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Panic in Kabul as Taleban take control of Afghanistan

Kuwait ‘gravely concerned’ • Planes mobbed at Kabul airport • Biden faces backlash



KABUL: (Left) Taleban fighters patrol the streets of the capital yesterday. (Right) People climb atop a plane as they try to flee at Kabul airport yesterday. — AFP photos

KABUL: Victorious Taleban fighters patrolled Kabul yesterday after a stunningly swift end to Afghanistan’s 20-year war, as thousands of people mobbed the city’s airport trying to flee the group’s feared hardline brand of Islamist rule. President Ashraf Ghani fled out of the country on Sunday night as the insurgents encircled the capital, capping a military victory that saw them capture all cities in just 10 days. “The Taleban have won with the judgement of their swords and guns, and are now responsible for the honor, property and self-preservation of their countrymen,”

Ghani said afterwards. Kuwait yesterday said it is “gravely concerned” over the developments in Afghanistan, urging all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint in order to save lives and ensure the smooth exodus of foreign diplomats. Preserving the security and stability of Afghanistan, in addition to protecting the rights of its people, requires a collective effort on the part of all those involved, the foreign ministry underlined in a statement. Afghan government forces collapsed without the support of the US military, which invaded in 2001 after the Sept 11

attacks and toppled the Taleban for its support of Al-Qaeda. But the US ultimately failed to build a democratic government capable of withstanding the Taleban, despite spending billions of

SEE PAGE 5

dollars and providing two decades of military support. Taleban fighters have taken over checkpoints across the city, and militants with rifles slung over their shoulders walked through the streets of

the Green Zone, the heavily fortified district that houses most embassies and international organizations. The Taleban sought to reassure the international community that Afghans should not fear them, and said they will not take revenge against those who supported the US-backed alliance. In a message posted to social media, Taleban co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar called on his fighters to remain disciplined after taking control of the city. “Now it’s time to test and prove. Now we have to show that we can serve our nation and ensure security

and comfort of life,” he said. The Taleban’s capture of the capital had occurred, as in many other cities, with little of the bloodshed many had feared. Washington was left shocked by the rapid collapse of the Afghan government, and critics say the United States’ reputation as a global power has been badly tarnished. Britain’s Defense Secretary Ben Wallace described the Taleban takeover as a “failure of the international community”, assessing that the West’s intervention was a job only half-done.

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Western nations rush to evacuate citizens, local staff

KABUL: Western nations rushed to evacuate their citizens and local staff from Kabul yesterday after the Taleban’s lightning fast takeover of Afghanistan. As thousands of people mobbed the city’s airport trying to escape the group’s feared hardline brand of Islamist rule, the US and 65 other countries issued a joint statement urging the Taleban to allow Afghan and foreign citizens to leave.

The US government said yesterday it had secured Kabul airport, but there was

still chaos with witnesses reporting soldiers firing shots into the air to ward off the crowds. Authorities then cancelled all remaining commercial flights, citing the threat of looters. However several countries managed some evacuations yesterday, with questions lingering over the fate of the many Afghans who helped foreign embassy staff and troops over the last two decades and face reprisals from the Taleban. Turkish media reported that a flight from Kabul with 324 Turkish nationals landed in Istanbul yesterday. Italy said about 50 of its diplomats and 20 Afghans reached Rome yesterday after being flown out of Kabul. A plane carrying 46 Czechs and some Afghans landed in Prague yesterday morning.

Dutch Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld

tweeted that a military plane was en route to evacuate interpreters and local staff along with their families from the country’s embassy in Kabul, with several flights expected. All Swedish personnel in Afghanistan were evacuated to Doha overnight, while Finland said it would help its embassy staff and up to 130 Afghans leave the country. Norway said all its embassy staff in Kabul had now been evacuated. Denmark’s defense ministry said it had evacuated a group “under very difficult conditions” but that a large group was still waiting to get out. Germany is planning to deploy soldiers to aid the evacuation of its nationals and Afghans in danger from the Taleban, parliamentary sources told AFP yesterday.

Continued on Page 2



KABUL: US soldiers rest at Kabul airport yesterday. — AFP

US image in tatters after swift Taleban takeover

WASHINGTON: After two decades in Afghanistan, America’s longest war was ending with the image of the United States in tatters. With the swift collapse Sunday of the government in Kabul, the 20th anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks that triggered the US invasion will be marked with the Taleban back in control of Afghanistan, despite a cost to the United States of nearly 2,500 lives and more than \$2 trillion. To some observers, the debacle following the withdrawal of US troops will inevitably weaken the United States on the global stage at a time when President Joe Biden was speaking of rallying democracies in the face of a rising China. “America’s credibility as an ally is diminished because of the way the Afghan government was

abandoned beginning with the Doha talks,” said Husain Haqqani, Pakistan’s former ambassador to the United States, referring to the deal last year in the Qatari capital with the Taleban in which the United States set a pull-out timeline. Haqqani, now a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, noted how US diplomats in the end could do little more than send tweets urging the Taleban to stop. “That envoys of the mightiest nation on earth can be duped as they were in Doha, and its leaders ignored so easily as they have been in the final days, will encourage others to engage in duplicitous diplomacy,” Haqqani said. Biden faced heated criticism that the withdrawal was mismanaged, with the United States racing to evacuate



KABUL: A US soldier points his gun towards an Afghan passenger at Kabul airport yesterday. — AFP

its sprawling embassy just a month after he played down fears the Afghan government would crumble quickly. “It is going to have ramifications not just for Afghanistan,” said Representative Liz Cheney, a

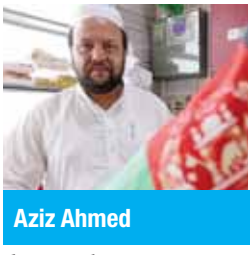
Republican hawk. “America’s adversaries know they can threaten us, and our allies are questioning this morning whether they can count on us for anything,” she said in an ABC interview.

Continued on Page 2

Afghans in UAE fear nightmare, others hopeful

DUBAI: Afghan restaurant owner Aziz Ahmed, who has called the UAE home for over 20 years, says the Taleban’s return to power is little short of a nightmare. “Even if my mother dies, I will not cry (as) much as I cried yesterday, but we have no option left,” Ahmed, 32, told AFP. “Now, we are hoping for ‘good’. We are hoping that these people have changed,” he said the day after the Taleban seized Kabul. Other Afghans in Dubai who spoke to AFP were more confident that the new Taleban rule would bring stability to their war-wracked country.

Continued on Page 2



Aziz Ahmed

Local

Kuwait authorities processed nearly 90% abroad vaccine certificates

Health Ministry lists four deaths, 343 new COVID-19 cases

KUWAIT: As steps to open up the country are being accelerated after bringing the third wave of the coronavirus under control, the team inspecting the certificates of those vaccinated abroad at the health ministry has intensified its efforts. Meanwhile, Kuwait's daily COVID-19 cases rose by 343 over the past 24 hours to a cumulative total of 406,883, while four more fatalities linked to the virus upped its death toll from the outbreak to 2,393, the health ministry said yesterday.



Country moving cautiously towards normal

The team has processed the majority of certificates registered on the ministry platform until Aug 15 - 87.6 percent - according to specific standards, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting sources with knowledge of the numbers. The number of those registered on the ministry platform who have received COVID jabs abroad, be they citizens or residents, reached 165,145, the sources said, adding that the specialized team inspected 144,768 certificates by Aug 15.

The number of certificates that were approved is 91,805, while 52,963 were rejected, a rejection rate of 36.5 percent of registered certificates. The sources said rejections are due to unapproved vaccines, incomplete vaccination data or not having a QR code through which the issuing body is identified and authenticated. Kuwait had reopened the air-

port on August 1, 2021 for vaccinated residents after nearly six months of closure as the country battled to curb a surge in COVID-19 cases. To enter Kuwait, residents must already have a valid visa, and have received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca or Moderna vaccines, or one dose of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

Moving cautiously

The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 433 as of yesterday, of whom 198 are in intensive care units, in addition to 6,623 active cases ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. He added that 620 more people were cured of the virus, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 397,867. Some 11,833 swab tests were conducted over the same period, raising the total to nearly 3.6 million so far, Dr Sanad added, saying that the positive case-to-swab ratio sits at 2.89 percent.

Kuwait is cautiously moving towards normalization after daily COVID-19 cases saw a sharp decline in recent weeks, prompting the government to ease restrictions including ordering the return of staff at state departments to full capacity. Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, a member of the Kuwait's supreme COVID-19 committee, had hailed the country's success in emerging from the third wave in a relatively short time, especially without a curfew, giving credit to the health ministry's wide vaccination campaign. In the meantime, Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah, head of the committee, said that the country needs to address the demographic and housing structure to avoid any future outbreaks from spreading, especially in densely populated areas.

The Ministry of Health had announced earlier this week that 2,668,082 people have received one or both doses of the vaccination against COVID-19 in Kuwait as of Friday. The percentage of people who are vaccinated represents 68.4 percent of the



population of Kuwait, Dr Al-Sanad said, noting that that the national campaign to vaccinate people will continue until it reaches its goal.

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

achieve herd immunity and return to normal life in the near future, he underlined.

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

Afghans in UAE fear nightmare...

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"Taleban, is not a problem," said Ezzatollah, who works at an Afghan bakery in the Al-Barsha residential area of Dubai. "I'm not scared to go back home," he said, as he prepared naan bread for a group of customers.

According to the Afghan consulate in Dubai, one of seven emirates that make up the UAE, the Gulf country is home to approximately 150,000 citizens. Many of them run successful businesses, while others work in shops, restaurants and construction. Gholameddine, the manager of Ahmed's Sabir Afghan restaurant in Dubai, said he would be happy to return home only once the country is safe and

secure. "I've been living in the UAE for about six years," he told AFP. But his dream, he said, would be to earn his living at home in Afghanistan where his elderly parents live.

Ahmed, who fled the Taleban for Dubai in the 90s, said the group's recent pledges to govern with more restraint were reassuring - if true. "When the name Taleban comes to your mind, you feel terror, you think of killings, you think of beatings. It's a bad dream," said Ahmed. He said the Taleban are now saying "they changed". "We are hoping and desperately waiting for that change to be convinced."

In the weeks leading to their return, the Taleban's leadership have sought to show a softer side, saying people have nothing to fear. They have also pledged there would be no retribution against those who supported US-backed forces. "I need to see concrete changes, they must be visible not just talk," said Ahmed, who wears the traditional Afghan dress and sports a beard. "I need to see ladies... moving freely," he added. — AFP

evacuate embassy employees and thousands of Afghans who worked for Washington's interests since they toppled the Taleban in the wake of the Sept 11 attacks. The scenes at the airport were reminiscent of the chaos that enveloped Washington's earlier bungled escape from Vietnam in 1975, even as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken rejected the comparison.

The US embassy in Kabul tweeted to tell American nationals and Afghans to "not travel to the airport". But thousands more Afghans - even some with no links to the US-led coalition - showed up in the hope of getting out, without tickets or visas for foreign destinations. "We are afraid to live in this city and we are trying to flee Kabul," said a 25-year old man who also asked to be identified only as Ahmed.

Many of the arrivals were fueled by rumors spread on social media. "I read on Facebook that Canada is accepting asylum from Afghanistan," said Ahmed. "Since I served in the army... there is danger. The Taleban would definitely target me." The US said it had evacuated its entire embassy staff to the airport, but they were being kept separate from those without permission to travel. Other videos posted on social media also showed desperate scenes overnight of people fighting to cram into the back of a cargo plane.

An Afghan military plane crashed in Uzbekistan, the Central Asian country's defense ministry said yesterday, while neighboring Tajikistan said over 100 Afghan soldiers had landed at one of its airports. The US government said yesterday it had secured the airport, but there was still chaos with witnesses reporting soldiers firing shots into the air to ward off crowds. A Pentagon official said in a later incident that US soldiers had shot dead two men in the crowd with weapons who had "brandished them menacingly". Authorities then cancelled all remaining commercial flights, citing the threat of looters.

The US had earlier released a statement with more than 65 nations urging the Taleban to let Afghans leave the country, warning of accountability for any abuses. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres urged the Taleban and all parties to "exercise restraint" and said the rights of women and girls must be protected.

China was the first major nation to flag support for the Taleban, stating it was ready for "friendly relations". Russia's ambassador to Afghanistan planned to meet with the Taleban today, with recognition to be determined on how they govern the country in the near future, a foreign ministry official in Moscow said. — AFP

US image in tatters after...

Continued from Page 1

The Biden administration is quick to point out that former president Donald Trump negotiated the Doha deal on the withdrawal and that a majority of the US public favors ending "forever wars". Trump has repeatedly put the blame on his successor, however, calling for him to resign on Sunday "in disgrace for what he has allowed to happen to Afghanistan". "What Joe Biden has done with Afghanistan is legendary. It will go down as one of the greatest defeats in American history!" he said in an earlier Sunday statement.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, also speaking on ABC, said the United States had "succeeded" in its primary mission of bringing justice to the Al-Qaeda perpetrators of the Sept 11 attacks. "It's also true that there's nothing that our strategic competitors around the world would like more than to see us bogged down in Afghanistan for another five, 10 or 20 years. That is not in the national interest," Blinken said.

China, which the Biden administration sees as the nation's preeminent challenge, has already rhetorically pounced, with the nationalistic state-run Global Times publishing an analysis saying Afghanistan showed Washington to be an "unreliable partner that always

abandons its partners or allies to seek self-interest".

But Richard Fontaine, chief executive officer of the Center for a New American Security, said it was simplistic to think that China would be emboldened, for example, to move on Taiwan, a self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing that depends on US weapons. China may instead see the high cost that the United States is willing to pay in exiting Afghanistan as a sign of seriousness in shifting to the Pacific, Fontaine said.

But Fontaine, who opposed the withdrawal, said the United States was taking major risks by effectively ceding Afghanistan to the Taleban, who never formally broke with Al-Qaeda. "Now that it looks like the Taleban will be running the country, I think the chances of a terrorist threat are pretty high," he said. "If that's the case, it could well increase distraction from our focus on the bigger strategic challenges in China."

Some policymakers argued for maintaining a residual force of some 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, but Biden decided the war was over and he should not risk further US lives. Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, which supports US military restraint, said the ones who have now lost credibility are advocates for a continued war. "When you see that the whole thing falls apart in nine days, this was nothing more than a house of cards," Parsi said.

He hoped the withdrawal would help end the view, in Washington but also among allies, that the US military should be the first resort. "Perhaps some of the external pressures on the United States to act as if it is the answer to everything in the world will reduce." — AFP

Panic in Kabul as Taleban take...

Continued from Page 1

While the head of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU party, Armin Laschet, described the withdrawal as "the biggest NATO debacle since its founding". The US government has insisted in recent days that its two decades of war in Afghanistan was a success, defined by quashing the Al-Qaeda threat. US President Joe Biden said there was no choice but to withdraw American troops and he would not "pass this war" on to another president.

Former US president Donald Trump called for his successor Biden to resign on Sunday. "It is time for Joe Biden to resign in disgrace for what he has allowed to happen to Afghanistan," Trump said in a statement, also blasting him over a surge in COVID-19 cases in the United States and domestic immigration, economic and energy policies. Biden was to break his silence on the US fiasco in Afghanistan with an address to the nation from the White House yesterday. The UN Security Council was also set to hold an emergency session on Afghanistan yesterday, with the Taleban looking for formal recognition.

There were desperate scenes at Kabul's airport yesterday as frantic Afghans trying to flee the Taleban takeover clung to an American plane as it prepared to take off from Kabul airport, as thousands of people desperately searched for a flight out of the country yesterday. Dramatic footage posted on social media shows hundreds of men running alongside a US Air Force plane as it rolls down the runway, with some clinging to the side of it.

In other videos, civilians frantically clamber up an already overcrowded and buckling set of airstairs. Crowds watched on, as those who successfully climbed the stairs helped others up, while some hung from the stair railings by their hands. Panicked families with frightened children in tow and laden with luggage were trying to escape the incoming Taleban regime, two decades after the group's harsh rule was toppled by a US-led invasion. "I feel very scared here. They are firing lots of shots into the air," the witness said, asking not to be named in case it jeopardized his chances of leaving.

The US State Department said American troops had secured the perimeter of the airport as they



KABUL: Taleban fighters stand guard in a vehicle along the roadside in the capital yesterday. — AFP

Western nations rush to evacuate...

Continued from Page 1

In Paris, the foreign ministry said military reinforcements were being deployed to the United Arab Emirates to help with evacuations through Abu Dhabi yesterday. More than 600 Afghans employed in French organizations have already arrived in France with their families, the French government said Friday. Britain ordered the deployment of 600 troops to evacuate their nationals tomorrow, as the Taleban overran key regional cities last week.

Defense minister Ben Wallace said 370 British employees and citizens had been evacuated in recent days, and a group of 782 Afghans will be evacuated in the next day and a half. "Our goal is to reach 1,200 to 1,500 evacuees a day," he added.

Warsaw said the government has issued 45

humanitarian visas for Afghans and their families who worked for Poland or the EU in Kabul, while Ireland said it has granted visa waivers to 45 people and has agreed to take up to another 150. Madrid said it will dispatch two military transport planes to Dubai yesterday for the "first phase" of the evacuation of its embassy staff and local staff.

Belgium's defense ministry told Belga news agency it would deploy three planes for evacuations from Kabul. Hundreds of the American embassy's employees have already left Afghanistan, a Pentagon official said on Sunday. The US had sent 6,000 troops to the airport to ensure the safe evacuation of embassy staff.

Russia meanwhile said it did not plan to evacuate its embassy in Kabul. Foreign ministry official Zamir Kabulov said Russia was among a number of countries that had received assurances from the Taleban their embassies would be safe. China's embassy in Kabul remains operational, Beijing said yesterday, although it began evacuating citizens months ago. The embassy told Chinese citizens remaining in Afghanistan to "pay close attention to the security situation" and stay indoors. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives new ambassadors' credentials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of South Korea to Kuwait Chung Byung-ha. —Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Azamat Karagulov.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Bhutan to Kuwait Shetem Tenzin.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Cyprus to Kuwait Michael Mavros.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the Ambassador of South Korea to Kuwait Chung Byung-ha.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Azamat Karagulov.



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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the Ambassador of Cyprus to Kuwait Michael Mavros.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received credentials of newly-assigned ambassadors of South Korea Chung Byung-ha, Kyrgyzstan Azamat Karagulov, Bhutan Shetem Tenzin and Cyprus Michael Mavros. The ceremony was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan

Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah and Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of His Highness the Amir Bureau Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the victims of floods that hit Turkey recently. In the cable, His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow mercy upon the dead and

wished speedy recovery for the injured, hoping for the friendly country to overcome such a natural disaster. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. —KUNA

Kuwait award reflects attention to youth success: Minister

KUWAIT: An annual youth award Kuwait offers to acknowledge exceptionally talented youngsters proves how significant the cohort is towards national development, a minister said. The Kuwait Youth Excellence and Creativity Award, which serves as a platform that allows the country's youth to display their varied skills, is one of many initiatives the Kuwaiti government has introduced to connect with youngsters. Information Minister and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi said amid a lavish ceremony to honor the winners yesterday. Speaking on behalf of His Highness the Amir, the minister said the winners represent a bevy of astute entrepreneurs who have translated their ambitions into success stories, adding that such dedication is the focal point of national development plans. The minister attributed the youngsters' success to the overwhelming support they have received from the Kuwaiti leadership, saying such dedication is synonymous with national development plans. —KUNA



KUWAIT: State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi poses with the winners of The Kuwait Youth Excellence and Creativity Award. —KUNA photos



State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi honors Dr Bader Al-Mutawa, who won in the sports category.



State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi honors Dr Alaa Al-Obaid, who won in the religious studies' category.

Local

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News in brief

Frontliners' rewards prepared

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission said yesterday it finalized names of frontline workers in 26 government departments who would be receiving special allowances for working during the coronavirus pandemic between February and May in 2020. CSC, in a statement, said the list of frontline workers were transferred to the Ministry of Finance for disbursement. It added it would refer any further lists of frontline workers to the finance ministry once it receives and verifies them.

'EASY' app soon

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Communications Minister Dr Rana Al-Fares announced yesterday the launch of "EASY" app soon. Dr Fares affirmed the ministry's continuous efforts in coordination with 13 state departments to provide electronic services via the "EASY" (SAHEL) app. She has added that the launch parallels the government's approach towards digitizing all services and transactions to render them faster, easier and more efficiently. The minister has pointed out that the smartphone application is in its final stages before launch, preparing a call center and customer services section to facilitate it for users.

Stadiums at 30% capacity

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football Association has informed the health ministry about procedures that it plans to put in place when fans are allowed back in stadiums for the upcoming football season. KFA assured the ministry that vaccinated fans only will be allowed in, social distancing will be observed, and the stands will be at 30 percent of a stadium's capacity. Al-Qabas reported yesterday quoting an official source at KFA. The source said that the ministry is expected to make a final decision 'within days,' hoping for approval especially considering the recent improvements in the fight against COVID-19 in Kuwait.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Government employees are seen in an office building in Kuwait City, Kuwait, August 15, 2021. Kuwait's state departments on Sunday resumed work at full capacity as the health situation in the country is stabilizing following the vaccination campaign against COVID-19. —Photo by Ghazy Qaffaf (Xinhua)

Kuwait helps north Lebanon blast victims

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society has hurriedly responded to appeals for help after a fuel tanker blew up in the northernmost region of Akkar, killing 28 people and injuring scores others. Dr Pierre Yared, director of Al-Jaitawi Hospital that received a number of people who suffered from burns in the tragic incident, lauded KRCS' contributions to cover the costs of treating the injured, expressing deep gratitude to Kuwait for its latest assistance for the people of Lebanon.

The hospital admitted 12 people

with burns, he said, noting that most of them suffered from severe burns and three were in a very critical condition.

The situation resulting from the blast prompted the hospital's administration to expand the ward for burns' treatment and purchase additional medical equipment, he said, noting that in some cases, the treatment would last for at least two months. The KRCS has been aiding the hospital since August 4, 2020 when a huge blast occurred at Beirut Port, inflicting wide-scale damage to properties including nearby hospitals. Meanwhile, Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, the head of the KRCS mission in Lebanon, said while visiting the injured at the hospital that the society has responded to the appeals for help, covering the high costs for treating patients. —KUNA



BEIRUT: Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, head of the KRCS mission in Lebanon, visits a patient at Al-Jaitawi Hospital who was injured in the recent fuel tanker blast in Akkar. —KUNA

KFH honors staff's outstanding children with gold biscuits

KUWAIT: Group Chief Human Resources Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar said that KFH has honored more than 50 children of KFH employees who have achieved an average of 90 percent or above in high school, as part of the bank's comprehensive interest in its staff.

As the employee is seen as an integrated entity that affects and is being affected by family and community surroundings, the family and children play an important and pivotal role in pushing the employee towards more diligence, perseverance and giving, considering that KFH employees distinguished success, career stability, and academic and practical development, are some of the most important reasons for the success and excellence of their celebrated children. Hopefully, they will continue their success and excellence during their educational stages following high school, whether in university or postgraduate studies.

In a gesture that expresses the interest and appreciation of the Group's Human Resources to honor the top and outstanding high school students (in the science and literary section) of the employees' children,

KFH rewarded them with valuable gifts consisting of gold biscuits, in addition to purchase vouchers. Omar also congratulated the honorees on the excellence they achieved, and their continuous efforts over the past years, which resulted in serious and ambitious academic life.

Omar stressed the importance of education as a mainstay for the development of the human element, which is the main factor in moving the wheel of the economy, pointing out that KFH places support for education, training and developing competencies by various means at the top of its priorities. This confirms KFH's belief in the importance of science and knowledge in building a brighter future with the help of the people of Kuwait.

Along with the great successes it achieved in the economic field at the local, regional and global levels, KFH pays most attention to developing capabilities of its staff as they are the most important profitable asset and feasibility in terms of investment standards. In addition, KFH considers supporting the education sector as a basic pillar in its social responsibility program and a real addition to the present and future of Kuwait.



Zeyad Al-Omar



KUWAIT: A group picture taken during the event.

Mughal Mahal lights up to mark India's Independence Day

KUWAIT: Popular Indian restaurant chain Mughal Mahal celebrated India's 75th Independence Day by illuminating their restaurant building in Sharq with the Indian tricolor. The entire building's facade was lit up and decorated to mark the occasion and also to emphasize the excellent relations between India and Kuwait.

Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George and his wife Joice George graced the occasion and celebrated the event with a select gathering of guests, while adhering to all COVID-19 protocols. The spe-

cial invitees were treated to Indian delicacies and also marked the celebration wearing colorful national outfits. Ambassador George expressed his best wishes and congratulations to all Indians on the occasion and praised the excellent relations between India and Kuwait. He highlighted the role of food diplomacy in the dynamic partnership between the two friendly nations and thanked Mughal Mahal for undertaking such a gesture that further consolidated the special friendship between India and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Managing Partner of Mughal Mahal, Ashok Kalra, thanked Ambassador George for his continuous support and dynamic leadership that is helping the entire Indian community. The Mughal Mahal Sharq branch, located in the heart of Kuwait City next to Al-Hamra Tower, will be lit up at night with the Indian tricolor and Kuwait flag for four days to promote the strong and dynamic India-Kuwait friendship.

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Zambia challenger wins presidency in landslide

UK gun applicants to face social media checks after killing



(Left) This file photo taken on Dec 23, 2001 shows Afghan anti-Taleban fighters flashing the victory sign as they leave the Tora Bora mountain area to make their way to their base. (Right) This file photo taken on Dec 16, 2001 shows US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld throwing up his arms as he concludes his town hall meeting with US troops at Bagram airfield after he met Afghanistan's new leaders to discuss the country's future. —AFP photos

Pentagon mistakes behind Afghan army rout

Soldiers no longer receiving salaries

WASHINGTON: The collapse of the Afghan army that allowed Taleban fighters to take control of Kabul cast a stark light on errors committed over 20 years by the Pentagon as it spent billions of dollars in Afghanistan.

The wrong equipment

Washington spent \$83 billion in its effort to create a modern army mirroring its own. In practical terms, that meant huge dependence on air support and a high-tech communications network in a country where only 30 percent of the population can count on a reliable electricity supply. Airplanes, helicopters, drones, armored vehicles, night-vision goggles: The United States spared no expense in equipping the Afghan army. It recently even provided the Afghans with the latest Black Hawk attack helicopters.

But the Afghans - many of them illiterate young men in a country lacking the infrastructure to support cutting-edge military equipment - were unable to mount a serious resistance against a less-equipped and ostensibly badly outnumbered foe. Their capabilities were seriously overestimated, according to John Sopko, the US special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction (SIGAR).

Each time he tried to evaluate the Afghan army, he said, "the US military changed the goalposts, and made it easier to show success. And then finally, when they couldn't even do that, they classified the assessment tool. "So they knew how bad the Afghan military was." His office's latest report to Congress, filed last week, said that "advanced weapons systems, vehicles and logistics used by Western militaries were beyond the capabilities of the largely illiterate and uneducated Afghan force."

Exaggerated numbers

For months, Pentagon officials have insisted on what they said was the numerical advantage held by the Afghan forces - supposedly with 300,000 men in the army and the police - over the Taleban, estimated to number some 70,000. But those army numbers were greatly inflated, according to the Combating Terrorism Center at the prestigious US Military Academy at West Point, New York.

As of July 2020, by its own estimate, the 300,000 included only 185,000 army troops or special operations forces under Defense Ministry control, with police and other security personnel making up the rest. And barely 60 percent of the Afghan army troops were trained fighters, the West Point analysts said. A more accurate estimate of the army's fighting strength - once the 8,000 air force personnel

are taken out of the equation - is 96,000, they concluded. The SIGAR report said desertions have always been a problem for the Afghan army. It found that in 2020, the Afghan army had to replace 25 percent of its force each year-largely because of desertions - and that American soldiers working with the Afghans came to see this rate as "normal".

Half-hearted promises

American officials have repeatedly vowed that they would continue to support the Afghan army after August 31 - the date announced for completing the withdrawal of US troops - but they have never explained how this would be done logistically. During his last visit to Kabul, in May, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin raised the possibility of helping the Afghans maintain their air force - from afar - through an approach he called "over the horizon" logistics. That vague concept implied the use of virtual training sessions with video conferencing on the Zoom platform - an approach that seems illusory given the need for the Afghans to have computers or smartphones with well-functioning Wi-Fi connections.

Ronald Neumann, a former US ambassador to Kabul, believes the American military "could have taken more time" to withdraw. The agreement reached by the Trump administration with the Taleban called for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces by May 1. Trump's successor Joe Biden pushed that date back, originally to Sept 11 before changing it again to August 31.

But he also decided to withdraw all American citizens from the country, including the contractors who play a key role in supporting US logistics there. "We built an air force that depended on contractors for maintenance and then pulled the contractors," Neumann, who was ambassador under President George W Bush, told NPR public radio.

Unpaid and unfed

Worse, the salaries of the Afghan army had been paid for years by the Pentagon. But from the moment the American army announced its planned withdrawal in April, responsibility for those payments fell on the Kabul government. Numerous Afghan soldiers have complained on social media that they not only have not been paid in months, in many instances their units were no longer receiving food or supplies - not even ammunition. The rapid US withdrawal provided a final blow. "We profoundly shocked the Afghan army and morale by pulling out and pulling our air cover," said Neumann. —AFP

How did Taleban take over so quickly?

KABUL: The Taleban's stunning and rapid takeover of Afghanistan was the result not only of their battlefield strength, but also a sustained push to force surrenders and cut deals. The insurgents mixed threats and lures with propaganda and psychological warfare as they took city after city - some with barely a shot fired - eventually capturing the capital Kabul. How did this happen?

Why didn't the Afghan army put up a fight?

As foreign troops began their final withdrawal in May, Washington and Kabul were confident the Afghan military would put up a strong fight against the Taleban. With more than 300,000 personnel and multi-billion-dollar equipment more advanced than the Taleban arsenal, Afghan forces were formidable - on paper. In reality, they were plagued by corruption, poor leadership, lack of training and plummeting morale for years. Desertions were common and US government inspectors had long warned that the force was unsustainable.

Afghan forces put up strong resistance this summer in some areas such as Lashkar Gah in the south, but they now faced the Taleban without regular US air strikes and military support. Faced with the smaller but highly motivated and cohesive enemy, many soldiers and even entire units simply deserted or surrendered, leaving the insurgents to capture city after city.

How did the Taleban take advantage of low morale?

The seeds for the collapse were sown last year when Washington signed a deal with the insurgents to withdraw its troops completely. For the Taleban, it was the beginning of their victory after nearly two decades of war. For many demoralized Afghans, it was betrayal and abandonment. They continued to attack government forces but started to combine those with targeted killings of journalists and rights activists, ramping up an environment of fear.

They also pushed a narrative of inevitable Taleban victory in their propaganda and psychological operations.

Soldiers and local officials were reportedly bombarded with text messages in some areas, urging them to surrender or cooperate with the Taleban to avoid a worse fate. Many were offered safe passage if they did not put up a fight, while others were reached through tribal and village elders.

What happened to the anti-Taleban warlords and their militias?

With Afghan forces unable to hold off the Taleban advances, many of Afghanistan's famed - and notorious - warlords rallied their militias and promised a black eye to the Taleban if they attacked their cities. But with confidence plunging in the ability of Afghanistan's government to survive, never mind hold off the insurgents, the writing was also on the wall for the warlords. Their cities fell without a fight. Warlord Ismail Khan in the western city of Herat was captured by the Taleban as it fell. Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Mohammad Noor in the north fled to Uzbekistan, as their militia members abandoned humvees, weapons and even their uniforms on the road out of Mazar-i-Sharif.

But how were the Taleban able to do this so quickly?

The Taleban had started putting deals and surrender arrangements in place reportedly long before the launch of their blitz in May. From individual soldiers and low-level government officials to apparently provincial governors and ministers, the insurgents pressed for deals - with the Taleban all but victorious, why put up a fight?

The strategy proved immensely effective. The images from their final march to Kabul were not of bodies in the streets and bloody battlefields, but of Taleban and government officials sitting comfortably on couches as they formalized the handover of cities and provinces. According to one reported US estimate less than a month before the fall of Kabul, the Afghan government could collapse in 90 days. But once the Taleban captured their first provincial capital, it took less than two weeks. —AFP

Afghan women's rights in firing line as Taleban return

HONG KONG: Aisha Khurram spent a sleepless first night under Taleban rule, the sound of gunfire and evacuation planes puncturing the silence as she reflected on a day that "shattered our souls and spirits to the core". "It was like a doomsday for the entire nation to see everything collapse in (the) blink of an eye," she told AFP in a series of messages via Twitter yesterday after Taleban fighters swept into Kabul, and her neighborhood, uncontested.

Khurram, a 22-year-old former youth representative to the United Nations, is just months away from graduating from Kabul University. But she and fellow female students now face an uncertain future. "The world and Afghan leaders failed the younger generation of Afghanistan in the cruelest way imaginable," she said. "It is a nightmare for educated women who envisioned a brighter future for themselves and generations to come."

In the weeks leading up to their return to power, the Taleban's leadership have strived to portray a softer image than when they last ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. But women struggle to take comfort from such assurances.

'History repeats itself'

Under the hardline version of sharia law that the Taleban imposed the last time they controlled the capital, women and girls were mostly denied education or employment. Full face coverings became mandatory in public and they could not leave home without a male companion. Public floggings and executions, including stoning for adultery, were carried out in city squares and stadiums.

The Taleban's ouster did not spell the end of abuses. Women often remained marginalized, especially in rural areas. But over the last two decades, significant progress was made in cities with women filling universities and entering the workforce in ambitious positions in the media, politics, the judiciary and even the security forces.

In the last 24 hours, prominent women in Kabul have taken to social media to express their pain for both a country and a way of life now that the Taleban are back in control. "I start my day looking at empty streets of Kabul, horrified (for) its people," wrote Fawzia Koofi, a rights activist and politician, and Afghanistan's former deputy speaker of parliament. "History repeats itself so quickly."



"The fear just sits inside your chest like a black bird," added Muska Dastageer, a lecturer at the American University of Afghanistan, which opened its doors five years after the Taleban were ousted. "It opens its wings and you can't breathe."

Broken hearts

The Twitter timeline of Rada Akbar, a 33-year-old photographer, was littered with broken heart emojis. "My beloved Afghanistan collapsed before my eyes," one post read. Another entry shared a now viral photograph of a man painting over pictures of smiling brides on the front of a hairdresser. "Erasing women from the public space," she wrote. Akbar is known for her striking self-portraits that were both a declaration of her independence and heritage.

An exhibition she held earlier this year was forced online after she faced threats for her work showcasing some of the nation's powerful female figures. Yesterday morning, her fear was palpable. "I want to become invisible and hide from the world," read her latest tweet.

Two days before the Taleban took power, the UN refugee agency was already warning that 80 percent of the nearly a quarter of a million Afghans forced to flee since the end of May are women and children. On Saturday, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the rights of Afghan girls and women were being "ripped away" in areas that the Taleban had already seized.

Sahraa Karimi, one of Afghanistan's most prominent women filmmakers, said she had no plans to leave. "I will not abandon my country until the last moment," she said in a video posted on Twitter, wiping away tears. "Perhaps, many will think this is foolishness. But foolishness is what was done by those who abused our homeland... Foolishness is what the world showed by turning its back on us." —AFP

CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of Gulf Insurance Group - Kuwait

Wish to offer their deepest & heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of their colleague

Mr. Hatem Hussain
(Senior Engineer in the Information Technology Department)

May his soul rest in peace and may God grant comfort and strength to the bereaved family members

May Allah Almighty Rest His Soul In Peace

International

Zambia's new president vows 'better' democracy after landslide victory

‘Once we restore the rule of law, we will see more economic investment’

LUSAKA: Zambian president-elect Hakainde Hichilema yesterday slammed the southern African country's outgoing "brutal regime" while promising a "better democracy" in his debut address to the nation, hours after winning the top job in a landslide.

Speaking shortly after his predecessor Edgar Lungu conceded defeat, the business tycoon and veteran opposition leader said his camp had been victims of a "brutal regime that is exiting". "I will be a president of all Zambians, of those that voted for me and of those that did not," he pledged.

After a campaign dominated by the country's economic woes and marred by sporadic violence, Hichilema garnered 2,810,757 votes against 1,814,201 for the incumbent Edgar Lungu, according to nearly final results. Lungu conceded defeat, saying he congratulated "my brother... Hichilema for becoming the seventh republican president." In a nationally televised address, Lungu thanked Zambians for "a great opportunity to be your president. I will forever cherish and appreciate the authority you invested in me." The electoral commission proclaimed Hichilema president-elect in the early hours of yesterday, bringing the curtain down on Lungu's nearly six-year reign.

Hichilema, 59, pledged: "We will foster a better democracy... rule of law, restoring order, respecting human rights, liberties and freedoms." Wiping away tears, Hichilema said his victory was the "historic moment millions of Zambians have been waiting for."

Hundreds of supporters had gathered on the dirt road leading up to Hichilema's sumptuous residence in a leafy suburb of Lusaka, and they shouted "Bally, Bally" (slang for "father") as he began to speak. "It is with great honour, humility, gratitude that I stand before you today to say change is here," Hichilema said.

Recalling that he had been arrested 15 times, Hichilema said: "We are not going into office to arrest those who arrested us." He added: "Once we restore the rule of law, we will see more economic investment."

It was Hichilema's sixth bid for the top job and his third challenge to his bitter rival Lungu, 64, after losing to Lungu by a wafer-thin 100,000-vote margin in 2016.

‘Finally, he has done it!’

Thousands of supporters flocked onto the streets of Lusaka, erupting into song and dance, cheering and waving party flags. The celebrations continued into the morning. At a hotel breakfast room early yester-



LUSAKA: Supporters of Zambian President elect for the opposition party, United Party for National Development (UPND), Hakainde Hichilema gestures as they ride on a pick up truck in the streets of Lusaka yesterday. — AFP

day, a waiter had swapped his usual dark tie for a bright red one.

"My vote helped swing it," he told AFP with a wide smile and twinkling eyes. On Saturday, as ballots were being counted, Lungu cried foul, but his objections gained little traction. International election observers have commended the polls' transparent and peaceful organisation, with a turnout of around 70.9 percent—a huge jump from the 57.7 percent recorded in the 2016 polls. But they also criticised restrictions on freedom of assembly and movement during campaigning.

Security forces blocked Hichilema from campaigning in several areas, including the strategic Copperbelt Province, citing breaches of coronavirus measures and a public order act. Lungu deployed the military following pre-election clashes and reinforced the army presence in three provinces after two deaths were reported on election day.

Social media access was restricted in the capital Lusaka just as Hichilema cast his vote but was restored on Saturday following a court order.

Democracy boost?

Observers viewed the election as a referendum on Lungu's rule, which saw plummeting living standards and deepening repression in the country of more than 17 million. Legislative and local elections were held alongside the presidential ballot on Thursday.

Kenya's former prime minister Raila Odinga congratulated Hichilema for a "decisive victory". "The Zambian people have made Africa proud for conducting a successful election," Odinga tweeted. The election "reminds fellow Africans elsewhere that nothing is impossible".

Despite occasional episodes of political violence, Zambia has earned a reputation for stability. Every transition of power has been peaceful since the former British colony adopted its multi-party system in 1990.

"Zambians have lived up to be true democrats. It's a different African story," Ringisai Chikohomero, researcher at the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, told AFP. Hichilema's prime task on taking office will be to tackle an economy wracked by high debt, inflation and unemployment.—AFP

Yazidi fighters killed in Turkish strike on Iraq

BAGHDAD: Three Yazidi fighters, including a local chief of Iraq's powerful Hashed al-Shaabi coalition, were killed yesterday in a Turkish air strike on north-west Iraq, a security source said.

The source, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said Hassan Saeed died along with two comrades as their car was hit on the road to Sinjar, the heartland of Iraq's Yazidi religious minority.

Saeed headed the Sinjar Resistance Units, set up in 2014 to protect the Yazidis from the Islamic State (IS) group before being integrated into the mainly pro-Iranian Hashed.

His force is seen as close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group outlawed in Turkey that has rear bases in northern Iraq. The PKK has since 1984 waged a rebellion in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey that has claimed more than 40,000 lives.

Turkish forces routinely conduct operations against PKK bases in the rugged mountains of northern Iraq. In its latest losses, Ankara said yesterday that four Turkish soldiers were killed in two separate incidents in northern Iraq over the weekend.

Before they were targeted by IS, around 550,000 Yazidis had been living in Iraq's rugged northwest, concentrated around Sinjar. But in 2014, the jihadists swept through Sinjar and, branding the Yazidis as infidels, killed the men, took boys as child soldiers and forced women into sexual slavery. Several thousand Yazidis were killed and nearly 100,000 fled abroad. Some 360,000 remain displaced in the autonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. — AFP

Most Algeria forest fires 'under control': Emergency services

ALGIERS: Most of the deadly forest fires that have hit northern Algeria in the past week are "under control" and no longer endanger residents, the country's emergency services said. Firefighters were still struggling Sunday to put out 19 blazes, after over 90 people, including 33 soldiers, were killed in wildfires since August 9.

"Most of these fires have been brought under control and don't represent a danger to residents," said Colonel Farouk Achour, a spokesman for the civil protection authority. The authority's efforts focus currently on the "protection of inhabited areas, notably El Tarf, Bejaia, Jijel and Tizi Ouzou, Achour said.

More than 74 fires had been extinguished in the past 24 hours, he added. The government has blamed arsonists and a blistering heatwave for the dozens of blazes, but experts have also criticised authorities for failing to prepare for the annual phenomenon.

Algerian police said Sunday they had arrested 36 people including three women after the lynching of a man suspected of having started one of the deadly fires. "A preliminary enquiry... into the homicide, lynching, immolation and mutilation... of Djamel Ben Ismail... led to the arrest of 36 suspects including three

Nigeria gunmen kidnap 15 students in latest attack on schools

KANO: Gunmen have killed three people at an agricultural college in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state and kidnapped 15 students among others, school officials and police said yesterday, in the latest in a wave of mass abductions.

Armed kidnappings for ransom now make almost daily headlines in Africa's most populous country, seven years after Boko Haram extremists shocked the world by taking 276 girls from Chibok. Schools targeted by criminal gangs in the north and centre of the West African country are usually in remote areas where students stay in dormitories with only watchmen for security.

On Sunday at the College of Agriculture and Animal Science in Bakura, "unknown gunmen attacked the school around 10 pm (2100 GMT)," registrar Aminu Khalid Maradun told AFP. They killed a policeman and two security officers, "and abducted 20, including 15 students," he said.

The five other abductees are staff and family members, he added. Another school official confirmed the attack. "The gunmen forced themselves into the school through the pedestrian gate and took away the hostages," Abdullahi Aminu, in charge of accommodation at the school, told AFP.

"They killed three security personnel in a shootout." The official said the school received a phone call early yesterday from the kidnappers, saying they were holding 20 hostages. Police said yesterday afternoon that 15 students were kidnapped in the attack but said only four staff were taken—and three were later "rescued".

"15 students and 4 staff were abducted by the bandits," local police spokesman Mohammed Shehu said in a statement, adding that police operatives rescued three staff while searching the area. The bandits were "heavily confronted" by security officers during the Sunday night attack, Shehu added, but a "police inspector" and two "civilian guards lost their lives."

950 abducted since December

A recent school graduate, Usman Usman, also confirmed the incident. "I left the school on Sunday around 5:30 pm... This morning my friend called me and said that some bandits attacked the school in the night. They killed people and kidnapped many," said Usman, 22.

The UN estimates that at least 950 students have been abducted across Nigeria since December. Most have been released after negotiations with local officials, although some are still being held. The latest mass abduction was in July, when gunmen kidnapped 121 students from the Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna state.

Heavily armed criminal gangs known locally as bandits have terrorised communities in the region for years. They usually attack villages to loot, kill and steal cattle. Military deployments and peace deals have failed to end the violence, and bandits who hide in camps in the Rugu forest straddling Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara and Niger states continue to launch attacks.

Since late last year, the gangs have increasingly targeted schools and colleges to squeeze out ransom cash. Bandits chase financial gain and have no known ideological leanings, but there has been growing concern among security experts and officials over potential ties with jihadists in the northeast of the country.

Kidnappings are just one of the challenges facing Nigeria's security forces who are battling a grinding Islamist insurgency in the northeast and separatist tensions in parts of the south. — AFP



BAABDA, Lebanon: A handout picture provided by the Lebanese photo agency Dalati and Nohra shows Lebanon's President Michel Aoun meeting with premier-designate Najib Mikati at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut, yesterday. — AFP

Crisis-hit Lebanon reels from latest deadly explosion

BEIRUT: Lebanon reeled yesterday from a deadly explosion that burned alive people desperate to fill plastic containers with fuel in a country sinking ever deeper into darkness and chaos. At least 28 people were killed when the fuel tank, which was swarmed by residents clamouring to fill their vehicles amid crippling shortages, blew up early on Sunday in the northern region of Akkar.

The latest deadly disaster comes as Lebanon grapples with an economic crisis described by the World Bank as one of the world's worst since the 1850s. Nearly 80 people were also injured in the blast, many of them with burns that further overwhelmed hospitals struggling to function without electricity, medics said.

Yesterday, foreign countries and UN agencies were scrambling emergency aid to help exhausted health workers cope with the new influx of serious injuries and run DNA tests on the charred remains of the dead.

Shortages of key commodities have accelerated and compounded one another in recent days, leaving much of Lebanon struggling to source fuel, gas and even bread, with buying power pummeled by the currency losing more than 90 percent of its value on the black market. The country's six million inhabitants now fear the internet and drinking water will be next to disappear. The blast in Akkar, one of the most impoverished parts of the country, was a deadly direct consequence of a vicious cycle fast turning the region's erstwhile beacon of modernity into a failed state.

The scenes of horror piled trauma on a country still coming to terms with last year's cataclysmic Beirut port explosion that killed more than 200 people and disfigured the city. Nobody has been held to account for the port blast, caused by the poor storage of enormous quantities of ammonium nitrate that had languished there for years.

‘Need to leave’

Across the country, with no more than two hours a day of mains electricity supply, many shops and restaurants remain closed, unable to source fuel for

their generators. Many private and public sector employees have been told to stay home and most of the rest have often ended up doing the same for lack of transport options.

Stuck in an endless queue of cars at a Beirut petrol station, Mohammed, who did not want to give his full name, said he could see no light at the end of the tunnel. "We need to leave Lebanon. We all need to get out," said the 30-year-old engineer. "I've started working on it, and God help those who stay."

His six-month-old baby had cried through the sweltering night, and his family was being forced to spend hard-earned savings on operating a private generator to keep his grandmother's oxygen concentrator running. "There's no more hope," he said. The state has declared a national day of mourning over the Akkar blast, a move unlikely to offer much solace to a population that blamed those very authorities for the tragedy. Angry protesters on Sunday torched the home of the landowner on whose plot the tragedy unfolded, accusing him of involvement in a hoarding and smuggling scheme allegedly covered up by top officials.

The exact circumstances of the explosion, which happened at night and as a huge crowd of people swarmed the tank, have yet to be fully established.

‘Massacre’

Gas station owners have been accused of hoarding fuel ahead of an expected price hike, causing crippling shortages and spawning a ruthless black market that is enriching a small cartel and choking the rest of the country. The central bank last week warned it could no longer afford to subsidise fuel imports. A few dozen people protested on Sunday in front of the Beirut home of Najib Mikati, who was recently appointed prime minister-designate.

The country's richest man is the third person to attempt to form a government since the last one resigned in the aftermath of the Beirut port blast last August. Sahar Mandour of Amnesty International called the Akkar blast "a massacre resulting from an economic crisis caused by massive corruption that has been going on for years." "The latest economic crisis didn't close the door to corruption... it aggravated it to an extent that it is now deadly," she told AFP yesterday. The lack of a government is freezing international assistance that could help dig Lebanon out of the abyss. As every aspect of daily life unravels, sometimes deadly scuffles have broken out at petrol stations and residents across the country fear for their safety. —AFP



Algerians inspect the damage at their home due to forest fires in the Ait Daoud area of northern Algeria on Aug 13, 2021. — AFP

women," police chief Mohamed Chakour told reporters.

Ben Ismail, 38, had "turned himself in of his own accord" at a police station in the hard-hit Tizi Ouzou region after hearing he was suspected of involvement, he said. Algeria is Africa's biggest country by surface area, and although much of the interior is desert, the north has over four million hectares (10 million acres) of forest, which is hit every summer by fires. Last year some 44,000 hectares went up in flames. In neighbouring Morocco, firefighters worked through the night on Sunday and into last night to bring fires under control amid unfavourable winds. —AFP

International

Malaysian premier quits after turbulent 17 months in office

I will never work with kleptocrats: Muhyiddin

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's prime minister resigned and his government collapsed yesterday after just 17 months in office, throwing the country into fresh political turmoil as it battles a serious coronavirus outbreak. Muhyiddin Yassin's tumultuous period in office came to an end after allies withdrew support, and he becomes the shortest-serving premier in Malaysian history.

With an election unlikely and no obvious successor on the horizon, Malaysia is set for a period of intense political horse-trading before a workable coalition takes shape. After submitting his resignation to the king, the 74-year-old took a parting shot at enemies within his coalition. "I could have taken the easy way out by casting aside my principles to remain as prime minister — but that is not my choice," he said in a televised address. "I will never work with kleptocrats." He has claimed that several MPs who pulled support from his coalition — including scandal-plagued ex-leader Najib Razak — had been angered that he refused to get corruption cases against them dropped.

The national palace confirmed the monarch, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah — who formally appoints the premier — had accepted Muhyiddin's resignation. It said in a statement Muhyiddin would serve as a caretaker prime minister until a replacement is found but the monarch was not in favour of polls now due to the outbreak. Muhyiddin came to power in March last year without an election at the head of a scandal-plagued coalition following the collapse of a two-year-old, reformist government led by Mahathir Mohamad, a political heavyweight in his nineties.

But his government faced turmoil from day one — his majority in parliament was in doubt, its legitimacy was constantly questioned, and he faced a constant challenge from opposition chief Anwar Ibrahim.

Criticism over virus response

The demise of his government extends a period of political drama for the multi-ethnic nation of 32 million. After independence from Britain in 1957, Malaysia was ruled for over six decades by a coalition dominated by the country's ethnic Malay Muslim majority. But corruption scandals, unpopular race-based policies and increasingly authoritarian rule prompted weary voters to boot the coalition and its leader Najib out of power at 2018 polls.

The victory of Mahathir's opposition alliance fuelled hopes for a new era, but it collapsed amid bitter infighting. As well as questions over its legitimacy, Muhyiddin's government faced mounting criticism over its failure to keep the virus under control — officials have now reported over 1.1 million cases and 12,000 deaths.

In January, he persuaded the king to declare Malaysia's first nationwide state of emergency for over half a century, ostensibly to fight the pandemic. But parliament was also suspended for months, leading to criticism that Muhyiddin was using the crisis to avoid a no-confidence vote. Muhyiddin's position finally became untenable after a group of once allied MPs withdrew support, depriving him of a parliamentary majority turned against him.



KUALA LUMPUR: A man watches a television on display at a shopping mall store as Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announces his resignation as he addresses the nation during a live telecast in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP

He made his last bid to stay in power on Friday, appealing to opposition MPs to back him in a no-confidence vote — but his offer was rejected.

There are a number of possibilities for the next government — the remnants of Muhyiddin's gov-

ernment could try to form a coalition, while the opposition will also take a run at power — but it is wide open. "His replacement is anybody's guess," said Oh Ei Sun, an analyst at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. — AFP



YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia: This picture taken yesterday shows Mount Merapi, Indonesia's most active volcano, spewing ash and lava from its peak. — AFP

Indonesia volcano erupts, blankets villages in ash

MAGELANG, CENTRAL JAVA: Indonesia's most active volcano Mount Merapi erupted yesterday, belching a cloud of ash into the air as red lava flowed

down its crater. The early morning explosions spewed clouds as far as 3.5 kilometres (2 miles) from the rumbling volcano, blanketing local communities in grey ash.

There were no evacuation orders or reports of casualties. Merapi, close to Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta on Java island, has been particularly active in recent months and authorities raised its danger level late last year.

Residents were told to avoid the area within a five-kilometre radius of the rumbling volcano, Indonesia's geological agency said. "Residents should avoid volcanic ash and they've been warned about potential lava

flows in the area surrounding Merapi," it added.

Mount Merapi's last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of around 280,000 residents from surrounding areas. That was its most powerful eruption since 1930, when around 1,300 people were killed, while another explosion in 1994 took about 60 lives.

The Southeast Asian archipelago nation has nearly 130 active volcanoes. Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide. — AFP

New Orleans hopes health-pass rule doesn't stop partying

NEW ORLEANS: As the COVID-19 Delta variant tightens its grip on the United States, that grip is nowhere tighter than in the southern state of Louisiana, where the sky-high rate of infections is the worst in the country. With hospitals hammered and healthcare workers struggling amid a furious virus surge that has brought the state's daily average of infections to 126 per 100,000 inhabitants, historic New Orleans has opted for decisive action: Today it will follow New York and San Francisco in requiring what amounts to a "health pass" for entry to an array of venues.

"We're here today because we really have no choice," said Mayor LaToya Cantrell. "The situation is dire and we are simply out of time." People will now be required to present either proof of vaccination or a negative virus test to be admitted to bars, restaurants, sporting arenas and fitness centers—and even to attend major outdoor events including NFL football games at the city's Superdome.

This aggressive approach has polarized residents of the state's biggest city. Some put aside their doubts and resigned themselves to heading to a vaccination site for their first dose. But others, either defiant or oblivious, shrugged off the new rule and, as night fell, converged on the busy streets of the French Quarter, the night-life epicenter in this city of 400,000.

'Pushed over the edge'

At a vaccination site set up in a parking lot in the Tremé neighborhood—an area devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 — the authorities were also offering virus testing. But in a reflection of the broader divide across Louisiana—where cases have exploded as vaccinations have lagged—dozens of cars were lined up for testing, while three National Guardsmen manning a vaccination tent had little to do.

Despite a stepped-up pace of immunizations since mid-July, only 37.9 percent of the state's population is



NEW ORLEANS: People gather in the French Quarter on August 15, 2021 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Beginning yesterday, people will be required to have proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test to enter restaurants, bars, stadiums and certain other indoor locations. — AFP

fully vaccinated, compared to the 51.1 percent rate nationwide. For Justin, who is 34, and his 26-year-old partner Jen, the health-pass requirement made a difference. The two Florida natives said they are "hooked" on sports and cannot imagine being barred from the events, or gyms.

"It definitely pushed me over the edge," said Justin, a software engineer. He said he and Jen, a makeup artist, had been waiting for the US Food and Drug Agency to give the vaccines final approval. "I'm a big-time gym guy," he added. "So that's my main motivator, honestly."

People getting their inoculations cited a variety of reasons. Jenny, an immigrant who speaks little English, said she was getting the jab to keep her job in a restaurant that is requiring all workers to be vaccinated. Richard was lined up for a virus test, but said he planned to return in a few days for a vaccination. His reason: to protect his son.

'We still got to live'

This is not the first time COVID-19 has brought Louisiana to its knees. The first wave, already serious, grew far worse after last year's Mardi Gras celebration, the climax of New Orleans' festive winter season that

UK gun applicants to face social media checks after killing

LONDON: Britain's interior ministry yesterday asked police to review the social media accounts of people applying for gun licences and revisit existing permits, after the country's worst mass shooting since 2010.

On Thursday Jake Davison, 22, shot and killed five people — including his mother and a three-year-old girl — in Plymouth in southwest England before taking his own life. His social media accounts revealed misogynistic views and an interest in right-wing politics, guns and violent video games.

But the local police restored Davison's gun licence and his weapon in July months after they had been removed following an assault allegation — a decision now being scrutinised by the police watchdog. The UK government is planning to publish guidance on firearms licensing applications that will affect all 43 police forces in England and Wales.

"Incidents such as Thursday's horrific events in Plymouth are thankfully rare, but their impact is profound," an interior ministry source said. "Today, as a matter of urgency, we are asking the police to review their practices and whether any existing licences need to be looked at again."

"This will help reassure people that all necessary checks have been made to keep them safe."

Britain has low gun crime rates and strict controls on the ownership of firearms, with most police unarmed. Only four percent of homicides were caused by shooting in England and Wales in the year to March 2020, according to the latest government figures. Licences are granted for sporting rifles and shotguns only after stringent background checks, including character references and mental health assessments.—AFP

Russia sentences Navalny spokeswoman for virus breaches

MOSCOW: A Russian court yesterday sentenced the spokeswoman for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to 18 months of restricted movement for breaching coronavirus regulations. Kira Yarmysh is among several opposition figures accused of calling for unsanctioned protests in January after Navalny was arrested on his return to Russia from Germany, where he was recovering from a poisoning attack.

She has been under house arrest since February. "Kira has been sentenced to 1.5 years of restricted movement," said a message on her Twitter account, which is currently being run by her allies. Under the terms of her sentence, Yarmysh—a well-known figure in opposition circles who has been Navalny's spokeswoman since 2014 — will be banned from mass events and leaving Moscow without permission from authorities. Moscow's Preobrazhensky district court told TASS state news agency.

Kremlin critics say authorities have piled pressure on the opposition ahead of a parliamentary vote in September, with Navalny proposing a strategy to vote out candidates from the ruling United Russia party.

In June, Russia labelled Navalny's key organisations as extremist and barred his allies from running in the polls. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic, is currently serving two and a half years in jail on old fraud charges.

Last week Russian investigators charged Navalny, 45, with a new crime that could keep him behind bars for another three years. Criminal cases have also been launched against Navalny's key aides Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov for raising funds for an "extremist" organisation, charges that carry a maximum penalty of eight years. Volkov and Zhdanov, and several other Navalny allies have fled Russia under pressure from authorities. Earlier this month, Navalny aide Lyubov Sobol was sentenced to a year and half of restricted movement on the same charges as Yarmysh. Navalny's brother Oleg was handed a one-year suspended sentence in the same case. — AFP

TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2021

Business

US opens probe into Tesla Autopilot after 11 crashes

Electric automaker warns it requires ‘active driver supervision’ behind the wheel

NEW YORK: US safety officials opened a preliminary investigation into Tesla’s Autopilot after identifying 11 crashes involving the driver assistance system, officials said yesterday.

The incidents dating back to 2018 included one fatal crash and seven that resulted in injuries, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Tesla founder Elon Musk has defended the Autopilot system and the electric automaker warns that it requires “active driver supervision” behind the wheel, but critics, including in Congress, say the system can be easily fooled and have called for NHTSA to take action.

Testers with the magazine Consumer Reports demonstrated in a video that Autopilot could be fooled into driving with nobody

behind the wheel, an exercise also shown in widely-seen videos on Tik-Tok and other social media platforms. “A preliminary evaluation starts the agency’s fact-finding mission and allows additional information and data to be collected,” a NHTSA spokesperson said.

In April, Democratic Senators Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Ed Markey of Massachusetts urged NHTSA to probe a fatal crash in Texas involving a Tesla after law enforcement said there was no driver behind the wheel. The senators said Tesla has been criticized for “misrepresenting” it systems and “giving drivers a false sense of security,” according to an April 22 letter.

Tesla has said it does not believe the April crash involved Autopilot, and the incident was

not included in NHTSA’s list of 11 crashes. Those incidents involved cases “in which various Tesla models crashed where first responders were active, including some that crashed directly into the vehicles of first responders,” the spokesperson said. “NHTSA reminds the public that no commercially available motor vehicles today are capable of driving themselves,” the spokesperson said.

“Certain advanced driving assistance features can promote safety by helping drivers avoid crashes and mitigate the severity of crashes that occur, but as with all technologies and equipment on motor vehicles, drivers must use them correctly and responsibly.” Tesla shares fell 3.4 percent to \$693 in early trading. —AFP



MONTCLAIR, US: In this file photo a man charges his Tesla vehicle in his backyard in Montclair, New Jersey. US safety officials opened a preliminary investigation into Tesla's Autopilot after identifying 11 crashes involving the driver assistance system, officials said yesterday. —AFP

Nigerian president signs long-delayed oil bill into law

ABUJA: Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday signed a long-awaited oil and gas bill into law as Africa’s largest crude producer aims to attract more foreign investment to its ailing petroleum industry.

The country’s House of Representatives and Senate passed the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) in early July, nearly two decades after it was first introduced in parliament. Buhari, who recently returned to Nigeria after a medical check in London, “assented to the bill Monday,” the presidency said in a statement.

It added that “the ceremonial part of the new legislation will be done on Wednesday” after the president leaves self-isolation, in line with COVID protocols following an overseas trip. Nigeria, an OPEC member, has lured only a small fraction of global petroleum investments, long troubled by cor-

ruption, inefficiency, high production costs and security concerns.

The new law is expected to provide a clearer framework and simplify taxes and royalties for energy companies. Nigeria currently produces around 1.9 million barrels of oil per day (bpd). Income from energy sales accounts for almost all foreign exchange earnings and about half of government revenue, although the sector badly needs investment.

The government is worried about the pressure of time, as the world’s interest in oil and financing fossil fuel projects diminishes due to climate change. Under the new legislation, the state-owned Nigeria National Petroleum Commission (NNPC) will be overhauled to better separate commercial and regulatory roles.

The PIB also seeks to also address demands from local communities after years of underdevelopment and environmental damage in Nigeria’s oil-producing states. Companies will be required to invest three percent of their operating expenses into local projects — a lower figure than the five and 10 percent some representatives had asked for. Some community leaders said they were at last compensated for the oil resources in their regions while others said it fell short of expectations. —AFP

Japan economy rebounds despite virus surge

TOKYO: Japan’s economy grew slightly in the second quarter, recovering from a slowdown at the start of the year despite continuing virus surges and restrictions, data showed yesterday. The world’s third-largest economy contracted at the beginning of the year as a new wave of infections forced the government to impose virus restrictions that slowed consumption. But despite continued virus worries and restrictions that have lasted most of this year, Japan’s economy grew a better-than-expected 0.3 percent in the three months to June, data from the cabinet office showed.

That slightly exceeded the expectations of economists surveyed by Bloomberg, who had forecast just 0.1 percent quarter-on-quarter growth. The data released by the cabinet office also showed a slight upwards revision for the first quarter, when the economy shrank 0.9

percent, compared with a previous estimate of 1.0. Japan has seen a smaller virus outbreak than many developed economies, with 15,400 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. But for much of this year Tokyo and several other regions have been under virus states of emergency, limiting alcohol sales and restaurant and bar opening hours. Experts have warned the measures are losing their effectiveness, with signs the rules are being increasingly flouted. Stefan Angrick, a senior economist at Moody’s Analytics covering Japan, said consumption proved surprisingly resilient despite the restrictions. “The Japanese economy eked out some moderate growth in the second quarter of the year, avoiding a technical recession thanks to a combination of stronger consumption and business investment,” he said in a note.

“Despite the improvement, we expect growth to remain under pressure in the third quarter as spending and production continue to struggle amidst disruptions from the pandemic.” Japan is also playing catch-up with its vaccine program, which began much later and more slowly than those in many other developed economies. The roll-out has now picked up speed and around a third of Japanese are now fully vaccinated but infections are at record levels, with nationwide daily cases topping 20,000 in recent days. —AFP

Toyota Corolla achieves global sales milestone of 50m vehicles

Iconic model is recognized as the best-selling car of all time and continues to bring peace of mind and the joy of motoring to drivers around the world



Toyota Corolla generations



1970 Corolla, second generation

KUWAIT: Further strengthening the 55-year legacy of its best-selling vehicle, Toyota has announced that the iconic Corolla model has surpassed sales of 50 million units worldwide. The incredible milestone underlines the enduring appeal of the much-loved model, which is globally renowned for providing low operating costs and reliable, trouble-free motoring stemming from quality engineering, together with outstanding comfort levels.

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: “We are proud to have achieved this fantastic milestone, which demonstrates the huge impact the Corolla has had on people’s lives around the world. Being the world’s best-selling car speaks volumes about the satisfaction and loyalty our customers have towards the Corolla and the Toyota brand. The Corolla’s legendary reputation for quality and reliability, combined with its exceptional comfort and efficiency, has led to cumulative sales of more than 50 million units. I would like to thank all of our past, present, and future customers for placing

their trust in us and taking the Toyota Corolla to their hearts, which provides further inspiration on our journey to make ‘ever-better’ cars.”

Since its launch in 1966, the Corolla series has continued to evolve in line with the needs of the times and remains a highly popular choice among drivers. New advanced features and functions have been introduced to suit the expectations of customers, all while inheriting the original model’s core DNA reliability and usability from the very first generation.

Exemplifying Toyota’s continuous commitment to providing environmentally-friendly vehicles is the addition of a hybrid electric (HEV) model, which combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and two electric motors. The class-leading model offers the lowest fuel consumption value in its category at 27.6km/L, enabling customers to contribute to a greener future while enjoying the increased driving satisfaction provided by its advanced technologies. The HEV model offers exceptional cabin quietness and smooth acceleration, especially when accelerating from a stand-still.



Business

China's retail sales, industrial output falter as virus rebounds

COVID-19 drags on demand while recent floods disrupt businesses



NINGBO, China: Employees working at a construction site in Ningbo, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

BEIJING: Growth in China's retail sales and industrial production slowed in July, official data showed yesterday, with a rebound of COVID-19 dragging on demand while recent floods disrupted businesses. The world's second-largest economy staged a rapid recovery from last year's coronavirus outbreak, beating back the virus with mass testing and strict lockdowns.

But a flare-up across the country due to the Delta variant has threatened the good news on growth with renewed localized lockdowns and extensive travel restrictions. Retail sales rose 8.5 percent on-year in July, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Monday, below a Bloomberg consensus forecast of analysts.

This figure was also below 12.1 percent growth in June, likely reflecting the virus resurgence in dozens of places last month, according to analysts. "The spread of domestic outbreaks and natural disasters have affected the economy of some regions, and economic recovery remains unstable and uneven," NBS spokesman Fu Linghui told a press briefing yesterday.

But he added that "the national economy continues to stabilize and recover" overall. Industrial production rose 6.4 percent in July, easing as well from the month prior, the NBS said.

China's urban unemployment rate, meanwhile, ticked up to 5.1 percent. Iris Pang, ING's chief economist for Greater China, told AFP industrial output was weak "because of the semiconductor chip shortage that has affected production". A shortage of chips has been sending shock waves through the global economy, squeezing supplies of everything from cars to headphones.

Capital Economics' chief Asia economist Mark Williams added in a recent note that a "broad-based slowdown" seen in July was likely caused by disruptions in the final week of the month, due to COVID-19 and the aftermath of flooding in central China. "There were also reports of production lines being halted as workers were unable to travel to factories," he said. — AFP

CBK announces winners of Al-Najma account campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer campaign on Sunday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Abdulaziz Ashkanani.

The results of the draws were as follows:

1. Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Mahrous Sadat Ramadan El-Raey
2. Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Ibtisam Hamza Najem Mohsin

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan for a period of up to five years and up to KD 25,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 1 percent from their transferred debt.

The Bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 200, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

The bank informed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time

Thailand downgrades outlook as COVID hampers recovery

BANGKOK: Thailand downgraded its economic growth forecast for 2021 yesterday as it battles its worst COVID-19 wave, which has brought record numbers of new infections and deaths. The kingdom last year suffered its worst full-year performance since the Asian financial crisis of 1997 with a 6.1 percent economic contraction.

The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) had initially given a cool forecast for recovery during the first quarter, estimating growth of 1.5 to 2.5 percent for 2021. But yesterday, NESDC secretary general Danucha Pichayanan announced it had to revise that figure down to between 0.7 and 1.2 percent.

"This crisis caused by the pandemic is unlike the financial crises of 1997 and 2009 — our estimation is based on domestic causes," he said during a press conference. He added that the new forecast was dependent on the hope that the pandemic's curve will flatten after the third quarter, enabling a relaxation of

restrictions by October.

"But if the pandemic continues and relaxation cannot start in the fourth quarter... the growth could be lower than 0.7 percent," Danucha said. Thailand's GDP for the second quarter was up 7.5 percent on the same period last year, the first sign of recovery since the pandemic.

The growth was most visible in agricultural, industrial and exports sectors, while tourism — once Thailand's cash cow — remained sluggish. The king-

dom has gradually re-opened borders to vaccinated travellers via a quarantine-free program in ultra-popular beach island Phuket — drawing more than 34,700 tourists to its sun-soaked shores since the so-called "sandbox" launched on July 1.

But COVID-19 cases there have started to climb. Restrictions were enacted last month on Phuket's businesses — shuttering pubs, boxing studios and karaoke lounges — while domestic travellers have been barred from entering the island.



PHUKET: International travelers wait for COVID-19 swab tests as part of the 'Phuket Sandbox' quarantine-free tourism scheme for vaccinated visitors to the Thai resort destination, at Phuket International Airport in Phuket. — AFP



Mohammed Al Marzouq (left) and Rashed Al-Manee



(From left) Martin Belgraver, Mohammed Al Marzouq, Rashed Al-Manee and Fahad Al Salem

Aquafina, Gatorade join hands with Rafa Nadal Academy

The United Beverage Company - the official distributor of PepsiCo products in Kuwait - is proud to announce the partnership between Aquafina, Gatorade, and The Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex in Kuwait. As the first academy of its kind in the Middle East (the only other branch being located in Majorca, Spain), The Rafa Nadal Academy aims to advance tennis — and hence sports - in Kuwait and equip the present and upcoming generations of Kuwaiti athletes who will raise the Kuwaiti flag. Thus, the partnership between The United Beverage Company and The Rafa Nadal Academy, both sharing similar values and vision in promoting sports and hydration, promises to be a positive, significant collaboration that contributes to sports and the youth, and illustrates our commitment to the progress of sports in Kuwait, and the future generation.

Aquafina, Kuwait's market leader in the bottled water industry encourages players and fans of all ages to drink more water and to stay hydrated throughout their day. On average, a tennis player should consume at least six liters of water daily. One of Aquafina's main pillars is to promote healthy lifestyles by staying active and hydrated. More than a water supplier, Aquafina has a purposeful presence in the society.

In addition, Gatorade, the world's number one sports drink (and which has been around for half a century), has changed sport culture and the way hydration is treated. During sports and exercise, the human body loses electrolytes, not just water, and Gatorade is essential in replenishing those electrolytes lost through sweat, thus making it an essential drink for athletes.

Mr. Rashed Al-Manee, Deputy CEO of The United Beverage Co. commented that in addition to the high quality of our products and the strong market share position, we



Mohammed Al Marzouq (left) and Rashed Al-Manee

do work with a purpose. Through few green initiatives, The United Beverage Co. managed to reduce its waste to landfills. One of our initiatives is reducing our footprint in the environment by reducing the weight of our bottles (on average) while maintaining the quality of our primary packaging. Another green initiative is saving the trees by stopping the usage of wooden pallets and producing plastic pallets from 100% recycled plastic collected from the local community.

During the ceremony, the General Manager of Tam-

deen Sports, Mr. Mohammed Mustafa Al Marzouq said: "We are delighted and proud to sign a premium partnership with Aquafina and Gatorade and to be sharing this journey together in creating an impact for the future generation in Kuwait".

Additionally, Mr. Fahad Al Salem, Unibev's Sales & Marketing Director, remarked "It's about promoting the quality of hydration and not only focusing on rate and frequency. Revealing products benefits and value is what educates consumers and deliver on brand promises. As athletes' knowledge evolves, we'll be right there to quench their needs. So it's a matter of how we move as fast as athletes are or even faster, and pave the way for the drinking water and sports drinks industry."

Al Marzouq further explained: "The Academy's vision is to lead the way for tennis in the Middle East, and develop a unique, high-end sports facility with the highest level of service and care. Our greatest asset in achieving this is our partners, and we are thrilled that Aquafina and Gatorade leadership is playing an important role in helping us become the leading tennis Academy in the Middle East and redefine sport, fitness, health, and leisure across the region".

The Deputy CEO of The United Beverage Co., Mr. Rashed Al-Manee, added that the company's mission is to promote healthy and active lifestyles - and in keeping with the company's values and vision for a competitive, leading-edge service and product - this partnership makes for a unique, symbiotic, and strategic one, built on the strong foundation between The United Beverage Company and Tamdeen Group. Mr. Al-Manee concluded with: "We are proud to be the strategic beverage partner for Tamdeen Group for the past 28 years and we look forward to supporting the next generations and growing the sports community in Kuwait".

Business

Agility reports KD 38.6 million net profit for second quarter of 2021

We've been able to respond to pandemic challenges: Sultan

KUWAIT: Agility, a leader in supply chain services, innovation and investment, yesterday reported second quarter 2021 earnings of 18.32 fils per share on net profit of KD 38.6 million, an increase of 503.7 percent over the same period in 2020. EBIT increased 202.6 percent to KD 29.6 million, and revenue grew 26.6 percent to KD 112.2 million.

For the first six months of 2021, earnings were 24.33 fils per share on net profit of KD 51.2 million, an increase of 215.9 percent over the same period in 2020. EBIT increased 39.6 percent to KD 40.1 million, and revenue grew 13 percent to KD 220.2 million.

All of Agility's largest businesses reported Q2 growth and profitability levels that were at or above pre-pandemic levels in 2019. "We're proud of how we've been able to respond and recover from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Tarek Sultan, Agility Vice Chairman and CEO.

Agility is working to finalize the sale of its Global Integrated Logistics (GIL) business to DSV Panalpina A/S (DSV), in exchange for 19.3 million shares in DSV. Sultan said: "We see this transaction as a catalyst for Agility's future growth. Agility will continue to grow its high-value business in emerging markets, and continue to invest in companies and technologies reshaping global supply chains."

Reporting

For the second quarter, Agility is reporting GIL's results on a limited basis. Reporting will be done as per IFRS 5, covering non-current assets held for sale and discontinued operations. On the balance sheet this quarter, GIL is reported as single line items as Assets and Liabilities Held for Sale. On Agility's

Profit and Loss (P&L) statement, GIL is reported as Income from Discontinued Operations.

Once the transaction has been completed, Agility's investment in DSV will be reported as per IFRS 9 as a "financial asset at fair value."

Agility Global Integrated Logistics

As noted above, GIL results in Q2 appear as one line item and are not consolidated with figures from other Agility businesses, as per IFRS 5, covering non-current assets held for sale and discontinued operations. GIL continues to witness favorable market conditions in freight forwarding and growth in contract logistics, which drove a revenue increase of 33 percent. Higher volumes, yield improvements, combined with ongoing cost control practices, led to exceptional year-over-year improvement in GIL profitability for the quarter.

Agility's infrastructure companies

Agility's Infrastructure group of companies remains the main contributor to Agility's profitability and has historically generated around 80 percent of Agility's EBIT. Each entity within this group is pursuing its own growth strategy. Entities that have been impacted by COVID-19 are recovering, and all are continuing to execute their growth plans. Infrastructure entities have seen solid performance over the years. Agility will continue to explore growth opportunities for these businesses moving forward.

Agility Logistics Park (ALP) revenue increased 5 percent in the second quarter. Demand for warehousing space is still growing in regions where ALP has a presence, especially in the Middle East. ALP strategy is to increase its land bank

top five tools used by adversaries that IT administrators and security professionals use in their everyday tasks. The report also revealed that 37 attack groups used more than 400 different tools between them. The median attacker dwell time before detection was 11 days, providing attackers with up to 264 hours for malicious activity, from lateral movement, reconnaissance, credential dumping, data exfiltration, and more. Early detection and response through automation can help minimize these statistics and improve security against attackers who are constantly looking for new ways to gain entry and a foothold.

"First-generation SOAR solutions have moved our industry forward in significant ways, but we're now witnessing an evolution where more and more businesses are becoming software companies, and our security solutions need to evolve in parallel. As we've seen in recent supply-chain incidents, attackers are increasingly targeting software development pipelines, and defenders need the ability to shift further left of attackers. The industry needs SOAR to mature into more capable and generalizable DevSecOps solutions, and Sophos' acquisition of Refractor will help us lead the way," said Joe Levy, chief technology officer, Sophos. "With Refractor, Sophos will fast track the integration of such advanced SOAR capabilities into our Adaptive Cybersecurity Ecosystem, the basis for our XDR product and MTR service. We will provide a full spectrum of automated playbooks for our customers and partners, from drag-and-drop to fully programmable, along with broad integrations with third-party solutions through our technology alliances program to work with today's diverse IT environments."

Sophos will continue to develop and offer Refractor's platform to their existing and growing base of partners and organizations that want to build customized IT and security automations for themselves and for their customers. Refractor's Community Edition will continue to be available as well.

"We created the Refractor platform so that every organization can deliver effective DevSecOps through holistic security-first automation. Our platform was purpose-built to be versatile, interoperable and easy to use. Cybersecurity teams can now collaborate with DevOps to easily build complicated IT automation and security integrations through DevSecOps pipelines," said Michael Fraser, CEO and co-founder, Refractor. "Our mission is to enable DevSecOps to become the modern approach to automation, where cybersecurity use cases like SOAR, XDR, compliance, cloud security, and Identity and Access Management (IAM) become building blocks for DevSecOps solutions. We are already seeing success in providing organizations our emerging technology, including the Center for Internet Security and the US Air Force. We are proud of what we accomplished at Refractor, and excited for the next part of our journey with Sophos to help create a more secure world through DevSecOps."

Refractor's entire team of developers and engineers have joined Sophos. In addition to the continued offering of the Refractor platform, Sophos plans to begin offering SOAR options by early 2022.

Financial Results At A Glance

	Q2 2021 (Million KD)	Q2 2020 (Million KD)	Variance (%)	6 months 2021 (Million KD)	6 months 2020 (Million KD)	Variance (%)
Revenue	112.2	88.6	26.6%	220.2	194.9	13.0%
Net Revenue	60.3	48.4	24.6%	120.0	110.9	8.2%
EBIT	29.6	9.8	202.6%	40.1	28.7	39.6%
Net Profit	38.6	6.4	503.7%	51.2	16.2	215.9%
EPS (fils)	18.32	3.04	502.6%	24.33	7.70	216.0%

in the countries where it operates and to provide high quality warehousing space to its customers. Tristar, a fully integrated liquid logistics company, posted a 12.5 percent increase in revenue growth for Q2. This performance reflects improving market conditions and Tristar's resilient and diversified business model. Tristar has a strong pipeline of growth opportunities across its business segments and is expected to deliver attractive returns. The company's blue-chip clients have been key enablers of its success.

National Aviation Services (NAS) revenue reported 131.9 percent growth in Q2. NAS's performance represents a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels of 2019. NAS's rebound is attributed to three factors. First, there has been an increase in flights in all of the countries served by the company, particularly Kuwait, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda and Iraq. The increase in flights, coupled with significant cost reduction, has enabled NAS to improve margins. Second, NAS began new operations that have been profitable, particularly in Baghdad and Democratic Republic of Congo. Finally, the company's investments in technology and digital

health have paid off, contributing significantly to revenue in Kuwait and Baghdad.

United Projects for Aviation Services Company (UPAC) saw a 238.3 percent increase in revenue for Q2 compared with the same period in 2020. UPAC's Q2 2020 revenue was impacted by the three-month rental waiver for its airport mall tenants in response to the COVID lockdown in Kuwait.

Revenue is still affected by ongoing travel restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic. UPAC continues to take various measures to reduce the negative impact on its business. With a vaccination program fully underway in Kuwait, UPAC operations are showing signs of gradual recovery. The company anticipates an air traffic pick up by Q3 2021.

Construction of Abu Dhabi's Reem Mall, being developed by UPAC, is more than 90 percent complete. Positioned on Reem Island, the mall will be an attractive destination with 2 million square feet of retail, leisure, dining, and entertainment choices. It will feature the region's first fully integrated omni-channel retail ecosystem with fully enabled digital, e-commerce and logistics capabilities. It

will also be home to the world's largest snow play park, Snow Abu Dhabi.

At Global Clearance House System (GCS), Agility's customs modernization company, Q2 revenue increased 48.1 percent. The growth was driven by increased trade volumes and initiatives implemented by the company to spur its growth. GCS is looking into new customs modernization opportunities inside and outside of Kuwait as ways of diversifying its income.

Recap of Agility Q2 2021 financial performance

- Agility's net profit increased 503.7 percent to KD 38.6 million. EPS was 18.32 fils vs. 3.04 fils a year earlier.
- Agility's EBIT increased 202.6 percent to KD 29.6 million.
- Agility's revenue increased 26.6 percent, to KD 112.2 million and Net Revenue increased by 24.6 percent.
- Agility enjoys a healthy balance sheet with KD 2.4 billion in assets. Net debt for continued operations stood at KD 300 million as of June 30, 2021. Reported operating cash flow was KD 88.8 million for the second quarter of 2021.

Closing

Sultan said: "After the deal with DSV closes, a new chapter of Agility's story will be begin. We will continue to grow our existing businesses, which have proved to be solid and stable performers over the years, and we will invest in companies, technologies, and digital initiatives that are reshaping our industry. We are proud of the fact that we have increased shareholder value by more than 5 times over the last decade, and we remain committed to growing shareholder value in years to come."

Sophos acquires Refractor to optimize MTR and XDR

DUBAI: Sophos, a global leader in next-generation cybersecurity, yesterday announced that it has acquired Refractor, which develops and markets a versatile DevSecOps automation platform that bridges the gap between DevOps and cybersecurity. Based in Bellevue, Washington, Refractor launched in 2017 and is privately held.



Joe Levy

As DevOps and security teams continue to adopt "IT-as-a-Code" approaches to managing their environments, Refractor's ability to automate any of these processes enables teams to scale. For example, with Refractor's platform, DevOps teams can augment existing continuous integration, continuous delivery and continuous deployment (CI/CD) workflows, and cybersecurity teams can leverage the platform's visual drag and drop builder. Refractor has leading customers in both the private and government/public sectors, including the Center for Internet Security and the US Air Force's Platform One.

Sophos is optimizing Refractor's DevSecOps automation platform to add Security Orchestration Automation and Response (SOAR) capabilities to its Managed Threat Response (MTR) and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) solutions. The SOAR capabilities will also help automate Sophos' Adaptive Cybersecurity Ecosystem, which underpins all of Sophos' product solutions, services, threat intelligence, and data lake.

According to Gartner, "the security technology market, in general, is in a state of overload, with pressure on budgets, staff shortages and too many point solutions. Customers often cite problems with an overload of events or alerts, complexity and duplication of tools. As a general practice, automation promises to solve many of these problems and, in cybersecurity, SOAR is the primary vehicle for this functionality." Gartner further notes that "proposed use cases for SOAR include everything from the automation of rote SOC tasks to the streamlining of niche and complex workflows. With appropriate preparation, the commitment of the right skills and resources, and careful use-case-centric planning, SOAR can deliver on the promises of reduced event overload, increased detection accuracy, team scalability, and reduced time to detection and overall better security operations."

Sophos' Active Adversary Playbook 2021 has identified clear correlations among the

NBK Money Markets report

Taper talks in US continue amid rising inflation

KUWAIT: The month of July saw the rapid pace of US consumer price increases steady at a 13 year high, with month on month gains slightly moderating. The Bureau of Labor Statistics released its consumer price index (CPI) on Wednesday showing that the figure rose 5.4 percent in July from the year before. While surpassing the 5.3 percent increase expected by economists, the reading remained in line with the 5.4 percent increase reported in June, which was the largest surge since 2008. On month on month basis, the readings showed prices rose 0.5 percent, compared to the 0.9 percent gain clocked in June.

With the volatile items such as food and energy removed from the equation, the readings showed price pressures easing a little. The core CPI rose 4.3 percent in July relative to the year before, just shy of the 4.5 percent increase in June.

The data showed that inflationary pressures have broadened beyond the sectors most affected by the economic reopening, like air fares and travel related expenses, raising concerns that inflation will be more than a transitory phenomenon. Looking at the components of the figure, prices for used cars and trucks, which have increased 41.7 percent on year on year basis, rose a modest 0.2 percent in July, a sharp deceleration from the 10.5 percent and 7.3 percent increases recorded in the two preceding months. Airfares were 0.1 percent lower month on month, after having shot 19 percent higher year on year. The rise in hotel expenses also receded slightly, with costs up 6.8 percent year on year, following an increase of 7.9 percent in the previous period.

A worrying trend right now seems to be the rising house costs, which climbed further last month. Rent prices ticked up 0.3 percent month on month in July, building on similar gains in the previous two months, and bringing the year on year increase to 2.4 percent.

Personal services costs such as price of haircuts rose 1.2 percent month and month in July, driving the year on year increase to 3.1 percent, dining out costs increased 0.8 percent month on month and 4.6 percent year on year. Such price increases are usually a sign of higher wages being passed on to consumers. Whether the recent increase in consumer prices will now turn into more persistent inflation is now a point of debate. The Fed has previously taken the view that rising costs will subside over time as pandemic related shortages ease, but Fed chair Jerome Powell has recently acknowledged that inflation risks were tilted "to the upside" in the near term.

We are now seeing an increased number of US central bankers beginning to make the case that the Fed should soon consider scaling back its unprecedented monetary policy stimulus of \$120bn monthly asset purchase program.

The Fed has said it will maintain that

pace until it sees "substantial further progress" on its goals of 2 percent inflation on average and maximum employment. Raphael Bostic, president of the Atlanta Fed and a voter in the FOMC said this week that the Fed had achieved the first of these goals, his view is supported by Tom Barkin of the Richmond Fed, Boston's Eric Rosengren and James Bullard of St Louis, among others.

Mary Daly, president of the San Francisco Fed, and one of the more dovish Fed members, who has been advocating a patient approach to withdrawing support, said that the Fed could start "dialing back" its pandemic levels of monetary support by the end of the year given the strengths of the economic rebound. In an interview on Wednesday Daly said "Talking about potentially tapering those later this year or early next year is where I'm at."

Following the CPI report, the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note eased 0.02 percentage points to 1.33 percent. Two-year Treasuries fell by a larger magnitude, with yields down about 0.02 percentage points to 0.22 percent. The readings also saw the US dollar dropping with the index showing the greenback 0.72 percent down to close the week at 92.518.

Bipartisan support

In an uncommonly bipartisan vote, the US Senate voted 69 to 30 to approve the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill presented by President Joe Biden's administration. The bill is designed to invest \$1 trillion in roads, bridges, public transport and improved internet access across the next five years. As the vote concluded, Democrats turned their focus to a more partisan endeavor, a \$3.5 trillion social policy budget which addresses climate change, health, and education among others. The budget will create tax increases and is expected to be widely opposed by Republicans.

Improved jobs figures

Data Released on Thursday showed Initial jobless claims in the US came in at 375,000 last week, down from 387,000 a week earlier and matching economists' estimates, this was the third week in a row that new applications had fallen. Meanwhile, the number of people already collecting state jobless benefits slid by 114,000 to a seasonally adjusted 2.87 million. These so-called continuing claims are now at a pandemic low. The readings show that the delta strain of the coronavirus doesn't appear to have thrown the rapid recovery in the US economy off its rails.

The reading for the producer price index was release on the same day where it showed the pace of wholesale inflation over the past 12 months moved up to 7.8 percent from 7.3 percent. That's the highest level since the index was reconfigured in 2010 and likely one of the highest readings since the early 1980s. Around 75 percent of the

increase in wholesale inflation during July was in services, a volatile category that can swing sharply from month to month.

A growing economy

The UK saw its economy surging forward in the second quarter of the year, with GDP growing 4.8 percent as consumers eagerly spent money following the easing of coronavirus restrictions and the progress of the country's vaccination program. The rate came in line with market expectations, but a bit lower than the Bank of England's forecast of a 5 percent expansion.

The fast quarter on quarter growth rate allowed the UK economy to recover much of the ground it lost over the past years, yet it still produced 4.4 percent fewer goods and services compared to the final quarter of 2019. Comparatively, the US has recovered all of its lost ground in the second quarter and the Eurozone output 3 percent below its pre pandemic peak during the same period. The figures are showing the UK's economic performance was still lagging behind other advanced economies.

Economists expect that the pace of recovery to have slowed down over the summer as the delta variant spread across the UK and Europe, forcing an average of 1m people a week to self-isolate and bottlenecking the recovery in the travel sector.

UK's Treasury chancellor Rishi Sunak welcomed the strong second quarter recovery as evidence that Britain's economy was "bouncing back." He said in a statement "I know there are still challenges to overcome, but I feel confident in the strength of the UK economy and the resilience of the British people."

Commodities

In the commodities complex, crude prices have climbed at the start of the week but started to shed some of those gains on Thursday as investors wagered that the global demand recovery will remain intact, despite the latest wave of COVID-19, which has pushed governments to implement pandemic restrictions once again. President Joe Biden urged OPEC+ to boost crude supplies to make petrol more affordable for Americans. In the previous meeting, OPEC+ has agreed for a hike in production by 400,000 barrels a day each month from August, however, the rise of the delta variant has been clouding the crude outlook. The International Energy Agency is due to release its monthly report and that will shed light on the impact of the delta variant on the global demand for oil. Shifting to gold, the weaker dollar allowed shimmering metal to revive above the level of \$1,770 an ounce.

Kuwait

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USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30085

Lifestyle | Gossip



Margot Robbie is incredibly homesick

The 31-year-old actress - who divides her time between London and Los Angeles - has not been back to her native Australia in over two years due to filming commitments and the COVID-19 pandemic. She told *The New York Times Style Magazine*: "There was the pandemic and before that I was on a film or two. I miss

home so much." Australia's borders are currently closed and international travel from Australia remains strictly controlled to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Margot - who is known for her work in 'The Wolf of Wall Street', 'I Tonya' and 'The Suicide Squad' - believes her success is down to committing "120 per cent" to every project. She explained: "You

cannot half-a** anything. You have to commit 120 per cent - anything less than that ends up looking stupid." Meanwhile, Margot - who is married to British film producer Tom Ackerley - recently admitted she is worried that her career has already peaked. She said: "Honestly, this keeps me up at night, this very question. Maybe it's all downhill from here. Maybe I'm at

the top and it can't get any better. I hope that's not the case because I still feel like I have a lot to give and there's still a lot of directors I want to work with. And, you know, I'm just going to keep climbing as long as I can."

Cunningham victim of sexual assault in music industry

RuthAnne Cunningham was the victim of a sexual assault in the music industry in Los Angeles. The 36-year-old Grammy Award-winning songwriter has revealed that she suffered the shocking assault during her time in Los Angeles and immediately informed management about it. However, as the incident happened prior to the MeToo movement, RuthAnne doesn't feel it was adequately handled. She told *The Sunday Independent's Life magazine*: "The way the record label handled it at the time was very much in keeping with the times. If they handled it the way that they handled it with me now, the label would be finished." RuthAnne - who has written for Niall Horan, JoJo, John Legend and Britney Spears - also revealed that there



is "a lot of misogyny around women in music". She explained: "There's pressure sometimes like, 'You need to sleep with producers' or 'You need to have sex with that A&R'. I never did any of that. I saw a lot of women around me pressured to do that and it was never my thing. "Someone said to me, 'You need to act like you'll have sex with them so that they think you will - but you don't have to.' You know, using your sexuality to get further and I didn't. I'm just like, no I don't want to do that just to get a song. I'd rather the song be taken because it's a great song. So I'm

seeing that I sometimes hinder my career; and seeing other people advance because they would do that - that was difficult. "But then, ultimately I've had the success I wanted to have. So I feel like sticking to my guns - and sticking to my own morals in the way I was raised - was better."

Dynevov's girls' trip after Pete Davison split

Phoebie Dynevov is enjoying a girls' holiday after her split from Pete Davison. The 26-year-old 'Bridgerton' actress recently ended her five-month romance with 'Saturday Night Live' star Pete, 27, but she is putting it behind her with a fun-filled holiday to Istria, Croatia with friend and 'Bridgerton' co-star Sabrina Bartlett. Phoebe - who played Daphne Bridgerton - and Sabrina (Siena Rosso) have shared a number of pictures of themselves on their idyllic getaway, where they have been sailing, bike riding and enjoying plenty of tasty food and wine. Phoebe wrote: "Pasta, wine, Thank you @meneghetti_istria for putting up with two very giddy children! What a trip." Meanwhile, it was recently revealed that Phoebe and Pete's romance fizzled out after busy work schedules made it difficult for them to spend time together. An insider said: "Pete and Phoebe's romance was a real whirlwind and from the start they were both totally committed. But as time has passed, it's become increasingly obvious it is going to be difficult to make this work. "Phoebe has had back-to-back filming dates with 'Bridgerton' in the UK. Meanwhile, Pete has been back in the US filming 'Saturday Night Live'. Alongside that he has just started working on a new film, 'Meet Cute', with Kaley Cuoco." The couple last saw each other in July, and because of travel restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they've been unable to jet across the world to see each other. The source added: "Phoebe and Pete were last together in the UK in July but since he flew back to the States, he's not seen her. Obviously all the travel restrictions because of the pandemic have not helped. "People can't just jump on planes and jet around the world when they want to. It has made everything more difficult. It was pretty telling when Phoebe headed to Croatia with her mates this week rather than going to see Pete in America."



Pugh praises 'generous and welcoming' Ireland

Florence Pugh has praised Irish people as "generous and welcoming". The 25-year-old actress is currently filming 'The Wonder' in Ireland and has taken to her Instagram Stories to share her love for Ireland. She wrote: "I can't tell you how gorgeous everyone is, every single person I interact with is lovely and so helpful. "Everyone is so kind and ready to just have a good time with you. So, thank you Ireland for being so generous and welcoming." Florence also enjoyed a tasty pint of Guinness with her pals, actor Jack Reynor and his fiancée Madeline Mulqueen. She shared a picture of herself with a pint and wrote: "(DELICIOUS GUINNESS.. thank you both @madelinemulqueen and @jack_reynor) #ilooklikegollum (sic)." Florence is starring in 'The Wonder', Netflix's adaptation of the Emma Donoghue novel of the same name. The synopsis for the movie reads: "The Irish Midlands, 1862 - a young girl stops eating but remains miraculously alive and well. "English nurse Lib Wright (Florence Pugh) is brought to a tiny village to observe eleven-year-old Anna O'Donnell (Kila Lord Cassidy). Tourists and pilgrims mass to witness the girl, who is said to have survived without food for months. "Is [she] a saint 'surviving on manna from Heaven', or are there more ominous motives at work?" Florence shared a picture of herself in costume last week and wrote: "We've been traipsing around the Irish hills for the last week and it's truly been a magnificent start to a beautiful and exciting film. "What a story to get our teeth stuck into, what a crew to be working alongside and a fantastic director Sebastian Lelio to be leading us!" The film also stars Ciaran Hinds, Niamh Algar, Brian F O'Byrne, Elaine Cassidy and her daughter, Kila Lord Cassidy.



poned or fell through, or postponed and then cancelled. Everything felt out of reach. "I found it really tough at times to figure out what I should be doing. What happens if I can't do these things? 90 per cent of my work is in front of a crowd so I was starting to worry." Matt also revealed he has stopped watching the news as it leaves him feeling helpless but he urged everyone to "do as we're told" in order to move forward from the pandemic. He explained: "I stopped watching the news about three months ago. When I get too involved in something...I'm not gonna do anything, I'm not a politician, I'm not a doctor. All I do is get angry and I'm like what's the point? "If there's something worth fighting I will be alongside everyone else, but when it comes to [COVID-19] I know nothing. I listen to things and I was just getting more and more conflicting information, I didn't know what to do, so I relinquished that power. "I don't think there's any hidden awful agenda or conspiracy theory. We're all trying to do the best job we can, and if that means we have to do as we're told for a while I'm gonna do as I'm told."

—Bang Showbiz

O'Connor's open letter to Prince Harry

Sinead O'Connor has written an open letter to Prince Harry. The 54-year-old singer was moved by Harry's recent Apple TV documentary on mental health, 'The Me You Can't See', with Oprah Winfrey and believes his late mother, Princess Diana, would be very proud of him. Writing in Ireland's Sunday Independent newspaper, Sinead said: "As someone who has trauma-related mental health struggles, I wanted to let you know how bowled over I am by your Apple TV series. You're slammin' it, to use a musical term. You just keep shining on

through." Sinead revealed that she identifies with Harry's grief over the death of his mother Princess Diana in a car crash in 1997 when he was just 12, as she lost her own mother in similar circumstances when she was 18. She explained: "I'm writing this because you and I have something in common Harry. I also lost my mother in a car crash... I do know something of the grief you've been brave enough to share in the public arena. It's a shock that takes years to come out of, when someone dies so violently and suddenly. It's a lifetime's recovery. "I really identified with you when you shared the rage and anger you felt at the time of your mother's passing. I was the same. I'm sure we all were, any of us who ever lost someone in that sudden way. Transcending that grief as you've done by sharing it, cuts through a lot of garbage. And a lot of us appreciate what you're doing." And Sinead went on to tell Harry, 36, that his mother would be very proud of him. She wrote: "When so many of us see the work you're doing for people who experience mental health struggles, we see you stomping on stigma. And we're all delighted for you. Most importantly, we know how proud your mama is of the incredible young man you are."



Ellie Goulding: Spears documentary really affected me'

Ellie Goulding found the Britney Spears documentary very upsetting. The 34-year-old singer/songwriter admitted 'Framing Britney Spears' "really affected" her and she believes that a lot of people have been "let down" by the music industry. Ellie told *The Mail On Sunday's You* magazine: "It really affected me. Britney was so young, and she was thrown into this circus without any support. The same people who want your music and want more from you are also telling you that they want less. 'I don't want you to have mental health issues. I want you to be fine and perform and write perfect songs for me.' When I started out, there wasn't much help and mental health wasn't talked about. There's more awareness now, but we've let a lot of people down, people who have brought us so much joy through their music." Britney has spoken out about being isolated, medicated, financially exploited, and emotionally abused, by those in charge of her conservatorship and she was only recently granted the right to appoint her own attorney, in an attempt to free herself from the



legal structure she has been under since 2008. Ellie also hit out at those who blasted gymnast Simone Biles after the athlete pulled out of some events at the Tokyo Olympics, in order to protect her mental health. She said: "Don't get me started on that. When you sit at home and shout at these athletes, you don't see the sheer amount of work that goes into that one performance. Anyone competing in professional sport is allowed to say, 'You know what, I can't. My mental health is not great at the moment.' You can't be at your greatest physically if you're not mentally. It's bizarre to me that she's even having to defend herself."

George details suffering physical symptoms of depression

Max George has been left battered and bruised after diving into a rock. The 32-year-old singer took to Instagram to share pictures of his face - including bruising and cuts around his eye - as he revealed he suffered the injuries while swimming in the Adriatic Sea. Max wrote: "You should see the other guy. (A MASSIVE rock at the bottom of the Adriatic)." When a follower asked what happened, Max explained: "I hit my face on a rock at the bottom of the sea." However, he showed that his injuries were not too serious as he also included a laughing emoji. Max's girlfriend Stacey Giggs commented: "muppet", while his The Wanted bandmate Tom Parker joked: "Getting beaten up by the rock." Max also shared the picture on Instagram Stories and wrote: "Always wear goggles in the sea..." Although Max didn't appear to be taking his injury too seriously, it could have been much worse as the singer already has sight loss in his right eye and had to have part of his left eye removed due to an infection. He previously said: "I can't see properly out of my right. My left eye does all the work."

Willis feared for career during COVID-19 pandemic

Matt Willis says the COVID-19 pandemic left him worried for his career. The 38-year-old actor admitted that lockdown restrictions and the closure of live events left him in fear for the future as "90 per cent of my work is in front of a crowd". He told *Metro.co.uk's Back to the Stage* series: "I'd been renting a music studio in Watford for the last few years, that was the place where I would go and write songs and be creative. When Busted took a break I went back to drama school, and when the first lockdown happened suddenly that was taken away as well. "Then everything I had lined up was either post-

Lifestyle | Gossip

Momoa won't let his kids watch Baywatch or Game of Thrones



Jason Momoa has banned the word 'Baywatch' from his household. The 'Aquaman' star has revealed he won't let his daughter Lola, 14, and son Nakoa-Wolf, 12, watch the action drama series which launched his small-screen career when he played hunk Jason Ioane. Appearing on Australia's *Fitzy And Wippa* show, presenter Wippa asked: "What's the feedback you've got from your kids on Baywatch mate?" To which he laughed: "We don't say the B word here. We hide all of that mate! Never happened, mate!" As well as wanting to erase his role in 'Baywatch' - which also starred David Hasselhoff and Pamela Anderson - from his memory, the 42-year-old actor also doesn't want his kids to see him in 'Game of Thrones', though he insisted that show is "fantastic". Jason - who played warlord Khal Drogo on the hit HBO program - added: "We don't talk about those words, the B word didn't hap-

pen, they're not going to watch 'Game of Thrones' either even though it's fantastic. "So right now superheroes and we're good." Meanwhile, Jason recently admitted he's not keen on the idea of his kids following him into acting. He said: "I'm not a fan. "I don't want them to." The 'Dune' star admitted there is too much "pressure" placed on actors and he will do all he can to encourage his kids - who he has with his wife Lisa Bonet - to pursue other careers. He continued: "I don't know. I'll try my damndest to keep 'em out of it. "I love storytelling, I love theatrical things, I like directing and filmmaking, but I just want them to, you know, really to go for other things. If they [really] want to, maybe, but I don't want them to get into acting. It's very hard on people and I don't want them to have that pressure. I'm tough, I can handle it, but I wouldn't want to put someone I love [through] that."

Addison Rae loves 'juicy lips' in a video

Addison Rae loves to have "bouncy, plush, and juicy lips" in her videos. The 20-year-old social media sensation has revealed the products from her ITEM Beauty Sephora make-up line which make her look the most photogenic and the part of her face she likes to highlight for her TikTok clips. She said: "For sure, the Lip Quip (\$14). I love a glossy lip. Especially in a video, it's super captivating to see someone with really bouncy, plush, and juicy lips. I think it just looks so good. Or our Lid Glaze (\$14)-it's just such a good flush of color and shine. I love a good highlight in a photo, and that product really accentuates my features." Addison also discussed the importance of creating clean beauty products. She said: "Clean ingredients and clean formulas. As I was getting older and learning more about make-up, I wasn't really sure what the difference really was between clean and non-clean products, so I was learning how



to educate myself on that and figure out what was best for me and my skin. [Launching my brand] gave me an opportunity to tell other people about how easy the switch to clean beauty is." And Addison has teased that there will be some new additions to the collection coming out for her 21st birthday in October. She said: "We have a really exciting launch coming up for my birthday, which is going to be really fun for me. It's coming up really, really soon, and I think people are going to enjoy seeing a little twist on the ITEM products that we've come out with." Kourtney Kardashian's close pal also admitted it's a dream come true to have her products in Sephora. She added to Byrdie.com: "I think that's everyone's goal when they start something as exciting as a make-up line. Being in Sephora is something that I could have only ever dreamt of, especially as a kid. I feel like I learned about so many brands in make-up by going to the store with my mom and my friends. I also learned a lot about clean beauty and its importance by going to Sephora and seeing how much emphasis they put around their clean brands."

Healy is 'in a good place' following Foden split



Una Healy has rebuilt her life following her split from Ben Foden. The 39-year-old pop singer - who has Tadhg, six, and Aoife, nine, with Ben - insisted she's now "in a good place" after her divorce in 2018. The former Saturdays star explained: "It was a different chapter when I was with the girls. We were constantly on the road. I'm juggling being a working mum and a full-time mum. But I'm in a good place now." Una currently lives in Ireland with her kids, while Ben - who married Jackie Belanoff a year after his split from Una - is based in the US. And the pop star has relished spending quality time with her kids amid the coronavirus crisis. She said: "We're very close. They're really good kids and get on well." Una has also managed to keep herself in great shape, despite having two young children at home. The

singer has a home gym and admits that exercising helps to keep her spirits high. She told The Sun newspaper: "I love the feeling it [exercise] gives me." Earlier this year, Una insisted she is not looking for love anymore and is "happy" to be single. Despite this, the chart-topping star is hoping she can meet "the one" for a second time after her split from her ex-husband. Una - who was married to the sportsman between 2012 and 2018 - said: "I feel happy to be single, I'm not looking for anyone. Maybe the second time round when I meet 'the one', it will be for longer. "You just want someone who is a decent person, you have to be compatible, and someone who makes you laugh and who will be there for you."

Lopez unfollows Rodriguez on Instagram

Jennifer Lopez has unfollowed Alex Rodriguez on Instagram. The 52-year-old singer and actress has made the end of engagement to the retired baseball star Instagram official, as she's unfollowed his account and removed all pictures of him from her own page. As of the time of writing, Alex, 42, still follows Jennifer and still has pictures of her on his account. The 'Hustlers' star began dating Alex back in early 2017 and the pair got engaged in March 2019, but after cancelling their wedding plans because of COVID-19, they were reported to have split in March this year. Initially, the couple denied breakup rumors and said they were simply "working through some things", but by April they announced they had separated. After splitting from Alex, Jennifer - who has 13-year-old twins Emme and Max with her ex-husband Marc Anthony - rekindled her romance with Ben Affleck, whom she previously dated between 2002 and 2004. And the

new couple have been going from strength to strength, as they were even spotted house hunting together in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California, earlier this week. The couple were seen looking at a 12-bedroom, 24-bathroom mansion, which is listed on the market for \$85 million, that boasts an indoor sports complex with a basketball court and boxing ring, a massive pool, as well as a guest penthouse and a caretaker's house. They then reportedly drove over the hill to the San Fernando Valley where they viewed the late Bob Hope's former estate - which is currently owned by Ron Burkle and priced at \$40 million - which is complete with five acres and a golf course. A source said that the couple is not just looking for a property for Jennifer and, instead, one for both of them and their families.



Hart's wife Eniko pens note to him on 5th Anniversary

Kevin Hart marks fifth anniversary with "momma cheesecake" Eniko Hart. The 42-year-old actor has taken to Instagram to pay tribute to his wife Eniko - with whom he has Kenzo, three, and Kaori, 10 months - to mark five years since they tied the knot in a lavish Santa Barbara wedding. Kevin wrote: "Happy anniversary hot momma cheesecake....Love u to the moon and back #Harts (sic)" Eniko also marked the special occasion with a picture of herself and Kevin on their wedding day, where she said she hopes to be with her beau "forever". She posted: "happy anniversary babe! "As we continue to grow older and change with age, my love for you remains the same..happy to be sharing life with you.. "5 years down! Forever to go..xo "#Harts

(sic) Meanwhile, the 'Fatherhood' star - who also has Heaven, 16, and Hendrix, 13, with his ex-wife Torrei Hart - recently admitted he purposefully does a bad job at changing his youngest child's nappies so that Eniko doesn't ask him to do it. He said: "I'm very much involved, but I'm not that great at it. So what I've learned to do is kind of butcher it. So that [my wife] goes 'You know what ... don't do it. I'll put the diaper on backwards, or not snap it properly and she'll just snatch the baby from me [like] 'Give me the baby! You're not paying attention, you don't do it right!' " And Kevin also said his house is "too loud" for him to want more kids, as he thinks his family of six is perfect. He explained: "Is the house not loud enough? I think it is, right? I think it's loud enough around here. "It's good. We're in a good place, a family of six and a couple of dogs, it's a lot going on right now. I say that jokingly but, you know, look, if it's what the universe calls for and it's what we've decided, then it is what it is. "We're in love with being parents, we're in love with all the little ones that we have now. I mean, we got teenagers and two toddlers, man. It's the perfect separation of age. It's the perfect household. It's everything that you would think it is plus more."

Portman hails Miss Dior ad for focus on female character's pleasure

Jatalie Portman loves how her latest Miss Dior perfume ad focuses on the female character's pleasure. The 39-year-old actress has hailed the beauty brand for making a fragrance commercial where the woman's "expression of herself" is the focus rather than being smelled by a man. Speaking to WWD, she said of her character in the film: "It's so much about this woman wanting to be really paying attention to her own pleasure. "You really get the sense that she wants the fragrance for herself, as an expression of herself. And I love that, because that's really felt like a shift from the early days of [fragrance ads] always being about romance and, you know, someone else smelling you. With this, you get the sense that she's



enjoying her own scent." The 'Black Swan' star loved being at one with nature filming the ad. She said: "It was so beautiful to be really outside with the ocean, the fields and with the trees." Speaking about how the promo reflects the "earthiness" of the new incarnation of the iconic fragrance, she added: "It's still so much about roses. "But then it's also got so much earthiness to it. I think you feel it in the film, too. You've got this feeling of the forest with these top notes of the flowers. And I think it's also so much about this character, too. You've got this love and sensuality and wildness, but also something quite grounded and engaged with nature, and real, something very true." Natalie also hailed the French luxury fashion house for the level of "detail" that goes into their products. The 'Thor: Love and Thunder' star - who has been a part of the Dior family for a decade - added: "Everyone's just really lovely, and you can really feel the attention and respect to detail and this artistry of all the thousands of people who work on the fragrance and the clothes. "It's all so, so much handwork. People making beautiful things with their hands."



Richard Madden isn't fazed by going grey

The 'Eternals' star is known for his distinctive silver streak and has insisted his "vanity doesn't extend to the greyness" of his locks. He said: "Every time I've been in a role for six or eight months, I get to see where my own hair is at the end of it. Usually, I get a little surprise of a few extra greys. That's only going to continue, but I don't mind." When it comes to skincare, the 35-year-old actor insisted the most important product is sun lotion. He said: "Often if I'm filming outside, I'm going to get sunburned. "I'm a big advocate for making sure everyone wears sunscreen every day." The 'Rocketman' star keeps his beauty routine simple, prioritizing moisturizer and face wash. He told Haute Living: "Just use a good face wash and moisturize, get your sunscreen on, and put on fragrance in the morning. In the evening before you go out, you get another couple of scooches of your aftershave, and before bed just wash your face." Richard recently became the new face of Calvin Klein's Defy fragrance. The 'Game of Thrones' star followed in the footsteps of the likes of Jake Gyllenhaal and Kate Moss by starring in one of the luxury brand's campaigns. Speaking about the gig, he said: "I've always been a fan of Calvin Klein and having the opportunity to partner with the brand on the launch of their new fragrance, Calvin Klein Defy, has been an exciting adventure." Richard was named GQ's Most Stylish Man at the 2019 GQ Men of the Year awards, but it's not an accolade he believes he deserved. While he was grateful for the honour, he insisted his stylist should take the credit for dressing him in fashionable clothes. Speaking on stage after being handed the award, Richard said: "My friends will find it most amusing that I've won this award, one I don't really think that I deserve. Actors mostly spend their lives wearing other people's clothes, and so it really is other people who should take the credit for this tonight. "So thank you very much to Hugo Boss for this gorgeous tux, and thank you very much to Gareth Scarfield, my stylist, who finds many ideal ways to cloak all of my insecurities. Thank you, Gareth." — Bang Showbiz

Sports

Afghan turmoil leaves Paralympic athletes unable to compete; Cricket series in doubt

TOKYO: Afghanistan's Paralympic team will not participate in the Games in Tokyo next week because they are trapped in the country, the International Paralympic Committee said yesterday. The Taliban have in recent days capped a military victory that saw them bring a swift end to the 20-year war in the country. Just two Para athletes from Afghanistan were scheduled to compete in the Games — taekwondo athletes Zakia Khudadadi and Hossain Rasouli. Khudadadi, 23, was to be the first woman ever to represent Afghanistan at the Paralympics. But the IPC confirmed yesterday that with the Taliban takeover, the two athletes would no longer be able to travel to Japan.

"Regrettably NPC (National Paralympic Committee) Afghanistan will no longer participate in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games," IPC spokesman Craig Spence said. "Due to the serious ongoing situation in the country, all airports are closed and there is no way for them to travel to Tokyo."

There was no word on whether the IPC had been asked to try to assist teammates, or was making efforts to do so. "We hope the team and officials remain safe and well during this difficult time," Spence said.

Just one week ago, the two athletes were profiled on the IPC's website, with the country's chef de mission Arian Sadiqi saying the Games offered a chance to "deliver the message of coexistence for humanity".

Cricket series in doubt

Elsewhere, officials scrambled yesterday to find out whether Afghanistan's cricketers were safe, as Sri Lanka's national board said it was going ahead with arrangements to host a T20 series between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

No official was able to guarantee however that the three Twenty20 matches would start on September 1 after the Taliban swept to power. The team are also scheduled to play in the T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates in October which could also now be in doubt. The Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001 frowned upon organized sport.



PANJSHIR: Humvee vehicles from the Afghan Security Forces are pictured in Panjshir province in Afghanistan yesterday. — AFP

Star spin bowler and T20 captain Rashid Khan and all rounder Mohammad Nabi are currently playing The Hundred tournament in England. Both made pleas for peace in their country before the Taliban takeover.

But most other national players are in Afghanistan. "Efforts are being made to check their whereabouts," said an international cricket official, speaking on condition of anonymity. Sri Lanka's cricket board said it was still hoping to host Afghanistan and Pakistan for the three matches in an empty stadium at Hambantota.

The series was originally to be held in Dubai but was shifted to Sri Lanka because it clashed with the Indian Premier League which also starts in September in the UAE. "We have told them that we are ready to

host the tournament," Sri Lanka Cricket secretary Mohan de Silva told AFP. "All the preparations are underway. But, given the current situation in Kabul, we don't know if they will be able to go ahead. We are awaiting a response from them."

De Silva said that because of coronavirus precautions, the two teams should be in Sri Lanka by next week to begin the matches in September. The Afghanistan Cricket Board website said its national squad met top officials on August 7 and were told that they would be "rewarded handsomely" for a good performance against Pakistan. In its latest postdated August 9, the board said it had appointed former Australian fast bowler Shaun Tait as the national team bowling coach. — AFP



TOKYO: Toshiro Muto (left), CEO of Tokyo 2020, and Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto (right) attend a press conference following a four-party meeting in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Spectators barred from Paralympics over virus fears

TOKYO: Spectators will be barred from the Tokyo Paralympics over coronavirus fears, organizers said yesterday, as Japan battles record infections despite emergency measures in several parts of the country. The decision for the Paralympics, which open on August 24, had been widely expected and follows similar rules in place for the Olympics.

The Games come with Japan facing a new wave of virus cases and states of emergency in place in six regions. "More stringent measures will be taken for competitions to be held in these prefectures, including no spectators," organizers said in a joint statement with local and national governments and the International Paralympic Committee.

The statement said an exception would be made to allow some school children to attend under a special program. But organizers emphasized children would only participate with "safety measures" and "where local authorities or school administrations request this in response to the wishes of parents and others".

"We hope that we can give dreams and hopes to as many children as possible through the Games," Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto told reporters. Virus cases are surging across Japan, with over 20,000 new daily infections recorded in recent days, driven by the more contagious Delta variant.

Tokyo and five other areas are currently under a state of emergency that bans alcohol sales by bars and restaurants and limits their opening hours. The measure also caps event attendance at 5,000 people, or 50 percent capacity, whichever is less. The government is expected to expand emergency measures to seven more regions today, and extend the curbs already in place until mid-September, several weeks beyond their current timeframe. Japan's government has insisted the Paralympics will be held safely, and that it remains committed to hosting them, but it is under growing pressure over the virus. Just 37 percent of Japan's population is fully vaccinated, though the initially slow rollout has sped up. —AFP

Police said two teenagers had been arrested, with another suspect still at large. "It is highly likely a burglary that has gone wrong, although I think that understates it," said Fleming. "But I can say we do not believe this was targeted." Rugby Australia chief Andy Marinos called it "shocking news".

"To the Kefu family — the Australian Rugby community is here for you," he said, while the Wallabies tweeted: "You got this great man!! All our love and thoughts to you and the entire Kefu family!!" The All Blacks also offered their support, saying: "Our thoughts are with Toutai Kefu and his family at this time. A warrior on the field and leader off it, we are pulling for you!" —AFP

African players in Europe: Scorer Salah resumes normal service

PARIS: When an English Premier League season kicks off, one of the safest bets is that twice African Footballer of the Year Mohamed Salah will score. His goal for Liverpool in a 3-0 win at promoted Norwich City raised to five the number of consecutive seasons in which he netted on the opening weekend of the most watched football league in the world. Senegalese Ismaila Sarr and Algerian Said Benrahma were other African scorers in the Premier League as they helped Watford and West Ham United to victories.

England

Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)

Salah maintained his record of scoring on the opening weekend of the season in each of his five years at Liverpool in the win at Norwich. The Egyptian had already provided two assists for Diogo Jota and Roberto Firmino before he fired into the top corner after picking up a corner at the edge of the box.

Ismaila Sarr (Watford)

Sarr enjoyed a dream return to the Premier League with a goal and an assist as Watford beat Aston Villa 3-2. The Senegalese's pace gave Villa left-back Matt Targett such a hard time he was replaced at half-time. After teeing up Nigerian Emmanuel Dennis to score on his Watford debut, Sarr's deflected strike gave the Hornets a 2-0 lead.

Said Benrahma (West Ham)

Benrahma carried his excellent pre-season form into the opening weekend as West Ham twice came from behind to beat Newcastle 4-2. The Algerian headed in just his second Premier League goal for the Hammers' second equalizer early in the second half and then turned provider for Michail Antonio to complete the comeback.

Spain

Youssef En-Nesyri (Sevilla)

Top scorer for his club last season with 18 goals, the Moroccan international needed only 19 minutes to open his account for this campaign with a well-struck penalty. He also set up one of Erik Lamela's two goals in the 3-0 win over Rayo Vallecano.

Oussama Idrissi (Sevilla)

The Moroccan striker won the penalty which En-Nesyri converted in the victory against Vallecano. Idrissi was brought down by goalkeeper Luca Zidane, the son of French legend Zinedine Zidane, who was red-carded for his troubles.

Germany

Taiwo Awoniyi (Union Berlin)

The Nigerian scored one of the best goals on the opening weekend of the Bundesliga season with a superb net-buster as Union Berlin were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Bayer Leverkusen. Despite the attention of two defenders, the former Liverpool forward found enough space on the edge of the penalty area to smash the ball into the net with just seven minutes gone.

Hamadi Al-Ghaddioui (VfB Stuttgart)

The Bonn-born German-Moroccan striker scored his first Bundesliga goal in Stuttgart's 5-1 rout of promoted Greuther Fuerth. The 30-year-old headed a cross into the net for Stuttgart's fourth.

France

Mohamed Bayo (Clermont)

Guinea striker Bayo took his tally to three goals in two Ligue 1 games this season as his double claimed a 2-0 win for Clermont over fellow promoted side Troyes. The 23-year-old was born in the central French town but made his international debut in March and has spent his whole career in the second division before Clermont were promoted the top-tier for the first time earlier this year.

Wahbi Khazri (Saint-Etienne)

The experienced Tunisia striker opened his account for the season with an effort after just 20 seconds as Saint-Etienne drew 2-2 at Lens. The 30-year-old, now at his fifth club after coming through Bastia's academy, scored Ligue 1's quickest goal since January 2017 at fiery Stade Bollaert-Delelis filled with 38,000 fans. — AFP

Hosting Cup of Nations 'irreversible achievement' for Cameroon

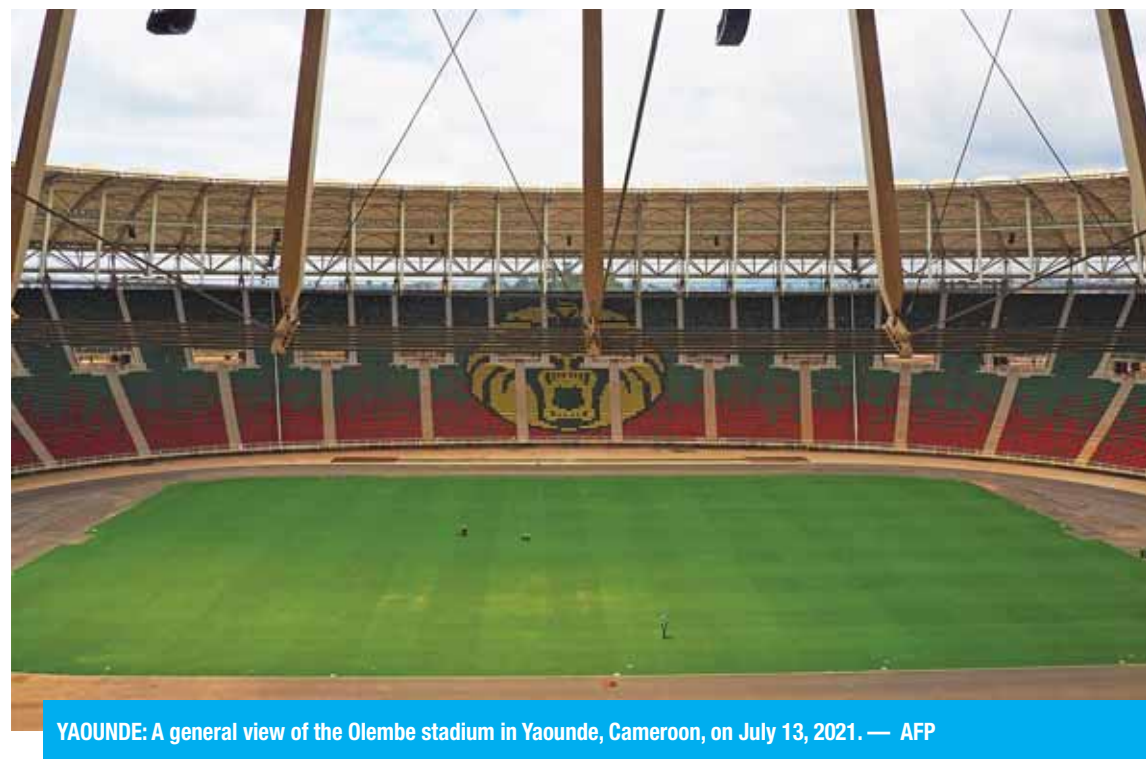
YAOUNDE: "We are the champions" resonates in the Olembe Stadium in Yaounde as Cameroon sports minister Narcisse Mouele Kombi enters the main venue for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations, surrounded by journalists.

With the January 9 kick-off of the 24-team tournament drawing closer, the government is emphasizing that the central African country is set to stage the biennial showcase of African football. "Cameroon is ready to host the CAN (Cup of Nations)," Mouele Kombi tells AFP, adding that its organization was "an irreversible achievement".

Geremi Njitap, a former Cameroon star and now president of the footballers' union in the country, believes the tournament is a "great opportunity for African football to regain a high level. "We must develop the local championships and that starts with the development of infrastructure. The players must be well paid," he told AFP.

Others are more skeptical. "The CAN will be done. There are no more fears. But at what cost?", asks Dimitri Mebenga, head of sport for the daily Mutations. "This tournament will have been a financial abyss for the country and will have made the Cameroonian taxpayer bleed, all in a great opacity."

Originally chosen as 2019 hosts, Cameroon fell behind with preparations and Egypt had to step in at the last minute and stage the event. Given a second chance, Cameroon have twice had to change the dates for the 2021 version, that will now be held a year later. Fears that torrential seasonal rains could wreak havoc with a tight 52-match schedule resulted in the first change, then the coronavirus pandemic caused another delay.



YAOUNDE: A general view of the Olembe stadium in Yaounde, Cameroon, on July 13, 2021. — AFP

Ex-Wallabies star Kefu critical after stabbing

BRISBANE: Tonga coach and former Wallabies star Toutai Kefu was in a critical condition yesterday after being stabbed by intruders at his Brisbane home during a "brutal and violent" attack, as the rugby world rallied around him.

The 47-year-old was among four people rushed to hospital after the early hours incident when several youths allegedly broke into the family house. Detective Superintendent Tony Fleming told reporters that an axe and knife had been recovered, calling it a "brutal and violent" assault.

Kefu underwent surgery for serious wounds to his abdomen, with his wife and children also hurt. "His (Kefu's) initial condition was described as critical, but expected to survive," Fleming said. "The mother has suffered very, very serious lacerations to her arm and I'm told her wounds are very significant."

Their 21-year-old son sustained "terrible" wounds to his arm and back and a daughter was also injured.

Sports

Federer to undergo more knee surgery, will be out 'for months'

PARIS: Roger Federer said on Sunday he will undergo further knee surgery and admitted he "will be out for many months", a decision which casts further doubt on his future in tennis at the age of 40. "I will be on crutches for many weeks and out of the game for many months," 20-time Grand Slam title winner Federer said in a video posted on his Instagram account.

The decision immediately rules him out of the US Open, where he has been champion five times and which starts in two weeks' time. "I want to give myself a glimmer of hope to return to the tour in some shape or form," added Federer. "I am realistic, don't get me wrong. I know how difficult it is at my age to go through another surgery. I will try it. I want to be healthy, I want to be running around."

Federer, who has played just 13 matches in 2021, underwent two knee surgeries in 2020 when he played only six times. He had already pulled out of the Tokyo Olympics to rest his knee. Federer withdrew from this year's French Open after reaching the fourth round and was knocked out in the quarter-finals of Wimbledon, a tame 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 loss to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz.

That defeat was only his 14th at the All England Club in 119 matches, and the first time he had been beaten in the tournament in straight sets since a first-round exit at the hands of Mario Ancic in 2002. It was also the first time he had lost a set 6-0 at Wimbledon and just the third time at a Slam.

"I've been doing a lot of checks with the doctors on my knee," he added on Sunday. "I hurt myself further during the grass-court season and it's just not the way to go forward. "They told me to feel better I'll need surgery. I decided to do it."

'Bodies breaking down'

After turning 40 last weekend, Federer said he was learning to adjust to the fact that recovering from niggles takes two weeks rather than two days. "It was different before. The questions were simple: what is my place in the ranking? What will my next tournament be?," he told Blick newspaper.

"Today, it's more difficult: how do I feel when I start training again? What are my goals? How to reconcile all this with the family? What does the rest of the team say? I am much more enthusiastic than before, the attitude is different. It's really completely different from 10 years ago."

Federer captured his most recent major at the 2018 Australian Open. He was already well past 36 and the second oldest man to clinch a Slam title. Since then, Novak Djokovic has claimed eight more majors and old rival Rafael Nadal has picked up four.

Both now stand level on 20 Slams with Federer. Should Federer be preparing to bow out after 23 years on tour, he will leave behind a career decorated by 103 titles — only Jimmy Connors with 109 has more — a combined 310 weeks at number one and more than \$130 million in prize money alone.

Later Sunday, the US Open confirmed Federer's withdrawal from the final Grand Slam event of the year with his spot in the draw taken by Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands. Nadal remains a doubt for the US Open where he is a four-time champion.

The 35-year-old Spaniard suffered a foot injury in his semi-final loss to Djokovic at the French Open in June. The Spaniard skipped Wimbledon and the Olympics and played just one match in Washington earlier this month before withdrawing



LONDON: In this file photo taken on July 07, 2021, Roger Federer leaves the court after losing to Hubert Hurkacz during their men's quarter-finals match of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships in Wimbledon, southwest London. —AFP

from the Toronto and Cincinnati Masters events.

Djokovic is also skipping Cincinnati after his disappointing Olympics campaign. The field, headed by Russian Daniil Medvedev, is without resting world number one Novak Djokovic plus injured

Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. "Things are changing. Bodies are breaking down instead of top players being overtaken by tennis (progress)," said three-time major winner Andy Murray in Cincinnati on Sunday. —AFP

Medvedev dominates Opelka to win ATP Toronto Masters

TORONTO: Daniil Medvedev neutralized the attack of American serving giant Reilly Opelka on Sunday, dominating 6-4, 6-3 to win the ATP Toronto Masters. The world number two Russian needed just 87 minutes, limiting his 2.11m opponent to just eight aces and breaking him three times while saving all four break points he faced.

Medvedev, aided by 34 unforced errors from Opelka, became the first Russian to win a Canadian trophy since Marat Safin 21 years ago. The winner was playing a fifth career final at the Masters 1000 level. "When I was starting I could barely have dreamed of a Masters final," he said. Now I've played five of them and won four. "I'm just happy," he added. "I want to achieve more, I want to play better."

Medvedev, who will be the top seed at next week's Cincinnati

Masters, the final major tuneup for the US Open that starts August 30, had praise for Opelka, the US number one who is ranked 32nd in the world. "It was a great week for him, he fought to the end," Medvedev said. Playing a first Masters final is never easy. My first was in Canada (Montreal, 2019) and I won just three games," he recalled of a title tilt against Rafael Nadal.

Opelka said he was outplayed from the start by the top seed. "Daniil played great, as expected. He was flawless. I had one chance to break early and I don't think that would have changed much. It was a little windy and a little bit swirlier out there, so it was really tough to be consistently powerful. Even when I hit some big shots, he countered well. It was very tough to disrupt him at all."

Medvedev said he went into the match with a plan to combat



TORONTO: Daniil Medvedev of Russia celebrates victory in the National Bank Open singles final against Reilly Opelka of the United States at Aviva Centre on Sunday in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. —AFP

Opelka's big delivery. "The goal was to get as many balls back as possible, not go for crazy shots, make him move and make him doubt," Medvedev said. "The more balls you put back the more pressure you put on the opponent."

Medvedev, Opelka and their

teams were due to take a private plane laid on by organizers in order to reach next week's Cincinnati Masters, 660 kilometers away, later in the evening. Medvedev said that if offered the chance, he would not turn down a glass of celebratory champagne in flight. —AFP



Novak Djokovic

Djokovic clocks 334 weeks at number one in ATP rankings

PARIS: Novak Djokovic, who has won all three majors this year and has his eyes firmly set on completing the sweep with another success at the US Open, remains comfortably at number one in the ATP rankings, released yesterday.

The Serb has now spent a record 334 weeks in top spot, well ahead of next-best Roger Federer, who managed 310 and is now down at number nine and faces several months out of action while he undergoes further knee surgery.

Daniil Medvedev remains at number two after his victory in Toronto on Sunday while the man he beat in the final, the American Reilly Opelka, climbed nine places to 23. Norwegian Casper Ruud continues to knock on the door of the Top 10, moving up one place to 11, shadowed by the Pole Hubert Hurkacz, who beat Federer in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon.

ATP rankings as of August 16:

1. Novak Djokovic (SRB) 12,113 points
2. Daniil Medvedev (RUS) 10,620
3. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 8,350
4. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 7,815
5. Alexander Zverev (GER) 7,263
6. Dominic Thiem (AUT) 7,005
7. Andrey Rublev (RUS) 6,005
8. Matteo Berrettini (ITA) 5,533
9. Roger Federer (SUI) 4,215
10. Denis Shapovalov (CAN) 3,625
11. Casper Ruud (NOR) 3,350 (+1)
12. Hubert Hurkacz (POL) 3,288 (+1)
13. Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP) 3,260 (-2)
14. Diego Schwartzman (ARG) 2,980
15. Jannik Sinner (ITA) 2,745
16. Roberto Bautista (ESP) 2,720 (+1)
17. Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN) 2,693 (-1)
18. Alex De Minaur (AUS) 2,600
19. David Goffin (BEL) 2,513
20. Cristian Garin (CHI) 2,510

Giorgi topples Pliskova for WTA Montreal title

MONTREAL: Italian underdog Camila Giorgi upset fourth seed Karolina Pliskova 6-3, 7-5 on Sunday to win the biggest title of her career at the WTA hard-court event in Montreal. The world number 71 completed a 2021 hat-trick of victories over the sixth-ranked Czech, who has now lost three finals this season. "I was very emotional inside," Giorgi said. "Of course, I'm not the one that shows a lot. "It's just amazing," she added. "I'm very happy for what I did this week."

Wimbledon finalist and Rome runner-up Pliskova had no answer for the inspired shotmaking of Giorgi, who also defeated Pliskova in the first round at Eastbourne and in the third round at the Tokyo Olympics. The Czech had won 12 of her past 14

matches coming into the final, which lasted almost one and three-quarter hours.

But Giorgi's seven aces, and four service breaks, were enough to again overcome Pliskova, who remained impressed with her opponent's top form. "She played super-solid all week actually, not crazy like she can play sometimes," Pliskova said. "I think she played really well, serving well at the important moments ... she was just a bit better today."

The first Italian winner of the prestigious US Open tuneup now owns three career titles after winning in Linz in 2018 and in the Netherlands three years earlier. Giorgi is expected to rise into the top 35 in the world rankings for the first time since May, 2019, as a result of her victory. The Italian, whose stylist mother designs her tennis wear, retains a close bond with her father/coach, who was not in Canada this week for his 29-year-old daughter's biggest moment on court.

"I've been working all my life with my father, we work hours and hours on the court," Giorgi said. "Of course, the results should come. I believe it and he believe it. This was an amazing week, I'm very hap-



MONTREAL: Camila Giorgi of Italy (left) and Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic pose with their trophies after their Women's Singles Final match of the National Bank Open on Sunday in Montreal, Canada. —AFP

py to have this gift. I dedicate it to him. When you dedicate all your work, one day comes beautiful things." —AFP

Kuwait prepares for Davis Cup Asia qualifiers

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Tennis Federation (KTF) Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah met members of the Kuwait national team as they prepare to leave for Spain to join a training camp at Rafa Nadal International Academy in Majorca in collaboration with Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK). They will prepare for the Davis Cup qualifiers for Asia and Oceania to be held in Jordan from Sept 13-18 with the participation of nine countries: Kuwait, Qatar, Syria, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Pacific Oceania, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and the host country Jordan.

The meeting was held at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex, attended by KTF Vice President Abdelsamad Al-Aryan, Secretary General Faleh Al-Otaibi, Treasurer Ali Al-Daihani and head tennis coach at RNAK Nuno Marques. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber urged players to exert their best efforts and benefit from the training camp, adding that KTF exerts all efforts to prepare a new generation of players to



KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Tennis Federation Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with members of the Kuwait national team and other executives.

achieve the best results for Kuwait.

Sheikh Ahmad wished the players the best of luck as they participate for the first time as main players in the Kuwait Davis Cup team. He hoped the players will be able to take advantage of this precious opportunity and benefit from all the facilities available for them to prove themselves, represent the country and qualify for the

second group at the Jordan qualifiers.

Sheikh Ahmad thanked the Public Authority for Sports (PAS) for its continued support in Kuwait and abroad, and thanked all member clubs for their cooperation. He also thanked Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait for its cooperation and invitation of the national team to train at its main academy in Majorca.

Sports

No Messi, no problem as Barcelona take 'leap into unknown' with victory

MADRID: Barcelona started life without Lionel Messi by defeating Real Sociedad 4-2 in their La Liga opener at the Camp Nou on Sunday even if fans admitted it felt like "a leap into the unknown". Captain Gerard Pique gave them a 19th minute lead with his 50th goal for the club.

Martin Braithwaite found the net in first half injury time and in the 59th minute. Sergi Roberto added a fourth in the last minute of the game. Just over 20,000 fans were in attendance as crowds returned for the first time since the pandemic.

However, they had to hold their breath at one stage when Sociedad came back from 3-0 down to get to 3-2 thanks to goals from 20-year-old Julen Lobete in the 82nd minute and a 30-metre free-kick from skipper Mikel Oyarzabal three minutes later.

Six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi called time on his two-decade career at Barcelona last week and moved to Paris Saint-Germain. Messi's memory lingered heavy over the Camp Nou on Sunday despite the removal of a giant photograph of the Argentine superstar from the entrance in the wake of his move to France.

Some banners were in place well before kick-off venting the fans anger towards president Joan Laporta. One read "Laporta, Barca is not your business", while another proclaimed "Barca yes, Laporta no!"

"It was a big emotional blow," said 23-year-old Barca fan Adria De Lucas. "I was in my room when I saw the news. I started sending messages to all my friends, and no one believed it. It was emotionally hard."

The supporter added: "It's a leap into the unknown (without Messi). We will see what happens." Inside the Camp Nou, fans made the most of their return after 18 months, chanting "Messi! Messi!". Banners expressed their "eternal grati-

tude". "The supporters are with us, they want to see football," said Pique. "We knew they were going to react that way. We all know what Leo represents, but everything changes and we have to keep going."

'Don't have Messi talent'

"We will be very competitive and we will fight for titles to the end. We will not have his talent, but we have proven that we can all play together."

La Liga champions Atletico Madrid got their season underway with a 2-1 win at Celta Vigo. Angel Correa gave Atletico the lead after 23 minutes after being set up by Thomas Lemar.

Correa added a second goal in the 64th minute just five minutes after Iago Aspas had pulled Celta level from the penalty spot. However, the game was marred by a mass brawl in the closing stages following a foul on Atletico striker Luis Suarez.

Red cards were brandished for Hugo Mallo of Celta and Mario Hermoso of Atletico. In Sunday's late game, Sevilla defeated Rayo Vallecano 3-0 with Moroccan international Youssef En-Nesyri scoring a first-half penalty before new Argentine recruit Erik Lamela grabbed two.

Vallecano played 75 minutes a man short after goalkeeper Luca Zidane, the son of French football legend Zinedine, was red-carded for bringing down Oussama Idrissi in the move which led to the penalty.

As Barca try to fill the Messi-sized gap, as well as ballooning debts of more than 1.2 billion euros (\$1.6 billion), Real Madrid got off to a flier on the pitch as a brace from French veteran striker Karim Benzema helped bring a 4-1 victory at Alaves on Saturday. The win, achieved with further goals from Nacho and Vinicius allowed Carlo Ancelotti to celebrate the start of his second spell in charge with a victory.



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Danish forward Martin Braithwaite celebrates after scoring his second goal during the Spanish League football match between Barcelona and Real Sociedad at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Sunday. —AFP

A Joselu penalty for the hosts was a minor blemish after Real keeper Thibaut Courtois, making his 100th Liga appearance for Real, brought down John Guidetti. In other action on 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. There were two matches last night as Villarreal went up against Granada while Elche met 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

Bordeaux claim 'good point' at Marseille

PARIS: Bordeaux's Remi Oudin said he was happy after his side came from two goals down to claim a 2-2 draw at Marseille on the weekend that Lionel Messi was unveiled to the Paris Saint-Germain crowd. The hosts led at half-time thanks to goals from in-form Dimitri Payet and Turkey winger Cengiz Under before 18-year-old defender Timothee Pembele and substitute Remi Oudin, with a well-worked volley from a corner, scored for the visitors. "Looking at the game at half-time, we were down 2-0. Then we get the draw. Here, in Marseille, it's a good point," Oudin told broadcaster Prime Video.

"It's the little details that mean you win or get a draw, like tonight. It's important," he added. Home coach Jorge Sampaoli kept faith in the 11 which started last weekend's 3-2 win at Montpellier. The visitors' Yacine Adli was named on Vladimir Petkovic's bench due to the 21-year-old attacking midfielder's expected move to AC Milan.

There was a worrying sight after six minutes as Bordeaux's Samuel Kalu collapsed outside the home penalty box without any contact with an opposition player. Less than 90 seconds later Nigeria winger Kalu was back on his feet after treatment, he played on for five minutes before being substituted by Remi Oudin.

Under claimed his second goal in as many games after the half hour mark after Brazilian midfielder Gerson's cut-back. Payet added his third of the campaign four minutes before the interval with a sublime effort which started near the half-way line and finished with his low shot into bottom corner.

Petkovic's men were on level terms by the hour mark after Timothee Pembele, who joined on-loan from Paris Saint-Germain last week, and first-half replacement Oudin scored to claim the point before Leo Balerdi was sent off after 89 minutes for the hosts.



MARSEILLE: Bordeaux and Marseille's players surround Bordeaux's Nigerian forward Samuel Kalu as medics take care of him after he fainted on the pitch during the French L1 football match between Marseille and Bordeaux at The Stade Velodrome in Marseille, southern France on Sunday. —AFP

Messi madness

Earlier, Lens claimed a 2-2 draw at home against Saint-Etienne despite Wahbi Khazri opening the scoring for Les Verts, record 10-time champions, after 20 seconds. Khazri's effort was Ligue 1's quickest goal since Valentin Vada after 14 seconds for Bordeaux against Toulouse in January 2017. Seven-time champions Lyon are still without a win this season after losing 3-0 at Angers and had forward Maxwell Cornet sent off for two fouls in the second half.

Promoted Clermont made it back-to-back victories to start their first top-tier campaign as Guinea forward Mohamed Bayo scored twice in the 2-0 home win over Ligue 2 champions Troyes, who are under the Manchester City umbrella of

the City Football Group.

On Saturday, 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.

The Argentina attacker watched the 4-2 win over Strasbourg 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. Elsewhere, Christophe Galtier had a successful return to Lille, with whom he lifted the title last season, as his Nice side hammered the champions 4-0. —AFP

Marsch loses Bundesliga debut as Leipzig stumble

BERLIN: American Jesse Marsch lost his first Bundesliga game as head coach of RB Leipzig on Sunday after his side suffered a surprise 1-0 defeat at Mainz, whose preparations had been badly hit by an outbreak of COVID-19.

After winning back-to-back Austrian league and cup titles with RB Salzburg, Marsch moved to their sister club this season to replace Julian Nagelsmann, who is now at Bayern Munich. There was a minute's silence before kick-off to pay respect to German legend Gerd Mueller who died in the early hours of Sunday.

The hosts deservedly took an early lead when captain Moussa Niakhate hooked the ball into Leipzig's goal on 13 minutes. It was a remarkable display from Mainz whose preparations were disrupted by having 11 players quarantined as striker Karim Onisiwo was one of three squad members to test positive for coronavirus. Head coach Bo Svensson had to reshuffle his starting team, but his side turned in a determined display in sweltering temperatures.

"We didn't have a good start and the early goal hurt us, it was a perfect situation for Mainz who could defend deeper and deeper," Marsch told broadcaster DAZN. "They defended well - you have to say - and we didn't find enough room with the ball. We didn't have enough tempo and didn't create enough."

Much is expected of last season's runners-up Leipzig, who host champions Bayern in the Bundesliga on September 11. "We had a good pre-season and this game didn't go in the direction we wanted, but for me, nothing has changed. This is a good reminder that we have more work to do," insisted Marsch. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807

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I Kavitha Mohan holder of Passport number: K.3652027, do declare changing given name KAVITHA MOHAN To KAVITA MOHAN. (C 0629) 17-8-2021

I Kapil Mohan holder of Passport number: K.3655272, do declare adding surname GEORGE along with given name KAPIL MOHAN full name to be KAPIL MOHAN GEORGE. (C 0629) 17-8-2021

I Hussain Zulfekar Ratlamwala holder of Indian passport No. V6088221 issued in Kuwait on 08/03/2021, R/O SN 18/19, B-13, F-403, R-Euphoria Phase 2, Kondhwa Budruk, Pune-411048, Maharashtra, India have changed my minor son's name born on 28/12/2016 holder of Indian passport No. P9483077 issued in Kuwait on 29/01/2017 to given name RAYHAN, surname RATLAMWALA for all purposes. (C 0630) 17-8-2021

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Laporta says Barcelona finances ‘dramatic’

Nine Super League rebels rejoin European Club Association

BARCELONA: Barcelona president Joan Laporta yesterday gave details of the “dramatic” financial problems that persuaded him to release Lionel Messi. “The economic and financial situation of the club is worrying, and the financial situation is dramatic,” Laporta told a two-hour press conference at the Camp Nou.

Barcelona, he said, have debts of 1.35 billion euros and a wage bill, at 617 million euros, that is “25 to 30 percent higher than that of our competitors.” “We are all tightening our belts, in a couple of years the club’s finances will be healthy.”

As for Messi’s departure, Laporta said that the two sides held “negotiations that both parties hoped would be fruitful but didn’t work out. There is a mutual disappointment.” He confided that the Argentine’s presentation as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Saturday left him with “mixed feelings, like all Barca fans”.

“I would have preferred to see him at Barca, although we have made the right decision,” Laporta said. “I wish him all the best, I like to see him happy, he deserves it. From now on we will be an opponent.” Barcelona opened their season with a 4-2 home win over Real Sociedad on Sunday. “It was a very Barca-like reaction,” Laporta said. “All the players are more motivated than ever.”

“Sunday showed that Barcelona fans are hungry for football and to see a team that fights and plays well. A new era is beginning. The short-term prospects are complicated, but in the

medium-term they are magnificent,” said Laporta, adding that Barcelona plan to return to developing young players as they did with Messi, who came through the youth system known as ‘La Masia’. “We are going to bet on La Masia, which will allow us to develop the model we want.”

Super League

Earlier yesterday, it was announced that nine of the 12 founder members of the short-lived European Super League rejoined the European Club Association (ECA), but Barcelona, Real Madrid and Juventus remain outside the influential group as they continue to back the breakaway project.

The ECA said that Atletico Madrid, AC Milan and Inter Milan, along with all six English clubs involved in the breakaway — Manchester City, Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea, Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur — had been reinstated after acknowledging that a Super League “was not in the interests of the wider football community”.

The nine clubs initially signed up to the project in April but all backed down within 48 hours in the face of overwhelming opposition from fans, players and organizations. The ECA called it “a regrettable and turbulent episode for European football” and also acknowledged the clubs’ “willingness to engage actively with the ECA in its collective mission to develop European club football — in the open and transparent interests of all, not the few.”

The nine clubs accepted punish-



BARCELONA: President of FC Barcelona Joan Laporta gestures during a press conference at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona yesterday. — AFP

ments from UEFA, including a five percent cut in their European revenue for one season, after backing down and apologizing for their “mistake” in joining the project, widely condemned as a crude land grab.

However Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juve did not back down — earlier this summer Laporta claimed the Super League was “still alive”. He insisted the Super League would mean “financial

sustainability for the clubs and make for a more attractive competition”.

The three remaining clubs took a legal case to European authorities, leaving the European Court of Justice (CJEU) to decide whether UEFA was abusing its dominant position by opposing the Super League project, a quasi-closed tournament.

Juventus chairman Andrea Agnelli resigned from his role as chairman of

the ECA as well as from his position on UEFA’s executive committee as the breakaway was launched in April. His position at the head of the ECA was taken by Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al-Khelaifi. The ECA, with nearly 250 members from across the continent, describes itself as “the sole, independent body directly representing football clubs at European level”. — AFP

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