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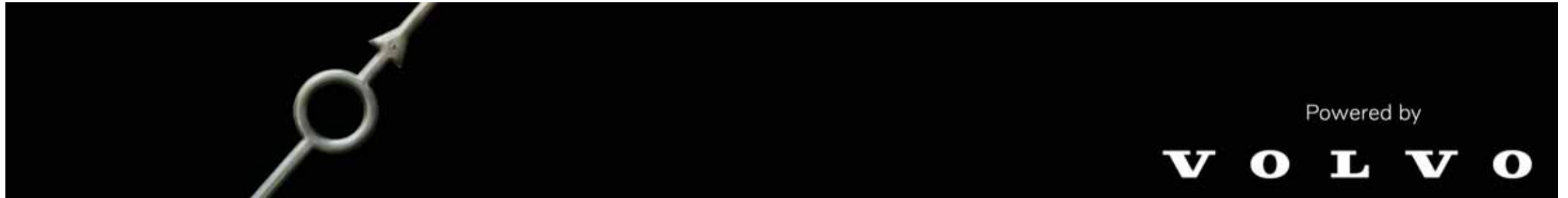
6 Losing steam, Polish govt plays immigration card



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Baghdad summit is held at crucial time: Premier

Afghanistan overshadows Iraq conference as Macron warns against IS



BAGHDAD: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is being received by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi on his arrival at Baghdad International Airport yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

BAGHDAD: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, addressing the Baghdad Conference for Partnership and Cooperation in the Iraqi capital yesterday, noted that the convention is held at critical and crucial time in the region. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled emphasized that the region could never witness stability as long as Iraq remained unstable. "Iraq is one of the basic security and economic foundations in the region," he said, lauding the nation's success in overcoming and tackling majority of the problems it had encountered since years back. Iraq will experience a pivotal phase in its political process that is the parliamentary elec-

tions due on October 10 (2021), Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stated, noting that the nation would need support from the regional states and the international community to back up the scheduled polling process. The Kuwaiti Prime Minister noted further that the support for Iraq would entail bolstering its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, non-intervention in its domestic affairs and meeting aspirations of the Iraqi people. The State of Kuwait is among the forward states in the region that sense and interact with the difficult security and economic conditions in Iraq, "thus we will not be reluctant in supporting it in the hardest times," he stressed. The Taliban's takeover of



BAGHDAD: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addressing the Baghdad Conference for Partnership and Cooperation in the Iraqi capital yesterday. — KUNA

Afghanistan overshadowed the summit in Iraq yesterday attended by key regional leaders, with French President Emmanuel Macron warning of the threat Islamic State group jihadists pose. Continued on Page 2

Kuwaiti borders stable and secure, says Army chief

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Army General Staff Command said in a statement, after a full surveillance conducted by special personnel of the army and the Ministry of Interior yesterday morning covering the whole international joint borders with the Republic of Iraq, it was determined that a single Katyusha missile had landed near the region causing no human or material losses.

The army statement affirmed what it had stated earlier that the northern border region is secure and stable. The general staff command had denied reports saying that three missiles crossed the border region targeting the vicinity of an American military base, affirming that the Kuwaiti borders are stable and secure. — KUNA

US air strike kills two 'high profile' IS targets in Kabul

WASHINGTON: A US air strike in Afghanistan killed two high-profile ISIS targets and left another wounded, the Pentagon said yesterday. No civilians were hurt in the attack early yesterday, which followed the suicide bombing Thursday that killed scores of people including 13 US troops at Kabul airport, Major General Hank Taylor told a news conference.

The Pentagon declined to say if the people targeted in the US strike were directly involved in the suicide bombing. "They were ISIS-K planners and facilitators. That's enough reason there alone," said spokesman John Kirby.

"The fact that two of these individuals are no longer walking on the face of the Earth, that's a good thing," Kirby added. The suicide bombing, which targeted throngs of Afghans gathered outside the airport in hopes of fleeing Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, opened a deadly new chapter in the drama unfolding as the frantic US evacuation drive approaches its Tuesday

deadline for completion. US officials have said more attacks on the evacuation effort are likely.

US forces overseeing the evacuation have been forced into closer security cooperation with the Taliban to prevent any repeat of the suicide bombing that killed scores of civilians Thursday.

But crowds pleading for entry outside the perimeter gates have thinned to hundreds, according to two people who gained access yesterday. The carnage of Thursday's suicide attack injected further stress and tension into a situation already fraught with panic and despair for those wanting to leave and high risk for the US forces tasked with securing the operation. Yesterday, two senior health officials from the former Afghan administration told AFP the death toll from the blast had topped 100, including the 13 Americans. Some media have put the toll as high as 170.

The bombing followed a chorus of warnings about an imminent threat and, as people gathered outside the airport yesterday, the United States issued a fresh alert for its citizens to leave areas around the main gates "immediately". In recent years, the Islamic State's Afghanistan-Pakistan chapter has been responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in those countries—massacring civilians at mosques, shrines, public squares and even hospitals.



ARLINGTON, US: John Kirby (right) and Army Major General William Taylor participate in a news briefing at the Pentagon in this August 23 file photo. — AFP

At the White House, President Joe Biden's press secretary Jen Psaki said US national security experts consider another attack is "likely" and the next few days will be "the most dangerous period to date". Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi tweeted that the group's fighters had already moved into parts of the military side of Kabul airport, but the Pentagon stressed that US forces retained control over the gates and airlift operations. Racing to meet the Tuesday withdrawal deadline has required close cooperation with the Taliban on evacuee movements and the IS threat. — AFP

Palestinian boy hit by Zionist army succumbs

JERUSALEM: A 12-year-old Palestinian boy shot last week by Zionist soldiers during clashes along the border with Gaza has died of his injuries, the

territory's health ministry said yesterday. Omar Hassan Abu Al-Nile was hit during clashes last Saturday on the sidelines of a demonstration near the border fence separating the Gaza Strip and the Jewish state, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa said.

He "succumbed to his injuries," the Gaza's health ministry said in a statement. The August 21 unrest left around 40 people wounded, according to

Continued on Page 2

'Just the clothes on me': Afghans flee to new life

ABU DHABI: Wazhma left everything behind to escape Taliban rule after the extremist group took control of Afghanistan, aspiring for a life "free of threats" in the United States. In a facility in the UAE, temporarily hosting Afghan evacuees heading to other countries, the 21-year-old medical student struggled yesterday to overcome the terror she experienced during the last days at home. "My husband worked for the US embassy. They (Taliban) would have killed us if we stayed," brown-haired Wazhma told AFP in English, just hours before she was due to board a US-bound flight.

"I only took the clothes on me. Nothing more." The young Afghan was among tens of thousands of evacuees who fled the capital Kabul after the Taliban swept in and deployed on the streets in mid-August. Wazhma, her husband, brother-in-law and baby nephew spent "the longest



ABU DHABI: Refugees who fled Afghanistan gather at the International Humanitarian City (IHC) in Abu Dhabi as they wait to be transferred to another destination yesterday. — AFP

three days" of their lives on the road, moving in secret until they reached the gates of Kabul airport where US personnel were waiting for them.

"The situation was very bad. Thank God, we are safe," she said, holding her baby nephew tightly in her arms. When

asked whether she will ever go back, she laughingly said: "Never, only if the Taliban go away." She said the hardline Islamist group will never change its discriminatory policies against women despite promises of a softer brand of rule than their last stint

Continued on Page 2



GAZA CITY: Friends and relatives of Palestinian Omar Hassan Abu Al-Nile, 12, who died of wounds he sustained during a Zionist attack last week, mourn during his funeral in Gaza City yesterday. — AFP

Local

Climate change reality necessitates urgent national, global response

Kuwait records unprecedented temperatures of 50 C on average

KUWAIT: Record heatwaves in the US, Canada, Russia and some European countries, wildfires in nations like Greece, Turkey, and Lebanon, as well as rising sea levels in regions like East Antarctica all point to a common perpetrator: climate change. What used to sound like a problem for future generations is occurring right here and now and according to international organizations, such as the UN amongst others, this problem necessitates an urgent solution or else humanity is doomed.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a recent statement, citing a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that climate change was a "code red for humanity", which begs the question, what will human beings do to overcome this dilemma? Seeking answers on countering climate change, several local experts were consulted to provide their input.

Head of marine forecast at the Kuwait Control and Meteorological Center (KCMC) Yasser Al-Bloushi said that the main cause for climate change was greenhouse gas emissions, which prevents sunrays from escaping earth's atmosphere, leading to increase in temperatures and other catastrophic environmental effects. Countries, which previously did not experience heatwaves, now face increased temperatures in addition to anomalous weather, leading to wildfires, rising sea levels, floods, mudslides, and so on, he added.

The solution? Decrease or manage the levels of

greenhouse gas emissions caused by vehicles, factories and other culprits, indicated Bloushi. On the national level, Bloushi revealed that Kuwait had recorded unprecedented high temperatures, managing over 50 C degrees on average this summer compared to previous years. Strong wind also increased dust, which has ill effects on both humans' health and power infrastructure, he added.

Grim future

On the grim future possibilities, meteorologist Mohammad Karam stressed the need for a global stance to decrease carbon emissions in the atmosphere via countering that with ecofriendly technologies or else, hope will be lost. He pointed out that the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) forecast for temperature in the upcoming half a century warned that temperature would increase by 1.5 to 2.5 percent, leading to rising sea levels and threatening humans' very own existence on this planet.

As for Kuwaitis contributions to better the chances against climate change, deputy head of monitoring at the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Samira Al-Kanderi revealed that the country had been a signatory to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1994. The UNFCCC's first article attributed climate change to the direct and indirect human activities, which reshaped the composition of earth's atmosphere, leading to alarming and bizarre weather conditions. Kuwait also signed UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in 2005 and the Paris Agreement in 2018, she mentioned.



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a dust storm in Kuwait. — KUNA

phere, leading to alarming and bizarre weather conditions. Kuwait also signed UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in 2005 and the Paris Agreement in 2018, she mentioned.

Kanderi added that Kuwait provided its national environment proclamations in 2012 and 2019 as well as the Kuwait National Adaptation Plan (NAP) submitted to the UNFCCC on February 11th, 2021. She

indicated that the documents offered inputs and predictions of greenhouse gas emissions until 2035 in addition to data in rising temperatures and sea levels up to 2100. She revealed that the EPA was in the process of formulating Kuwait's 2050 strategy for carbon emission decree as well as the 2025 document for national contributions within the framework of the Paris Agreement. — KUNA

Report ranks Kuwait City dead last in environmental security

KUWAIT: Kuwait City has ranked last in environmental security among 60 cities surveyed in the 'Safe Cities Index 2021' report, released recently by The Economist Intelligence Unit. Kuwait managed a score of only 22 out of 100 in environmental security, and is the only city in the list with a 'Low' score in this category, designated for cities with scores between zero and 25.

The report is based on the fourth iteration of the index, which ranks 60 cities across 76 indicators covering digital, health, infrastructure, personal and environmental security. Environmental security considers how the city has incorporated sustainability parameters into its urban planning to reduce carbon emissions and manage climate risks. It takes account of policy inputs aimed at improving the health of the natural and physical environment in urban areas, where many have witnessed severe deterioration in recent years. Input indicators in this domain look at the city's sustainability master plan and market incentives for renewable energy

sources. Output indicators include urban tree cover and the rate of water stress in cities.

"With the growing importance of sustainable development, particularly in urban areas, we decided to include environmental security as a stand-alone category in the index for this year," the report reads. "In prior editions of the index, sustainability-related indicators were distributed across the index. However, given the growing attention to sustainability by city planners and policy makers, we decided to cut this out into a separate stand-alone category by itself. The focus on environmental sustainability in cities has become an important factor in urban safety."

Kuwait ranks 53rd overall in the index. Its highest rank came in the health security category where it placed 27th, followed by personal security (37th), infrastructure security (51st) and digital security (54th). The 'best health' indicator ranks cities with a score of 75.1-100 as 'Very high', 50.1-75 as 'High' and 25.1-50 as 'Medium'.

Final UK flight for civilians leaves Kabul

KABUL: Britain's last plane carrying only civilian evacuees has taken off from Kabul, the defense ministry said yesterday, leaving hundreds of Afghans eligible for resettlement behind. The government is winding up its operation to airlift civilians, diplomats and troops out of Afghanistan ahead of the August 31 deadline for US troop withdrawal.

The ministry said further planes could carry some civilians along with military and diplomats. The head of the UK armed forces, General Sir Nick Carter earlier yesterday told the BBC that the evacuation effort would end "during the course of today". "We have some civilian flights to take out but it's very few now," Carter said, after which "it will be necessary to bring our troops out on the remaining aircraft".

The UK Ambassador to Afghanistan, Laurie Bristow, tweeted a video of himself standing on the airfield with military planes in the background, wearing a

bullet-proof vest.

He said his team had been working "to the very last moment to evacuate British nationals, Afghans and others at risk". "Since August 13, we have brought nearly 15,000 people to safety," the ambassador said. Carter said the evacuation operation had "gone as well as it could do" but it was "heartbreaking" that "we haven't been able to bring everybody out".

The armed forces chief estimated the number of eligible Afghans who had not been evacuated to be "in the high hundreds". He stressed that they will be welcome in Britain if they manage to leave after the deadline, through third countries or other ways. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace earlier estimated that between 800 and 1,100 Afghans eligible for relocation under the UK's scheme "didn't make it".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday that London would "shift heaven and earth" to help the Afghans left behind. Several British nationals were killed in Thursday's bomb attack at Kabul airport, claimed by the regional Islamic State chapter.

The BBC reported Saturday that a taxi driver from London, Mohammad Niazi, was killed in firing in the aftermath of the blast, while his wife and two of their children were missing. Foreign minister Dominic Raab said Friday that two British nationals and the child of another British citizen were killed. — AFP



KABUL: A handout picture released by the British Ministry of Defense shows a member of the UK Armed Forces fist-bumping an evacuee during their deployment to support the evacuation of British nationals and entitled personnel at Kabul airport in Afghanistan. — AFP

Baghdad summit is held at crucial...

Continued from Page 1

The meeting comes as Iraq, long a casualty of jihadist militancy, also tries to establish itself as a mediator between Arab countries and Iran.

"We all know that we must not lower our guard, because Daesh (IS) remains a threat, and I know that the fight against these terrorist groups is a priority of your government," Macron said, after a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi.

Iraq and France "are key partners in the war against terrorism," Kadhemi replied. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II flew in for the summit, while the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia were also present. In addition to Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and Turkey's foreign minister were also present.

Iraq is seeking to play a "unifying role" to tackle crises shaking the region, sources close to Iraq's Kadhemi said. Oil-rich Iraq has been caught for years in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies, Iran and the United States. Iran exerts major clout in Iraq through allied armed groups within the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored paramilitary network.

Baghdad has been brokering talks since April between US ally Riyadh and Tehran on mending ties severed in 2016. "It was really not easy to put the Saudis and Iranians in the same room," a French diplomatic source said. But an adviser to Kadhemi said that just the presence of the two foreign ministers together was itself a "success". Macron aims to highlight France's role in the region and its determination to press the fight against terrorism, his office said. The French president considers Iraq "essential" to stability in the troubled Middle East, it added.

The Baghdad conference "will make it possible to lay the framework for cooperation in the fight against terrorism," Macron said. An IS affiliate claimed Thursday's suicide bombing in Kabul that killed scores of people, including 13 US service members. The attack has revived global concerns that the extremist organization, which seized swathes of Syria and Iraq before being routed from both countries, is emerging anew, analysts said.

In July, President Joe Biden said US combat operations in Iraq would end this year, but that US soldiers would continue to train, advise and support the country's military in the fight against IS. Washington currently has 2,500 troops deployed to Iraq. Rasha Al Aqeedi, senior analyst at Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, said coalition forces believed Iraq's security personnel could prevent another IS advance. "Maybe they're not ideal, but they're good enough for America to leave the country believing that Iraq is not going to live through another 2014," she said. — Agencies (See Page 3)

'Just the clothes on me': Afghans...

Continued from Page 1

in power between 1996 and 2001 — when the US led an invasion after the September 11 attacks. "I'm happy I left. The only thing I am worried about now is my mother, father, sister and brother," Wazhma said.

Afghan evacuee Naim, a father of five who worked as a translator for the US army, immediately went into hiding when the Taliban seized the capital on August 15. He and his family managed to escape to the airport, where they spent three nights until a US aircraft flew them to the United Arab Emirates.

"We were afraid that they would kill us," the 34-year-old told AFP as he sat next to his wife, three daughters and two sons. "I took my kids' clothes only and our IDs. We lost everything, the carpets, the couches, the baby clothes. All gone," he said. "I just want my kids to have a good life."

Other mask-clad Afghan men, women and children were gathered in the facility in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, some sipping on small juice boxes

and others sitting on white chairs near rooms bustling with medical staff. They were waiting nervously before heading to the airport to board a flight to the US.

A young Afghan girl, in a black-gold sequence dress, patiently waited her turn for a medical check-up, swaying her legs back and forth as she played with a stuffed bear. Dozens of others poured in, queuing at the entrance of the facility, waiting to be checked in by Emirati employees.

Gulf nations—including the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar—which host US and other Western forces, have been instrumental in evacuation efforts, offering Afghans critical passage to new lives in third countries. The UAE said on Thursday that it has helped evacuate 28,000 people from Afghanistan, adding it was hosting 8,500 evacuees on a temporary basis until they head to the US within days. About 109,000 people have been flown out of the country since August 14, the day before the Taliban swept to power, according to the US government. Some countries—including France, Britain and Spain—announced an end to their airlifts Friday, following other nations such as Canada and Australia earlier in the week. The United Nations said it was bracing for a "worst-case scenario" of up to half a million more refugees from Afghanistan by the end of 2021. — AFP

Palestinian boy hit by Zionist...

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Gaza's Hamas rulers, including a 32-year-old Palestinian man who died on Wednesday.

The Zionist army said it had responded with live fire and other measures to Palestinian "rioters" who were hurling explosives over the border fence and attempting to scale it. Following the clashes, the Zionist entity carried out air strikes it said were targeting weapons manufacturing and storage sites of the Islamist group Hamas. The Zionist forces struck Gaza again overnight Monday-Tuesday in response to incendiary balloons that sparked multiple fires in

southern Eshkol region.

There were no reported casualties from the strikes.

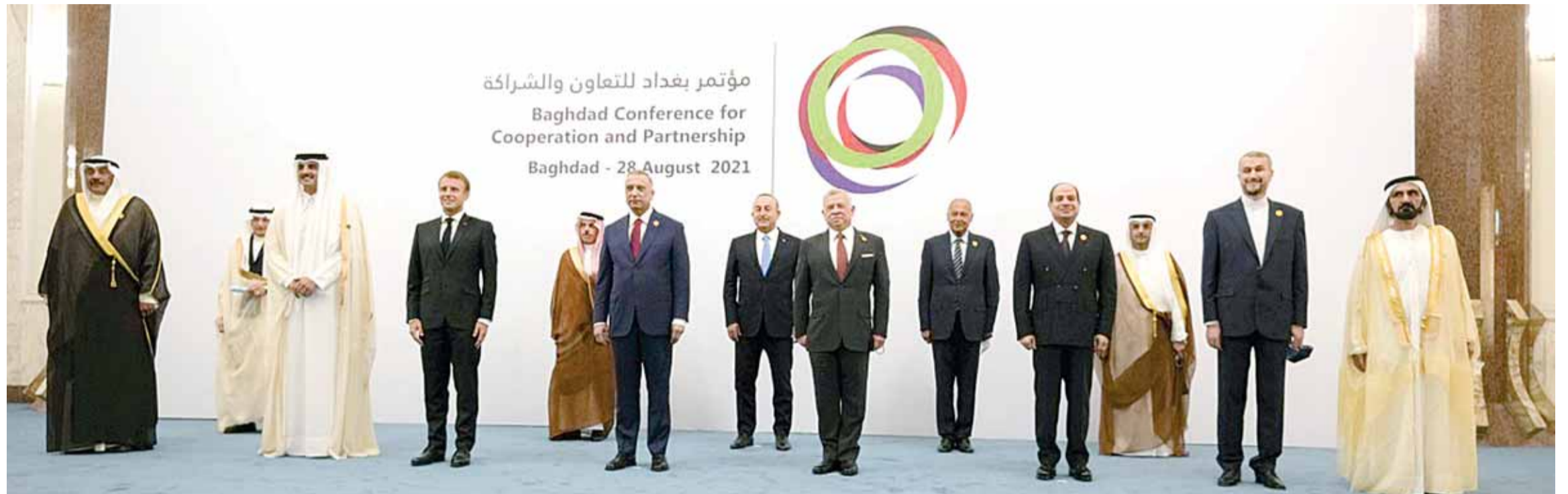
New clashes took place on the border between Gaza and Zionist state on Wednesday, but they were less violent than those yesterday. More protests were planned, according to Palestinian sources.

The protests came just over three months after an informal truce ended 11 days of conflict between Hamas and the Zionist forces, the worst fighting between the two sides in years. Hamas authorities said 260 Palestinians were killed by Zionist air strikes during the conflict, including fighters. In 2018, Gazans began a protest movement demanding an end to Zionist blockade and the right for Palestinians to return to lands they fled or were expelled from when the Jewish state was founded. The Hamas-backed weekly demonstrations, often violent, sputtered as the Jewish state killed some 350 Palestinians in Gaza over more than a year. — AFP

Local

No regional stability without stable Iraq: Kuwait's Premier

Support Iraq to bolster its sovereignty: Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled



BAGHDAD: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (left) appears in a group photo taken on the sidelines of the Baghdad Conference for Partnership and Cooperation in Baghdad yesterday. — KUNA

BAGHDAD: The region can never witness stability as long as Iraq remains unstable, Kuwait's Prime Minister said, noting that support for Iraq would entail bolstering its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, non-intervention in its domestic affairs and meeting aspirations of the Iraqi people.

Addressing the Baghdad Conference for Partnership and Cooperation in the Iraqi capital, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah noted that Iraq is "one of the basic security and economic foundations in the region," lauding the nation's success in overcoming and tackling majority of the problems it had encountered since years back.

The convention is held at a critical and crucial time in the region, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said. Iraq will experience a pivotal phase in its political process that is the parliamentary elections due on October 10, 2021, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stated, noting that the nation would need support from the regional states and the international community to back up the scheduled polling process. The State of Kuwait is among the forward states in the region that sense and interact with the difficult security and economic conditions in Iraq, "thus we will not be reluctant in supporting it in the hardest times," he stressed.

Citing a tangible example of Kuwait's unwavering support for Iraq, His Highness the prime minister recalled the initiative by the Leader of Humanitarian

Action, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, where he masterminded the holding of the international conference for rebuilding Iraq regions demolished by the IS, held in February 2018. The convention ended with a \$30 billion pledge for aiding Iraq. The pledges depicted the State of Kuwait and the international community's commitment to back Iraq in the phase post the victory on terrorism for surpassing the difficult circumstances and ensuring comeback of the relocated Iraqis.

Moreover, the State of Kuwait responded several times to international appeals to meet needs of the displaced Iraqi people, in coordination with the UN Higher Commission for Refugees, in addition to coordinating with charities' campaigns to aid those who had been locally displaced in all Iraqi governorates.

COVID-19 support

"Recently, for the sake of empowering the Iraqi health system to cope with repercussions of the coronavirus, the State of Kuwait presented \$10 mil-

lion to Iraq via the World Health Organization, in addition to supervising and follow-up on part of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development with regard of the second phase of the Kuwaiti grant on repairing and rehabilitating 30 health centers with a sum amounting to \$85 million, after completing the first stage of the project at \$15 million. Furthermore, the State of Kuwait had responded several times to

international appeals to secure needs for the displaced Iraq in coordination with the UNHCR, in tandem with the 'Kuwait by your side' campaign," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said. As to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations, "they have been evolving steadily; motivated by serious resolve and joint will from leaderships of the two countries toward bolstering these bonds in various sectors," he indicated.

Noting Kuwait's aspiration toward implementing bilateral accords, His Highness the Prime Minister lauded Iraq's honoring of its commitments: stipulated in the Security Council Resolution 2107 concerning the missing Kuwaitis and citizens of third states and the Kuwaiti properties including the

national archive. "We praise Iraq's cooperation and applaud what has been achieved so far. We also encourage continuing these intensive efforts regarding the missing Kuwaitis and citizens of third states whose number amounts to 328," he said.

His Highness the Prime Minister thanked the Iraqi Government, members of the tripartite commission and the sub-committee of the International Committee of the Red Cross, efforts of whom resulted in determining destiny of the located human remains. "We look forward toward ending this humanitarian tragedy as soon as possible," he said.

He also expressed gratitude to the UN mission for aiding Iraq (UNAMI) for its vital role in following on the file of the missing and the Kuwaiti properties according to the UNSC Resolution 2107, and facilitating transport of the human remains to the State of Kuwait in cooperating with the Iraqi authorities and the ICRC. "We hope the cooperation will continue with the same pace to resolve all pending matters and start bolstering confidence and elevating the relations to higher levels for serving mutual interests," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled added. He reiterated Kuwait's commitment to supporting Iraq amid the existing difficulties noting that the Kuwaiti private sector' readiness to partake in Iraq's reconstruction, wishing Iraq further progress and prosperity. —KUNA

“ October elections pivotal for Iraq ”

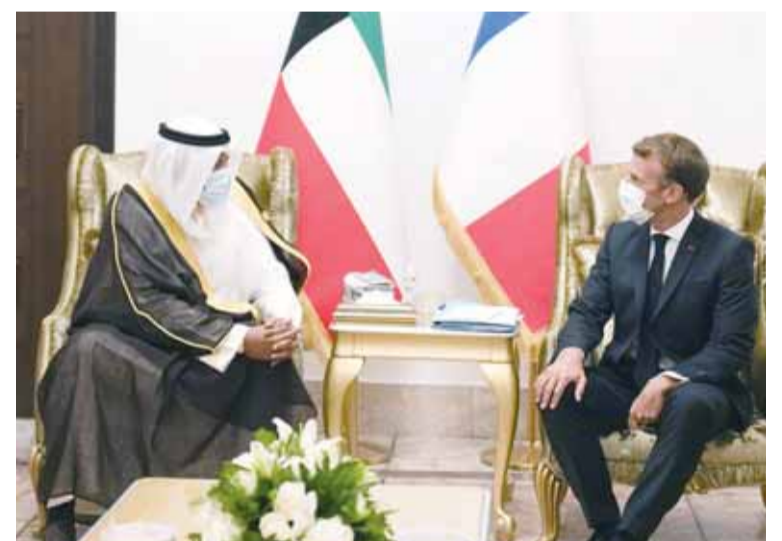
Kuwait Amir's envoy meets heads of state in Baghdad



BAGHDAD: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Jordanian King Abdullah II. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets French President Emmanuel Macron.

BAGHDAD: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met various heads of state and senior officials on the sidelines of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Iraq yesterday. His Highness the Prime Minister met with Jordanian King Abdullah II, Egyptian President

Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, French President Emmanuel Macron, UAE Vice President Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum and Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab World Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi

and Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq Salem Ghassab Al-Zamanan attended the meetings. Upon his arrival to Baghdad earlier yesterday heading the Kuwaiti delegation to the conference, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was received by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, Kuwaiti Ambassador Zamanan, and members of the Embassy's staff. —KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets UAE Vice President Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is received by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi.

Local

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Dallahs (traditional coffee pots) are displayed for sale at the Friday Market. —Photo by Shakir Reshamwala

News in brief

Embassy celebrates anniversary

PARIS: The Embassy of Kuwait in France is organizing festive events on the 60th anniversary of the Kuwaiti-French friendship, in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and the Arab World Institute (AWI) in Paris. In a statement to KUNA, Kuwaiti Ambassador to France Sami Al-Suleiman said yesterday that the French national post office will issue a postage stamp on this occasion, bearing a logo designed by Kuwait's Information Ministry. NCCAL will hold a musical celebration at AWI on September 14, Al-Suleiman added. —KUNA

Kuwait condemns explosions

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait on Friday strongly condemned and denounced the horrific explosions, which targeted Kabul airport in Afghanistan, leading to several deaths and injuries. A statement by the Foreign Ministry stressed Kuwait's unwavering stance against all acts of violence and terrorism, calling for more international efforts to counter such criminal acts against humanity. The ministry conveyed Kuwait's sincere condolences for the victims of the explosions and wishes for swift recovery for those wounded. —KUNA

Oil price at \$72.60 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil price went up by 53 cents to \$72.60 per barrel Friday after being at \$72.07 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. As for the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate prices, both went up respectively by \$1.63 and \$1.32 to settle at \$72.70 pb and \$68.74 pb. —KUNA

Kuwait police open homicide probe in Ardiyah woman's death

KUWAIT: Police are investigating a case in which a man allegedly stabbed his wife to death then turned himself in to Ardiyah police. Detectives headed to the crime scene and found the victim's body with stab wounds and beating marks, according to a security source. The crime came 24 hours after another suspected murder case was filed after police reportedly arrested a man who allegedly shot his mother-in-law dead in Wafra following a family dispute.

Car catches fire

In other news, a vehicle caught fire at a gas

station in Khaitan on Friday. Firefighters responded to the scene and put out the blaze before flames could spread and cause any material damage. No injuries were reported, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement, noting that an investigation was opened.

Meanwhile, firemen brought under control a massive fire in Salmi on Friday. The fire happened at the animal feed market on Salmi road, 40km marker. No injuries were reported as well. Similarly, firemen extinguished a blaze in a chalet in Wafra that left no injuries.



KUWAIT: A handout photo showing a car on fire at a gas station in Khaitan.

Social media rumors complicate fight against COVID-19

KUWAIT: The menace that is the coronavirus (COVID-19) was not only spread via conventional methods of exposure and lack of hygiene. Rumors and false information on social media platforms also played an equal role in propagating the virus, said a medical expert yesterday. Dr Mohammad Abol, a virologist, indicated in an interview that there was a thirst for information concerning COVID-19; however, most of what was being spread on social media platforms like Twitter for example tend to veer off the truth and scientific data.

According to Dr Abol, there was an "alarming anti-science trend" on social media concerning COVID-19; from false information on the origins of the virus to inaccurate data on vaccines, and so on. It is necessary to involve medical experts and their peers in all media plat-

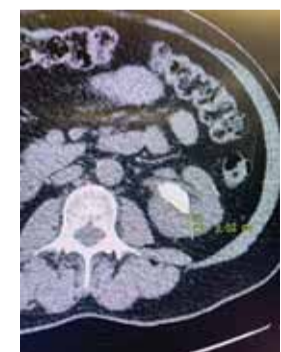
form including social media to fend off rumors and put the correct information out there, affirmed Dr Abol who stressed that the faster experts refuted rumors and lies, the better.

The world has been struggling with COVID-19 since it was declared a pandemic back in early 2020. While authorities around the world, including Kuwait, launched their media and health campaigns to counter the spread of the virus, false information and fake news, discussions regarding the COVID-19 on social media and some conventional media outlets were polarizing with some describing the virus as a hoax, a normal flu, and sometimes even a blatant lie.

In a quote that described Kuwaiti medical professionals' painful struggle against the coronavirus, head of Mubarak Hospital Dr Mahdi Al-Fadhli said previously that "there were two enemies in the fight against COVID-19, one being the virus itself and other being rumors and false information." Despite, the odds Kuwaiti medical staff and peers around the world continue to fight with keen determination to end the suffocating hold of the coronavirus on the world. — KUNA

Armed Forces Hospital doctors remove large kidney stone

KUWAIT: Doctors at the Jaber Armed Forces Hospital removed a kidney stone from a patient in his 50s that was half the size of the kidney itself, the hospital announced yesterday. Head of Urology Dr Mohammad Al-Ghanem said a medical team decided to operate on the patient after locating the stone in his left kidney. Doctors used lithotripsy endoscope through a one-centimeter opening, and the operation was fully successful, he added. Dr Ghanem advised people to drink large amounts of water each day, eat less meat and nuts, and consume less tea, coffee and similar beverages in order to help prevent the development of kidney stones. He warned that risk factors include family history, dehydration as well as having a diet rich in protein



Dr Mohammad Al-Ghanem

and sodium. He added that obesity may also lead to the formation of stones.

Association welcomes newly-arrived health workers from Pakistan

KUWAIT: Pakistan Christian Welfare Association, Kuwait (PCWAK) organized a gathering for the newly-arrived health workers from Pakistan, and invited Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider to attend the function as Chief Guest. Founder member and General Secretary PCWAK Saleem Karamat, in his welcome speech, appreciated the role of the Pakistani government in bringing the medical team to Kuwait, especially during the pandemic crises.

Ambassador Sajjad lauded the efforts of Pakistani paramedical staff in playing a positive role in Kuwait's health sector, and their services to humanity. He informed the participants about achievements of Pakistan's government in various fields. He advised the participants to



work hard and build their positive image through dedication and professionalism in Kuwait. The function was also attended by few members of Hindu and Sikh community of Pakistan. Ambreen Mustafa, the wife of the Ambassador of Pakistan and Patron of Pakistan Women Forum (PWF), thanked the organizers for their great efforts in bringing the community together. The event was concluded with prayers for progress and prosperity of Pakistan and Kuwait.

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Future of Kabul airport subject of intense and complex talks

Bobby Kennedy's assassin granted parole in California

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KABUL: A Taliban Badri fighter, a "special forces" unit, stands guard on Humvee vehicle at the main entrance gate of Kabul airport in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Where is the Taliban's supreme leader?

Taliban remain tight-lipped about Akhundzada's movements

KABUL: In the days since taking power in Afghanistan, a wide range of Taliban figures have entered Kabul-hardened commandos, armed madrassa students and greying leaders back from years of exile. There has been one major exception—the group's supreme leader.

Hibatullah Akhundzada—the so-called commander of the faithful—has shepherded the Taliban as their chief since 2016 when snatched from relative obscurity to oversee a movement in crisis. After taking the insurgency's reins, the cleric was tasked with the mammoth challenge of unifying a jihadist movement that briefly fractured during a bitter power struggle.

The infighting came as the group was hit with successive blows—the assassination of Akhundzada's predecessor and the revelation that its leaders had hidden the death of Taliban founder Mullah Omar. Little is still known about Akhundzada's day-to-day role, with his public profile largely limited to the release of annual messages during Islamic holidays.

Apart from a single photograph released by the Taliban, the leader has never made a public appearance and his

whereabouts remain largely unknown. Since taking control of Kabul in mid-August, the group has remained tight-lipped about Akhundzada's movements.

"You will see him soon, God willing," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told reporters this week when asked about Akhundzada's whereabouts. The ongoing silence comes as the heads of various Taliban factions have openly preached in Kabul's mosques, met with opposition figures, and even chatted with Afghan cricket officials in recent days.

The secret history

The Taliban have a long history of keeping their top leader in the shadows. The group's enigmatic founder Mullah Mohammad Omar was notorious for his hermit ways and rarely travelled to Kabul when the group was in power in the 1990s.

Instead, Omar stayed largely out of sight in his compound in Kandahar, reluctant even to meet visiting delegations. Still, his word was rule and no singular figure has emerged to command the movement with the same respect.

Laurel Miller—the head of the Asia program at the International Crisis Group—said Akhundzada "appears to have adopted a reclusive style similar" to that of Omar.

The secrecy might also be fuelled by security reasons, Miller added, citing the assassination of his predecessor Mullah

Mullah Omar did."

Akhundzada's absence follows years of rumors about his health, with chatter in Pakistan and Afghanistan suggesting he had contracted COVID or had been killed in a bombing.

There has never been much in the way to prove these rumors, but Akhundzada's secrecy comes at a sensitive time for the erstwhile insurgency. There are myriad Taliban factions comprising groups from across Afghanistan, representing a vast array of constituents. The revelation in 2015 that the Taliban leadership had for years hidden the death of Mullah Omar sparked a brief but bloody power struggle, with at least one major faction splitting from the group. As the Taliban transition from fighting to governance, balancing the interests of their numerous factions will be crucial to consolidating power. Any power vacuum would risk destabilizing a movement that has managed to stay cohesive following decades of conflict, tens of thousands of foot soldiers killed, and top leaders assassinated or shipped off to the US prison in Guantanamo Bay.

Contracted COVID or had been killed in a bombing?



Akhtar Mansour by a US drone strike. "A Taliban spokesman has indicated their leader will emerge soon, and he might have reasons to do that to quash suspicions of his demise," Miller told AFP. "But it's also possible that after showing himself he would withdraw and exercise his authority in a remote fashion, as



Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada

Others suggest the group may just be biding its time until US-led forces make their final exit from Afghanistan in the coming days. "The Taliban consider themselves in a state of jihad" as long as foreign troops are on Afghan soil and will likely keep their leader hidden until they leave, said Pakistan-based security analyst Imtiaz Gul. "That's why the supreme leader is not surfacing." —AFP

Khamenei: Biden has same demands as Trump on nuke issue

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday accused US President Joe Biden's administration of making the same demands as his predecessor Donald Trump in talks to revive a nuclear accord. The multilateral deal that offers Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program was torpedoed by Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from it in 2018.

A last round of negotiations between Iran and the US's remaining parties to revive the 2015 accord concluded in June with no resumption in sight. "America's current administration is no different from the previous one, because what it demands from Iran on the nuclear issue is different in words, but the same thing that Trump demanded," Khamenei said, quoted by his official website.

"The Americans truly have no shame on the nuclear issue, and even though they withdrew from

the JCPOA... they now talk in a way and make demands as it was (Iran) that withdrew," he added, referring to the deal by its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with President Ebrahim Raisi's newly formed cabinet, during which he acknowledged public trust in government had been "damaged". The ultraconservative Raisi won a June 18 election marred by record low turnout and an absence of significant competitors.

He succeeded the moderate Hassan Rouhani, the architect of the political opening that culminated in the nuclear agreement between Tehran and six major powers. A year after Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal and impose sanctions on Iran, the Islamic republic retaliated by gradually waiving most of the key nuclear commitments that it had accepted under the agreement.

Six rounds of nuclear talks between Iran and world powers—with the US indirectly taking part—were held in Vienna between April and June. The last round concluded on June 20, with no date set for another. "Behind the scenes of America's foreign policy, there is a predator wolf that sometimes changes to a cunning fox," Khamenei said.



TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by the office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday shows him (center) meeting with Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and his cabinet in the capital Tehran. —AFP

Khamenei's remarks came after a senior security official in Tehran said Iran reserves the right to a "reciprocal response" to Washington, after what it deemed as threats by Biden. Biden received Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at the White House on Friday and said the United States was committed to ensuring "Iran never develops a nuclear weapon". —AFP

Marine guards. "There's really no other way to do it."

The operation has been aware since the beginning of a threat from IS-Khorasan, a violent jihadist group at odds with the Taliban. US troops brought with them defenses against possible mortar and rocket attacks, but so far none have emerged as, on some days, nearly 100 evacuation flights have lifted off from the airport. In one of the greater ironies after two decades of war, racing to meet the August 31 deadline for the US withdrawal has meant constant cooperation on evacuee movements and the IS threat with longtime foe the Taliban.

The head of US forces at the airport, Rear Admiral Peter Vasely, is in constant contact with the Taliban official overseeing security in the area of the airport. In most cases, US officials say, the Taliban has expedited the passage into the airport of foreign nationals, Afghans with visas to the United States and even Afghans who face threats from the Taliban due to their political or social activism or work for the media. While President Joe Biden has been criticized for cooperating with the hardline Islamist group, McKenzie defended it, including sharing intelligence with them related to the evacuation. —AFP

US aims to complete Kabul airlift despite fraught security risk

WASHINGTON: US military officials say it is nearly impossible to eliminate the threat of another attack on the Kabul airport airlift, and that close cooperation with longtime enemy the Taliban is crucial to keeping it safe. One day after an Islamic State suicide bombing killed at least 85 people, including 13 American troops, the Pentagon said it was determined to keep processing refugees through the gates of the airport and onto aircraft through the August 31 deadline.

"We have seen firsthand how dangerous that mission is. But ISIS (Islamic State) will not deter us from accomplishing this mission," Major General Hank Taylor told reporters Friday. Thursday's attack showed the high risks being taken with the evacuation, which has flown at least 105,000 people out of

the country since the operation began on August 14 as the Taliban claimed control of the country.

It appeared that an IS suicide bomber exploded his bomb just outside the airport's Abbey Gate, where thousands of people had gathered, hoping to leave the country. After the explosion, IS gunmen opened fire, adding to the carnage. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Friday that the threat has not dissipated. "We still believe there are credible threats... specific, credible threats," Kirby said.

"You have to get close"

The more than 5,000 US troops who control the airport have assumed the role of gatekeepers, clearing evacuees through entrances while standing guard on the airport compound's razor-wired walls. "We have to check people before they get onto the airfield. We have to ensure they're not carrying a bomb or any other kind of weapon that could ultimately make its way onto an aircraft," said General Kenneth McKenzie, the head of the US military's Central Command.

"We can't do that with standoff. You ultimately have to get very close to that person," he said of the

Uproar in Washington: Did US share evacuee names with Taliban?

WASHINGTON: Did the US military give the Taliban the names of Americans and Afghans waiting to be evacuated in order to facilitate the process? The idea, not entirely denied by President Joe Biden, had his opponents screaming in Washington on Friday. The controversy arose from a Thursday report by the respected Politico news website. Pressed by journalists, Biden did not rule out the possibility of names being provided to the Taliban.

"I can't tell you with any certitude that there's actually been a list of names," Biden said. "I don't—there may have been—but I know of no circumstance." He added, "It doesn't mean... it didn't exist, that, 'Here's the names of 12 people; they're coming. Let them through.' It could very well have happened." That caused an uproar in Republican circles in the US capital.

"Never in the history of this nation would we have ever thought that our own government would give the names of Americans to the Taliban," said top House Republican Kevin McCarthy. "Why wouldn't we have created a situation of safe passage?" Thirteen US troops and dozens of Afghans were killed in a suicide bombing at Kabul airport on Thursday, highlighting the troubled evacuation effort and shaking the Biden administration. The Pentagon has acknowledged being in touch with the Taliban to coordinate the mass evacuation, but the State Department hit back on Friday at the notion that anybody had been put at risk. "The idea that we are providing names or personally identifiable information to the Taliban in a way that exposes anyone to additional risk—that is simply wrong," State Department spokesman Ned Price said. —AFP

International

Losing steam, Polish govt plays immigration card

350 migrants stopped from crossing into Spain's Melilla

MADRID: As it loses steam in the polls, Poland's right-wing populist government is playing the anti-immigration card that helped it win in 2015, hoping to take back the political initiative, analysts said. Thousands of migrants—most of them from the Middle East—have crossed from Belarus into eastern EU states, including Poland, in recent months.

The EU suspects the influx is engineered by the Belarusian regime in retaliation against increasingly stringent EU sanctions, with Poland the Baltic states calling it a “hybrid attack”. Political attention in Poland in recent weeks has focused on a group of around 30 migrants camped out on the border between Poland and Belarus.

Meanwhile, around 350 migrants tried to scale the fence from Morocco into Spain's Melilla enclave before dawn yesterday but none managed to get across, a Spanish government spokesman said.

Spanish border forces had been alerted at around 5:30 am by their Moroccan counterparts that “a group of 350 sub-Saharan Africans” were trying to scale the fence near the Barrio Chino border post, prompting Guardia Civil police to deploy a helicopter to head them off.

“No one got across,” the spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Another group of more than 300 people had tried to cross into Melilla on August 20 but none managed to get in, he said. Three days earlier, more than 50 did succeed in entering the tiny enclave when around 150 people stormed the fence. And on July 22, more than 230 people managed to sneak into Melilla in one of the largest influxes in recent years.

Spain's two tiny enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have Europe's only land border with Africa, making them a magnet for migrants desperate to escape grinding poverty and hunger.

Poland is refusing to let in the migrants, said to be Afghans by a charity trying to help them, or give them aid without the consent of Belarus. “It cannot be ruled out that there will be early elections next year... and it is by no means certain that the Law and Justice (PiS) party will win a majority or manage to piece together a coalition,” said Agata Szczesniak, a



Govt sends mixed messages

political analyst for the news portal OKO.press. The government lost its formal parliamentary majority earlier this month after the departure of a junior coalition partner. A recent poll by Kantar also found that PiS had fallen by three points in the polls and is now neck-and-neck with the main opposition grouping, Civic Platform, at 26 percent.

“To go back up in the polls, PiS is trying to replay what happened in 2015 but even more so. It is focusing public emotion around the image and



BIALYSTOK, Poland: Polish soldiers unload materials to construct a barbed wire fence on the border with Belarus in Zubrzyca Wielka near Bialystok, eastern Poland. — AFP

rhetoric of a war” against migrants, Szczesniak said.

During Europe's migration crisis of 2015, PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski scored electoral points in parliamentary elections that year with his anti-immigration rhetoric, including warnings about the diseases and “all sorts of parasites” that the migrants might bring with them.

The government has remained intransigent over the migrants on the border even after multiple appeals from the UN refugee agency, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has said he is protecting “holy Polish territory”.

But analysts pointed out that public feeling around the issue has changed in recent years. Many Poles sympathise with Afghans and are growing used to higher levels of immigration in the country, particularly of Ukrainians and Belarusians. “At the time, around 70 percent of Poles said they were opposed to letting in refugees. Today, it is 55 percent,” said Szczesniak. The government may also be sending a mixed message. In recent days, it has also evacuated almost 1,000 Afghans who worked for Poland's military contingent. “On the one hand, the PiS is helping Afghans and on the other it is rejecting them. This creates confusion,” said Szczesniak. — AFP

Biden: China still withholding info on COVID origins

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden said Friday that China was withholding “critical information” on the origins of COVID-19 after the US intelligence community said it did not believe the virus was a bioweapon—but remained split on whether it escaped from a lab.

The United States, however, does not believe Chinese officials had foreknowledge of the virus before the initial outbreak of the pandemic that has now claimed 4.5 million lives, according to the unclassified summary of an eagerly awaited intelligence report. “Critical information about the origins of this pandemic exists in the People's Republic of China, yet from the beginning, government officials in China have worked to prevent international investigators and members of the global public health community from accessing it,” Biden said in a statement. “To this day, the PRC continues to reject calls for transparency and withhold information, even as the toll of this pandemic continues to rise.”

US intelligence has ruled out that the coronavirus was developed as a weapon, and most agencies assess with “low confidence” it was not genetically engineered.

But the community remains divided on the pathogen's origins, with four agencies and the National Intelligence Council judging in favor of natural exposure to an animal as the likely explanation, and one agency favoring the lab leak theory. Analysts at three agencies were unable to reach a conclusion.

“Variations in analytic views largely stem from differences in how agencies weigh intelligence reporting and scientific publications, and intelligence and scientific gaps,” the summary said.

The intelligence community and global scientists lack clinical samples or epidemiological data from the earliest COVID-19 cases, it added. Biden said the United States would continue to work with allies to press Beijing to share more information and cooperate with the World Health Organization.

“We must have a full and transparent accounting of this global tragedy. Nothing less is acceptable,” he said. The office of the director of national intelligence said it was reviewing declassifying parts of the report in the near future, in light of the historic nature of the pandemic and the importance of informing the public, while protecting its sources and methods.

Lab leak fading

Beijing has rejected calls from the United States and other countries for a renewed origin probe after a heavily politicized visit by a WHO team in January also proved inconclusive, and faced criticism for lacking transparency and access. In a statement Friday, the Chinese embassy in Washington slammed the US intelligence community's findings, defending its handling of the pandemic and the WHO investigation. “The report by the US intelligence community shows that the US is bent on going down the wrong path of political manipulation,” the embassy said in a statement.

“The report by the intelligence community is based on the presumption of guilt on the part of China, and it is only for scapegoating China.” At the outset of the pandemic, the natural origin hypothesis—that the virus emerged in bats and then passed to humans, likely via an intermediary species—was widely accepted. —AFP

US south coast braces for Hurricane Ida

MIAMI: Residents evacuated high-risk areas and lined up to buy supplies Friday as Louisiana braced for Hurricane Ida, expected to strengthen to an “extremely dangerous” Category 4 storm when it hits the southern United States this weekend. The National Weather Service is now forecasting a “life-threatening storm surge” when the hurricane makes landfall along the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, warning of “catastrophic wind damage” and urging those in affected areas to follow advice from local officials.

“The time to act is NOW. Hurricane Ida is now forecast to make landfall as a category 4 hurricane,” the New Orleans branch of the US National Weather Service urged in a tweet. That level is the second-highest on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale,

with a minimum wind strength of 130 miles (209 kilometers) per hour. Louisiana has declared a state of emergency in preparation for the storm, forecast to make US landfall Sunday — 16 years to the day after the devastating Hurricane Katrina first hit the state, which flooded 80 percent of New Orleans and killed more than 1,800 people.

Officials have already ordered mandatory evacuations outside the levee-protected areas of New Orleans and flood-prone coastal towns on the state's coast such as Grand Isle.

“People are packing and leaving right now,” Scooter Resweber, police chief in Grand Isle, told local media. “We know this is going to be a big one.” The declaration, approved by President Joe Biden, will funnel federal supplemental funds and aid to the southern state to bolster its emergency preparedness and response efforts.

The hurricane made landfall late Friday in western Cuba as a Category 1 storm, packing maximum sustained winds near 80 miles per hour. Ida struck Cuba in the province of Pinar



HAVANA: People walk under the rain in Havana Friday as Hurricane Ida passes through eastern Cuba. Storm Ida has strengthened into a hurricane as it barrels toward Cuba and the US Gulf Coast, the National Hurricane Center said Friday. — AFP

del Rio, the current coronavirus epicenter of the island. More than 10,000 people were evacuated and electricity was cut off ahead of the storm as a precaution.

In the capital Havana, public transport was suspended by midday and thousands of people were evacuated.

“Now is the time for Louisianians to get prepared,” tweeted the state's

governor John Bel Edwards, calling on residents to “make sure you and your family are ready for whatever comes.”

But New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell told residents inside the city's protective levee system to stay in their homes. “We do not want to have people on the road, and therefore in greater danger,” she told local news website nola.com. —AFP

Bobby Kennedy's assassin granted parole in California

LOS ANGELES: The man convicted of shooting dead Robert F Kennedy in a 1968 assassination that rocked the United States was granted parole Friday. Sirhan Sirhan, now 77, has been behind bars for five decades—despite doubts that he fired the shots that likely changed the course of US politics.

Kennedy, the younger brother of slain president John F. Kennedy, was campaigning for the Democratic nomination when he was gunned down in a Los Angeles hotel. His murder came just months after the killing of Black civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and as a divided America was deep in an unpopular war in Vietnam. Sirhan was convicted and sentenced to death in 1969 after pleading guilty.

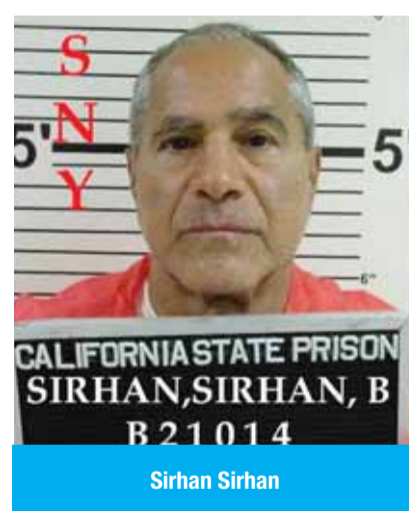
His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment several years later. But doubts soon surfaced that he was

actually responsible for Bobby Kennedy's death, with claims that there could have been a second gunman in the Ambassador Hotel on June 5, 1968.

‘Wrong person’

Kennedy had given a speech at the hotel after winning California's Democratic presidential primary. On a walkabout in the kitchen where he met staff, he was shot, as were several other people in his entourage, among them Paul Schrade, who took a bullet to the head. Schrade, along with Kennedy's then-14-year-old son, have since campaigned for Sirhan's release, saying the evidence against him does not stack up.

“It is a good decision,” Schrade told AFP on Friday. “I'm really grateful to the parole board for giving Sirhan the chance to go home.” The



vote on Friday by a two-person panel of the California parole board does not mean that Sirhan will automatically be released.

The decision is subject to a three-month review, and then ultimately passes to state Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat who faces a recall vote in September. During

Friday's hearing, Kennedy's youngest son, Douglas, spoke in favor of Sirhan's release, media reports said, adding that Robert F. Kennedy Jr had sent a letter of support to the parole board.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr told The Washington Post in 2018 that he had visited Sirhan in the California desert prison where he was serving his sentence, and had become convinced that an injustice had been perpetrated. “I went there because I was curious and disturbed by what I had seen in the evidence,” he told the paper.

“I was disturbed that the wrong person might have been convicted of killing my father. My father was the chief law enforcement officer in this country. I think it would have disturbed him if somebody was put in jail for a crime they didn't commit.” Uncertainty over Sirhan's guilt began during his trial, when prosecutors produced an autopsy report that showed Kennedy was shot at point-blank range from behind. —AFP

Cameroon's main port city battles rising flood peril

DOUALA: It is the middle of the night in Cameroon's largest port city, Douala, and the floodwaters are rising fast and quietly.

Alerted by frightened neighbors, Hummel Tsafack hastily sends his children to safety and grabs a few possessions. A few minutes later, brackish water pours into the family home. Flooding is an annual hazard during the July-September rainy season in Makepe-Missoke, a poor district in the heart of this city of more than three million people. But, impelled by suspected climate change and worsened by urban planning and blocked

drains, such events have become more and more frequent.

“The TV burned out, the refrigerator burned out,” Tsafack, 35, sighed after the most recent flood earlier this month. “Everything has been trashed.”

“As soon as we hear thunder, we raise the beds,” his neighbor Francois, a man in his fifties, said. “Everyone here is scared. The water rises so fast.” The two men have stark memories of a flood in summer 2020 that devastated the neighborhood and paralyzed Cameroon's economic capital on the Atlantic coast. Francois's small home is steeped in damp and none of his household appliances work. The concrete floor has holes in numerous places. “We have already patched that area seven times. Every time there's a flood, it breaks up and we have to start again,” he said.

Population growth

“We moved here because it was cheaper. We aren't going to move



DOUALA, Cameroon: Francois Bakakeu walks in the courtyard of his house in the Makepe-Missoke district, that was heavily affected by floods, in Douala, Cameroon. —AFP

again,” Francois said, though the endangered neighborhood is located in a flood zone where building is officially banned. People continue to settle there, driven by the lack of space in a city with a population growth rate of more than 5.5 percent

per year. The gap is widening between demand and supply for available land as nearly 110,000 newcomers per year look to put down roots in Douala. Even before climate change, Douala was already prone to rising water. —AFP

International

Future of Kabul airport subject of intense and complex talks

Airport equally vital for Taliban rulers and Western nations

KABUL: Who will ultimately run the airport in Kabul after US forces leave? That question—a vital one for Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers but also for Western nations still hoping to evacuate everyone eligible—is the subject of intense and complex talks.

Next week, on September 1, Hamid Karzai International Airport will be under the control of the hardline Islamists, who already on Friday claimed to have moved into certain areas of the military side of the facility. "We are departing by August 31. Upon that date, we are delivering—we're essentially giving the airport back to the Afghan people," State Department spokesman Ned Price said Friday, cutting off speculation about the possibility of it falling into international hands.

However, the Afghan government collapsed in the face of the Taliban advance on Kabul, and now the onetime insurgents are in power but still haven't even formed a government. "Running an airport is not an uncomplicated piece of business," Price said. "I think that it is probably unreasonable to expect that there will be normal airport operations on September 1."

The idea that the airport could be temporarily closed was raised on Wednesday by his boss, Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He said there had been "very active efforts" by countries in the region to see whether they could help keep it open "or, as necessary, reopening it if it closes for some period of time." Blinken insisted that the fate of the airport was important to the Taliban, who did not want to find themselves once again heading a pariah regime, as they did from 1996 to 2001.

The Islamists are especially hoping to see humanitarian aid quickly flow into the country.

Role for Ankara?

But the airport is also important for Western coun-

tries who want to be able to get their citizens out of Afghanistan, as well as thousands of Afghan allies who cannot be evacuated in the US-led airlift before August 31. Up until now, NATO has played a key role: the alliance's civilian personnel have taken care of air traffic control, fuel supplies and communications, while military contingents from Turkey, the United States, Britain and Azerbaijan were in charge of security.



'We're departing by August 31'

With the full withdrawal of international forces rapidly approaching, it has long been thought that perhaps Turkey would step into the breach, maintaining responsibility for securing the perimeter of the airport. The hope was that the Taliban would accept the presence of a small force from Turkey, a mainly Muslim nation that is also part of NATO.

But once they took power, the Taliban have repeatedly said they will not accept any foreign military presence in Afghanistan after August 31, and Turkish soldiers have begun to pull out.

However, negotiations have continued on the diplomatic front. After the first talks on Friday between Turkish officials and the Taliban in Kabul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan revealed the Taliban now want to oversee security at the airport, while



KABUL: Taliban Badri fighters, a "special forces" unit, stand guard as Afghans, hoping to leave Afghanistan, walk through the main entrance gate of Kabul airport in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

offering Ankara the option of running its logistics. "We will make a decision once calm prevails," Erdogan said, saying the suicide attack on Thursday at the gates of the airport showed how complex the mission was.

Beyond Turkey, the discussions on the future of the airport have included Qatar and private operators, while the United States has said it is acting as a facilitator. But the question of who takes over the airport is a sensitive one: beyond the security concerns, the airport is in a bad state, US officials say, adding

that apart from the US Army, there are few entities in the world capable of taking charge of it from one day to the next. US and Western experts on air traffic have just completed an evaluation of the airport in a bid to assess if commercial flights could resume quickly, Price said Friday. Other officials are more blunt: there won't be many airlines that will agree to fly into Kabul as long as the Taliban are unable to offer real assurances on security and that the infrastructure is in good working order. — AFP



DHAKA: At least 21 people were killed and dozens remain missing as a boat packed with passengers and a sand-laden cargo ship collided Friday in a lake in eastern Bangladesh, officials said.

21 killed in Bangladesh boat accident

DHAKA: At least 21 people were killed and dozens remain missing as a boat packed with passengers and a sand-laden cargo ship collided Friday in a lake in eastern Bangladesh, officials said. The boat was reportedly carrying some 60 passengers when the incident occurred on a lake in the town of Bijoy Nagar, local government administrator Hayat-ud-Doula Khan said. The cargo ship's steel tip and the boat collided, causing the passenger vessel to capsize, he said.

"We have recovered 21 bodies including nine women and six children so far," he told AFP, adding that the toll would likely rise. Local fire service spokesman Taufiqul Islam said divers were searching the scene of the accident for more bodies, and that

reinforcements had been called in from neighboring towns. Locals also joined the rescue efforts. Police said at least seven people were taken to a local hospital after they were rescued from the sunken boat. Survivor Akhi Akter said she was travelling with her son, mother-in-law and brother-in-law in the passenger boat. "When the accident occurred, I managed to swim back to the bank. But the rest of my relatives are still missing," she said tearfully. Local authorities have formed a probe committee to investigate the accident. The maritime accident was the latest in a string of similar incidents in the south Asian country. In April and May, 54 were killed in two separate boat capsizing accidents.

Experts blame poor maintenance, lax safety standards at shipyards and overcrowding for many of the accidents. Vessels transporting sand sit low in the water and can be hard to see in choppy conditions, contributing to poor lighting. In June last year, a ferry sank in Dhaka after it was hit from behind by another ferry, killing at least 32 people. In February 2015, at least 78 people died when an overcrowded ship collided with a cargo boat. —AFP



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on May 24, 2012, AFP photographer Massoud Hossaini speaks during a discussion of his Pulitzer Prize winning photograph at the Newseum in Washington. — AFP

Afghan lensman warns of Taliban threat to media

KABUL: The Taliban will shut down Afghanistan's media and are fooling the West by promising to let journalists operate freely, an award-winning Afghan photographer said after fleeing Kabul over threats by the group. Massoud Hossaini, who scooped a Pulitzer Prize in 2012 while working for Agence France-Presse and is now freelance, said Afghanistan's new rulers were already restricting female journalists in particular.

The 39-year-old's dire warning on the future of the media in Afghanistan comes as he recovers from a dramatic escape from Kabul on the last commercial flight the day the Taliban took power. "It is going to be really, really bad. They are trying to kill the media but they are doing it slowly," Hossaini, who is currently staying in the Netherlands, told AFP on Friday.

"When Taliban capture someone, first of all they capture someone and then kill them, and this is now happening to media in general." After the fall of Kabul, Taliban officials stressed that the media, including women, could continue to operate freely and would not be harassed. The Taliban even held a formal press conference where the group's spokesman took questions.

'Another North Korea'

But Hossaini—whose 2012 picture of a green-clad Afghan girl crying in horror after a suicide attack also won second prize in the spot news category of the World Press Photo awards—said the Taliban's promises were a sham. "The Taliban will completely close down the media, and they will also cut internet completely and

probably become another North Korea for this region," Hossaini said at a World Press Photo exhibition in Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk.

"Right now they are fooling the international community, they are fooling westerners," he said, branding the press conference a "gimmick". Long a target for militants, Hossaini made his escape from Afghanistan after learning that the Taliban "really hated" a recent story that he and a foreign journalist had covered about the group carrying out forced marriages of women and girls to Taliban gunmen. After receiving threats on social media, the pair booked tickets out of Kabul, with Hossaini travelling on the morning of August 15 as it became clear the Taliban were closing in.

"When the plane took off as the last commercial plane before Kabul falling, we cried," he said.

"I saw that many friends, even foreigners were crying, because they felt like me that we cannot go back to Kabul again." Kabul itself has descended into nightmarish scenes, with the suicide attack outside Kabul airport on Thursday producing "even worse" images than those that won Hossaini the Pulitzer. —AFP

News in brief

Nigerian gunmen free 32 more

KANO: Nigerian gunmen have freed 32 more students kidnapped in July from a Baptist school in northwest Kaduna state, a church leader and family representative said on Friday. The news came just hours after nearly 100 pupils snatched from an Islamic seminary in northwest Niger State were reunited with their parents after three months in captivity. The two mass abductions were part of a string of kidnapping for ransom attacks on Nigerian schools and colleges this year by heavily armed gangs known locally as bandits. —AFP

Anez seeks international legal help

LA PAZ: Lawyers for Bolivian ex-president Jeanine Anez, in jail since March, said Friday they were appealing to a regional UN rights body for her. Attorney Luis Guillen said the appeal to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) was made because Anez's legal team "exhausted the legal and court bodies (to which they could appeal) in Bolivia." Anez, 54, has been charged with "genocide" over protesters' deaths in 2019; she made an attempt on her life while suffering from "severe depression" due to her prolonged imprisonment, her family has said. —AFP

Mali ex-interim president, PM freed

BAMAKO: Former Malian interim president Bah Ndaw and his prime minister Moctar Ouane have been freed from house arrest, the West African bloc ECOWAS said on Friday. In a statement, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said it "welcomes" the move by Mali to lift "all restrictive measures" on the former leaders. Both men were appointed as interim civilian leaders after a military coup in August 2020, charged with steering Mali back towards civilian rule. —AFP

DR Congo's former minister held

KINSHASA: Former DR Congo health minister Eteni Longondo was detained on Friday over the alleged misappropriation of funds allocated to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, official sources said. Longondo "was placed under a provisional arrest warrant this evening" following lengthy questioning, a government source said. The former health minister, who was in office until April, was taken to the Makala prison in the capital Kinshasa, according to a prison official also speaking anonymously. —AFP

Peru approves president's cabinet

LIMA: Peru's under fire leftist President Pedro Castillo staved off a political crisis on Friday as the right-wing dominated congress approved his first cabinet. In a bitter debate that began on Thursday, the cabinet headed by Guido Bellido was approved by 73 votes to 50 against. "Consequently, the question of confidence has been approved," said Maria del Carmen Alva, the opposition legislator that heads congress. —AFP

Judge backs Florida mask mandate

MIMAI: A judge overruled Florida's conservative, pro-Trump governor Friday and said the state's schools can make mask-wearing mandatory. Judge John Cooper sided with a group of parents who had filed a lawsuit challenging an executive order by Governor Ron DeSantis that barred schools from making students and school staff wearing masks to fight COVID-19.

Kazakhstan arms depot blast death toll climbs to 13

ALMATY: The death toll from explosions at an arms depot in southern Kazakhstan climbed to 13, authorities in the ex-Soviet country said yesterday, adding that three people were still missing. The blasts occurred at a defense ministry munitions depot in the southern Jambyl region, leaving dozens injured and forcing the evacuation of more than 1,000 people from nearby villages.

The Central Asian country's emergencies ministry said yesterday that a 13th body was recovered at the site but had not been identified. "The search for three missing (persons) continues," the ministry said in a statement. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced that today would be a day of national mourning for the military personnel and rescuers who died at the scene of the disaster.

Praising their "heroism," Tokayev wrote on Twitter yesterday that the victims would "always remain in the memory of the people". On Friday, he acknowledged "systemic problems" with Kazakhstan's munitions storage.

Regular incidents at Kazakhstan's Soviet-era military depots have proven a headache for the government. Another depot near the southern town of Arys has seen three lethal explosions in the last decade. The defense ministry said some of the munitions stored at the Soviet-era depot in Jambyl had been transferred from the facility in Arys, where there have been calls to resettle the town's entire population of 45,000.

A video shared online showed a column of smoke billowing from a fire before a powerful explosion sent flames shooting out. Another showed debris flying through the sky in long arcs as the fire raged.

The defense ministry said a fire had broken out and "quickly spread to storage facilities where engineering ammunition is stored" causing multiple blasts. — AFP



TARAZ, Kazakhstan: This screen grab from AFP TV video shows explosions at a defense ministry munitions depot in the southern region of Jambyl, about 30kms from Taraz, Kazakhstan. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2021

Fed chief signals US economy may be ready for less stimulus by year end

Pandemic recession was the briefest yet deepest on record: Powell

WASHINGTON: The US economy and labor market have healed to the point that the central bank could begin to withdraw its stimulus measures by the end of the year, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Friday. But the Fed chief stressed that there was no hurry to raise interest rates, arguing that current inflation pressures will be temporary. When COVID-19 hit the world's largest economy last year, the Fed jumped into action to prevent a major recession, slashing the key lending rate to zero and buying huge amounts of Treasury debt and agency mortgage-backed securities to provide liquidity to the financial system.

The pandemic recession was "the briefest yet deepest on record," Powell said in his highly anticipated speech to the annual Jackson Hole central banking symposium.

With millions of jobs recovered, he signaled that the Fed may ease the pace of bond buying from its current \$120 billion per-month. Powell provided no specifics, but instead repeated the Fed's stance that "it could be appropriate to start reducing the pace of asset purchases this year." Any move to slow asset purchases would still leave a large amount of stimulus in place, and would not be a signal that an increase in the benchmark lending rate would soon follow, he said. The timing of "rate liftoff" from zero will be subject to a "substantially more stringent test," Powell added.

No 'ill-timed' move

Widespread vaccinations have allowed businesses across the United States to reopen fully, bringing the unemployment rate down to 5.4 percent last month, much closer to the pre-pandemic level of 3.5 percent.

However, Powell said the recovery has further to go

and the fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 adds uncertainty. He noted that total employment remains about six million positions below its February 2020 level "and five million of that shortfall is in the still-depressed service sector."

Meanwhile, prices have jumped as the economy restarted, pushing the central bank's preferred inflation gauge up to 4.2 percent annually in July, well above the long-term target of two percent. The White House on Friday more than doubled its forecast for consumer price inflation this year, predicting a 4.8 percent annual increase, up from the two percent forecast in May.

But President Joe Biden's Office of Management and Budget expects consumer inflation to slow sharply by the end of next year to 2.6 percent. Powell downplayed fears inflation could accelerate, noting that supply bottlenecks appear to be resolving and wage increases do not appear to be spilling

over into prices.

Inflation is likely to decline as temporary pressures, like skyrocketing prices for used cars, recede, and Powell warned that moving to respond to factors that could prove to be temporary "may do more harm than good." "The ill-timed policy move unnecessarily slows hiring and other economic activity and pushes inflation lower than desired," he said, warning that with the labor market still healing, "Such a mistake could be particularly harmful."

The Fed target aims to get inflation running at an average of two percent over time, which in practice means accepting higher prices for a short period. Powell noted that inflation has fallen short of that goal for decades, but policymakers nonetheless will watch



ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND: File photo shows, gas prices are posted at a station in Annapolis, Maryland. A key US inflation gauge continued to climb last month and income shot higher as the economy bounces back from last year's downturn, according to government data released yesterday. —AFP

incoming data for signs high prices are becoming entrenched.

'Strategic plan'

Veteran Fed-watcher Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets said Powell may have disappointed those waiting for a roadmap for the taper program, but his speech doubled down on the bank's focus on job gains. "Clearly, the Fed is carrying through on its prioritization of maximum inclusive employment established in its new strategic plan, with a very loose interpretation of its tolerance of higher inflation," Levy said in an analysis. Some Fed officials recently have indicated

they want to end the bond-buying program quickly.

Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said the Federal Open Market Committee making the decision is divided and likely to wait until its November meeting "to make a tapering announcement, and start reducing asset purchases in December or January."

Fed Vice Chair Richard Clarida seemed to be leaning that way, saying on CNBC later Friday that officials "will get a better read on the labor market, in particular, this fall." "Clearly Delta does pose a downside risk to the outlook," Clarida said, and the central bank will have to "be attuned and attentive to the data" to see if the economy is slowing. —AFP

Microsoft warns cloud customers of data vulnerability

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft says it has warned thousands of its cloud computing clients of a recently discovered flaw that left their data vulnerable for an extended period. The problem involved keys used to access Microsoft Azure's flagship database service Cosmos DB, and was discovered two weeks ago by cybersecurity company Wiz.

"Imagine our surprise when we were able to gain complete unrestricted access to the accounts and databases of several thousand Microsoft Azure customers, including many Fortune 500 companies," Wiz said on its blog Thursday.

Companies including Coca-Cola and Exxon-Mobil use Cosmos DB "to manage massive volumes of data around the world in real time," Wiz added. The cloud service is used to store data, as well as to analyze and process everything from orders from suppliers to transactions with consumers.

According to Microsoft, customers who may have been impacted were notified, but there was no evidence the flaw had been exploited by malicious actors. "We fixed this issue immediately to keep our customers safe and protected," a Microsoft spokesperson told AFP.

Microsoft told more than 30 percent of Cosmos DB customers that they needed to change their access keys, according to Wiz. But the cybersecurity firm warned others could be at risk. "Microsoft only emailed customers that were affected during our short (approximately week-long) research period," Wiz said. "However... the vulnerability has been exploitable for at least sev-



CHEVY CHASE: Photo shows, 2021 a Microsoft logo adorns a building in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Some 38 million records stored on a Microsoft service, including private information, were mistakenly left exposed this year, security firm UpGuard said. —AFP

eral months, possibly years."

Microsoft is one of the world's biggest cloud service providers, behind Amazon. Demand has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic with the growth of working from home and reliance on digital services for things like entertainment and shopping.

The US tech company has recently suffered a series of security issues. Earlier this year, Microsoft disclosed that a state-sponsored hacking group operating out of China was exploiting

security flaws in its Exchange email services, a potentially devastating hack believed to have affected at least 30,000 Microsoft email servers in government and private networks.

The company was then also attacked by the suspected Russian group behind the 2020 hack of the SolarWinds software company. This week, tech bosses including from Microsoft, met with US President Joe Biden to discuss ways to fight ransomware attacks and defend cloud computing systems from hackers. —AFP

China sets rules on computer codes that guide consumers

BEIJING: China on Friday announced new rules to limit the power of computer programmes used to drive the choices of the country's consumers, who must instead be encouraged to use online culture to "spread positive energy". The measures are part of a broader crackdown by Beijing on the tech sector and mega-apps including gaming, personal finance and ride-hailing. Algorithms must not promote content "endangering national security, disrupting economic and social order or infringing on the legitimate rights and interests of others", according to the rules published by China's Cyberspace Administration.

Users must not be shown discriminatory prices

based on their past behaviour and must have the option to turn off recommendations, the rules say. Algorithms drive the success of the most popular e-commerce, social media and news apps used in China, including TikTok's Chinese twin Douyin and top online shopping platforms Taobao and JD.com.

They detect patterns in users' past purchases and viewing behaviour to push them toward new products and content tailored to their preferences. But app firms have faced criticism for allowing their algorithms to promote content that is illegal or deemed by state censors to be inappropriate. The programmes should not induce "bad habits" in minors and must not push them to be "addicted to the internet." Instead they should "actively spread positive energy" and "adhere to mainstream values", the new rules say.

While China's largest social media platforms are often subject to censorship of politically sensitive posts, other undesirable content including gambling-related and sexual posts has been able to slip under the radar. —AFP

Apple's Tim Cook gets \$750mn bonus payout

NEW YORK: Apple chief executive Tim Cook has received a bonus of some \$750 million, reflecting his performance at the US technology giant in his 10 years at the helm, a regulatory filing showed. The Thursday filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission showed Cook's bonus was granted in some five million Apple shares, which were subsequently cashed out. The bonus reflects a stock option plan implemented in 2011 when Cook took over as CEO from Steve Jobs shortly before the Apple co-founder's death. Since then, Apple's market value has skyrocketed and the California giant's worth is estimated at more than \$2.4 trillion. The stock award included 1.1 million shares granted based on Apple's performance and 3.9 million

Apple announces App Store concessions as pressure grows

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple has agreed to loosen payment restrictions on its App Store, a major change announced in a settlement with small developers as the US technology giant faces growing scrutiny and legal challenges over its tightly controlled online marketplace.

The change will allow small developers to inform their customers of alternative payment options beyond the official App Store. In a class-action lawsuit, the developers had accused Apple of monopolistic distribution practices by operating the sole gateway to get apps or other content onto iPhones and other devices powered by iOS software.

The proposed settlement is pending court approval. "The agreement clarifies that developers can share purchase options with users outside of their iOS app; expands the price points developers can offer for subscriptions, in-app purchases, and paid apps; and establishes a new fund to assist qualifying US developers," the company said in a statement late Thursday. The iPhone maker is also awaiting judgement in a separate App Store case filed by Epic Games.

The proposed changes come as Apple faces mounting pressure from lawmakers and regulators over its business practices, such as charging up to 30 percent commissions on purchases through the official App Store. Earlier this month, US senators introduced legislation that would make it illegal for app store operators such as Apple and Google to require use of their own payment systems for transactions. —AFP



SAN JOSE, California: File photo shows, Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks at Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference in San Jose, California. Cook has received a bonus of some \$750 million, reflecting his performance at the US technology giant in his 10 years at the helm. —AFP

time-based share awards, all of which were vested this month. Cook still owns some 3.2 million Apple shares worth \$483 million at today's value. —AFP

Business

US Supreme Court ends Biden's pandemic eviction moratorium

Around 3.5 million people face eviction in the next two months

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Thursday blocked the extension of a federal moratorium on evictions, ending a protection granted to millions who have struggled to afford rent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a 6-3 ruling, the court sided with homeowners who claimed to be victims of unwarranted measures, and argued that any renewal of a moratorium must be decided by Congress and not health officials. The court's unsigned majority opinion said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had exceeded its authority with its latest order temporarily halting evictions in areas where coronavirus cases were surging.

"It is up to Congress, not the CDC, to decide whether the public interest merits further action here," read the eight-page majority opinion. The court's three liberal justices dissented, citing fears that evictions could exacerbate the spread of the Delta variant.

The case was prompted by the CDC's latest, two-month-long moratorium, rolled out on August 3. An earlier, September 2020 moratorium issued by the CDC expired after a Supreme Court ruling in June said it could not continue beyond July 31 without authorization from Congress.

President Joe Biden's administration had urged Congress to approve an extension, but US lawmakers failed to do so before summer recess.

Under pressure from Democrats, the CDC ordered a new moratorium, citing public health risks posed by the pandemic.

The Supreme Court has now ended that moratorium. At the White House, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the administration "is disappointed" that the court blocked the eviction moratorium "while confirmed cases of the Delta variant are significant across the country".



Unwarranted Measures

The moratorium "saved lives by preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout the pandemic," Psaki said in a statement. The White House had expected the moratorium to be challenged in court, but hoped the extra time would allow for emergency rental assistance funds approved by Congress to reach those in need.

But much of that money is still caught in red tape, even as around 3.5 million people in the US



LOS ANGELES: File photo shows renters and housing advocates attend a protest to cancel rent and avoid evictions in front of the court house amid Coronavirus pandemic in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

told the Census Bureau they face eviction in the next two months. In light of the ruling "and the continued risk of COVID-19 transmission,

President Biden is once again calling on all entities that can prevent evictions... to urgently act to prevent evictions," Psaki said. —AFP

China to clamp down on tech firms' IPOs

BEIJING: China plans to block tech firms with large amounts of sensitive user data from listing abroad, a report said Friday, dealing another blow to the ambitions of its largest digital companies. The move will make it tougher for businesses to raise cash in the lucrative US markets and gives further control to the government as it presses on with its regulatory clampdown on private industries.

China's stock market regulator has proposed targeting tech firms eyeing initial public offerings, even via a legal loophole that allows them to use a unit registered abroad, the Wall Street Journal said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Officials from the China Securities Regulatory Commission said that even Chinese firms in less sensitive sectors would need regulatory approval to list abroad, the report said. The developments come weeks after Chinese ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing was investigated for "cybersecurity issues", shortly after a bumper New York listing.

Similar cybersecurity investigations were announced on the platforms of two more US-listed Chinese firms a day later. After the Didi probe was announced, China's cybersecurity watchdog published draft rules that mandated tech firms with more than a million users to seek regulatory approval before listing overseas.

The move is "not surprising given that data security is a key issue that will likely be brought up as the US and China potentially restart discussions on



LIANYUNGANG, China: A worker transfers materials at a factory in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. — AFP

auditing oversight of US IPOs", Marvin Chen, an analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, said.

The US Securities and Exchange Commission said in July that it would increase scrutiny of Chinese companies looking at US IPOs. Despite the regulatory hurdles, US listings in particular remain attractive to Chinese tech firms looking to expand even if some have put their plans on hold for the time being.

"These companies are quite big and they're attracted to the great liquidity in the US market and the ample pool of capital. That's just not there now

in Hong Kong (markets)," said a financial adviser who wishes to remain unnamed.

In recent months, Beijing has ordered a withering crackdown on its biggest tech firms, after years of lax regulation and breakneck growth in the sector. At the same time, it has beefed up its network security regime while expressing concern over excessive data collection and monopolistic practices, ostensibly to protect users from abuse. But analysts suggest that the Chinese government is wary of their outsized influence on consumers and any potential challenges to the state. —AFP

UK targets 'endless' cookie pop-ups in data shake-up

LONDON: Britain announced a "shake-up" of its data rules, including plans to eliminate "endless" website pop-ups asking for permission to store user information, potentially putting it on collision course with the European Union.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden told The Daily Telegraph that "high risk" sites would still need to ask users for permission to store "cookies" of their personal information, but that the pop-up requests were "pointless" for most websites.

The pop-ups are largely implemented to deal with European Union data law aimed at protecting people's online privacy. Dowden said that reform of data protection rules was "one of the big prizes" of leaving the bloc. "There's an awful lot of needless bureaucracy and box ticking and actually we should be looking at how we can focus on protecting people's privacy but in as light a touch way as possible," he said. The European Union last year agreed to formally recognise Britain's data protection standards, allowing the continued flow of personal data across borders.

The European Commission warned on Thursday that any changes could affect that agreement, however. "We... monitor very closely any developments related to the UK data protection rules," said commission spokesman Christian Wigand.

"In case of problematic developments that negatively affect the level of protection..., the adequacy decision can be suspended, terminated or amended at any time," he added. "This can be done immediately in case of justified urgency."

The plans are part of a wider push by the British government to harness data. "Data underpins innovation and the global digital economy," the government said in a statement announcing the reforms.

"It allows businesses to trade, drives international investment, supports law enforcement agencies tackling crime, the delivery of critical public services and health and scientific research." As part of its plans, the government said it hoped to secure "new multi-billion pound" global data partnerships with the United States, Australia and South Korea. —AFP

ABK highlights dangers of loan encashment

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) continues its efforts in raising awareness on loan encashment and the associated risks in line with Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and Kuwait Banking Association's (KBA) nation-wide awareness campaign, 'Let's Be Aware'.

Loan encashment involves taking funds from intermediaries at exorbitant interest rates to pay back an existing debt, so that new bank loans can be secured. While obtaining funding to pay back the original lender in order to borrow anew, customers could potentially present false documents or information.

"The CBK has carefully regulated personal lending and financing activities in Kuwait so that customers can benefit without running the risk of defaulting or of overburdening themselves financially," said Mahmoud Ahmed Assad, Head of Retail Lending. "Nevertheless, customers must be careful not to overextend themselves, as this can lead to default and place them in legal jeopardy. Furthermore, creditors extending loans or financing have a responsibility to carefully counsel customers and assess their current monthly obligations and liabilities. They also have the responsibility to clearly explain the risk involved in increasing their financial indebtedness, especially in the event of changes in their financial circumstances."

The 'Let's Be Aware' campaign brings together regulators and financial service providers in Kuwait, spearheading a joint effort to raise consumer awareness of banking products and services as well as other crucial topics such as effective bank card usage, guidance on borrowing, complaints and escalation methods, fraud management, cybersecurity protocols, and more. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central Bank of Kuwait, with the support of the Kuwait Banking Association, has helped mitigate the economic impact on the nation. The latest initiative adds to the Central Bank's track record of ensuring financial and economic stability in Kuwait.

DR Congo seeks \$58bn to rebuild industry

KINSHASA: The Democratic Republic of the Congo announced a plan to re-industrialise the resource-rich but impoverished African nation with a \$58 billion investment plan. The plan would see new railways, ports and other infrastructure to connect six pillar regions of the vast country and chart a long-term course of growth to 2040, Industry Minister Julien Paluku said.

The blueprint aims to revitalise businesses in a country that has only 507 registered industrial entities, from the 9,600 or so inherited from colonial ruler Belgium at independence in 1960. The plan seeks to roughly double the number of industrial production units in the next five years, reducing an annual bill for imports by 60 percent as more goods are made at home. To get there, Paluku said the government is seeking \$58 billion (49 billion euros) for investment: \$21 billion for rail; \$22 billion for energy; \$6.3 billion for airports and ports. It aims to host an investor conference to seek funding commitments, he said.

Investment will be directed at the six industrial zones that will be transformed by 2040 "into export hubs for neighbouring countries", riding on the African Continental Free Trade Area and the opening up of the Chinese market to African countries, he said. —AFP



Booking.com headquarters in Amsterdam.

Russia fines Booking.com \$17m

MOSCOW: Russia has slapped online travel agency Booking.com with a \$17.5 million fine for "abusing" its dominant position in the market, a government regulator said. The move comes as Russia ratchets up pressure against Western tech companies and several months after authorities hit Apple with a \$12 million fine for the same violation.

Russia's Federal Anti-Monopoly Service said in a statement that Booking.com had "abused its dominant position in the Russian market for the provision of services by aggregators of information about accommodation facilities."

It accused the Amsterdam-based travel site of having imposed on hotels and hostels "the obligation to provide and comply with price parity". "For hotels, this meant that they could not price their services in other sales channels lower than on the Booking.com aggregator," the regulator said.

It said Booking.com's "actions restrict competition in the market, and also lead to infringement of

the interests of hotels." The regulator said it took up the case at the request of an NGO that brands itself as supporting Russian entrepreneurs and has been praised by President Vladimir Putin.

Booking.com said it was "disappointed" with the decision, which it said it intends to "appeal". "We have always contributed to the development of the tourism industry and firmly believe that our price parity practice is fair and allows Booking.com to maintain the travel ecosystem," the company said in a statement carried by the Russian state news agency TASS.

"This is especially important now, in an unprecedented time for the tourism industry, which continues to have a huge impact on Booking.com, our partners and the industry as a whole." In April, Russia fined Apple \$12.1 million for "abusing" its dominant position in the market by giving preference to its own applications.

Russia routinely fines Western tech companies for failing to comply with its legislation. Earlier Thursday Russia fined Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for failing to store the data of Russian users on local servers. Russia has blocked a number of websites that have refused to cooperate with the authorities, including LinkedIn. —AFP

Business

Private sector should lead economy to achieve Kuwait Vision 2035: Al Fulaij

Kuwait banking sector sits on high levels of capital and liquidity ratios

KUWAIT: NBK-Kuwait CEO, Salah Al-Fulaij said that the year 2020 was characterized by unprecedented challenges combined with a high level of uncertainty, confirming that NBK held up well in the face of extraordinary market conditions and clearly demonstrated its governance and prudent risk management.

In an interview with MEED, Al-Fulaij said that NBK's prudent proactive management practices have supported the legacy of the Bank in maintaining strong asset quality levels despite the slight increase in NPLs as a result of the impact of the pandemic on the operating environment. "We still carry low NPLs ratio by regional and international standards. In addition, our coverage ratio is very comfortable with provisions carrying a surplus compared to IFRS9 ECL requirement," Al-Fulaij said.

"The high level of uncertainty around the operating environment alongside our fundamentally conservative risk practices resulted in management taking a very conservative view on provisioning, which in turn led to building even higher provisioning buffers at the peak of the crisis. Such prudent proactive management practices have supported the legacy of the Bank in maintaining strong asset quality levels at all times similar to what happened during the low oil price as well as the financial crisis," Al-Fulaij added.

Digital excellence

Al-Fulaij stressed that NBK remained on track with its strategy, has not deviated from its course, and demonstrated an operating model that proved more than capable of overcoming the challenges faced. "NBK's diversification strategy, which has included greater emphasis on wealth management, Islamic banking and a deeper geographic footprint, displayed resilience to the adverse conditions and in mitigating risk", Al-Fulaij stated.

Going forward, technological and digital investments will remain the key drivers of the retention and

acquisition of young clientele on the domestic retail front. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Group to remain agile in delivering on its strategic priorities. This saw heavy emphasis placed on realizing digital ambitions, in order to maintain business operations while driving efficiency and ensuring uninterrupted service to customers.

"Another focus area is the growth of our Islamic subsidiary, Boubayan Bank, as a means of strengthening our domestic market position in Kuwait, and expanding our Islamic banking presence outside Kuwait", Al-Fulaij observed.

Sustainable fiscal path

Responding to a question about the lack of a new public debt law and how it is affecting the Kuwaiti financial sector, Al-Fulaij clarified that it was clear from the recent public announcements by government officials regarding the exhaustion of the GRF that the situation is very critical and requires an immediate and aggressive action plan that includes corrective measures in order to keep fiscal stability intact.

"Approving a new debt law and accelerating the reform process should be priorities to avoid liquidity shortages and to put the fiscal position on a sustainable path. The previous sovereign downgrades in 2020 including the recent by S&P may provide a trigger for undertaking fiscal reforms. However, fiscal measures will not be sufficient by itself to provide the needed resources for the budget in the short-term", He explained.

Al-Fulaij also pointed out that the debt markets are relatively more favorable now, expecting that there will be very good demand for an issuance from Kuwait as seen in the previous sovereign transactions. These favorable market conditions will most likely make it less costly to borrow than to continue servicing the deficit through drawdowns or liquidation of reserves.

"Additionally, the country needs to establish a



Salah Al-Fulaij

yield curve for the sovereign issuance as this will be a strong reference for all long-term pricing; a potential sovereign issuance will keep Kuwait engaged with international capital markets and enhance the country's profile with global investors", Al-Fulaij added.

He also stressed that addressing structural imbalances in the state budget and finding sustainable solutions to meet financing needs and covering the increasing budget deficit are necessary steps towards long-term sustained growth.

Speaking about developing the non-oil sector and its significant importance to drive economic growth, Al-Fulaij said: "In years where Kuwait has witnessed high infrastructure projects awarding and execution levels, growth trend in the non-oil sector were promising; adding value to GDP away from oil revenues."

On that front, Al-Fulaij called on the government to have a clear determination to diversify the economy and accelerating the adoption of a comprehensive agenda that supports further growth for the non-oil sector is key in financing opportunities for banks.

Private sector is the engine of growth

Al-Fulaij sees that the private sector should lead the economy, creating competition and promoting production efficiency in order to realize Kuwait's 2035 vision aimed to transform Kuwait into a financial and trade hub regionally and internationally, becoming more attractive to investors.

"The creation of the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects was only the beginning of the journey, and the success of projects that were public-

private partnership-structured is testimony to the ability of the private sector to support that vision", Al-Fulaij explained.

"The Kuwaiti banking sector sits on high levels of capital, liquidity and profitability ratios, enabling banks to extend their participation in project financing. We witnessed a big shift in the strategy of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and its subsidiaries in recent years," Al-Fulaij said.

He also confirmed that NBK was and continues to be the largest player in the Kuwaiti market to secure participation in the large ticket financing deals.

Technological partnership

Al-Fulaij elaborated on NBK's Digital transformation programme and its dual impact of improving efficiency of operations by building on the introduction of RPA and AI capabilities, and controlling costs as the Group places heavy emphasis on technology to achieve regional leadership.

"We are tirelessly working to prepare for the next generation of FinTech trends. To that end, we established our Digital Factory in Kuwait to support our digital transformation agenda across the entire Group. The Digital Factory will increase our chances to engage and partner rather than compete with FinTechs, as they provide the agile platforms needed for product innovation in today's fast-moving banking environment", Al-Fulaij confirmed.

He also suggested that to optimize the cooperation with FinTechs, the regulatory framework should level the playing field through laying down the foundation and regulations on FinTechs' operation in the market. Towards that end, CBK launched a Regulatory Sandbox framework to provide a safe space for testing innovative financial. Al-Fulaij praised CBK for its efforts in setting the infrastructure for a digital economy by developing a Kuwait National Payment System, to provide real-time payment services in a FinTech safe and supportive environment.

AUB announces Privilege draw winner

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced the result of quarterly Privilege draw in Al Hassad Islamic program and named Mohammad Fahid Al-Hajri as the lucky winner of KD 25,000 during the draw. The bank held the draw at its main office on Wednesday 25th August.

AUB presented the "Privilege Draw", as a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

On this occasion Amresh Nandkeolyar, head of marketing and product development, retail at AUB congratulated the winner, wishing him all the best and expressed his happiness with the value trust of the customers in the Bank.

Nandkeolyar assured that AUB is keen since the beginning of launching Al-Hassad Islamic prizes program to offer a host of exclusive prizes to contribute in making the aspiration and dreams of its clients true, and to enhance the culture of savings, stressing that the Bank is committed to provide state-of-the-art banking solutions, which are in line with the client's changing requirements.

Al Hassad Islamic account is the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

In addition to the Privilege draw, Al-Hassad draws include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner.

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

DHAMAN works with Deloitte in selection of partner

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to apply best global standards for healthcare in Kuwait, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) appointed Deloitte to support in operational partner selection & onboarding for the purpose of attracting and choosing an operating partner with international capabilities in healthcare fields.

The operating partner will assume the responsibility of managing DHAMAN's network of hospitals and primary healthcare centers (PHCs) throughout Kuwait. The operating partner will play a strategic role with DHAMAN being the first Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare organization in the Middle East and the first company in the Gulf to offer its services based on the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) model.

DHAMAN acting CEO Dr Mohammad Al-Qenai said that regardless of the developments of the COVID-19



Mohammad Al-Qenai



Tamer Charife

pandemic, DHAMAN is fully focused on its responsibility of improving Kuwait's healthcare indicators as outlined by the company being one of the main elements of the national development plan (New Kuwait 2035). During 2022, DHAMAN will finalize the construction of two hospitals in the governorates of Ahmadi and Jahra, while also adding two more PHCs in Jahra and Fahaheel by the end of 2021, which will lead to DHAMAN having two hospitals and five PHCs throughout Kuwait during the first phase of operations.

Al Zayani welcomes Ferrari Portofino M in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Al Zayani, the sole authorised Ferrari dealer in Kuwait welcomes the evolution of the Prancing Horse's GT 2+ spider, Ferrari Portofino M to the market. Portofino M is the Prancing Horse's pursuit of innovation whilst fully respecting its heritage, passion, and constant search for perfection. All of these values are reflected in the new Portofino M with the 'M' in its moniker standing for 'Modificata', which in Ferrari nomenclature refers to cars that have undergone an evolution that has boosted their performance.

There is no shortage of technical innovation in this stunning new evolution of the Ferrari Portofino, the most notable being its redesigned power train, a brand-new eight-speed gearbox and a five-position Manettino that includes a Race mode, an absolute first for a

Maranello GT spider. As a consequence of these and many other new features, the Portofino M guarantees a completely unprecedented combination of authentic GT performance, driving pleasure, agility and exceptional versatility in everyday driving contexts.

The significant technological evolution the model has undergone is visually underscored by the new design of the front of the car and the bumpers in particular, which are sportier and more aggressive. Both inside and out, there is a sense of harmony of expression and intent in forms that are sometimes sharper and then softer and more flowing.

This latest design and engineering masterpiece from the Prancing Horse is the perfect evolution of the Ferrari Portofino. Sportier in character than its



predecessor, it also delivers superior handling whilst not only maintaining but enhancing on-board comfort, courtesy of specific new optional features, such as ADAS, and ventilated and heated seats. The Ferrari Portofino M thus retains its predecessor's twin soul and is the only car on the market that can rightfully be described as an authentic coupe with its

top closed and a genuine spider when it is open. This is thanks, of course, to the Retractable Hard Top (RHT), the signature feature of all the Prancing Horse's convertibles. The Portofino M's compact dimensions also make it ideal for all occasions. In fact, its unparalleled versatility and on-board comfort turn every trip into a voyage of (re)discovery.

stc announces next-generation Samsung Galaxy Z

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, today announced that the latest Samsung Galaxy Z Series is now available for pre-order across Kuwait. Comprising of the Galaxy Z Fold3 5G and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G, the brand's next-generation flagships fuse world-class design and engineering with cutting-edge technology and features to welcome consumers to a brand new chapter in mobile innovation. Those wishing to pre-order the premium smartphones and immediately acquire them upon official nationwide availability can do so up until Thursday, September 9, 2021. In addition, consumers that pre-order will avail valuable offers part of the pre-launch promotion.

Chief Consumer Officer (CCO) of stc, engineer Amer Atoui, said, "We are proud to offer our customers the option to pre-order Samsung's Galaxy Z Series as part of our commitment to offer the latest cutting-edge 5G enabled devices in the market. Our long-standing part-

nership with Samsung, has proven to be a fruitful one, allowing stc to display the breadth of its pioneering services and customer-centric promotions. The next generation flagship devices, coupled with stc's strong 5G network, aim to transform the digital and online experience for users while incorporating the most modern innovations in the rapidly evolving world of smartphones."

Atoui added, "stc customers interested in taking advantage of the pre-order promotion can do so by visiting the stc website (www.stc.com.kw) or mystcmobile application. To ensure optimum customer satisfaction, we have been continuously enhancing and updating our digital channels to provide our customers with a seamless experience that meets their expectations, with access to the most demanded devices offered in the market."

"For Samsung, working alongside operators has always been an honor as we present consumers with the latest innovations to grace the local smartphone market," said Osman Albora, Senior Director - Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics. "The pre-order rollout is an exciting yet demanding period for Samsung. As such, the support we receive from operators is invaluable as we



Amer Atoui

promote upcoming products, engage with audiences, and ensure they complete their purchases in advance. The coming weeks will enable us to showcase what's in store for consumers across the country, and we believe these efforts will be more successful than ever thanks to our operator partners." Customers pre-ordering the Galaxy Z Fold3 will receive valuable free gifts including Flip cover with Pen, Galaxy Buds Pro and Samsung Care+. Alternatively, customers pre-ordering the Galaxy Z Flip3 5G will acquire Galaxy Buds2 and Samsung Care+. These additions are certain to enhance the Galaxy Z Series experience, with consumers set to be introduced to new ways to work, watch, and play.

The Galaxy Z Series

Samsung continues its foldable device manufacturing leadership with refined operations and time-tested processes to create devices that remain reliable after years of use. The revolutionary Hideaway Hinge enables the devices to stay in place at different angles for innovative user experiences with Flex mode. And thanks to enhanced Sweeper technology, the bristles inside the Hinge are now shorter, helping to repel dust and other particles and maintain the devices' durability and seamless user experiences. The Galaxy Fold3 5G and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G also are equipped with the world's first IPX8 water-resistance in a foldable device, and the strongest aluminum on a smartphone to date.



BANGKOK: This photo taken on June 22, 2021 shows a security guard patrolling the platforms at Bangkok Railway Station, more commonly known as Hua Lamphong, in Bangkok.



Photo shows people standing in the ticketing area.



Photo shows a convenience stall.

END OF THE LINE LOOMS FOR HAWKERS, ROUGH SLEEPERS AT BANGKOK STATION

An uncertain fate awaits the hawkers, drivers and rough sleepers who have made a second home under the ornate arched ceiling of Bangkok's century-old central railway station. The elegant Italianate columns and stained glass windows of the station at Hua Lamphong will soon echo no more to the constant rattle of trains arriving and departing.

The vast majority of services will move to a new rail hub on the capital's northern outskirts later this year, with plans for eventual fast services to China through neighbouring Laos. The coronavirus pandemic has already bought a year's reprieve for the current station, near the city's Chinatown district — its replacement is almost finished but currently being used as a vaccination centre.

But movement restrictions and a lack of foreign visitors have crippled the kingdom's tourism-dependent economy and the dozens of people eking out a living are already feeling the pinch. "We have to be very frugal — I'm using my savings to cover living expenses," said Boonkerd Khampakdi, who has sold food to hungry travellers at the station for the past 20 years.

The 51-year-old told AFP she now makes only 1,000 baht (\$30) per day, a tenth of what she made before the pandemic and barely enough to cover monthly rent for her stall. Nearby, tuk-tuk driver Wutthisak Inthawat waits patiently for what few potential fares pass through the station's entrance.

He said it had been increasingly difficult to cover the hire fees for his vehicle, pay rent and feed his family. "I have two young daughters — a three and nine-year-old," said Wutthisak, 34. "If I can't manage to pay off my debts I will have to return to my home province."

'Grandiose and austere'

The long platforms and languid atmosphere of the Hua Lamphong station have long imbued an element of romance to rail travel in Thailand. It was a crowning achievement for Italian architect Mario Tamagno, who worked extensively in

Thailand at the turn of the century and whose blueprints drew inspiration from the Frankfurt central station in Germany, built near the end of the 19th century.

"The structure itself is quite imposing, in that neo-Renaissance style and it's quite ornate and almost grandiose and austere in a way," said Dave Kendall, the former host of travel TV show Destination Thailand. Work on the terminal began in

1910 and the first train rolled into the station six years later.

The fountain that now greets visitors at the station's main entrance sits at the site of what was once a 100-person bunker built after the Japanese invasion of Thailand during World War II, local train enthusiast Wisarut Bholisithi told AFP.

A bomb hit the vault during an Allied air raid and killed all those taking shelter

inside, he added. At its pre-pandemic peak, the station handled 37 million passengers each year, according to the State Railway of Thailand.

Authorities plan to turn the station into a train museum — coupled with commercial space — as a way to preserve the building's heritage. Less clear is what the future holds for the small community of homeless who sleep rough

around the station, relying on donations from a dwindling number of passing travellers to survive.

"Right now I don't have enough food to eat every day, I drink water to ward off hunger," said Nares Kaysao, who has been homeless for 20 years. "I don't know what will happen when there are no passengers." — AFP



This aerial photo taken on August 20, 2021 shows the Bangkok Railway Station. — AFP photos

Ancient vicuna wool shearing tradition lives on in Peru

At daybreak on a freezing cold day high in the Andes, dozens of Peruvian peasants clamber up a mountainside to carry out a centuries-old tradition of shearing the highly-prized wool off vicunas, which are relatives of the llama.

One week each year, the peasants of Totoroma, a village 50 kilometers (30 kilometers) to the southwest of Lake Titicaca, join forces for a process of herding and shearing known locally as the "chaccu". They trudge up the mountainside and herd around 500 vicunas back down the slope into a pen made of posts and three-meter high mesh—a necessary precaution to keep the agile members of the camelid family from escaping.

The comuneros—men and women, some even carrying children—wrap up against the cold and wear wide-brimmed hats to protect them from the sun. This year, they're also wearing face masks to protect against COVID-19.

"It's an ancestral activity that has been going on since time immemorial and now we're helping out as a public state administration," vet Jaime Figueroa told AFP. Jesus Pilco Mamani is following in the footsteps of his father and grandfathers.

"I started working as a comunero in 1986," he told AFP. The vicuna appears on Peru's national coat of arms and there are an estimated 200,000 of the Andean camelid in the country. The annual chaccu helps support families in 290 communities in the Peruvian Andes.

Vicuna wool is highly-prized for its soft qualities and is one of the most expensive in the world. The vicunas live at least 3,500 meters above sea level so getting their wool by rounding up and shearing them is a difficult task.

The communities in the Peruvian Andes produce around 10 tons of vicuna wool a year. Unlike llamas and alpacas, amongst Andean camelids, vicunas and guanacos have not been domesticated. Alpaca wool is far more common, while

and placed inside individual plastic bags.

Once shorn, the vicuna is immediately released from the pen and runs at top speed back up the mountain.

A kilogram (2.2 pounds) of unprocessed vicuna wool sells for \$400 — much more than alpaca wool. But a single sheared alpaca produces three kilograms of wool, compared to "150 to 180 grams" from the much smaller vicuna, Erick Lleque Quisoe, an official in the regional Puno government, told AFP.



TOTOROMA, Peru: Picture of vicuna wool taken as members of the community of Totoroma participate in the traditional Chaccu, or Chaccu, an annual vicuna round-up and shearing festival, in Puno, southern Peru, on August 25, 2021. — AFP

llama wool can be used to make rugs and carpets but is considered too rough for clothing.

Guanaco wool is also highly-prized, although not as soft as vicuna. Inside the pen, the comuneros hold each brown vicuna down on a blanket on the ground while an expert quickly shears them using a machine powered by a portable generator. The wool of each vicuna is collected

He said that in Totoroma the locals "took off 35-40 kilograms" of wool from the 500 vicunas. In 2019, Peru made \$3 million exporting seven tons of vicuna wool, whereas alpaca exports bring in around \$300 million, according to official figures. — AFP

DNA from skeleton found in Indonesia reveals unknown group of humans

Archaeologists have discovered the remains of a 7,200-year-old skeleton from a female hunter-gatherer in Indonesia that has a "distinct human lineage" never found anywhere in the world, according to research published this week. The relatively intact fossil, which belonged to a teenager aged 17 or 18, was buried in the foetal position inside Leang Panninge, a limestone cave in South Sulawesi. It was found among artefacts from the Toalean people, an early culture of hunter-gatherers in the region. The remains are the first known skeleton of a Toalean.

The study, which was published in the journal Nature on Wednesday, was a collaboration between Indonesian and international researchers. Excavation began in 2015. "This is the first time anyone has reported the discovery of ancient human DNA from the vast island region between

mainland Asia and Australia," Adam Brumm, archaeologist at the Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution at Griffith University in Brisbane, who co-led the research, told AFP Friday.

Brumm was referring to an area stretching from Kalimantan and Lombok to the western tip of Papua that is known to scientists as Wallacea. Researchers found the excavation to be particularly challenging because DNA can be easily degraded in the tropical climate.

"It is very rare to find ancient human DNA in the humid tropics—that's why this is such a lucky discovery," Brumm said. Analysis of the DNA revealed that the woman was part of a population group related to modern day Papuans and Indigenous Australians. — AFP

Egyptians discover fossil of new amphibious whale

Egyptian scientists have discovered the fossil of a new species of amphibious whale that dates back 43 million years, a member of the research team said. "This is a species that was not known" previously, said Hesham Sallam, an Egyptian palaeontologist from the team.

"This is the first time that an Arab research team, specifically an Egyptian one, is in charge of documenting such a discovery," he said on television late Thursday. The fossil was found in the Fayum region, a part of Egypt that was

once covered by sea and is home to Whale Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The newly discovered species, which was more than three metres (10 feet) long and weighed about 600 kilograms (about 1,320 pounds), has been named *Phiomocetus anubis*. Egypt's environment ministry said in a statement Wednesday that the species of whale "was the most ferocious and ancient in Africa".

"The whale had both the ability to walk on land and swim in the sea," it said, adding that the discovery was evidence of the evolution of whales from land mammals to marine mammals. "An anatomical study of the fossil shows that this new species of whale is completely different from other known species," the ministry said. It was a "large predator with large, powerful jaws" that allowed it to "control the environment in which it lived". — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



VENICE: File photo shows Jewish director Amos Gitai and actress Bahira Ablassi attending a photocall for the film "Laila in Haifa" presented in competition on the seventh day of the 77th Venice Film Festival. — AFP photos



VENICE: File photo shows Russian director Andrei Konchalovsky posing with the Special Jury Prize he received for "Dear Comrades!"

Actress hit with \$46mn tax fine as China targets celebrity culture

Top Chinese actress Zheng Shuang was hit with a \$46 million tax evasion fine Friday while references to film star Zhao Wei were wiped from video streaming sites as Beijing steps up its campaign against celebrity culture.

Beijing is on a mission to rein in what it calls "chaotic fan culture" and celebrity excess, after a spate of scandals in recent months that have taken down China's biggest entertainers including singer Kris Wu, who was arrested on suspicion of rape earlier this month.

Shanghai tax authorities on Friday fined Zheng 299 million yuan (\$46.1 million) for tax evasion and undeclared income between 2019 and 2020 while filming a TV series, according to an online statement.

Zheng, 30, became a household name in China after starring in the hit 2009 remake of Taiwanese drama "Meteor Shower", and a string of successful series and movies afterwards. China's state broadcasting regulator also pulled Zheng's offending TV drama and ordered producers not to hire her for future shows.

The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television added it had "zero tolerance" for tax evasion, "sky-high pay" and "yin-yang contracts", referring to the shady contracts commonly used in Chinese showbiz to obscure actors' real pay. State media has gone into overdrive urging changes to China's entertainment culture.

"For some time now, artists' moral failures and legal violations, the cultivation of younger idols, and 'chaotic' fandoms have attracted widespread attention in society," state broadcaster CCTV said Tuesday.

"We must restore a clean and upright literary and artistic environment to the public."

On Thursday evening, search results for Zhao, an enormously popular actress also known as Vicky Zhao, were censored from major Chinese video streaming sites. Her name was suddenly removed from the credits of major TV series, while a forum dedicated to the actress on social media platform Weibo was also mysteriously shut down, as the hashtag "Zhao Wei super-topic closed" gained 850 million views. No official reason was given.

But Zhao and her husband were banned from trading on the Shanghai Stock Exchange earlier this year, owing to



HONG KONG: This file photo taken on April 15, 2012 shows Chinese actress Zheng Shuang smiling as she walks down the red carpet at the 31st Hong Kong Film Awards. — AFP

a failed 2016 takeover bid that authorities ruled had "disrupted market order". China's cyber regulator released new regulations Friday that ban celebrity ranking lists and tighten control over "chaotic" celebrity fan clubs and management agencies.

Video streaming site iQiyi said it halted all idol talent programmes Thursday, while a Chinese boy band made up of primary school children disbanded earlier this week after performers' ages sparked a public backlash. — AFP

Venice film fest returns with another blockbuster lineup

The Venice Film Festival returns Wednesday with an ultra-glitz lineup, including the world premiere of sci-fi blockbuster "Dune" and Kristen Stewart's turn as Princess Diana, cementing its status as a serious rival to Cannes.

After a low-key event last year due to the pandemic, La Mostra is raising the stakes once again in the battle for film fest supremacy with the sort of lineup that has drool running down the chins of red carpet gawkers and pretentious film critics alike.

The world's oldest film festival has embraced Hollywood in recent years and its 78th edition, running September 1-11, is no exception.

"Dune" brings hot young things Timothee Chalamet and Zendaya to the Venice festival, while Ridley Scott's "The Last Duel" marks the bromantic return of Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, writing and starring together for the first time since their Oscar-winning breakout "Good Will Hunting" in the 1990s.

But Venice still has serious arthouse chops, and the competition for the Golden Lion award features some of the era's

most revered filmmakers, including Spain's Pedro Almodovar, Italy's Paolo Sorrentino and New Zealand's Jane Campion. Almodovar opens the festival with the Penelope Cruz-starring "Parallel Mothers" and true to his provocative style, the poster was immediately banned on Instagram for featuring a lactating nipple.

Even the Princess Di biopic, "Spencer", promises to be more than the usual fawning royal mush, as it comes from Chilean director Pablo Larrain, whose 2016 film was an intelligent and lauded take on Jackie Kennedy, starring Natalie Portman.

Oscar buzz-maker

Since taking over in 2012, festival director Alberto Barbera is credited with rejuvenating La Mostra, partly by positioning it as the launchpad for Academy Award hopefuls. Two of the last four Golden Lion winners, "The Shape of Water" and "Nomadland", have gone on to win the best picture Oscar-something which had never previously happened.

Many other recent critical and box-office hits have debuted in the floating city,

including "La La Land", "Joker" and "A Star Is Born". Part of the success is that publicists love having their stars snapped on gondolas, but it's primarily a question of lucky timing.

"Venice's position on the cusp of summer and fall gives it unmatched clout as a launchpad" for the Hollywood awards season, explained The Hollywood Reporter. Venice has also side-stepped the fracas between Netflix and Cannes, over the latter's demand that entries hit the big screen. That has left Venice with first dibs on recent Netflix hits such as "Roma" and "Marriage Story", and two of this year's hopefuls: Campion's "The Power of the Dog" and Sorrentino's "The Hand of God".

Movies from 59 countries are being presented this year across its multiple sections, though Cannes director Thierry Fremaux has previously sniffed at his Venice counterpart's "obsession with American movies". —AFP



OCAMPO, Mexico: File photos show Monarch butterflies (Danaus plexippus) at the Sanctuary of El Rosario, Ocampo municipality, Michoacan state, Mexico. — AFP photos

When Canadian conservation enthusiasts head out to find monarch eggs, it's always with a magnifying glass and a notebook. They are volunteers taking part in a summer census of the iconic, endangered butterflies. July and August are the best months, when the monarch is visible in Canada at all stages of its development: eggs, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult butterfly.

It is also the reproduction period for the generation which will take off in a few weeks for a 4,000 kilometer (2,500 mile) journey to Mexico. But it's complicated research. "The monarch lays one egg per leaf. There are insects which can lay a dozen eggs all together while the monarch lays one. So we are looking for something very small," explains Jacques Kirouac, who is among the hundreds of people who take part in the citizen science program Mission Monarch.

The eggs of these creatures known for their striking orange and black colors are off-white or yellow and about the

size of a pinhead, with ridges that run from the tip to the base. The species's dire situation led to the creation five years ago of this program set up by the Montreal Insectarium to document monarch breeding grounds. The data is used by researchers, in particular to determine zones in need of protection. There are similar programs in the United States.

Monarchs of the eastern side of the continent are in a difficult situation: their population has decreased by more than 80 percent in two decades. Western monarchs—which hibernate in California—are even worse off: fewer than 2,000 were reported in the last census by Western Monarch Count, down 99.9 percent since the 1980s.

More generally, the disappearance of insects-less spectacular and less striking for the public than that of large mammals—is just as worrying, say the scientists. They are essential to ecosystems and economies because they pollinate plants, recycle nutrients and serve as staple food for other animals.



'Not enough data'

"It's a beautiful butterfly. It would be a real loss to lose it," says Renald Saint-Onge, also a volunteer for Mission Monarch. This 73-year-old former carpenter and ornithologist feels driven to "save this butterfly." So he decided to let grow at his home as many milkweed plants as possible. Often considered a weed, this perennial plant is the only one on which the monarch butterfly lays. But we find it less and less.

"The natural fields where we had milkweed and nectar-bearing plants are increasingly rare," says Alessandro Dieni, coordinator of the Mission Monarch program. And the plants are "of lower quality because we have fields with monocultures everywhere" and an intensive use of pesti-

cides in the country that killed them off.

Logging has also devastated forests in Mexico where the monarchs spend the winter. Faced with the catastrophic decline of this insect, the Canadian government has decided to get involved in helping the monarch by seeking to protect its breeding grounds. "However, there was not enough data in Canada to know where to go to protect the monarch," says Dieni.

The decline of insects, which represent two-thirds of all terrestrial species, dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, and accelerated in the years 1950-60 to reach alarming proportions over the last 20 years.

"Thanks to the censuses, we can now do more precise research," explains Marian MacNair of McGill University. "This

allows us to better determine the routes taken, the conditions that the monarch particularly like," adds the biologist who expresses amazement over this small, emblematic butterfly's ability to fly thousands of kilometers.

The monarch butterfly makes a good study for scientists because often "we have great difficulty in observing the evolution" of populations of insects. But the monarch's territory is rather small and therefore it is easy to do calculations and observations and document "the extent of the disaster," explains MacNair. — AFP



Sports

Superstar Vio repeats Rio gold as McFadden wins 18th medal

Boccia competition underway at Paralympics



CHIBA: Italy's Beatrice Vio takes off her mask during a video review while competing against Russia's Ludmila Vasileva in the wheelchair fencing women's foil individual category B semi-final bout during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at Makuhari Messe Hall in Chiba yesterday. — AFP

TOKYO: Fencing icon Beatrice "Bebe" Vio successfully defended her women's Paralympic gold yesterday as US wheelchair racing legend Tatyana McFadden won her 18th Paralympic medal. Vio, one of the world's best-known Paralympians, was in unstoppable form as she defeated China's Zhou Jingjing 15-9 in the Women's Individual Foil Category B gold medal match, just as she had done in Rio five years ago.

The Italian 24-year-old, who had both forearms and legs amputated when she contracted meningitis as an 11-year-old, screamed in joy before bursting into tears in the arms of her coach after the winning point was scored. On Day 4 of the competition, a total of 54 gold medals were up for grabs across nine different sports, including 17 athletics finals at the Olympic Stadium.

McFadden took bronze in the women's T54 5,000m to extend her streak of finishing on the podium in every Paralympic race she has entered since 2008. But she said just competing in Tokyo was a victory in itself, having been diagnosed with a blood-clotting disorder in 2017 that took almost two years to recover from.

"I'm on cloud nine," said the 32-year-old, who was born in Russia and raised in an orphanage until she was adopted at the age of six. "I was in a really dark spot because it took me 20 months to recover, and everyone



Britain to play in wheelchair rugby final

was getting better in those 20 months."

McFadden added that it was "quite amazing" that she took the bronze behind US teammate Susannah Scaroni, who won gold. Fleur Jong of the Netherlands won the women's T64 long jump, beating French defending champion Marie-Amelie Le Fur with a jump of 6.16m.

Le Fur, a three-time Paralympic gold medalist, said she would retire after the competition. "The time has come to finish it here in Tokyo," said the 32-year-old. "I'm proud to do so with this performance and with these extraordinary girls. There are no regrets."

Boccia underway
Britain's Kadeena Cox will turn her attention to ath-

letics after winning her second cycling gold in the team sprint. She will try to defend her T38 400m title next week. Also at the velodrome, husband and wife Neil and Lorie Fachie of Britain won gold within 15 minutes of each other.

The boccia competition got underway with all four individual gold medalists from the Rio Games returning to defend their titles. Hong Kong's BC4 champion Leung Yuk-wing will try to repeat his Athens 2004 feat of winning gold in individual and pairs events. "I am trying to be relaxed to face the game because just thinking about being the champion or the gold medal would be a lot of pressure," he said. In wheelchair rugby, Britain booked their place in the final with a 55-49 win over hosts Japan. They will play either USA or twice-defending champions Australia in the gold-medal match.

Away from the competition, organizers apologized after a visually impaired Japanese judoka was hit by a self-driving bus in the Paralympic village on Thursday. Tokyo 2020 suspended the operation of the vehicles after the accident, where one of the buses "made contact" with Aramitsu Kitazono. Kitazono was scheduled to compete in the men's -81kg competition on Saturday morning, but did not start his match against Ukraine's Dmytro Solovay. — AFP

Paralympic triathlete who helped Spain fight COVID wins gold

TOKYO: During Spain's tough lockdown last year, Paralympic triathlon champion Susana Rodriguez trained furiously at home and helped fight the coronavirus in her job as a doctor. Rodriguez — who swam, cycled and sprinted to gold in yesterday's PTVI race for athletes with visual impairments — said working in a hospital meant she "knew COVID was very serious, since the very beginning".

In the fraught early days of the pandemic, when she was on the phone lines to assess people with symptoms, her boss would hold a meeting each morning. "He gave the new data, and things were going really wrong," the 33-year-old told AFP ahead of her competition at the virus-postponed Tokyo Paralympics. "I realized that the Games would not be possible before they said they wouldn't be in 2020." She then put her specialization in physical medicine and rehabilitation to use by helping patients recover from the most severe infections — while fitting in hours on her treadmill and exercise bike between shifts.

"I was also afraid of catching COVID," said the athlete, who has albinism and is partially sighted, and competes with a guide. "For a blind person, we rely a lot on touching things, and when (the pandemic) started, everything turned to distancing, and touch was not the best idea. So it was difficult, especially in the beginning." Rodriguez, who has competed in para-athletics since she was a child, eventually took a break from her medical career to focus on preparing for victory. "In the world of sports, this means everything," she told reporters on Saturday after her win, adding that she had "done my homework" by training hard for the race.

'Stressful schedule'

Rodriguez will become the first Spanish Paralympian to compete in two disciplines at the same Games when she runs in the women's 1500m T11 today. "I will try to relax now and try to recover my legs. I need to keep calm, because this situation (winning gold) gave me a lot of adrenaline," she said yesterday.

The best way to keep up stamina for back-to-back events is to take things day by day, according to the Spaniard. "I've been really used to a very stressful schedule in the last year, between Rio and Tokyo, so I am used to focusing on one day, then resting, then the next."

"I'm better in triathlon... but I really love the track," said Rodriguez, who finished fifth in her triathlon category at Rio 2016. Her guide Sara Loehr also received a gold medal on Saturday, with the pair holding hands and grinning triumphantly on the podium. Rodriguez says her guide athletes are "my eyes during competition", and "they know me really well. We don't need to speak, because they know if I can push harder or not."

They also help her in the Paralympic Village. "For example, when you go for dinner or breakfast, they are telling you what food to take. In the end, they are my friends." Rodriguez faced another challenge in early 2020 when she was diagnosed with and underwent treatment for a genetic heart condition.

"I didn't know if I could keep practicing sport at a professional level," she said. But "the cardiology team from my hospital were very good to me, helping me take decisions... so I can be here in Tokyo, safe, and happy."

Spectators are banned from most competitions at the Games and athletes must stick to strict virus rules. Despite the difficulties of the pandemic, Rodriguez sees a light at the end of the tunnel as vaccines help reduce the number of seriously ill patients. "This is taking so long, we have been putting our hopes in many things and it's getting hard," she said. "But we say hope is the last thing to lose, and I hope in 2022 we can get back to normal life." — AFP



TOKYO: Britain's Stuart Robinson, a veteran who was wounded in Afghanistan, rolls to score during the pool phase group B wheelchair rugby match between Britain and Canada during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at the Yoyogi National Stadium in Tokyo on August 25, 2021. — AFP

'Far from fragile': Battering rams of wheelchair rugby

TOKYO: The battered round wheels collide like Viking shields, as the combatants of wheelchair rugby dodge, battle, and score in a sport that players say upends preconceptions about disability. "It's a sport that breaks stereotypes, where we push beyond our limits," said Christophe Salegui, 35, a member of the French team competing at the Tokyo Paralympics.

Originally known as "murderball," the sport has a reputation for tough confrontations, with players mercilessly battering opponents to keep them from landing a point. "It's definitely one of the sports that gets people interested because of the weird nature of it, the collision and the contacts," acknowledged Britain's Stuart Robinson. Collisions are often so forceful that wheelchairs lift partly off the ground or topple over altogether, with staff helping hoist players back upright. But athletes say there's simply nothing better. "I love the speed, the aggression, the competitiveness, the impacts, the camaraderie," said Zak Madell, one of Canada's top players.

And the rough and tumble nature of the sport helps undercut ideas about people with disabilities, he said. "I think when you just watch it proves that we are far from fragile, and not afraid to go there and knock around and beat up on each other a little bit," Madell told AFP. Despite the name, the sport differs in various ways from rugby: the ball is round rather than oval and can be passed forward, and it's played indoors on a court rather than an outdoors pitch. Attackers have just 12 seconds to get the ball across the court's central line and 40 seconds to score a try. Failure to do so in the time means the ball switches sides. The fast-paced

game, invented in Canada in the 1970s, is much more than just brute force though, said Salegui. "It's super strategic," he told AFP. "It's very technical and tactical." Four players are on court at any one time, and each is categorized with a certain number of points according to their disability, ranging from 0.5 points for a more severe impairment to 3.5 points. Each team cannot exceed more than eight points between the players on court, although the figure rises to 8.5 if they bring on a female player.

'Bumps and bangs'

But while the sport is mixed, men continue to dominate and some teams in Tokyo — including France — don't have a single female player. "It's a relatively new sport in France, so there are not that many players," French team coach Olivier Cusin said. "There are only about a dozen women who play wheelchair rugby in France, but to make the highest levels is a lot of work and for the moment we haven't found that rare pearl. But we're looking!"

At the Tokyo Games, defending champions Australia are bidding for a record third consecutive gold, coming back from a shock defeat by debutants Denmark in their opening fixture. The sport's players are divided between attack and defense, with chairs adapted to their roles. "Offensive" chairs feature rounded front edges to help players slip past opponents, and wider wheels that help attackers power forward with speed. "Defensive" chairs by contrast are reinforced with a grid at the front to help blunt attacks.

And it's their chairs, rather than their bodies, that take the brunt of the contact, players say. "A lot of people kind of protect themselves when they're going to fall. A lot of the hits are taken by the chairs," said Britain's Robinson. "Relatively serious injuries are very rare," adds Cusin, who says in 11 years as national team coach in the sport he's yet to see a player get seriously hurt. Specialized mechanics are on hand to keep the chairs in top shape and patch them up after clashes. — AFP



TOKYO: Gold medalists Spain's Susana Rodriguez (right) and her guide Sara Loehr pose with their medals after competing in the women's triathlon category PTVI during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at the Odaiba Marine Park in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Ooredoo honors Team Kuwait Olympic athletes

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, took pleasure in welcoming the Assistant Secretary of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Ali Al-Marri and honoring the champions of Team Kuwait for their participation and excellence in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics started in July 2021 in Japan. During the honoring ceremony which was inaugurated by the CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, he was keen to praise the great achievements of the Olympic athletes during the tournament which was just the crossing point to a more prosperous future with greater pioneering milestones for the State of Kuwait.

The honoring began by celebrating the Kuwait champions, headed by the Assistant Secretary of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Ali Al-Marri, with the presence of each of the players: Abdullah Al-Rashidi, Mansour Al-Rashidi, Talal Al-Rashidi, Abdulrahman Al-Faihan, Abbas Qali, Mudhawi Al-Shammari, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhel and Mohammad Al-Mosawi. Representatives of Ooredoo's executive management, headed by CEO Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Acting Chief of Commercial Officer

Tapan Trapathi, Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Director of AlNukhba Department Thamer Al-Tahous, Senior Manager of Public Relations Fatima Dashti, in addition to members of the Corporate Communications team.

Babtain also rewarded all the athletes in which the Bronze medalist, Abdullah Al-Rashidi, was awarded a free lifetime royal number with unlimited minutes, unlimited 5G internet and SMS. While the other nine athletes were treated with a one-year free subscriptions (unlimited min-

utes, unlimited 5G internet and SMS). It is noteworthy that the State of Kuwait participated in five sport games in the Olympic Games 2020 that took place from 23 July to 8 August 2021, where the Kuwaiti list included ten players, four in the shooting game, and two in swimming and two in athletics, one in rowing and one in karate.

"We take pride of all the ten Olympic athletes who have started the main sport ladder in an honor of our beloved country through their participation and excellence during the tournament," Babtain said. "We will con-

tinue to harness the company's resources to motivate and support them with the aim of achieving greater sustainability of long-term development of excellence in the world of sports."

"We confirm the unwavering role of Ooredoo in empowering Kuwaiti youth and talents, supporting sustainable developments that shade lights on creating creative, innovative and aspiring generation, along with motivating them to achieve a distinguished participation in different domains" Babtain added.



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom and Team Kuwait members pose for a group photo during the honoring event.

Sports

'Life goes on' for Juventus despite losing superstar Ronaldo

Turin side targets Moise Kean, Mauro Icardi as replacements

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo's departure to Manchester United undoubtedly leaves Juventus a weaker proposition on the field but his departure is unlikely to cause too many tears in Turin as an expensive experiment comes to an early end.

Coach Massimiliano Allegri almost shrugged his shoulders on Friday when he told the world the five-time Ballon d'Or winner wanted to leave after three seasons in Italy, simply saying that "life goes on" with the air of someone who had made his peace with the separation.

It came in great contrast to the fanfare that greeted the most expensive transfer in the history of Italian football in the summer of 2018, the shock signing of one of the game's greatest ever players pitched as the missing link between domestic dominance and European glory.

Juve are Italy's biggest-supported club, but although they have won by far the most Serie A titles they lag behind the Milan giants in continental success. Last crowned European champions in 1996, The 'Old Lady' reached Champions League finals in 2015 and 2017, and once Ronaldo arrived hopes in Turin were that they could go one better with the competition's all-time highest scorer in their attack.

However they have failed to get any

further than the quarter-finals since Ronaldo arrived and in the past two seasons were dumped out by Lyon and Porto in the last 16. In his time there Juve also somewhat lost their way domestically, last season finishing 13 points behind league winners Inter Milan under novice coach Andrea Pirlo and only qualifying for the Champions League on the final day of the campaign because Napoli failed to beat Verona at home. Ronaldo was left out of the 4-1 win at Bologna which enabled

quicker than any other player in the club's history — topping the league's scoring charts last season — but he is unlikely to remain in the affections of Juve fans like he has at Real Madrid and United, where he had his greatest successes.

Over the past two seasons at Inter Romelu Lukaku became a huge fan favorite not just for his play but for the way he integrated in Italy, quickly learning the language and settling into life in Milan. By contrast Ronaldo never truly connected with Juve supporters, rarely speaking to media, struggling to learn Italian and failing in Juve's mission to win the Champions League.

For Juve there is also the convenience of removing Ronaldo's reported net salary of 31 million euros (\$36.6 million) from the books as the club, like many others, deals with the damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic. On Wednesday Juve's board of directors approved a capital increase of 400 million euros to steady the club's finances against the impact of COVID-19.

In February Juventus said they had made losses of 113.7 million euros in the second half of 2020, more than double the loss recorded in the same period of the previous year. Revenues dropped by 20 percent in that period with Juve blam-



UDINE: Juventus' Italian coach Massimiliano Allegri gives his instructions during the Italian Serie A football match between Udinese and Juventus at the Dacia Arena Stadium in Udine, on August 22, 2021. — AFP

ing the reduction on the pandemic. And in June they estimated the running cost of COVID to the club at 320 million euros.

Juve's reported top targets to replace Ronaldo — Moise Kean and Mauro Icardi — are undoubtedly downgrades but are capable forwards with experience in Italy who are in no danger of feeling

almost too big for the club, even considering the troublesome way Icardi left Inter for Paris Saint-Germain in 2019. Allegri meanwhile made it clear who he thinks should lead his attack, handing the captain's armband to Paulo Dybala for Juve's opening round 2-2 draw at Udinese as he left Ronaldo on the bench. — AFP



Dybala leads the attack... for now

Juve to jump into fourth place and despite official denials of a definitive breakdown between club and player he has been subject to heavy speculation all summer.

Financial troubles

He won two Serie A titles and one Italian Cup and reached 100 Juve goals

News in brief

PSG magic trio to play?

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe, covered by Real Madrid, should be in the Paris Saint-Germain squad at Reims, along with Lionel Messi, who could make his debut, and Neymar, coach Mauricio Pochettino said yesterday. "We have not yet announced the squad," the coach told his press conference ahead of today evening's Ligue 1 match, adding that all the 'magic trio' "will certainly be among those named, we will see if they can play from the start of the match." Pochettino said Mbappe had not told him he wanted to leave PSG for Real Madrid. — AFP

Dortmund down Hoffenheim

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund's goal-scoring "machine" Erling Braut Haaland scored the winner in added time on Friday to snatch a dramatic 3-2 win at home to Hoffenheim in the Bundesliga. Hoffenheim equalized twice as goals by Dortmund teenagers Giovanni Reyna and Jude Bellingham were cancelled out by Christoph Baumgartner, then Munas Dabbur who levelled in the 90th minute. However, Haaland made sure of the three points for Dortmund when he smashed his sixth goal this season into the net in the 91st minute. — AFP

Valencia move to top

MADRID: Valencia eased past Alaves 3-0 on Friday to take top spot in La Liga as coach Jose Bordalas celebrated victory over his former club. Denmark international Daniel Wass opened the scoring at the Mestalla after only three minutes with Carlos Soler making it 2-0 in first-half stoppage time. Portugal's Goncalo Guedes added the third on the hour. Mallorca also have seven points from three games and are second before the rest of the weekend's matches after a 1-0 win over Espanyol. — AFP

Kuwaiti triathlon athlete ranks 10th

VIENNA: Kuwaiti triathlon athlete Abdullah Hamada has ranked 10th in the finals of the international "Triathlons 2021-2022" tournament that kicked off on Friday in the city of Samorin, Slovakia. Hamada said yesterday that he reached this rank in the age category 30-39 among 403 competing athletes. He added that the tournament kicked off with the athletes competing in swimming for 750 meters in the Danube River and proceeded on bicycling for 20 kilometers ending with a running round for five kilometers. — KUNA

Kuwaiti riders qualify

VIENNA: Three Kuwaiti equestrian champions on Friday qualified for Neustadt International Equestrian Tournament's hurdles competitions in the finals. Kuwaiti rider Ahmad Al-Ansari said after qualifying for the two-star competition that he faced hard competition from horse riders of various countries in several rounds throughout two weeks, where he scored the required number of points to qualify for the 130-cm hurdles competition. Fellow rider Shaker Al-Kahdemi said he had taken part in the past competitions with two horses. Fawaz Al-Rashed said he had taken part in three rounds, where he qualified for the finals. Kuwait is the sole Arab state partaking in the tournament. — KUNA

Correa makes Inter dream come true with winning brace at Verona

MILAN: Joaquin Correa hailed a dream Inter Milan debut on Friday after he scored twice to help the Serie A champions come from behind and win 3-1 at Hellas Verona. Correa completed his move to Inter from Lazio on Thursday and came off the bench to snatch the points for Simone Inzaghi's side, who have begun their title defence with two wins from as many games.

The Argentina forward struck Inter's second goal seven minutes from the end, leaping high to power home Matteo Darmian's cross and complete a second-half comeback after Lautaro Martinez had levelled shortly after the break with a header of his own. He added the cherry to the cake in stoppage time when he gathered the ball and fired home the third with a precision finish.

"I dreamed about coming here as a kid, I've put the Inter jersey on for the first time and thankfully we won thanks to my goals," a joyous Correa told Sky Sport Italia. "I want to thank my teammates, coach and the club who showed their faith in me and made me feel like I

had been here for years."

Defeat was harsh for Verona who had deservedly taken the lead through Ivan Ilic in the 15th minute and gave Inter a battle throughout the match, but they are pointless after their two opening fixtures. Inzaghi, who replaced title-winning coach Antonio Conte this summer, has his new team singing from his hymn sheet with the players signed to replace departed stars Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi all slotting straight into place.

After Edin Dzeko and Hakan Calhanoglu shone last week against Genoa, it was Correa's turn to snatch the headlines with his match-winning brace. Martinez had a chance to put Inter ahead in the 13th minute of his season debut, but his close-range snap shot was well saved by Lorenzo Montipò.

Just two minutes later Verona took the lead through Ilic, who was quick to read that keeper Samir Handanovic was about to pass to Marcelo Brozovic and nipped the ball away from the Croatia midfielder before dinking home a classy finish.



VERONA: Inter Milan's Argentinian forward Joaquin Correa is congratulated by teammates after scoring his team's third goal during the Italian Serie A football match between Hellas Verona and Inter Milan at the Marcantonio Bentegodi stadium in Verona on Friday. — AFP

Correa saves Inter

Inter dominated possession but looked bereft of ideas as the well-drilled hosts initially kept a lid on Dzeko and playmaker Calhanoglu. However Inter were level straight after the break with Dzeko pressure from an Ivan Perisic long throw leading to the ball dropping kindly for Martinez, who nodded home from close range. Fresh from

netting his 50th Inter goal, Martinez somehow lashed wide seven minutes later following another long throw and Dzeko flick on, the Argentine's left foot failing to find the target from just yards out. Inter slowly started to squeeze Verona into their own half but beyond a well-saved Alessandro Bastoni drive Verona kept restricting their opponents to very little. — AFP

Confident Osaka sees no more Slam pullouts

NEW YORK: Defending US Open champion Naomi Osaka has ruled out any future repeats of her abrupt withdrawal from the French Open, saying Friday she would have handled the controversy differently if given the chance.

The four-time Grand Slam winner, seeking her third New York title, dropped out at Roland Garros after skipping post-match interviews with reporters, saying it caused her mental health distress. When she was fined and warned future similar violations could bring greater punishments, Osaka withdrew from the tournament and skipped Wimbledon as well, her actions raising global awareness of the mental challenges facing world-class athletes.

Speaking in a room of reporters on Friday with more tuned in virtually, the 23-year-old Japanese star said she would do things differently if put in the same situation again. "I feel like there's a lot of things I did wrong in that moment," Osaka said Friday. "But I'm



QUEENS: Japan's Naomi Osaka speaks during an interview ahead of the 2021 US Open Tennis tournament at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Queens, New York on Friday. — AFP

also the type of person that's very in the moment, like whatever I feel I'll say it or do it. I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. "I think there's a lot of things I learned to do better. Of course, I don't feel the same situation will happen again. I'd say maybe think it through a bit more in the way that I didn't know how big a deal it would become."

Osaka, seeded third in the final Grand Slam event of the year that begins tomorrow, said she was happier to have people asking questions rather than

greatest achievement. "I know how big of an opportunity is in front of me here in New York, where historically I've played really well over the years. It's probably the most entertaining tennis court that we have. Crowd will be back on stadium. I can't wait. Honestly I'm very motivated to play my best tennis."

Djokovic called the 2021 Slam sweep possibility a "guiding star" as he chases a fourth US Open crown after 2011, 2015 and 2018. "I'm hugely inspired and motivated by that, no doubt," Djokovic said. "But at the same time I know how to balance things out mentally, with lots of expectations obviously around."

Nadal and Federer will not play in New York due to injuries, leaving Djokovic to feel the spotlight without his "Big Three" rivals but with three young rising star rivals in Daniil Medvedev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Olympic champion Alexander Zverev.

"I feel it. I know there's a lot of people who are going to be watching my matches and expecting me

getting them over audio and video monitors. "Definitely it feels better to see the person," Osaka said. "It's really off-putting just to be seated in front of a screen. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I feel, like, a lot of nerves. But it feels much better to be talking to a human."

Osaka, who lit the cauldron in the opening ceremonies of the Tokyo Olympics, has played only once since then, losing in her second match last week at Cincinnati. "I know I haven't played that many matches. I know that I haven't even gotten to a quarterfinal," Osaka said. "Actually I feel pretty happy with how I'm playing. I feel pretty confident with where I am right now. I'm not declaring that I'll do amazing here. I'm the one-match-at-a-time person. Hopefully it will work out in the end."

Top-ranked Ashleigh Barty has found consistency in the basics and captured five titles this year, giving the Australian star a major confidence boost heading into the US Open. The 25-year-old from Brisbane skipped most of last year due to Covid-19 and hasn't been home since early in the year, but captured titles in Melbourne, Stuttgart, Miami and her second Grand Slam crown at Wimbledon. Add in last week's final major US Open tuneup trophy at Cincinnati and it's easy to see what the top seed has her sights set on a third major crown when the New York hardcourt showdown starts. — AFP

to do well and fight for a Slam," Djokovic said. "At the same time, regardless of Roger's and Rafa's absence, you still have tremendous quality tennis players that are probably right now on hot streak, like Zverev, Medvedev, Tsitsipas, those are the three top contenders I see for the title."

"I've been in this situation numerous times in my life. There's a slight difference in terms of what's at stake and the feeling towards that, but I don't give it too big a significance on a daily basis because I'm trying to be in the present moment."

Winning Olympic gold has helped ignite a Grand Slam fire in Zverev as he chases a US Open title after coming within two points of capturing it last year. The German fourth seed, coming off a title last week at Cincinnati in an event where he hadn't won a prior match, burns for his first Grand Slam title after falling to Dominic Thiem in last year's championship match on the New York hardcourts. — AFP

Sports

Ronaldo return puts Solskjaer on the clock at Man Utd

Pressure to bring back glory days of Ferguson era

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo's sensational return to Manchester United on Friday capped a transfer window that has made fans quickly forget the disappointment on the field, and uprising off it, that ended last season.

Just four months ago supporters stormed the Old Trafford pitch in protest at the club's owners for their part in the failed European Super League project and a perceived lack of investment in the club, forcing the postponement of a Premier League clash with Liverpool.

In response, the Glazer family have sanctioned a transfer spend of nearly £150 million (\$206 million) with Ronaldo joining his former Real Madrid teammate Raphael Varane and Jadon Sancho. That investment has ramped up the pressure on United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to deliver the club's first Premier League title since Alex Ferguson retired as manager in 2013. Solskjaer is yet to win a trophy in his two-and-a-half years in charge with his mismanagement of losing the Europa League final on penalties to Villarreal in United's final game of last season still fresh in the memory. The Norwegian did not make a single substitution until 100 minutes had been played in Gdansk as United failed to make their far greater resources count. A lack of strength in depth is not an excuse Solskjaer will be able to use this season if he does not end United's wait for silverware.

'Greatest of all-time'

Even at 36, Ronaldo is still one of the most prolific goalscorers in the game. The Portuguese netted 36 times for

Juventus last season and won the Golden Boot at Euro 2020, scoring five goals in four games. "He is a legend of this club, he's the greatest player of all time if you ask me," said Solskjaer of his former teammate.

He and Sancho, who cost a reported £73 million from Borussia Dortmund in June, join a stacked forward line of Edinson Cavani, Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial and Mason Greenwood. Behind them Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba have already shone this season in a 5-1 thrashing of Leeds on the opening day of the Premier League season.

But a 1-1 draw at Southampton last week exposed some familiar failings of Solskjaer's reign that the recruitment of Ronaldo may solve. The United manager can boast an impressive record against stronger opposition. He has beaten Pep Guardiola's Manchester City four times in eight meetings and lost only twice in six clashes with Liverpool. Twice he's won away to Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League.

But too often United have performed poorly in the games they are expected to win. Last season they finished 12 points behind City having dropped the same number of points against Crystal Palace and relegated Sheffield United, West Brom and Fulham.

"That was the difference against Southampton, we weren't clinical, we didn't take our chances," added Solskjaer. "We had as many, or even more, chances (as against Leeds). If you're not ruthless in the box, you won't win points in the Premier League."



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

If Ronaldo's predatory instincts turn those games into routine wins, the glory days of the Ferguson era could be back. According to reports, Ferguson played a part in convincing Ronaldo to return to the club where he made his name on the world stage between 2003 and 2009 rather than risking his United legacy by crossing the Manchester divide to join City.

But there is a danger of the club harking back to their past rather than embracing the future. Teenage striker Mason Greenwood has scored in both his side's opening two league games of the season, but is likely to see his playing time curtailed by Ronaldo's return. —AFP

Man Utd, Ronaldo reunite to rekindle past glories

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo completed an emotional return to Manchester United on Friday, 12 years after leaving as the world's most expensive player, tasked with firing the Red Devils back to the top of the English and European game. The 36-year-old has forced a return to the Premier League from Juventus as one last shot at a sixth Ballon d'Or and Champions League title.

Ronaldo arrived at United as a skinny 18-year-old from Sporting Lisbon in 2003 with a bag of tricks. In six years under the tutelage of Alex Ferguson his physique and end product were transformed to lead United to three Premier League titles and Ferguson's final Champions League in 2008.

However, even United could not resist Ronaldo's desire to move to Spain when Real Madrid offered a then world record £80 million (\$110 million) in 2009. Real were more than rewarded with nine years of Ronaldo in his prime. He smashed the club's all-time goalscoring record at a rate of more than a goal a game, netting 450 times in 438 appearances. After ending Real's long-wait for "La Decima", the club's 10th European Cup, he spearheaded a run of three consecutive Champions League wins between 2016 and 2018. That is what United are looking for an ageing Ronaldo to repeat.

The club he returns to is different to the all-conquering behemoth he left behind. United have not won a league title since Ferguson left in 2013 and have failed to even qualify for the Champions League regularly in the intervening years.

Progress has been made in the nearly three years since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer replaced Jose Mourinho, but the Norwegian is still to win a trophy as United boss and they finished a distant second to Manchester City in the Premier League last season.



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on December 3, 2007 Cristiano Ronaldo (right) of Manchester United heads his second goal past Dejan Stefanovic of Fulham during the Premier league football match at Old Trafford, Manchester, north-west England. —AFP

Spoiled for choice

Ronaldo's experience in Italy also serves as a warning of what could go wrong on his return. Juventus had reached the Champions League final twice in three years prior to Ronaldo's arrival in 2018 for 112 million euros. In his three seasons in Turin, la Vecchia Signora never made it beyond the quarter-finals — crashing out to far less well-resourced opposition in Ajax, Lyon and Porto. Inter Milan also ended Juventus' nine-year grip on Serie A last season.

But Ronaldo can argue that was a sign of the Italian giants' declining standards rather than his own. Juve have changed managers in each of the past three seasons only to end up back where they started by reappointing Massimiliano Allegri.

Ronaldo still topped the Serie A goal charts last season,

edging out Romelu Lukaku, who joined Chelsea this month for £97 million. And he also rolled back the years at Euro 2020 to win the Golden Boot despite playing just four games as Portugal bowed out at the last 16. Unlike at Juventus, Ronaldo is returning to a situation more akin to what he enjoyed at Madrid, surrounded by a star-studded squad. United had already added his former Madrid teammate Raphael Varane and England winger Jadon Sancho this summer.

Solskjaer now has a wealth of attacking options featuring Ronaldo's international teammate Bruno Fernandes, Sancho, Edinson Cavani, Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial, Mason Greenwood and Paul Pogba. However, United's season and Solskjaer's time in charge will now likely come down to whether Ronaldo fires or fails second time around at Old Trafford. —AFP

Five magic Cristiano Ronaldo moments at Manchester United

PARIS: Cristiano Ronaldo is returning to Manchester United after 12 years away at Real Madrid and Juventus. AFP Sport takes a look at five of the best moments from his first stint at Old Trafford.

Dazzling debut - August 2003

Ronaldo joined United after players urged coach Alex Ferguson to sign him following a pre-season friendly against Sporting Lisbon where the winger had dazzled. After a £12 million investment, Ronaldo made his debut in the red shirt coming off the bench with United a goal up against Bolton. Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs (twice) and Ruud Van Nistelrooy got the goals, but all the talk was about the new teenage winger.

That winking feeling - post 2006 World Cup

Ronaldo was caught winking on camera as his United teammate Wayne Rooney was sent off for England at the World Cup, making the winger a hate figure across England. Instead of willing under pressure he took the ascendancy from Rooney at the heart of United, ending the season as player of the year and scoring the winning goal at Manchester City as United won the 2007 Premier League.

First Champions League goals - April 2007

Ronaldo produced one of his first true world class performances at Old Trafford in a 7-1 Champions League quarter-final win over Roma. His snapshot opener and far-post tap in were in fact less impressive than his overall performance dominated the game.

Towering header - May 2008

With Ronaldo's repertoire expanding, he added a new string to his bow with gravity defying high leaps to head goals home. One of the early examples was his opener for United in their Champions League final against Chelsea when he soared above the defence to bang home a Paul Scholes cross. The match eventually went to penalties and Ronaldo failed to convert from the spot when stepping up first. He threw himself to the ground sobbing in relief when Nicolas Anelka's spot kick was also saved as United emerged narrow winners in Moscow, despite his miss.

Puskas award - April 2009

In December, Ronaldo became the first United player to win the Ballon d'Or as best player in Europe since George Best a full 40 years earlier. His final season, however, was over-shadowed by a lurking Real Madrid and ankle injuries. But in Porto, Ronaldo scored a 35-metre wonder-strike in a Champions League quarter-final that won United the match and him the Puskas award for best European goal of the season. Ronaldo himself said it was the best goal he had ever scored. —AFP

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Manchester City thrash sorry Arsenal 5-0

No Ronaldo, no problem as City cruise; pressure mounts on Arteta



MANCHESTER: Arsenal's Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang reacts to City's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Arsenal at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola ruled out signing a striker before next week's transfer deadline after Manchester City rubbed salt into Arsenal wounds with a 5-0 thrashing yesterday to inflict the Gunners' worst start to a league season since 1954.

City's week had been dominated by transfer speculation as Harry Kane confirmed he will be remaining at Tottenham this season with Spurs unwilling to sell the England captain. Cristiano Ronaldo was then rumored to be making a sensational move to the Etihad, but opted instead to return to Manchester United.

Yet, even without the injured Kevin De Bruyne and with Raheem Sterling and Riyad Mahrez on the bench, City showed the wealth of attacking options on offer to Guardiola as Ferran Torres scored twice, while Ilkay Gundogan, Gabriel Jesus and Rodrigo were also on target. "I don't think so," said Guardiola when asked if he will add to his squad before the window closes on Tuesday. "The team made a magnificent last season and we are the same, plus Jack (Grealish)."

Arsenal have now lost their first three league games and are yet to even score a goal with the

pressure rising on Arteta with his side rooted to the bottom of the table. Arteta left the comfort of working as Guardiola's assistant for his first managerial job just under two years ago, but is increasingly in the firing line with the Gunners falling further behind the Premier League elite.

"He is above and beyond a good manager," said Guardiola in defense of his former colleague. "His personality, his leadership, we were sad when he left but sometimes people expect results immediately. I'm a big fan of him and I'm pretty sure if they trust him he is going to do a good job at Arsenal."

Arteta has reportedly been given until the October international break, in just over a month, to revive Arsenal's fortunes after spending over £130 million (\$153 million) in the transfer window. "I am sorry we cannot give them (the fans) the results right now and we have to fix it," said the Spaniard, who on top of facing Chelsea and City in Arsenal's first three

games has also had to cope with a series of positive cases of coronavirus at the club. "It's been really tough the first three weeks with everything that has happened."

Xhaka sees red again

His experimental selection of Sead Kolasinac, Rob Holding and Callum Chambers in a back three quickly backfired as the diminutive Gundogan outjumped Holding to head home the opener on seven minutes. More shambolic defending allowed Torres to tap home the second from Cedric Soares's sliced clearance.

A massive mistake from Ederson nearly gave Arsenal a lifeline when his clearance was charged down by Emile Smith Rowe and rolled inches wide. But Granit Xhaka's ill-discipline then left his side with no hope 10 minutes before half-time.

The Switzerland skipper recently signed a new con-

tract to end speculation over his future, but red cards have been a recurring feature of his six years in north London and his wild two-footed lung on Cancelo brought the 12th sending off in his club career.

"After we took the red card it was a completely different game but everyone has to look themselves in the mirror, stick together and move forward," said Arsenal captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. "We need to talk between us players. We are Arsenal and we need pride. We need to be honest with each other."

Against the 10 men, Grealish had the space to show why City spent £100 million on making him the most expensive player in Premier League history. The England playmaker's trickery left Chambers and Holding on the floor before squaring for Jesus to tap into an empty net.

City enjoyed a glorified training session after the break as Arsenal could barely get a touch. Rodrigo's inch-perfect curling finish from long range made it 4-0. Guardiola introduced Sterling and Mahrez for the final half hour and it was from Mahrez's perfect cross that Torres headed in off the post six minutes from time. — AFP



Gunners' worst start since 1954

Robinson strikes as England level India series

LEEDS: Ollie Robinson completed a five-wicket haul as England thrashed India by an innings and 76 runs to win the third Test at Headingley yesterday with more than a day to spare. The hosts leveled the five-match series at 1-1 after India's 151-run success in the second Test at Lord's.

The tourists, 215-2 overnight, collapsed to 278 all against the new ball as they lost eight wickets for 63 runs in 19.3 overs during a mere 103 minutes' play on the fourth morning. Robinson, in just his fourth match at this level, returned Test-best figures 5-65 for a match haul of 7-81.

India's 278 all out, however, was 200 runs more than their woeful first innings 78 — made after captain Virat Kohli won the toss—which saw England great James Anderson rip through the top order with 3-6. "It's a great day," Root told the BBC after his 27th Test win as England captain surpassed the record previously held by Michael Vaughan.

England's victory, which saw Root make 121 — his third hundred of the series and sixth in Tests this year—in a total of 432 on the Yorkshireman's home ground, followed a poor last day at Lord's. Asked if England's revival had been a surprise, Root replied: "It might be for you but it's not for me because I know the talent we've got and what we're capable of."

Robinson has become an increasingly important figure in a pace attack missing the injured Stuart Broad, Jofra Archer, Mark Wood, Chris Woakes and Olly Stone, with all-rounder Ben Stokes out of action due to mental health issues. "To get a five-for at Headingley, where I started my professional career, is very special," said player of the match Robinson. "I enjoy bowling here and to bowl with Jimmy is an



LEEDS: England's Jonny Bairstow leaps into the arms of England's Craig Overton after Overton takes the catch to dismiss India's Rishabh Pant off the bowling of England's Ollie Robinson (left) for 1 run on the fourth day of the third cricket Test match between England and India at Headingley cricket ground in Leeds, northern England, yesterday. — AFP

absolute honour. I learn from him every day." Meanwhile Kohli, one of Robinson's wickets a spell of 4-25 in eight overs yesterday, praised the Sussex seamer by saying: "He understands his skills really well, understands angles, swings the ball both ways, is very consistent and especially in these conditions. A real find for them."

'Crumbled'

Kohli, whose side must regroup quickly before the fourth Test at the Oval starting on Thursday, insisted he had no regrets about batting first as he put India's collapse yesterday down to "scoreboard pressure".

"We knew we were always up against it when you are all out for 78 and the opposition then puts such a big score on the board," he said. "The English bowlers were outstanding today. The pressure was relentless and difficult to deal with. The batting order crumbled."

India resumed yesterday on 215-2 but, with 80 overs bowled, England took the new ball straight from the start of yesterday's play. From the moment Cheteshwar Pujara was out without adding to his overnight 91, lbw playing no shot to Robinson, England were in complete command with Kohli falling soon afterwards for 55 — his first fifty of the series—when he was caught in the slips by Root off Robinson.

Ajinkya Rahane (10) edging Anderson to wicket-keeper Jos Buttler before Rishabh Pant (one), reaching for a wide delivery, nicked Robinson to third slip. Now the only question was whether India could keep the match going beyond the lunch interval.

They could not for all Ravindra Jadeja made 30, with the recalled paceman Craig Overton (3-47) ending the match when he had Mohammed Siraj caught in the slips for a duck to the delight of sun-drenched crowd of more than 16,000. — AFP

Afghan Paralympians arrive in Tokyo

TOKYO: Afghanistan's two Paralympic athletes have arrived in Tokyo and will compete at the Games, the International Paralympic Committee said yesterday. "The Afghan athletes Zakia Khudadadi and Hossain Rasouli were warmly welcomed to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Village," the IPC said in a statement.

With the swift fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, the pair had been among the tens of thousands trapped and unable to leave the country. But they were evacuated last weekend and have been in Paris at a French sports ministry training center, the IPC said. "Over the last 12 days, Zakia and Hossain have continued to express their absolute desire to come and compete at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games," said IPC chief Andrew Parsons.

Earlier this week, the IPC had said that Khudadadi and Rasouli had safely left Afghanistan but would not be competing at the Games, as the focus was on their well-being. At the opening ceremony on Tuesday, the Afghan flag had featured in a symbolic fashion, carried by a volunteer.

"We always knew there was a remote chance both athletes could participate at Tokyo 2020 which is why the Afghan flag was paraded at Tuesday's Opening Ceremony," Parsons said. "Our number one priority has and always will be the health and well-being of both athletes."

Khudadadi will compete in the women's taekwondo K44 -49kg category, which is scheduled for September 2. And Rasouli will run in the men's 400m T47 athletics event on September 3, the IPC said. — AFP