit "Honor of Kings", while under-18s are locked out after two hours during holidays and one hour on school nights. "I wanted to cry," an anguished Zhang said as the news ricocheted across the world's largest gaming market, which soaked up \$20 billion in the first half of this year alone.

"Limiting game time over the holidays means I can't play (Honor of Kings) to my heart's content," he told AFP. The changes—incontestable and imposed far too quickly for the liking of Zhang and his peer group—have come as a censorious state scours the tech scene for signs of any firm growing too big, owning too much data or having too great a hold over China's people. Gaming appears to be the latest target for regulators who have already strafed mega-apps providing ride-hailing, personal finance and online learning, as the Communist Party refines the type of capitalism it wants for society. State media reports have singled out gaming, with one article calling it "spiritual opium" and another advocating an end to tax breaks for the sector.

"I have nothing to do"
Investors rushed to sell shares in Tencent and rivals NetEase, XID Inc and Bilibili, despite China's place as the world's biggest gaming market. In reaction, Tencent this month dropped the bombshell curbs on play time, an early sign of broader industry changes to come. Minors complain that the measures are too sweeping, affecting even teens who have finished their university entrance exams and just want to relax.

"I'm on vacation now and have nothing to do, but



This file photo a man wearing a face mask using his mobile phone in front of an advertising board in Beijing. —AFP photos

I can only play for a short while," said a 17-year-old student surnamed Li. "It's quite upsetting," she added, noting that older teens have more self-control and should not be forcibly stopped from playing. She gets automatically locked out after hitting the two-hour holiday limit. But there are loopholes even with broader curbs, Li added, as playing an hour on different games could still lead to teens gaming for the same hours as before. Others have circumvented the policy altogether, by borrowing an adult's account or using their parents' mobile phones.

"By borrowing an account now, I can play two to three hours a day and of course, game after 10 pm," said another 17-year-old student on condition of anonymity. Some analysts say the reaction to state media reports about gaming may be excessive. "Investors made it a big story by overreacting,"

Ether Yin, partner at consultancy Trivium China, told AFP. "Keeping kids from getting addicted to games has been the policy of the land since 2018."

'Why do they have to do this?'

To get ahead of public criticism, however, Yin believes other gaming companies will likely roll out their own plans to restrict minors from playing and spending money inside games. The impact on Tencent for now will be "minimal", given that children under 16 contribute around three percent of gross billings, said Michael Norris, research and strategy manager at consulting firm AgencyChina. But with the gaming sector already highly scrutinized, Norris called it "unusual" to single out online gaming, which is regulated, if the concern was addiction. For now, Tencent's gaming curbs have claimed unlikely victims—with some parents who

game with their children also locked out.

Programmer Peng Jianfei said his 12-year-old son was using his account to play "Honor of Kings" while on summer break when an authentication prompt appeared and the boy entered his own ID number, triggering a block. "I think such measures can, to an extent, reduce minors' gaming time," the 45-year-old said. "But for now... if I can't play Tencent's games, I could always go to NetEase, don't you think?" But other parents welcomed the restrictions. "If children spend too much time on games, it's bad for their eyesight," said a 34-year-old mother in Beijing surnamed Wang. Tugging on her arm was her 10-year-old son, an "Honor of Kings" fan who was less enthusiastic about the changes. "Mum, say it's a bad decision!" he said. "Why do they have to do this?" AFP



This file photo shows a woman walking past a Tencent sign at the China International Fair for Trade in Services (CIFTIS) in Beijing.

Indonesia's Edwin wins at Locarno film festival

Indonesian director Edwin on Saturday won the Golden Leopard for the best picture at the Locarno Film Festival with "Vengeance Is Mine, All Others Pay Cash", a homage to 1980s Asian all-action movies. The feature paints a humorous portrait of a violent young man who falls for a woman after fighting her. Edwin, who uses a single name, had already returned to Jakarta before the awards ceremony but the organizers put out a video in which he said the Golden

Leopard was "happiness... it's a nice support and it motivates. "We need this energy in this not so easy time."

Indonesian cinema was still young, he said, as in most of the cinema in the region. "I feel connected with the all of south-east Asian region because we are facing more or less the same spirit and also at the same time facing the same problem, you know we have censorship, we have violence here and there. "We are very excited with the growing of our cinema," he

added. "And even in this very difficult time, we can find the energy and all those spirits that can bring us, keeping us together and... celebrating ourselves and at the same time criticizing and find out what do in order to face our problems through cinema." To close the 74th Locarno festival a lifetime achievement award was made to Italian director Dario Argento, including for his leading role in Gaspar Noe's Vortex about an elderly couple coping with Alzheimer's disease.—AFP



Indonesian director Edwin

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 kilometers in 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

EVEN IN RAREFIED WORLD OF FRENCH CUISINE, YOU GOTTA INSTA



In this file photo French three-star Michelin chef Christian Le Squer poses at the kitchen of the Moulin de Rosmadec's restaurant in Pont-Aven, western France. —AFP photos



In this file photo French chef Helene Darroze poses in her restaurant during a photo session in Paris.



In this file photo French chef Mory Sacko poses during a session photo in Paris.

It was a shockwave in the world of French cuisine. Jean Imbert, best known for winning a reality TV show and hobnobbing with stars, replaced the most decorated chef in the world, Alain Ducasse, at one of the finest restaurants in Paris. The announcement in June that Imbert, 40, would take over the illustrious Plaza Athenee, was met with much harping and pursing of lips among the fusty corners of the French culinary world. "It's like getting a rocker to perform at the Opera de Paris," one "expert des grands tables" told Challenges magazine.

But for many of France's top chefs, it is hardly a surprise. "A chef that stays in the kitchen, who isn't 'Instagrammable', reaching out to the public, is no longer in the race. Restaurants can't survive without publicity. There are so many of us," Christian Le Squer, head chef at the three Michelin-starred Le Cinq at the George V hotel in Paris, told AFP. Le Squer, 58, learned this lesson from the best: he was assigned to train Imbert during his winning performance on Top Chef, the phenomenally successful TV competition, in 2012. He gave him tips of the trade, and Imbert returned the favor by helping Le Squer set up his Instagram account. Ducasse may have had more Michelin stars than anyone in the world, "but he perhaps didn't find his audience on Instagram," said Le Squer.

'Trial by TV'

Even more than social media, Top Chef has changed the rules of the game. First launched in the United States, the show arrived in France in 2010, pitting professional cooks against each other in a knock-out competition. It has become more than just an amusing side dish for chefs—it is "a trampoline to success", said chef Mory Sacko, who took part last year. He used the publicity to help launch his restaurant MoSuke, bringing the flavors of francophone Africa to the French capital, and now fronts his own TV show. Le Squer said that before, chefs made a name for themselves in the industry by winning professional contests and titles, such as "the best craftsman of France". "Now, it's trial by TV," he added. Helene Darroze—a decorated chef with five Michelin stars—has also become a household name thanks to her regular appearances on Top Chef. "The competition attracts more and more very talented young people," she told AFP. "I'm astonished—they all have an agent. I've never had an agent in my life," she added. But Darroze sees this as a positive thing—elevating the job of chef in the eyes of the public. And social media presence proved vital for many chefs during the hard months of pandemic-induced closures.

Narrative

Imbert is the perfect illustration of the new trend, using his victory in 2012 to launch a restaurant in partnership

with Pharrell Williams and pick up more than 400,000 followers on Instagram. "Ducasse was a man of big ideas, but he lacked a narrative," Philippe Moreau Chevrolet, head of PR firm MCBG Conseil, said in a recent editorial. "Jean Imbert, on the other hand, is always telling stories—about his grandmother, the time he dined with Pharrell Williams—with words, with images, with videos, with selfies..." It marks a cultural shift, he added, as the importance of Michelin stars fades in comparison to the power of a selfie by model Bella Hadid in your restaurant kitchen.

'A dangerous game'

When David Gallienne, from the Jardin des Plumes in Giverny, won Top Chef in 2020, his Instagram followers jumped from 5,000 to 50,000. "Social media is part of how we are known and exist today," he told AFP. He ran online masterclasses during France's lockdowns last year, followed by a competition in which participants compared their culinary creations on Instagram—with a free lunch in Gallienne's restaurant for the winner.

It's all part of the job, even if everyone is acutely aware that a big online presence carries risks. "You've got to play the game, even if it can be a very dangerous game," said Gallienne. "You've got to weigh your words carefully. They can just as easily hurt you as help you. It's a full-time job in itself, and in the future, I will probably delegate it to someone else entirely." —AFP

Sports

Gerd Mueller, West Germany's prolific striker who set records but battled demons

BERLIN: Gerd Mueller's record of 68 international goals in 62 games for West Germany earned him the nickname "The Bomber" for his ability to destroy countless defenses. It took Miroslav Klose more than double the amount of games to finally reach the tally of 71 goals, in 137 internationals, to better Mueller's mark.

In the 1971/72 season, Mueller, who died yesterday aged 75 after battling Alzheimer's, netted an incredible 40 league goals in 34 games. The jaw-dropping German league record stood unchallenged until Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski scored for the 41st time on the final weekend of last season.

Born on November 3, 1945, Mueller's career coincided with a golden era for both West German football and the rise of Bayern Munich. He was signed by Bayern, who were then a second division club, in 1964. His short, stocky frame with a barrel-like chest led to club coach Zlatko Cajkovski quipping: "What am I supposed to do with a weightlifter?"

But Mueller's powerful legs became the stuff of Bayern folklore — his thighs were a massive 64-centimetres in diameter — and the goals he netted wrote him into the club's folklore. As Mueller's former team-mate Franz Beckenbauer said: "Everything that Bayern has become is due to Gerd Mueller and his goals."

Before he turned 18, Mueller had progressed through a variety of school and junior teams before joining his local club TSV Nordlingen, for whom he scored a remarkable 180 goals in the 1962/63 season, which attracted Bayern's attention.

'Short, fat Mueller'

He put his strength down to his mother's rich potato salad and Cajkovski affectionately referred

to him as the "short, fat Mueller". In 1965, Mueller, goalkeeper Sepp Maier and Beckenbauer helped Bayern win promotion to the Bundesliga.

The club never looked back, finishing third in their first season in the top flight and lifting the German Cup, a feat they repeated in 1967, 1969 and 1971. In 1970, Mueller became the first German to be crowned European Footballer of the Year.

Bayern became German champions for the first time in 1969, then won three straight titles in 1972, 1973 and 1974. The mark was only bettered in May 2016 when Pep Guardiola coached Bayern to a fourth straight Bundesliga title, which has since become nine in consecutive years.

Bayern's dream team of the 1970s went on to win the European Cup three times in succession from 1974 to 1976, and Mueller's goals — often from close range — were key. He was the club's top scorer every season from 1964/65 to 1977/78.

At the 1970 World Cup finals in Mexico, Mueller scored 10 goals to finish top scorer, before West Germany went on to win the 1972 European championships. Mueller then wrote himself into German football folklore by scoring the winning goal to seal a 2-1 win in the 1974 World Cup final over the Netherlands in Munich.

In his 62 international appearances, West Germany enjoyed 45 wins, nine draws and just eight losses. Then abruptly, after becoming a world champion at the age of 28, Mueller announced his retirement.

Alcoholism and depression

In 1979 and with his Bayern place no longer guaranteed, Mueller accepted a lucrative contract to play in the United States, signing a two-and-a-half-year contract with Fort Lauderdale Strikers. He retired from all football in 1982 and descended into



SILIGURI: In this file photograph taken on January 21, 2009, former German footballer Gerd Mueller looks on after kicking the ball before the start of a friendly between FC Bayern Munich-II and a Siliguri Mayor's 11 at Kanchenjunga Stadium in Siliguri. —AFP photos

a deep personal crisis, battling alcoholism and depression.

Bayern never forget their goal-scoring hero and Uli Hoeness, who was then team manager, helped him to get back on his feet, offering him a job meeting and greeting visitors to the club, then scouting and eventually a role coaching strikers. Mueller earned his coaching license in 1992 and became head coach of the reserves in 1995/96. He helped nurture current Germany star Thomas Mueller, who was no relation, at Bayern.

But he struggled with his health and his suffering was often on public display as he was seen



MUNICH: In this file photograph taken on July 7, 1974, West Germany's Gerd Mueller (left) raises the World Cup trophy after victory in the 1974 World Cup final between West Germany and Holland at The Olympic Stadium in Munich.

looking unsteady on his feet at Bayern's home games. In October 2015, it was announced he was suffering from Alzheimer's and in his later years one of football's most prolific scorers was rarely seen in public. — AFP



Naomi Osaka

Osaka to help out Haiti earthquake relief efforts

LOS ANGELES: Naomi Osaka says she is going to give all her proceeds from the WTA Tour's upcoming Cincinnati event to the earthquake victims in Haiti which was rocked by a devastating 7.2-magnitude quake on Saturday. The highest paid female tennis star has a personal connection to the disaster-plagued Caribbean country: Her father is from there.

"Really hurts to see all the devastation that's going on in Haiti, and I feel like we really can't catch a break," Osaka wrote on Twitter. "I'm about to play a tournament this week and I'll give all the prize money to relief efforts for Haiti. I know our ancestors blood is strong we'll keep rising."

The massive quake struck Haiti's southwestern peninsula early Saturday, killing at least 304 people and leaving churches, business and schools crumbled. The 23-year-old Osaka was born in Japan where her mother is from and has lived in the United States since age three.

On Saturday, American President Joe Biden approved immediate aid to Haiti and said the US would be assisting recovery and rebuilding efforts. Osaka's father, Leonard Francois, is from the Jacmel region on the southwestern peninsula close to the epicenter of Saturday's quake. Osaka has said her upbringing included learning about both Japanese and Haitian culture.

Her Haitian grandparents didn't speak English so they only spoke Creole to her. This week's Cincinnati tournament is just the second event for Osaka since she took a mental health break from the Tour. In her last event at the Tokyo Olympics, Osaka was chosen to light the Olympic cauldron to mark the opening of the Summer Games. Her bid for a medal fell short as she crashed out in the third round of the women's tennis tournament, losing in straight sets to silver medalist Marketa Vondrousova. It remains to be seen whether the four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka will touch on her earthquake relief efforts in Cincinnati.

She dropped out of the French Open in late May after organizers fined her for refusing to do mandatory post-match news conferences. She cited reporters' "disregard for athletes' mental health" in announcing her decision to stop doing interviews. —AFP

Kenyan rower's journey from childhood tragedy to Paralympic hope

NAIROBI: When she was just two years old, Asiya Mohammed was hit by a train as she crossed railway tracks near her Kenyan home, an accident that claimed both her legs and several fingers. Seven years later she was orphaned.

Rather than crumpling in the face of such adversity, Mohammed has gone on to become a highly decorated para-athlete and is the first Kenyan female rower to qualify for the Paralympic Games opening in Tokyo later this month.

Yet the bubbly 29-year-old, who was brought up by a cousin and first trained as a teacher, says she did not value sports until weight gain changed her outlook on life about five years ago. "As a disabled person I was weighing 70 kgs which caused a lot of concern to my immediate family. They advised me to join sports to help me cut the weight and remain in shape," she says.

The sports available at the time in her home city of Mombasa on Kenya's east coast were wheelchair tennis, badminton and rowing. Mohammed went on to win medals in competitions in all three sports as well as wheelchair marathons. But eventually the double amputee decided to focus on rowing and now will be competing in the PR1 single sculls in Tokyo.

"I realized I was getting more captivated by rowing because of the friendly atmosphere, and I made up my mind that I was going to do this sport until I qualified for the Olympics," she says. "I made an immediate decision to abandon teaching completely and go full bodied into sport full time, especially in the rowing."

'Heartbroken and frustrated'

She qualified to compete in her first ever interna-

Mahrez-led Algeria the team to avoid in Cup of Nations draw

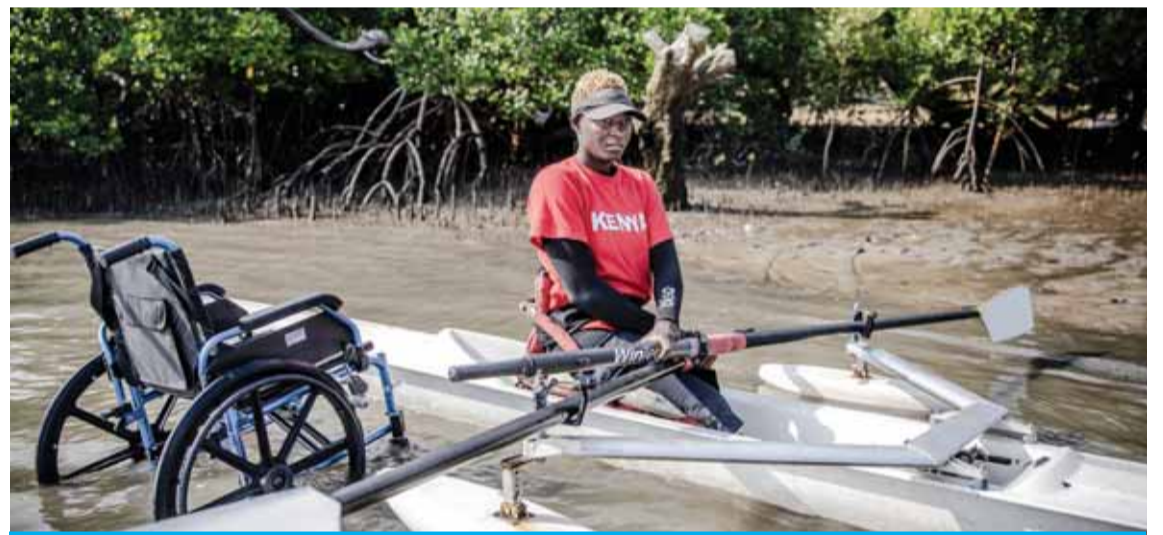
JOHANNESBURG: Riyadh Mahrez-led record-setters Algeria will be the team to avoid when the draw for a 2021 Africa Cup of Nations seriously disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic is made in Yaounde tomorrow. The defending champions created an African record for an unbeaten run by a senior national team in June when they won a friendly match in Tunisia to reach 27 matches without a loss.

Victory in neighboring Tunisia eclipsed the record set by Didier Drogba and Yaya Toure-inspired Ivory Coast in February 2013. Since losing a Cup of Nations qualifier in Benin 34 months ago, Algeria have won 20 competitive and friendly matches, drawn seven, scored 58 goals and conceded 17.

It is this form which makes the Desert Foxes early favorites to retain the Cup of Nations next February and conquer Africa a third time. They are among 24 qualifiers who will be split into six groups with the winners and runners-up in each plus the best four third-placed teams advancing to the knockout phase.

Algeria won the premier African national team competition for the first time when they hosted a then eight-team event in 1990 and edged Nigeria 1-0 in the title decider. A goal from Baghdad Bounedjah with less than two minutes on the clock in Cairo enabled Algeria to triumph again two years ago, this time over Sadio Mane's Senegal.

Algeria will be among the six top seeds for the



MOMBASA: Kenyan para-rower athlete Asiya Mohammed starts warming up with her boat during her training session at Tudor Water Sports Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya on July 26, 2021 ahead of the preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. —AFP

tional event — the season-opening para-rowing Gavarate Regatta in Italy in May 2019. "She finished second last in her competition, but her passion and keen interest for rowing impressed the international team of coaches attending the regatta who remarked that it wouldn't take long before Asiya qualified for the World Championships and the Paralympics," says Joshua Kendagor, a Kenya Navy officer who acts as Asiya's coach and will accompany her to the Paralympics.

She eventually booked her berth for Tokyo at the African pre-Paralympic championships in Tunis in October 2019, where she beat out seven other contenders to win the PR1 women's single sculls, for competitors using their arms only. But it has not been smooth sailing for Mohammed, who has had to overcome many frustrations as a physically-disabled woman in sport — including a lack of funding and support from Kenyan federations.

She had to borrow proper rowing gear from her able-bodied male compatriots to compete in Tunis after her request to the Kenya Rowing Federation to provide her with the competition kit

failed to materialize.

"I was so heartbroken and frustrated when the Kenya Rowing Federation and the Kenya National Paralympic Committee both told me they would not be sponsoring any rowers for the pre-Olympics qualifier due to lack of funds, and yet my male colleagues had received full funding from the National Olympic Committee of Kenya (NOCK)."

Her family and friends were also forced to raise the money for her airfare to Tunisia — but she repaid them by being the only Kenyan rower at the event to qualify for the Para games. "After the championships, I was gifted with two rowing boats by the International Rowing Federation — one for training and the other for the competition at the Paralympics — but until today I have not received the two boats," she said.

But the Kenyan says she is determined to put the problems behind her. "I don't want to finish last. I am very realistic," says Mohammed, adding that she wants to get to the final six in the PR1 women's single sculls to be in medal contention. "I am in rowing until I win an Olympic medal." — AFP

Yaounde draw, and however bold the public declarations of coaches may be before the event, privately they will be happy to dodge Mahrez and his teammates. As one national coach, who requested anonymity, said: "We say we do not fear any rivals, but desperately want to play potentially weak teams for as long as possible in any tournament."

Manchester City winger Mahrez is the star attraction in a squad composed of footballers, many born abroad to Algerian parents, who perform for European and Middle East clubs. Full-back Aissa Mandi, a long-time regular, recently swapped La Liga clubs, moving from Real Betis to Villarreal, and missed a penalty in the UEFA Super Cup shootout loss to Chelsea.

'National treasure'

Mandi is set to play in the upcoming Champions League group stage, as will other Algerians, including Mahrez and AC Milan midfielder Ismael Bennacer. Captain Mahrez says much of the praise for the 27-match unbeaten run and the 2019 Cup of Nations triumph must go to Djamel Belmadi, now 45 and a one-time Manchester City midfielder. "He is a national treasure. You cannot exaggerate his importance to the team. The work of Djamel is deeply respected by all Algerians," says the 2016 African Footballer of the Year.

A concern for Belmadi, though, is that favorites have not succeeded in the Cup of Nations since 2010, when Egypt became the first country to win the competition three times in a row. Zambia were shock winners in 2012, Nigeria exceeded expectations by finishing first one year later and, after many failures when favored, it came as a surprise when the Ivory Coast finally triumphed in 2015.

Cameroon mocked the form book by succeeding



NORWICH: Liverpool's Senegalese striker Sadio Mane reacts during the English Premier League football match between Norwich City and Liverpool at Carrow Road in Norwich, eastern England on Saturday. — AFP

in 2017 and hosts Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia were all considered stronger north African contenders than Algeria two years ago. Some coaches will be under extreme pressure in Cameroon to go far, notably Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic with Morocco and German Gernot Rohr with Nigeria.

A condition of the Halilhodzic contract is that he must reach the semi-finals at least while Nigerian football bosses have told Rohr to win the competition. Apart from Algeria, Cameroon, Senegal, Tunisia, Nigeria and Morocco are first seeds and strong title contenders. Record seven-time champions Egypt, Ghana and Ivory Coast are other possible winners and those looking for a long-shot could consider Mali, runners-up to Congo when Cameroon were last hosts 49 years ago. —AFP

Sports

Messi gets rapturous reception before watching PSG beat Strasbourg

PARIS: Lionel Messi got a first proper taste of his new home on Saturday as he was presented to a full stadium of Paris Saint-Germain fans before watching his team-mates beat Strasbourg 4-2 in Ligue 1 with Kylian Mbappe playing a starring role.

Messi received a rapturous reception as he ran out onto the pitch along with PSG's other summer signings, with a 48,000-full house greeting the six-time Ballon d'Or winner despite the welcome ceremony taking place an hour before kick-off.

Messi joined fellow recruits Sergio Ramos, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Georginio Wijnaldum and Achraf Hakimi on a stage set up on the turf at the Parc des Princes, and the flashy presentation ceremony threatened to overshadow the match itself.

The Argentine later watched from the stands alongside Neymar and Angel di Maria — the trio not yet considered match-fit having enjoyed an extended break after playing at the Copa America — as Mauricio Pochettino's team made it two wins from two Ligue 1 matches this season.

They led 3-0 at half-time thanks to goals by Mauro Icardi and Julian Draxler either side of a Ludovic Ajorque own goal, but Kevin Gameiro and Ajorque netted after the interval to bring the visitors back into the contest.

However Pablo Sarabia made sure of the win late on after Strasbourg had been reduced to 10 men in the first match played before a full house at the Parc des Princes since before the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March last year. "With all that has been happening at the club, it was not easy to stay focused on the game," Pochettino admitted to broadcaster Canal Plus.

Benzema brace has Ancelotti's Real off to a flier

MADRID: A brace from French veteran striker Karim Benzema got Real Madrid off to a flier in La Liga Saturday, his double laying the foundation for a 4-1 victory at Alaves to leave Carlo Ancelotti celebrating the start of his second spell in charge with a victory.

Eternal rivals Barcelona may have lost Lionel Messi but Real themselves are in a period of transition having seen Zinedine Zidane step down as coach and central defensive linchpins Sergio Ramos and Raphael Varane head for Messi's PSG and Manchester United respectively. Even with their big names still on board both of Spain's biggest clubs were unable to prevent Atletico Madrid walking off with

the title last season.

But after initially failing to click in a goalless first half, Real found their rhythm after the restart as the returning Gareth Bale found Eden Hazard who flicked on with his heel for Benzema, skipper in the injured Marcelo's absence, to volley home on 48 minutes. Bale blotted his copybook with a booking for a high boot thereafter but Real — who featured their only new face in David Alaba — did not allow that to loosen the grip they were steadily taking on the game.

Nacho volleyed in from close range following a Luka Modric short corner on 56 minutes and Benzema made it 3-0 and essentially game over just after the hour, scuffling in at the second time of asking after a fine run and assist by Federico Valverde. A Joselu penalty for the hosts was a minor blemish after Thibaut Courtois, making his 100th Liga appearance between the posts for Real, brought down John Guidetti. But a Vinicius header applied

Haaland nets twice, creates three goals as Dortmund rout Frankfurt

BERLIN: Erling Braut Haaland weighed in with two goals and three assists as Borussia Dortmund threw down a marker on the first weekend of the Bundesliga season with a 5-2 thrashing of Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

Defending champions Bayern Munich, who are bidding for a tenth straight league title, kicked off the new season with a 1-1 draw at Moenchengladbach on Friday. Dortmund host Bayern in the German Super Cup tomorrow.

The 21-year-old Haaland has now netted 62 goals in 61 games for Dortmund and proved he can create chances just as well as finish them. "We have to be careful not to praise him too much, but he is already a complete package," Dortmund captain Marco Reus said of Haaland, who enthusiastically celebrated the victory in

front of home fans.

Haaland also claimed a hat-trick in the German Cup last week, giving him a tally of five goals and three assists after just two games this season. "Erling is an unbelievable team player, he showed that with his assists and goals," said Dortmund's new coach Marco Rose. When Dortmund attacked early on, Haaland drew the defence and squared to Reus, who scored his 100th Bundesliga goal on 23 minutes. However, pressure by new Frankfurt signing Rafael Santos Borré saw Dortmund defender Felix Passlack put the ball into his own net four minutes later.

Haaland helped restore the lead on 32 minutes, releasing Thorgan Hazard, whose shot clipped the boot of Frankfurt's goalkeeper Kevin Trapp on its way into the net. Just over two minutes later, Haaland

extra gloss for Real's fourth in injury time.

"To call Karim a striker is not to do him justice - he is a very complete player. More so than five years ago," said Ancelotti. "In the first half we lacked intensity but Karim's first goal opened up the game. I want to play with intensity with or without the ball." In other action Saturday, Cadiz and Levante parted 1-1 as did Mallorca and Real Betis while the match between Osasuna and Espanyol ended in a goalless stalemate.

Atletico started their title defense yesterday at Celta Vigo in Galicia while Barcelona began the post-Messi era at the Camp Nou against Real Sociedad, whereas Sevilla hosted Rayo Vallecano. There are two matches today as Villarreal go up against Granada while Elche meet Athletic Bilbao. Valencia got the ball rolling Friday and pocketed three points after an early Carlos Soler penalty was enough to see them overcome Getafe 1-0. —AFP

broke free of the defence and drilled his shot past Trapp to make it 3-1.

It could have been 4-1 at half-time, but Reus had a second goal ruled out as replays showed the ball went dead in the build-up. Frankfurt's new coach Oliver Glasner responded by making three changes, including giving a Bundesliga debut for new Norway signing Jens Petter Hauge, who scored Frankfurt's late second goal.

However, there was only one Norwegian star in Dortmund as Haaland set up Giovanni Reyna to score the hosts' fourth goal on 58 minutes. Haaland showed his speed and strength to round off a move from the halfway line with a clinical finish for his second goal with 20 minutes left.

Dortmund were caught napping when Hauge got in behind the defence and tapped home Frankfurt's second goal five minutes before the whistle. Only a diving Trapp save denied Haaland a hat-trick in added time.



PARIS: (From left) Paris Saint-Germain's Moroccan defender Achraf Hakimi, Dutch midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum, Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, Spanish defender Sergio Ramos and Argentinian forward Lionel Messi pose during a presentation ceremony prior to the French L1 football match against Racing Club Strasbourg at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Saturday. —AFP

nine minutes from time when a foul on Icardi earned him a second booking.

PSG then secured a 4-2 win with four minutes left when Mbappe burst towards the byline and cut the ball back for substitute Sarabia to convert. Earlier Lille — who defied expectations to pip PSG to the title last season — suffered a humiliating 4-0 defeat at home to Nice, whose coach Christophe Galtier joined in the summer from the champions.

Galtier oversaw Lille's remarkable title triumph in May but then ended his three-and-a-half-year association with the club and headed south to take charge of an ambitious Nice outfit owned by Ineos, the group chaired by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe. Denmark striker Kasper Dolberg bagged a brace for Nice, his goals coming either side of a Hicham Boudaoui strike and a penalty converted by Amine Gouiri. — AFP



VITORIA: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (left) vies with Alaves' Spanish midfielder Pere Pons during the Spanish League football match between Alaves and Real Madrid at the Mendizorroza stadium in Vitoria on Saturday. —AFP



DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Braut Haaland acknowledges the fans after the German first division Bundesliga football match against Eintracht Frankfurt in Dortmund, western Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

Earlier, VfB Stuttgart romped to a 5-1 thrashing of promoted Greuther Fuerth as defender Marc-Oliver Kempf netted twice. Japan midfielder Wataru Endo opened the scoring after half an hour amid sweltering temperatures before Philipp Klement added Stuttgart's second on 36 minutes. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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NOTICE
August 9, 2021

Mr. Sinu Sebastian, son of Mr. Kureeckal Anotony Sebastian, resident of Kureeckal House, Kizhakkambalam P.O., Ernakulam, Kerala-683562 and Ms. Dintu Louis, daughter of Mr. Vattakkuzhiyil Joseph Louis, resident of Vattakkuzhiyil House, Vazhakulam PO Muvattupuzha, Ernakulam, Kerala-686670 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed, marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) /letters/ telephonic calls (00965-22550171, 00965-22533125).

K.S. Rathore
(K.S. Rathore) First Secretary (CA) and Marriage Officer, Embassy of India, Kuwait

Man City shocked by Kane-less Spurs

West Ham get better of Newcastle in six-goal thriller

LONDON: Tottenham shrugged off the absence of Harry Kane to give Nuno Espirito Santo a dream start as manager as Son Heung-min's strike beat Premier League champions Manchester City 1-0 yesterday. Nuno left Kane out of his squad with the England captain closely linked with a move to City, who showed why they are in need of a natural goalscorer in a toothless display. City have already spent £100 million on Jack Grealish and are prepared to smash the Premier League transfer record once more to get Kane by the end of the month.

The Spurs striker was reportedly in the stadium, but not on the pitch after returning back to pre-season training late in his bid to force a move away from his boyhood club. Early on it was easy to see why the 28-year-old sees City as the perfect destination for the final years of his prime to earn silverware. Pep Guardiola's men penned in the home side for the opening 10 minutes, but were left to rue not taking their chances as they slipped to a fourth defeat in four visits to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium without scoring.

Grealish could have won a penalty as he was tripped on the edge of the box by Oliver Skipp and Ilkay Gundogan's free-kick was deflected inches wide. Ferdinandinho then headed wide with the goal gaping as Hugo Lloris flapped at a cross, while Joao Cancelo and Riyad Mahrez sliced good chances wide. However, buoyed by the return of a full house to their 62,000 capacity home, Spurs grew into the game and soon started causing City's makeshift defense problems.

Guardiola left out England internationals John Stones and Kyle Walker due to their lack of pre-season training and Tottenham targeted the pairing of Nathan Ake and Benjamin Mendy on the left of the City defense. Son saw a deflected shot fly inches wide before the break in a prelude of what was to come in the winning goal.

The South Korean has been a persistent thorn in

City's side and scored his seventh goal against them on 55 minutes as he cut inside Ake and fired low into the bottom corner. Steven Bergwijn had a huge chance to double Spurs' lead moments later when he fired into the side-netting as City were again easily cut open on the counter-attack. Guardiola finally turned to his star-studded bench to turn the game around with Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus and Oleksandr Zinchenko introduced.

De Bruyne brought some much-needed speed to City's approach play and tested Lloris from range. But even the Belgian could not raise the champions from their slumber in the closing stages as their frustrations boiled over. Grealish was booked for diving in on Lucas Moura in stoppage time to round off his miserable debut.

City have now lost their last three competitive games 1-0 after defeats in the Champions League final last season to Chelsea and Leicester in last weekend's Community Shield. Guardiola's men should only get stronger with the return of many internationals and possibly Kane. However, they have already ceded ground to Chelsea, Manchester United and Liverpool, who all displayed their title credentials with convincing wins on Saturday.

Flying start for West Ham

West Ham twice came from behind to get their Premier League season off to a flying start with a 4-2 win at Newcastle in front of over 50,000 fans at St James' Park yesterday. Roared on by the Magpies' first capacity home crowd for 17 months, Newcastle started brightly as Callum Wilson headed home Allan Saint-Maximin's teasing delivery.

An intended cross by Aaron Cresswell crept in to quickly get West Ham level before Jacob Murphy's header restored Newcastle's lead at half-time. But David Moyes's men showed why they finished sixth ahead of Tottenham and


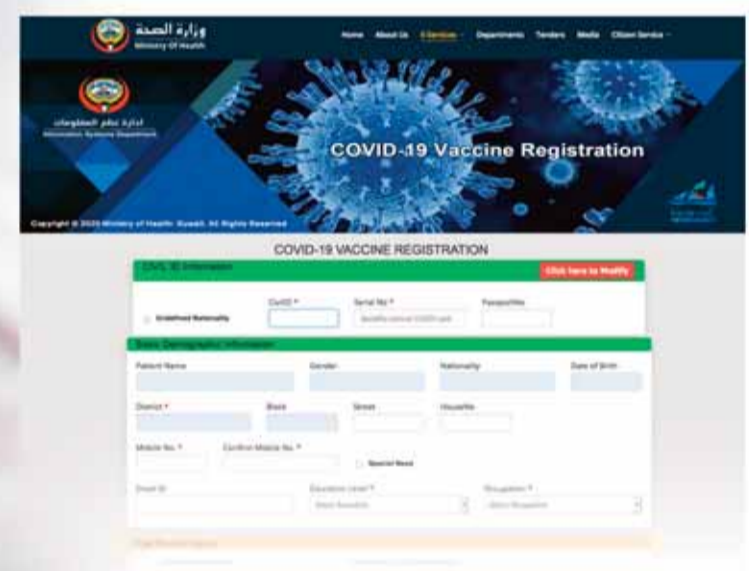


LONDON: Manchester City's Brazilian midfielder Ferdinandinho vies with Tottenham Hotspur's Brazilian midfielder Lucas Moura during an English Premier League football match at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium yesterday. — AFP

Arsenal last season after the break. Newcastle could not live with the pace and inventiveness of Said Benrahma and Michail Antonio.

They combined to get the visitors level once more on 53 minutes as Benrahma stooped to head home Antonio's cross. Antonio then hit the post with a header from point-blank range, but on the rebound Murphy tripped Pablo Fornals inside the

box. On his Premier League debut, Freddie Woodman saved Antonio's penalty, but Tomas Soucek pounded on the rebound to put West Ham in front. Three minutes later Benrahma fed Antonio on the counter-attack and this time he made no mistake with a thumping finish to move level with Paolo Di Canio as West Ham's all-time top goalscorer in the Premier League. — AFP

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