



NOTICE

Happy National and Liberation Days to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on Friday, February 26, 2021. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.net and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @KuwaitTimes



Private clinics can buy and administer COVID vaccines

Kuwait reports 1,001 new cases, 5 deaths • Sixth batch of Pfizer jabs to arrive Sunday

Bill filed to suspend foreign aid; election petitions quashed



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs a virtual meeting with leaders from 75 government agencies yesterday regarding the right to access information law, in the presence of Minister of Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh and Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five opposition lawmakers yesterday filed a draft law calling to suspend Kuwait's foreign aid for five years amid official reports stating that the country is projected to accumulate KD 81 billion in fiscal deficits over 12 years. The bill, filed by MPs Hasan Jowhar, Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, Muhallal Al-Mudhaf, Hamad Rouh El-Din and Muhammad Al-Sayer, stipulates that the government suspend all forms of foreign aid, loans and deposits for five years due to the difficult financial situation facing Kuwait as a result of low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

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KUWAIT: The health ministry yesterday allowed hospitals, health centers and private clinics to purchase COVID-19 vaccines from local agents or companies producing them after being licensed and approved by the ministry to provide vaccination services. In a statement, the ministry said the permission was stated in circular no. 5/2021 issued through the health licenses department. Applicants should complete the electronic connection with the electronic platform of the ministry before starting to provide the vaccination service.

The ministry stressed the need for recipients' data to match all the requirements of the automated COVID-19 vaccination service at the health ministry to issue vaccination certificates, indicating the need for hospitals, health centers and clinics to be located in a self-contained building that is not shared with other treatment institutions. They should also have vaccination permits from the health licensing department and commit to apply the precautionary measures recommended by the ministry of health.

The ministry also stressed the need to stick to the standards, specifications and guidelines related to transporting, storing and administering the vaccines issued by the producer and from the drug and food control sector. The ministry affirmed that the service provider bears full responsibility for the accuracy of recipients' data, ensuring data privacy and following up on the vaccination dates of recipients with the responsibility to inform them via SMS messages of their scheduled dates for taking doses.

The health ministry also announced yesterday 1,001 people contracted the novel coronavirus over the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 187,005, in addition to five new fatalities, with the death toll hitting 1,062. Speaking during his daily briefing, the ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the number of patients receiving treatment at intensive care units amounted to 147, putting the total number of confirmed cases that remain under treatment at 10,895.

Sanad added swab tests conducted over the past 24 hours reached 8,724, taking the total of such examinations to 1,755,500. He said 960

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News in brief

J&J vaccine highly effective

WASHINGTON: The single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine is highly effective in preventing severe COVID-19, including the South African and Brazil variants, new documents released by the US Food and Drug Administration showed yesterday. In large clinical trials, the vaccine efficacy against severe disease was 85.9 percent in the United States, 81.7 percent in South Africa, and 87.6 percent in Brazil. — AFP

Jazeera to launch US platform

DOHA: Qatar-based broadcaster Al-Jazeera will launch a center-right news platform in the United States, the network said Tuesday, five years after shuttering a mainstream cable news broadcasting project in the US. Al-Jazeera said in a statement that "Rightly" would be a "new US-based digital platform that will generate content for audiences currently underrepresented in today's media environment". — AFP

Stadium renamed after Modi

AHMEDABAD, India: The world's biggest cricket stadium was renamed after India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a surprise move yesterday, hours before its inaugural international match between India and England. The 110,000-seater stadium was the pet project of Modi who was chief minister in Gujarat state, where Ahmedabad is the main city, before taking over as head of government in 2014. — AFP

23 tons of cocaine seized

BERLIN: Germany and Belgium have seized 23 tons of cocaine in a record haul of the drug in Europe, German customs said yesterday. German officers had discovered 16 tons of cocaine hidden in containers from Paraguay at the port of Hamburg on Feb 12. Joint investigations into the stash with Dutch officers led authorities to swoop on another 7.2 tons in cocaine at the port of Antwerp in Belgium. Dutch police said they arrested a 28-year-old man early yesterday. — AFP

Tiger Woods 'recovering' after surgery

LOS ANGELES: US golf legend Tiger Woods was recovering in a hospital yesterday after surgery for serious leg injuries sustained in a car crash that law enforcement officials said he was lucky to survive. Woods was driving in a Los Angeles suburb on a road notorious for fatal accidents when his car crashed, rolling several times. "He is currently awake, responsive, and recovering in his hospital room," his representatives said in a statement on Woods's Twitter account late Tuesday.

In the same statement, Harbor-

UCLA Medical Center chief medical officer Anish Mahajan said Woods underwent surgery to repair "significant orthopedic injuries" to his lower right leg and ankle. This included the insertion of a rod into his tibia and the use of "a combination of screws and pins" to stabilize his foot and ankle, the statement read.

Woods did not appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol during the early-morning incident, said Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva. Villanueva said investigators would determine if Woods may have been using a cellphone while driving or was otherwise distracted in any way.

No other vehicles or passengers were involved in the crash, which occurred on a steep stretch of road known as an accident

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LOS ANGELES: The vehicle driven by golfer Tiger Woods lies on its side in Rancho Palos Verdes on Tuesday after a rollover accident. — AFP (See Page 16)

Germany convicts Syrian intel agent, Iraqi IS preacher

KOBLENZ/CELLE, Germany: A German court yesterday convicted a former Syrian intelligence service agent for complicity in crimes against humanity, in the first court case worldwide over state-sponsored torture by Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's government. Eyad Al-Gharib, 44, was sentenced to four and a half years in prison over his role in helping to arrest at least 30 protesters and deliver them to the Al-Khatib detention center in Damascus after a rally in Duma in autumn 2011.

Almost 10 years since the Arab Spring reached Syria on March 15, 2011, the judgment is the first in the world related to what judge Anne Kerber called "widespread and systematic repression" of protesters

by the regime in Damascus. The conviction was hailed as a "ray of hope" by Syrian Wassim Mukdad, a plaintiff who suffered torture in the Al-Khatib center, also named "Branch 251". "This is just the beginning and the day will come when Bashar Al-Assad and his cronies, the army and intelligence generals are put on trial," said Mukdad, who testified at the trial. Gharib, a former low-ranking member of the intelligence service, hid his face from the cameras with a folder as the verdict was read out, arms folded and wearing a medical mask. He is the first of two defendants on trial since April 23 to be convicted by the court in Koblenz, after judges decided to split the proceedings in two. The second defendant, Anwar Raslan, 58, is accused directly of crimes against humanity, including overseeing the murder of 58 people and the torture of 4,000 others.

Patrick Kroker, a lawyer representing the joint plaintiffs, said Assad's name was read out "at least five times during the verdict", while prosecutor Jasper Klinge saw the proceedings as "a signal to the perpetrators" of mass crimes in Syria.



Eyad Al-Gharib



Ahmad Abdullah

Prosecutors in Koblenz had been seeking five and a half years for Gharib, who defected in 2012 before finally fleeing Syria in Feb 2013.

After spending time in Turkey and then Greece, Gharib arrived in Germany on April 25, 2018. During

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Thieves go for manhole covers in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon's economic meltdown is not just leaving gaping holes in state coffers, with thieves now plucking Beirut's manhole covers for scrap. Governor Marwan Abboud told AFP

Wednesday that soaring poverty had led to a spike in the theft of manhole covers, because "they are made out of cast iron which has become much more expensive".

The fast disappearing manhole covers, which the authorities say they cannot afford to replace, are making the streets increasingly perilous for vehicles and pedestrians, especially at night. "We are deploying people to look for the thieves day and night," said one municipality official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Lebanon's Al-Akhbar daily newspaper said yes-

terday that a cover weighing upwards of 70 kg could fetch \$100 for scrap, income that is attracting increasingly organized and professional gangs. Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, and Abboud said the thefts started rising after the devastating Aug 4 port explosion sowed more misery.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 80 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market, and a growing number of people in the once relatively prosperous nation are relying on food handouts and sinking into poverty. — AFP

Local

Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Premier, Deputy PM



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



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



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also

received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-

Saleh. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, and Minister Saleh at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

Qatar's Amir receives Kuwaiti Defense Minister

DOHA: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani received Kuwaiti premier's envoy, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah on the occasion of opening of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Corridor project in Doha yesterday. Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali conveyed to Qatar's Amir greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali said that the Kuwaiti leadership expressed joy over the strong sentiments and affections towards the people of Kuwait, which contributed to the opening of the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Corridor. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Qatar Hafeeth Al-Ajmi attended the reception. Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled bin Khalifa Al-Thani later received Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali. During his meeting with Sheikh Khaled, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali affirmed that it was important to continue dialogue with brethren in the GCC to develop relations and seek mutual benefit and interests. Kuwait's Ambassador to Qatar attended the meeting. — KUNA



DOHA: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani meets Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Slovak President congratulates Amir

KUWAIT: President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Caputova sent a congratulatory telegram to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of Kuwait's national holidays. "On behalf of the citizens of the Slovak Republic as well as on my own behalf, I sincerely congratulate you on the Independence Day and Liberation Day of your country," President Caputova wrote in the telegram. "I believe that, as an international community, we will be able to overcome the current difficult situation caused by the pandemic, and that, thanks to this, we will be able to continue to develop friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation between Slovakia and Kuwait for the benefit of the citizens of both countries. Your Highness, on this occasion I wish your country and all its citizens good health, stability and successful development."



Zuzana Caputova



ABU DHABI: UAE Vice-President Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum receives from Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. — KUNA



ABU DHABI: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad holds talks with his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah Zayed Al-Nahyan yesterday.

Amir sends letter to UAE President

ABU DHABI: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a letter to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-

Nahyan on ways of further strengthening bilateral relations at all levels. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah delivered the meeting during a meeting with UAE Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum, a foreign ministry statement said.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah later yesterday held talks with his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah Zayed Al-Nahyan on the solid ties between the two countries, in a meeting in Abu Dhabi. The two sides explored cooperation in various domains, along with regional and international issues. — KUNA

Bill filed to suspend foreign aid; election...

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The bill however excludes urgent relief aid due to natural catastrophes and pandemics. It also calls on authorities to use all available channels to ensure that loans given to foreign countries are repaid.

MP Bader Al-Dahoum said yesterday that during a meeting of the budgets committee, he proposed to the director of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to stop giving loans to foreign countries and instead direct the money to the Kuwaiti government to face the rising budget deficit. He said the director rejected the idea. He called on the government to seriously study the proposal because it will provide funds to the budget.

The government has sent a draft law to the National Assembly seeking to withdraw KD 5 billion annually from the future generations fund to finance the state coffers in the face of a growing budget deficit. Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada said in a statement that the government projects accumulated deficits over five years - from fiscal years 2020/2021 until 2024/2025 - at KD 55.4 billion.

Based on official statistics, accumulated actual budget deficits in the seven years from 2014/2015 to 2019/2020 reached KD 26.1 billion. This means budget deficits over 12 years could reach KD 81 billion. Notably, the budget for the upcoming fiscal year is calculated based on an average oil price of \$45 per barrel, while the budget for the current fiscal year is based on oil prices of \$30 per barrel.

The government's bill to withdraw from the generations fund came after the state's reserve fund was drained

due to the sharp fall in oil prices. The finance ministry said easy methods to provide cash injections to the general reserve fund have vanished, and it's time to carry out fundamental reforms that aim at reducing public spending, about 71 percent of which goes for wages and subsidies, and raising non-oil revenues.

Meanwhile, the constitutional court yesterday rejected three petitions calling to nullify the results of the National Assembly elections due to alleged irregularities. The ruling, which is final, means the Assembly elections are immune to challenges.

Also yesterday, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held a virtual meeting regarding the right to access information law and its implementation rules, in the presence of ministers and leaders from 75 government agencies. The premier affirmed that the meeting aimed at discussing the mechanisms and tools for implementing the law on the right to access information despite the government's resignation, due to its importance.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said the National Assembly approved the government draft law on the right to access information in August and it was published in the official gazette, which is a true measure of the seriousness of Kuwait towards its international obligations that it has ratified, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The law issuance is also an advanced step to enforce what Kuwait has committed to in accordance with international anti-corruption requirements, upon which Kuwait previously issued law no. 2 of 2016 establishing the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), he added. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also noted that these laws and others are a step towards upholding the concepts of transparency and community participation. He called on all officials, government agencies and those addressing the provisions of this law to abide by its regulations.

Earlier yesterday, an official at the health ministry said the sixth batch of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine will arrive in Kuwait on Sunday. Speaking to KUNA, Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said Kuwait is keen on battling the spread of COVID-19 by reinforcing its national immunization campaign. The ministry is in direct contract with the pharmaceutical company for supplies of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, affirmed Bader, who stressed vaccination is necessary to rid the world of this health menace. — KUNA

Tiger Woods 'recovering'...

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"hotspot", where Woods was traveling at "a greater speed than normal", the sheriff added. "Apparently the first contact was with the center median, and from there (the car) crossed into the opposing lane of traffic, hit the curb, hit a tree, and there was several rollovers during that process," said Villanueva. He did not say what caused the crash.

The car ended up several hundred feet from the initial impact, lying on its side on a patch of grass some distance off the road, with its hood badly damaged. Deputy Carlos Gonzalez, the first officer to arrive at the scene, said it was "very fortunate that Mr Woods was able to come out of this alive". Gonzalez found Woods trapped in his vehicle but conscious, appearing "calm and lucid" and able to identify himself to the deputy as "Tiger".

Germany convicts Syrian intel agent...

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the trial, Gharib wrote a letter expressing sorrow for the victims. He also wept as his lawyers called for his acquittal, arguing that he and his family could have been killed if he had not carried out the orders of the regime. But the court argued that he "knew that torture was being practiced" in the detention center, even if he himself had not beaten protesters.

The trial marked the first time that photos from the so-called Caesar files were presented in a court of law. The 50,000 images taken by Syrian military police defector "Caesar" show the corpses of 6,786 Syrians who had been starved or tortured to death inside the Assad regime's detention centers.

Separately, a notorious Iraqi preacher said to be

"It is my understanding that he had serious injuries to both legs," said Los Angeles County fire chief Daryl Osby. Firefighters and paramedics extricated Woods from the wreckage of his SUV and transported him with a neck collar and backboard to a local hospital via road.

Woods, one of the most successful golfers of all time, has won 15 major championships. He recently underwent his fifth back surgery, and said he was uncertain if he would be able to complete his latest injury comeback in time to play at April's Masters. "On behalf of the PGA Tour and our players, Tiger is in our prayers and will have our full support as he recovers," PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said in a statement.

Woods was in the Los Angeles area for his annual Genesis Invitational golf tournament at the Riviera Country Club, and was driving a courtesy car on the morning of the crash. The crash happened near the hilly Palos Verdes peninsula, at the bottom of a stretch of road which has runaway truck ramps for drivers who lose control going downhill. The section has become notorious for fatal accidents over the years. — AFP

the Islamic State jihadist group's de facto leader in Germany was sentenced to 10 years and six months in prison by a German court yesterday. The 37-year-old Ahmad Abdulaziz Abdullah Abdullah, better known as Abu Walaa, helped radicalize young people in Europe and helped them travel to Iraq and Syria, the court found.

He was found guilty of belonging to a foreign terrorist organization, helping to plan subversive violent acts and financing terrorism. Handing down the verdict after 245 days of hearings, judge Frank Rosenow said Abu Walaa was "authorized to act in the name of IS" and was used by the jihadist group as its "representative in Germany" for propaganda and recruitment.

The Iraqi preacher was in the dock with three other men in a costly, high-security trial that began in 2017 in the northern German town of Celle. His three co-defendants were handed sentences ranging from four to eight years for supporting IS. Prosecutors had sought a prison sentence of 11 and a half years for Abu Walaa, while the defense had argued for an acquittal and criticized key witness testimonies. — AFP

Private clinics can buy and...

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COVID-19 patients recovered over the past 24 hours, taking total recoveries to 175,048. The proportion of recoveries compared to cases is estimated at 93.6 percent.

Local

In my view

Soft shout from the darkness



By Dr Bashayer Al-Majed

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The women of Kuwait played such a vitally important role during the invasion of Kuwait, one that every woman can be proud of. On August 2, 1990, Kuwait and the world woke up to the horrific scenes of tanks crossing the Kuwait border; our nation was shocked. However, the women of Kuwait did not stand idly by waiting for their future to be decided for them and waiting for the nation's men to speak for them, 1990 being prior to women's suffrage, and female presence in the National Assembly. There was a feeling of national outrage, hurt and fear for the future of their children and families and country. Everyone wanted to be involved and proactively work to get our country back. Whilst not politically yet having the right to speak out, constitutionally men and women are equal. The constitution gives women the right to a voice and women took it.

Whilst the men of Kuwait were fighting the invaders or were imprisoned, women were able to take on roles traditionally considered solely suitable for males. It was a great step forward for Kuwait, allowing women to shine and demonstrate their capabilities, opening the door to social development, better gender representation and a start towards gender equality.

But their role was more than just the work they did: mothers, sisters, aunts took to the streets, organizing peaceful demonstrations. It started with just a few people, telephoning their friends and neighbors, encouraging them to join the first demonstration and just three days after the invasion, 250 women were part of that first demonstration. The soldiers would never have allowed such a gathering of men; they would have been considered too great a threat. But the women were peaceful and were allowed to continue; they conducted prayers for those who had been murdered by the invaders, they carried placards of Kuwait's beloved Amir and the Crown Prince. More women joined them as they passed their homes. Those brave women led the way for more and more women joining the next day. Others started their own demonstrations in their own neighborhoods. Not only did they protest, but they took practical action. They started training courses for women in first aid, those with the knowledge trained the community to deal with food, water and energy shortages. The women started a newsletter reporting successes of the resistance; it gave people hope, and also let them know what was really happening across the country. This was so important: Kuwait's own news coverage, both radio and print, had been shut down and replaced by Iraq's own, so access to honest news and information was scarce and fragmented and full of negative propaganda. Women worked undercover as runners, collecting and delivering supplies, including guns, money and food to the resistance fighters; brave and dangerous work, indeed. They were vital to the cause in so many ways.

The Kuwaiti nation should be proud of our women's courage and strength and their passion to stand up and protect their country, their people, and their own freedom. These women deserve to be honored. Their families and our nation should always remember their strength and bravery. It is a legacy. It is a reminder that if we work together we can achieve anything. We can be peaceful and yet strong. Kuwaiti women deserve the equality that our Amir promised and that our constitution provides us.

We have come a long way with regards to equality, but there is still a long way to go, but at least we are on our journey and we can see where we want to go. Kuwaiti women are well educated, with the right to vote in democratic elections; we have the right to stand for office, and now finally just last year we finally can enter the judiciary. This last was truly an important step: a wonderful progressive achievement. If we want laws to change to give us equality and representation, then women need to be in a position to change them. Our country is made up of over 50 percent women, parliament and the courts should display this same representation, so our voice is heard and our needs met.

Despite 29 female candidates in the recent elections, none were elected in the new National Assembly in December. But a record number of women did turn out to vote, which is encouraging. We need to encourage women to have faith in themselves, show them they can do the job and be successful, as they were in the resistance. We need strong female role models at all levels of hierarchy and in all professions. And we do already have those; we just need to give them visibility. There are many intelligent, capable women doing wonderful jobs in Kuwait: in the fields of law, politics, medicine, engineering, business. There is strong hope for the future. Moving forward we need better legislation to support female entrepreneurs, so they have equal access to loans, we need more equal parental leave for childcare, we need mothers to have the right to guardianship over themselves and their children. Gender equality will help boost our economy if more people have access to work, and to work in the field that they enjoy and choose, and can excel at.

There is a lot to do, but we are making very positive steps, all supported by our late Amir's Vision 2035. The women of the resistance paved the way for modern Kuwaiti women; we owe it to them to rise up to the challenges of today, to be just as brave and strong as they were; to equally contribute to leading the Kuwaiti nation into a happy, safe and economically successful future.

— Dr Bashayer Al-Majed is a Professor of Law at Kuwait University

Amir receives congratulations on Kuwait national celebrations

Kuwait celebrates 60th National Day, marking great achievements



KUWAIT: The Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center lit with Kuwaiti flag colors to celebrate the 60th National Day of Kuwait. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday cables from top officials and figures, congratulating him on the advent of Kuwait's 60th National Day and 30th Anniversary of Liberation. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Chief of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Salem Ali-Salem Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of KNG General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent the cables. His Highness the Amir, in his reply cables, thanked the officials for their sincere sentiments towards the leadership and people of Kuwait, wishing them success in serving the country in their respective posts and positions. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received cables from GCC and Arab leaders, congratulating him on Kuwait's national celebrations. His Highness the Amir sent reply cables to the leaders, thanking them for their sincere sentiments towards Kuwait and its people.

His Highness the Crown Prince also received a letter of congratulations from Speaker Ghanem, The Speaker, and on behalf of the MPs, congratulated His Highness the Crown Prince on the advent of Kuwait's 60th National Day and 30th Anniversary of the Liberation Day. In a reply cable, His Highness the Crown Prince thanked Speaker Ghanem and the MPs for their sincere sentiments. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince sent a cable to His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, congratulating them on Kuwait's 60th National Day and 30th Anniversary of Liberation. His Highness the Crown Prince received a reply letter from His Highness

Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, where they congratulated His Highness the Crown Prince on the happy occasions. Furthermore, His Highness the Crown Prince received similar congratulations' cables from His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad. In turn, His Highness the Crown Prince, in reply cables, thanked the officials for their sincere sentiments.

Leadership's efforts

Kuwait celebrates its 60th National Day today, marking the efforts of its leadership to develop all sectors and preserve the country's peace and stability. This year's celebrations will be the first under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. During the celebrations, Kuwait is also remembering the great efforts of the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who passed away on 29 September, after long years of national and international achievements at every level. Although this year's celebrations come in time of the coronavirus virus crisis, as today marks one year since discovering the first coronavirus case in Kuwait, this crisis showed Kuwaiti people's strength and unity in facing the pandemic. Even though public celebrations are banned by the government due to the ongoing crisis, Kuwaiti families will continue celebrating the event in their homes. Meanwhile, all segments of society are cooperating to deal with the impact of the coronavirus, including the great efforts of the health care workers and people who

volunteered in different areas.

Kuwait had celebrated the first national day on June 19, 1962, organizing a huge military performance. Then Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said in his speech that Kuwaitis will unite in building a great future for their country and achieve social equality. In the same year, Kuwait launched an establishment council tasked with setting the constitution that relies on democracy. The constitution was approved by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem in November 1962, then holding the first legislative elections in 23 January, 1963. National day celebrations continued to be held on June 19 between 1962-64, but an Amiri decree issued on May 18, 1964, merging Independence Day with ascension of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem to office to be February 25. Kuwait's foreign policy has always been neutral and peaceful, while also focusing on cooperation with regional and international organizations to achieve international peace and stability.

Kuwait had also built strong relations with the Arab and Muslim Worlds, and exerted great efforts in supporting the work of the GCC, Arab League and the UN. Moreover, the country has great achievements in the humanitarian field, continuously aiding those in need around the world. These efforts were recognized by the UN in September 2014, granting late His Highness Sheikh Sabah the "Humanitarian Leader" title, and Kuwait the "Humanitarian Center" title. In the 70s and 80s, the National Day celebrations were held along the Arabian Gulf street, with performances by school students and musical bands. In 1985, Kuwait opened the Flag Square overlooking Arabian Gulf to hold national celebrations. The square also includes the longest pole, raising the Kuwaiti flag to about 36 meters. —KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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French Ambassador
congratulates Kuwait

KUWAIT: Ambassador of France to Kuwait Anne Claire Legendre released a statement yesterday congratulating Kuwait on its national holidays. "On the occasion of the National Day of Kuwait and the 30th anniversary of the Liberation, I would like to convey to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to all our Kuwaiti friends my warmest congratulations and my best wishes of prosperity, health and success," the ambassador said in the statement.

"France and Kuwait enjoy deep and long-standing ties of friendship and trust. The French people keep a vibrant memory of France participating in the coalition that led to the Liberation of Kuwait. Fifteen thousand troops contributed in liberating our Kuwaiti friends and this commitment continues to this day with a strong defense cooperation.

"This year we also celebrate the 60th anniversary of the independence of Kuwait and of our friendship. A very special year for both our countries and a great occasion to give a renewed momentum to our partnership. The enhanced strategic dialogue between our two countries is the first signal of this new momentum.

"Our two countries share a common commitment to the promotion of multilateralism, regional stability and international solidarity. Kuwait has worked steadily for regional stability and peace. In this regard, I would like once again to commend Kuwait's mediation efforts, which have enabled the reconciliation of the Gulf countries. We strongly believe our two countries can work hand in hand to further peace in the Middle East at a critical juncture.

"The multiplication of global issues, exacerbated since the onset of the pandemics, reminds us how essential it is that we continue our collaborative efforts to build a more just, sustainable and secure world. Kuwait has a long standing tradition of being a critical actor in multilateral and humanitarian action. From global health to protecting our planet I am very confident our joint contribution can make a difference."

Prime Minister inaugurates
rescue vehicle for major accidents

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inaugurated yesterday a large rescue vehicle, freshly acquired by Kuwait Fire Force for dealing with large scale accidents. His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh. His Highness listened to an explanation from Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lieutenant General Khaled Rakan Al-Mikrad about the huge truck, equipped with communication devices and thermal cameras. It also contains smart displays and a drone that helps in detecting fires and facilitating rescue operations. The state-of-art vehicle is also designed to rescue and board to safety senior citizens and state officials in case of crises and emergencies. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah walks past the rescue vehicle. —KUNA

Ooredoo's National
Day TVC sets record
with 2 million views

KUWAIT: There are viral television commercials and then there is Ooredoo's National day TV commercial. Since its launching, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has created the next viral sensation in which it peaked in the top viewed videos in YouTube, with more than 2 million views in the first five days.

Like every year, Ooredoo Kuwait launches a unique television commercial on the occasion of the country's National and Liberations days. The video became one of the fastest videos to reach more than 2 million views on YouTube due to its distinctive rhythms, lyrics, and scenes that perfectly conveyed the accurate image of Kuwaiti society. It achieved this milestone just five days after its release, which mirrors the public's admiration of the song.

Ooredoo takes pride of Kuwait yesterday and Kuwait today, in which the TVC boldly reflects. The song scenes also portrays the national pride through combining images of the camels walking in the desert of Kuwait with the image of modern Kuwait City, and its high-rise buildings and stunning towers. The video also presents some children dancing innocently in their traditional dresses and others in modern white dresses dancing ballet.

It is noteworthy that Marina FM, the first radio station in the State of Kuwait, hosted the Advertising and Marketing Manager, Naser Al-Abdullah, and Public Relations and Internal Communications Manager, Ooredoo Kuwait, Nazem Al-Ghabra, on its program "Al-Dewaniya", where they talked more about this amazing patriotic song and what it has achieved from success.

The talented singer who sang the song, Abdulaziz



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait Advertising and Marketing Manager Naser Al-Abdullah, and Public Relations and Internal Communications Manager Nazem Al-Ghabra hosted on Marina FM 'Al-Dewaniya' program.

Louis, and Advertising and Marketing Manager at Ooredoo Kuwait, Naser Al-Abdullah, and Public Relations and Internal Communications Manager, Ooredoo Kuwait, Nazem Al-Ghabra were also hosted in an exclusive radio interview on Q8 Pulse 88.8 FM, in the program "Diwanyat Al-Yaqout and Al-Ansari". During the interview, Abdulaziz Louis shed light on the elements of the song that made it to the top of the list of the most viewed videos on YouTube, while Naser Al-Abdullah explained the importance of the song, which came to reiterate Ooredoo's commitment and social responsibility in instilling patriotism among the people of Kuwait.

Commenting on the song, Youssef Al-Shalal, Director, Marketing Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "The impact of Ooredoo's National Day song for the year 2021 will continue to reverberate in the TVC landscape. Through this TVC, we were keen on sharing the joy of the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of national days, embrace youth talents and support creativity. Because we believe that despite all our differences, we all unite under national pride."

Vietnam congratulates
Kuwait on national holidays

KUWAIT: Vietnam congratulated Kuwait on its national holidays in a series of messages Vietnamese officials sent to Kuwaiti leadership yesterday. "On the 60th anniversary of the National Day of the State of Kuwait, on behalf of the State and the people of Vietnam, I would like to extend to you and the Kuwaiti people the warmest congratulations," Nguyen Phu Trong, President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam wrote in a letter to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. "I am impressed with great achievements that the Kuwaiti people have made over the past 60 years on the economic and political fields, thus help to bring Kuwait into a prosperous and developed nation, contributing to the peace, stability and prosperity of the region and the world. I would like to congratulate the brotherly Kuwaiti people, under your wise reign, continue to attain many greater achievements in the course of national development. May I wish the bilateral ties of traditional friendship and multi-faceted cooperation between Vietnam and Kuwait be further consolidated and enhanced."

Meanwhile, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of Vietnam, sent a similar message to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. "On the 60th anniversary of the National Day of the State of Kuwait, I would like to extend to you, the government and the people of Kuwait the warmest congratulations," he wrote in the letter. "I am confident that under your clear-sighted leadership and the government of Kuwait, the Kuwaiti people will continue to attain many greater achievements in the course of national-building. May I wish the traditional friendship and multi-faceted cooperation between our two countries and two governments be unceasingly consolidated and developed."

Radio Kuwait Urdu
Service marks
national days

KUWAIT: A Special National Day and Liberation Day Transmission "AP Ki MEHFI" was organized by Radio Kuwait Urdu Service to celebrate 60 years of Kuwait independence and 30 years of liberation in a colorful style. A Special program was arranged and broadcasted to mark the special day with full enthusiasm. Syed Sajjad Haider, Ambassador of Pakistan to the state of Kuwait, Major General Muhammad Ashikuzzaman, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the state of Kuwait and Sibi George, Ambassador of India to the state of Kuwait, were among the participants who extended their well wishes for Kuwaiti rulers, government and citizens from their respective government and citizens. They praised all the efforts by Kuwaiti government and all their departments to combat COVID-19 pandemic. They urged their citizens to celebrate the Kuwait National Day keeping MOH guidelines and abiding by the Kuwait laws. Many



well-known community figures from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India also participated through live calls and messages to extend their greetings to Kuwait government and citizens on this occasion.

The broadcast was hosted by Radio Kuwait Urdu Service Announcers, Nida Mirza and Razia Ashraf whereas Aboobacker Payyoli was coordinator and Anees Backer was the Sound Engineer of the show. The program was headed by Shejoun Al-Sabah, Director of Programs, Foreign Services and Shejoun Al-Marshoud, Supervisor of Programs, Foreign Services. At the end of the broadcast, Dua was offered for the Progress and prosperity of Kuwait.

Indian Embassy
hosts symposium on
combating COVID-19

KUWAIT: A symposium titled 'Combating COVID-19 - India-Kuwait Partnership' was organized by the Embassy of India in Kuwait, in association with the Indian Doctors' Forum (IDF) and Kuwait Medical Association (KMA). Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George inaugurated the event with his inaugural address which encapsulated India's success story in handling the pandemic, its vaccine program, its stellar role as the 'Pharmacy of the World' and the ever growing bilateral cooperation between India-Kuwait especially in the health domain. Dr Ahmad Thuwaini Al-Enezi, President, Kuwait Medical Association was the Guest of Honor on the occasion who delivered the keynote address and emphasized on the excellent cooperation between the two friendly countries particularly in the healthcare field. Dr Amir Ahmed, President of the Indian Doctors Forum, also deliv-

ered his remarks on the occasion and introduced the esteemed panel speakers of the Symposium.

The addresses were followed by the panel discussion featuring specialist Indian medical doctors working at reputed healthcare institutions in Kuwait. The discussion was moderated by Dr P Shankar Narayanan Menon, Consultant and Head, Department of Pediatrics, Jaber Al-Ahmed Armed Forces Hospital, Kuwait. Other members of the esteemed panel included: Dr Arijit Chattopadhyay, Consultant Endocrinologist, Medical Department, Al-Sabah Hospital, Ministry of Health Kuwait; Dr Manu Kurian Baby, Senior Registrar, Department of Respiratory Medicine, Jaber Al-Sabah Hospital; Dr Rohit Lohani Senior Specialist, Department of Anesthesia, Al Sabah Hospital; and Dr Saroj Bala Grover, Senior Physician, Department of Medicine, Infectious Diseases Hospital. The symposium generated a tremendous response with hundreds of people from different walks of life in Kuwait participating virtually. The symposium provided an unique opportunity for participants to listen to frontline healthcare warriors providing much needed insights on the ongoing pandemic.



It is our pleasure to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition. We hope that everyone is ready to create beautiful artworks and show support for our heroes of Kuwait! We're searching for great art – so get your paintbrushes, color pencils, crayons and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6-18 years with categories (6 - 8 years) (9 - 11 years) (12 - 14 years) (15 -18 years) and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- Submissions are open from February 14, 2021 till March 31, 2021.
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- Participants in the ages 6 - 8 years may use marker colors only.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artwork must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email at painting@kuwaittimes.net in PDF format ONLY.
- Participant must include on the bottom of the artwork the following: name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.

Kuwait Times

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Happy National and Liberation Day

Boeing remains committed to Kuwait's Vision 2035 and its inspiring progress. We wish you continued success and prosperity.

Together We Soar



International

At least 75 inmates dead in Ecuador prison gang riots

Distraught family members ask for death list

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador: At least 75 inmates died Tuesday and several were injured in riots blamed on gang rivalry at three jails in Ecuador's overcrowded prison system, authorities said.

As security forces battled to regain control, distraught family members waited desperately for news outside the prison in Ecuador's western port city of Guayaquil, where officials said 21 died.

Another 33 died at the prison in Cuenca in the south and eight in Latacunga in the center of the South American country, according to Edmundo Moncayo, director of the government's SNAI prisons management body. "We want the death list given to us," said Daniela Soria, 29, one of about 40 women outside the Guayaquil prison, many of them in tears. "We know that the problems are not over because everyone there has a phone and my husband doesn't call me," she told AFP.

Earlier, she received a WhatsApp voice message from her husband, Ricardo, which she played back for AFP. "They are going to kill me, get me out of here!" he could be heard exclaiming, the last she heard from him. Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno, on Twitter, attributed the riots to "criminal organizations" engaged in "simultaneous acts of violence in several prisons." The authorities, he said, "are acting to retake control."

The military was deployed to help police quell the uprising. The public defender's office, an entity akin to an ombudsman set up to defend human rights, called the violence "an unprecedented massacre" and expressed its "concern over the lack of security in the country, which is reflected in the increase in crime and violence inside these prison facilities."

'Like a market'

The prosecuting authority said several inmates were left injured in fighting between "criminal gangs," including two at Guayaquil in serious condition. Several police were also injured, said Moncayo, but no deaths have been reported among security personnel. Police commander Patricio Carrillo described the situation as "critical," while Interior Minister Patricio Pazmino created a centralized command post to respond to what he said was "concerted action by criminal organizations to generate violence in penitentiary centers."

The prison authority described fierce fighting between organized gangs that go by names such as Los Pijos, Los Lobos and Tigrones. They rely on drug trafficking and operate their criminal enterprises from prison. Moncayo told reporters that on Monday, guards seized two firearms that were to be used to kill the leader of a group imprisoned in Guayaquil.

"Inside, it is like a market. There is everything: drugs, arms, even puppies. Everything is sold," said Soria, the wife of prisoner Ricardo. In order to reduce prisoner numbers amid the coronavirus epidemic, the government commuted the sentences of people convicted of minor offences, reducing overcrowding from 42 percent to 30 percent. This still leaves Ecuador's prison system, with a capacity to house 29,000 inmates in 60-odd facilities, with a prisoner population of 38,000. There are 1,500 guards to oversee them.

Dearth of guards

The SNAI has said a dearth of personnel "hinders immediate response" to prisoner revolts. Last year,



GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador: Relatives of the prisoners at the Zone 8 Deprivation of Liberty Center are seen as they wait for news, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. At least 50 inmates died in riots at three prisons in Ecuador on Tuesday, police said. — AFP

inmate disputes left 51 dead, according to police figures. A 90-day state of emergency in the country's jails was ordered by Moreno last year to try to bring gang activity under control and reduce the violence.

But just in December, prison unrest left 11 prisoners

dead and seven injured. Tuesday's riots coincided with a march of hundreds of indigenous people on Quito to demand a vote recount after a first round of presidential elections this month saw their candidate left out in the cold. — AFP



In this file photo, Hillary Clinton kicks off her book tour of her memoir of the 2016 presidential campaign titled "What Happened" with a signing at the Barnes & Noble in Union Square in New York. — AFP

Hillary, Penny to publish political thriller

NEW YORK: Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who ran against Donald Trump for president in 2016, is to publish a suspense thriller with Canadian author Louise Penny in October, publishers Simon & Schuster and St. Martin's Press said Tuesday.

"State of Terror" will be on bookshelves on October 12, the publishers said, and will tell the story of a novice secretary of state serving in the administration of her political rival as a "series of terrorist attacks throws the global order into disarray."

Although the book's blurb makes no explicit mention of Trump, whose "America First" policy reined in the United States's global leadership role, the book is set "after four years of American leadership that shrank from the world stage." "Writing a thriller with Louise is

a dream come true," Clinton said in a statement. "I've relished every one of her books and their characters as well as her friendship. Now we're joining our experiences to explore the complex world of high stakes diplomacy and treachery. All is not as it first appears."

For her part, Penny said that writing with Clinton was "an incredible experience, to get inside the State Department. Inside the White House. Inside the mind of the Secretary of State as high stake crises explode." "Before we started, we talked about her time as Secretary of State. What was her worst nightmare? STATE OF TERROR is the answer," she said.

By venturing into fiction, the former first lady is following in the footsteps of her husband, former president Bill Clinton, who in June came out with a political novel, "The President's Daughter," written with best-selling thriller writer James Patterson.

They had co-authored another book in 2018 called "The President is Missing" about a terrorist cyberattack on the White House. It sold more than three million copies and is being adapted for television. Penny is a bestselling author whose Inspector Armand Gamache books have been translated into 31 languages. — AFP

In Somalia, a female taxi driver defies convention

MOGADISHU: At 19 years old, Asha Mohamed is divorced and drives a taxi in Somalia, defying conventions to support her family in one of the world's most conservative and dangerous countries. For the past year, the young woman has crisscrossed the capital Mogadishu in her white taxi, with a faux fur throw covering her dashboard.

Her career choice was driven by passion, but also necessity, after she divorced her husband-whom she married at age 16 — and was left to take care of her two children and her mother. Taxi driving in Mogadishu is not only typically reserved for men, but is also dangerous in a city where Al-Shabaab Islamists regularly set off car bombs at intersections and security checkpoints. In a recent blast on February 13, three people were killed and eight wounded. But car-loving Mohamed, who enjoys playing racing video games on her phone, was not put off. "In my childhood, it was my passion to be a driver one day, but I was not thinking that I will work as a taxi driver," she said. She said she had been given the opportunity by a relatively new company called Rikaab taxi. "The number of women working as taxi drivers were small for security reasons, but... the number of women taxi drivers is gradually growing," said Ilham Abdullahi Ali, the female finance chief at Rikaab Taxi.

However, only three of the company's 2,000 taxis in Mogadishu are driven by women. Mohamed earns up to \$40 a day, allowing her to take care of her family, and hopes that by defying tradition, she can contribute to changing the minds of her countrymen about the role of women. Clients are often taken off guard when they climb into the white taxi and see Mohamed, wearing light make-up and a colourful hijab, behind the steering wheel.—AFP



This photo taken and handout Tuesday by the Italian Foreign Ministry shows Carabinieri police officers carrying the flag-draped coffins of slain Italian Ambassador Luca Attanasio and Italian Carabinieri police officer Vittorio Iacovacci, upon the arrival late Tuesday. — AFP

Italy seeks UN probe into DRC envoy's killing

ROME: Italy said yesterday it has asked the United Nations to launch an investigation into the killing of its ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The envoy, Luca Attanasio, 43, died on Monday after a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy was ambushed in a dangerous part of the eastern DRC near the border with Rwanda. Attanasio's Italian bodyguard and a Congolese driver were also killed. "We have formally asked WFP (World Food Programme) and the UN to open an investigation to clarify what happened, the reasons behind the security arrangements used and who was responsible for these decisions," Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told parliament.

Di Maio's comments came the morning after the bodies of the two Italians were returned by military plane to Rome. "We expect, in the briefest possible

time, clear and exhaustive answers," Di Maio said. An Italian military plane carrying Attanasio and Iacovacci's flag-draped coffins was met at Rome's Ciampino airport by Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Foreign minister Luigi Di Maio and defence minister Lorenzo Guerini joined him to meet Attanasio's widow and three daughters, who flew home with the bodies.

On Monday, the DRC's interior ministry blamed the killings on the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu rebel group. But the FDLR rejected the allegation and instead blamed the Rwandan and DRC militaries.

Di Maio said the party was relying on UN protocol during the trip from the capital Kinshasa to Goma, some 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles) east, but that Attanasio had "full power" to decide how and where to move within DRC. "The mission took place at the invitation of the United Nations. So even the car journey took place within the organizational framework set up by the World Food Programme," Di Maio.

The WFP is a branch of the UN which focuses on hunger and food security, and which was awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. Di Maio said a team of Italian police had already been dispatched to the DRC for an initial investigation and others would follow. — AFP

News in brief

Navalny not 'prisoner of conscience'

MOSCOW: Amnesty International said yesterday that it no longer recognizes jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny as a prisoner of conscience because of past "advocacy of hatred" comments but vowed to still push for his release. Navalny's arrest at a Moscow airport in January sparked widespread condemnation from rights groups in Russia and abroad as well as from Western leaders who are expected to impose sanctions on Moscow in response. But Amnesty said it took the decision to rescind his status of prisoner of conscience "in relation to comments he made in the past." — AFP

Two Mali soldiers killed in ambush

BAMAKO: Two soldiers were killed and seven others injured, Mali's military said Tuesday, in an ambush in a central region regularly hit by jihadist attacks. Around 0200 pm local time (0200 GMT), the troops were ambushed en route between Konna and Serey by an armed terrorist group, according to the army statement, confirming what security sources and a local official had previously told AFP. "Ground and air reinforcements immediately rushed to the scene of the ambush," added the statement. One of the security sources said the target was an army resupply mission. — AFP

Venezuela may expel EU envoy

CARACAS: Venezuela's National Assembly called Tuesday for the government to expel the European Union's ambassador to Caracas, in response to new EU sanctions against 19 Venezuelan officials. The Assembly, which is controlled by President Nicolas Maduro's party, approved a "rejection agreement" of the sanctions and plans to "urge" the head of state to "declare persona non grata the head of the diplomatic delegation" from the EU, Isabel Brilhante Pedrosa, in order to proceed with her "expulsion." The text, unanimously approved by the deputies, also calls for a revision of the agreement on the EU's presence in Caracas. — AFP

Texas power board members resign

WASHINGTON: Four board members of Texas' power grid operator announced their resignation Tuesday after millions of state residents were left without power during days of unprecedentedly frigid temperatures. The board chair of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), Sally Talberg, vice chairman Peter Cramton, finance and audit committee chair Terry Bulger and human resources and governance committee chief Raymond Hepper, all of whom live out of state, resigned effective yesterday. "We have noted recent concerns about out-of-state board leadership at ERCOT." — AFP

FB tools to fight child exploitation

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Tuesday said it is stepping up its fight against child abuse with new tools for spotting such content and tighter rules about what crosses the line. "Using our apps to harm children is abhorrent and unacceptable," global head of safety Antigone Davis said in a blog post. "We are developing targeted solutions, including new tools and policies to reduce the sharing of this type of content." The social media giant updated its guidelines to make it clear it will remove Facebook or Instagram accounts dedicated to sharing images of children posted along with captions, hashtags or comments containing innuendo or inappropriate signs of affection. — AFP

International

Poverty road in China drives some to riches, leaves others behind

Beijing's decades-long war on want has yielded remarkable results

BEIJING: At his village along a "poverty alleviation road" in Hunan province, farmer Liu Qingyou shares a booklet detailing how Xi Jinping's government has hoisted him and 100 million other Chinese from the breadline. In it, the cause of his family's hardship is diagnosed as "illness" and "schooling", followed by a list of ways the state has helped, from grain subsidies to improving the yield of their orange groves. Authorities designated his family as impoverished in 2014 as Xi ramped up a "targeted poverty relief" strategy that sent officials door-to-door to assess poorer households. For Liu, the following years brought another boost: a new road cutting through Hunan's mountainous countryside, helping transport produce to market twice as quickly and giving valuable links to nearby towns.

But it has not been a smooth journey up China's economic ladder. Liu says his harvests have not improved despite efforts by local authorities to help him diversify his crop. Meanwhile, his wooden house does little to keep out temperatures that plunge close to zero in the winter. From his vantage point, Liu and his family of five still live modestly, and he worries for their future—despite being counted as lifted from poverty. "We can get by," he said. "But our house is bad." He wants what some others have received from the state: resettlement or enough funds to build a brick home. The reasons he did not qualify are unclear to him. "Why can't we have the same?" he asked.

War on poverty

China's decades-long war on want has yielded remarkable results. "Over the past 40 years, China's economic growth has resulted in more than 800 million Chinese escaping extreme poverty... This is an extraordinary achievement," said Martin Raiser, the World Bank's country director for China. In 2015, Xi vowed to eradicate extreme poverty by 2020, a pillar of the Communist Party's goal to build a "moderately prosperous society" by the 100th anniversary of its founding later this year. Xi declared that the target was reached last year, heralding a "major victory".

But reality on the ground is patchier, with experts warning that rising incomes have made China's poverty line outdated. Complex criteria to determine who gets aid has also fuelled unhappiness. Liu's family was officially lifted from poverty around four years after being designated—the product of a policy shift by Beijing away from relying on the breakneck growth that pulled nearly a billion people out of penury.

Authorities set a poverty line based on income of around \$2.30 a day and offered targeted help to those under the line. But China is now an upper-middle income country, for which the World Bank suggests a benchmark that doubles the current threshold. "The current low, unidimensional, rural poverty line no longer reflects what it means to be poor in China's rapidly evolving society," said Terry



BAOJING, China: This picture shows farmer Liu Qingyou at his orange orchard in Baojing County, in central China's Hunan province. —AFP

Sicular of the University of Western Ontario. Contacting villagers remains sensitive, with six cars of officials showing up unexpectedly during AFP's Hunan visit.

Authorities asked about AFP's interview plans

and insisted on accompanying reporters around after acquiring details like travel history for Covid-19 prevention. A police officer showed up at another interview, staying to observe for "sensitive" issues. —AFP

Russian fugitive nabbed in Bali after dramatic escape

DENPASAR, Indonesia: A Russian fugitive whose dramatic sprint out of an Indonesian immigration office was captured on CCTV has been caught again after two weeks on the run, authorities said yesterday. Andrey Kovalenko fled the office on Indonesia's resort island of Bali to avoid deportation, with the surveillance footage showing him keeping pace on foot with a motorcycle as he escaped. Authorities fanned out across the island in the hunt for Kovalenko, who was nabbed early yesterday at a villa in tourist hub Kuta along with girlfriend Ekaterina Trubkina, who was wanted for allegedly assisting his escape.

His dash for freedom on February 11 came as officials readied to deport Kovalenko back to Russia on an Interpol warrant. The 32-year-old had

just finished a prison term following a 2019 arrest for selling hashish to tourists in Bali. The Interpol warrant was linked to a drugs case back in Kovalenko's home country, said Eko Budianto, head of the immigration division at Bali's justice and legal agency. Trubkina, 31, also Russian, could face up to nine months in prison if convicted of assisting Kovalenko's escape, authorities said.

Indonesian authorities have previously caught international fugitives wanted by Interpol who sought to hide in Bali. In July last year, Bali police arrested Marcus Beam, an American fugitive accused of scamming \$500,000 from women he met online between 2015 and 2019. Beam had been hiding in Bali with his girlfriend where he worked as a porn actor-director. —AFP



BALI, Indonesia: Andrey Kovalenko (center), a Russian man wanted by Interpol, and Russian national Ekaterina Trubkina (left) stand during a press conference at Immigration Ngurah Rai office in Jimbaran on Indonesia resort island of Bali yesterday. —AFP

Displaced families face exodus as Yemen fighting shifts again

MARIB, Yemen: As the sound of gunfire grew closer, Mahfouz Ahmed knew to scoop up his children and run, before getting caught in the line of fire between Yemen's warring sides. The Al-Zor camp where they had been living for four years was no longer safe, as the Iran-backed Huthi rebels drew near in a major offensive against the northern city of Marib and its nearby oil fields. The family collected what few possessions they had, including a small television, a cooking burner and a few pots and pans, and headed to Jaw Al-Naseem, another camp closer to Marib, which is the Saudi-backed government's last northern bastion.

"We were about 600 families living in Al-Zor camp, and now they have dispersed," Ahmed told AFP, as he sat on the floor of a green tent in Jaw Al-Naseem, just three kilometers (less than two miles) from the city. "Some are living with relatives and others—three or four families, sometimes even seven—are living in one tent. Only God knows what kind of situation this is," Ahmed and his family first fled their home in the battleground city of Ta'izz in 2016, part of a huge exodus of Yemenis for whom Marib province became a sanctuary of sorts in a country ravaged by years of war. Around 140 sites have sprung up in the region to provide basic shelter for the displaced, who number up to one million according to some estimates.

Fighting menaces camps

Al-Zor is among a cluster of 14 displacement



MARIB, Yemen: Yemeni children sit at the Jaw Al-Naseem camp for internally displaced people on the outskirts of the northern city of Marib, in the Saudi-backed Yemeni government's last northern bastion. —AFP

sites in Marib's Sirwah district—a flashpoint area on the road to the rebel-held capital Sanaa. Marib has been menaced by fighting in recent weeks as Saudi-backed government troops struggle to defend the city. All the camps could be forced to empty as the Houthis intensify their campaign for the province, a huge prize that would consolidate their control of the north and give them possession of Yemen's richest oil and gas fields.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has said that Sirwah has been hit hardest since the rebel offensive resumed this month, with some 1,048 families—averaging six members each—displaced so far. Ahmed's wife, Huriya, said the situ-

ation has become unbearable for the couple and their four children. "They do not study. We can't find schools or teachers, and we don't know what to do for them," she told AFP, as two girls sat on the bare floor watching cartoons. "We are two families in one tent with the bathroom and kitchen inside," said Huriya, her voice quivering under the niqab covering her face.

Until early last year, life in Marib was relatively peaceful despite the civil war that erupted in 2014. With its proximity to the Saudi border, the province was largely untouched by the first years of conflict, and even flourished as those who sought sanctuary opened businesses and restaurants. —AFP

to have been left behind, with officials offering no explanation as to why. Yesterday the High Court ruled those remaining should be not sent back as NGOs challenge the repatriation. Malaysian immigration officials insisted there were no members of the persecuted Rohingya minority—not recognized as citizens in Myanmar—or asylum seekers among those repatriated.

But rights groups have raised doubts over authorities' claims there were no asylum seekers among the deportees. Authorities have since 2019 blocked the UN refugee agency from immigration detention centers, meaning they cannot assess which migrants have genuine asylum claims and should be allowed to remain in Malaysia. It is rare for NGOs to challenge repatriations but in the latest case, they were particularly concerned about the worsening human rights situation in Myanmar since the coup. —AFP

News in brief

Iraqi MP target of extortion bid

SYDNEY: Police in Australia and Canada arrested four people accused of trying to extort a senior Iraqi politician, after what was described yesterday as a year-long campaign of intimidation. Dual raids were launched after a string of attacks on a Sydney home and online extortion attempts linked to an address in Canada. The target was the family of a "very senior politician" who is a dual Australian and Iraqi citizen and "spends almost all of his time in Iraq", Australian police said. The attacks are believed to have begun in December 2019, when masked and armed assailants broke into a home in western Sydney, assaulting a 16-year-old boy and stealing cash. —AFP

Ghana receives first free vaccines

ACCRA, Ghana: Ghana received yesterday the first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines from Covax, a global scheme to procure and distribute inoculations for free, as the world races to contain the pandemic. Covax, launched last April to help ensure a fairer distribution of coronavirus vaccines between rich and poor nations, said it would deliver two billion doses to its members by the end of the year. "We are pleased that Ghana has become the first country to receive the COVID-19 vaccines from the Covax facility," UNICEF, which organized the shipment from Mumbai, said in a joint statement with the World Health Organization—both backers of Covax. —AFP

Malaysia 'sugar daddy' site charged

SHAH ALAM, Malaysia: The head of a controversial Malaysian "sugar daddy" dating website was charged yesterday with causing public alarm after his claims that university students were using the service sparked an outcry. Sugarbook bills itself as a site "where romance meets finance" and aims to link up older men with younger women, with the men expected to provide financial support for their companions. But it sparked an uproar after releasing statistics purportedly showing thousands of students were using it to make money in the socially conservative, Muslim-majority country. —AFP

Singaporean admits killing maid after 'inhumane' abuse

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean woman has admitted to starving, assaulting and ultimately killing her domestic worker from Myanmar in what prosecutors called one of the worst cases of maid abuse in the city-state. The affluent financial hub is home to about 250,000 domestic workers who mostly come from poorer Asian countries, and stories of mistreatment are common. But the abuse meted out against Piang Ngaih Don was particularly awful, with the helper stamped on, strangled, choked, battered with brooms, and burnt with an iron.

Gaiyathiri Murugayan, 40, pleaded guilty on Tuesday to 28 charges including culpable homicide against the 24-year-old maid. She will be sentenced at a later date, and could be jailed for life. "That one human being would treat another in this evil and utterly inhumane manner is cause for the righteous anger of the court; and the law must come down with full force", prosecutors said. The maid was employed by Gaiyathiri and her husband, a police officer, in 2015 to help take care of their four-year-old daughter and one-year-old son. But she physically assaulted the victim almost daily, often several times a day, with her 61-year-old mother sometimes joining in, according to court documents seen by AFP. —AFP

Malaysia under fire after controversial Myanmar deportation

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's government faced mounting criticism from opposition MPs and rights groups yesterday over its decision to deport over 1,000 Myanmar nationals in defiance of a court order. The migrants, whom activists say include vulnerable asylum seekers, departed Tuesday on Myanmar navy ships from a Malaysian military base back to their homeland, just weeks after a coup. Rights groups had fiercely criticized the plan, and hours before the deportation the Kuala Lumpur High Court ordered it be temporarily halted to allow a legal challenge from activists.

But officials pushed ahead regardless, repatriating 1,086 migrants and offering no explanation as to why the court's instructions were ignored. In a joint statement, four opposition lawmakers condemned the "inhumane" deportation and suggested government officials could be held in contempt for ignoring the legal ruling. "This act... is a clear display that the Malaysian government does not respect the ongoing court process and has put Malaysia in a bad light on the human rights front," they said. Amnesty International, one of the groups that challenged the deportation, said the government "owes an explanation to the people of Malaysia as to why they chose to defy the court order".

"These dangerous deportations have not been properly scrutinized and put individuals at grave risk," said Katrina Jorene Maliamauv, executive director of Amnesty's Malaysia office. More than 100 migrants originally to be deported are believed

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Business

Al-Bahar: We remain optimistic on the pace of recovery of Kuwaiti economy

NBK Group Deputy CEO in an interview with Bloomberg TV

KUWAIT: Shaikha Al-Bahar, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Group said that there is much optimism that the momentum of awarding and implementing mega government projects, including PPP projects, which will reflect on the activity of the private sector, support the agenda of Kuwait 2035 National Development Plan, and will contribute to create financing opportunities for banks.

In an interview with Bloomberg TV, Al-Bahar stated that she is optimistic that agreement will be soon reached on approving the Public Debt Law, noting that after formation of the new cabinet, the government should move faster with the steps taken to approve economic reforms, basically the Public Debt Law, in cooperation with the National Assembly.

Al-Bahar added that all discussions about the public debt law are related to the debt ceiling, maturities, and the channels that will be financed by the law, indicating that the core issues is that approving the law should not be intended to secure payments of salaries only, but rather to finance development projects to drive growth forward. Al-Bahar pointed out that necessary steps should be taken to sustain growth, including striving to achieve economic diversification, and supporting the private sector to create job opportunities, in addition to accelerating the adoption of a comprehensive financial reform agenda that supports further growth for the non-oil sector.

It is necessary to find sustainable solutions to meet financing needs and cover the increasing budget deficit, as well as to address structural imbalances in the budget, especially with the increasing fluctuation in oil prices, which represents 90 percent of public revenues, she added.

NBK Group Deputy CEO affirmed that for long years, the political scene in Kuwait was marked by political tension between the government and parliament, explaining that this tension did not significantly stymie the development process, despite occasionally causing slowdown.

Al-Bahar indicated that the current stand-off is not different from previous experiences where it took some time until solutions were finally found, which is recently manifested in the discussions aimed to reach common grounds to find a solution for the current situation. Al-Bahar said that with the formation of a new government, she is very optimistic to reach political settlements and cooperation by MPs, which would result in activation of reforms, hoping that the Public Debt Law will be approved soon.

Local dominance

Al-Bahar affirmed that the bank will continue to focus on leading mega projects financing sector,

expecting to maintain dominance over the local market in this sector, thanks to the bank's large balance sheet and strong relationships both on the local and international levels.

Our foreign corporate unit contributes to consolidating this leading local position, by servicing 75 percent of the companies operating in Kuwait, with remarkable leadership in the area of LCs and LGs, she continued.

On the local corporate level, Al-Bahar said that NBK strives to maintain its leadership as the house bank for large companies and continue to penetrate the medium-sized companies sector.

Digitization and diversification

On a question about the bank's intentions to make any deals for mergers or acquisitions, Al-Bahar stressed that NBK has a clear strategy, which is to focus on digitization and diversification across different sectors such as corporate banking and financing mega projects, in addition to continuing to focus on organic growth and strengthening our competitive edge in our international markets.

KD devaluation is unlikely

In response to a question about the probability of devaluation of the Kuwaiti dinar, Al-Bahar said: "This is very unlikely, and I do not agree with this assumption. Maintaining the stability of Kuwaiti Dinar exchange rate, in a way that preserves its purchasing power, is one of the key constants that are firmly supported by the Central Bank of Kuwait." At the present time, there is no pressure on the Kuwait Dinar, as it recently rose slightly against the US dollar, noting that even if there is pressure, the central bank has plenty of strong and stable reserves that can absorb any demand on the US dollar, and easily reduce the pressure on the Dinar, she added.

Seizing opportunities

NBK Group Deputy CEO emphasized that the bank is exploring more opportunities within the Kuwaiti market, being our key market, noting that it

- We expect an improved momentum of awarding and executing large government projects
- We hope there will be an agreement on approving the Public Debt Law in the short term
- Maintaining the stability of the Kuwaiti Dinar and ensuring its purchasing power are constants firmly supported by the Central Bank of Kuwait
- Focusing on organic growth and improving our competitive edge in our key international markets are top strategic priorities for the group
- The bank will continue to defend its dominance in the project finance sector in the local market



will continue to focus on customers by improving and simplifying digital capabilities to consolidate our leading position in the retail banking market.

Digital banking is the cornerstone of our consumer banking strategy for acquisition and retention of customers from the important youth segment, Al-Bahar pointed out. Islamic banking will also contribute to consolidate our leading position in the local market in Kuwait, as Boubyan Bank's strategy continues to evolve towards enhancing and growing its local market share, she added.

Al-Bahar highlighted that NBK will continue focusing on leading the project financing sector, expecting to maintain its local market dominance in this sector, thanks to the bank's large balance sheet and its strong relationships both on the local and international levels.

International operations

Regarding international operations, Al-Bahar

said that NBK seeks to expand in the retail and wholesale banking by transforming its retail franchise in Egypt with enhanced digital capabilities and focusing on acquisition of new customers and simplifying banking transactions, in addition to building a regional powerhouse for wealth management. The group seeks to expand its digital leadership, increase investments in developing digital platforms, and focus heavily on digital technologies, as a key driver for future growth in all our markets, she highlighted.

Al-Bahar added: "In Saudi Arabia, we will continue to strengthen our recently established wealth management proposition, and link it to the group's global wealth management platform, as we see huge potentials in this area. We also seek to increase our commercial banking offerings in the Saudi market to gradually enhance our presence in the Kingdom and increase its contribution to the group's bottom line."

Digital transformation

Al-Bahar emphasized that NBK's digital investments paid off during the crisis, as digital channels were instrumental to ensure uninterrupted services for the bank's customers. She noted that digital transactions increased to record levels, which is a continuing trend, even after the partial resumption of economic activities. The bank will continue to invest in digital banking, not only in the front-end but also in the back-end operations such as Robotics Process Automation (RPA). It will also continue to invest in data analysis and processing to better understand customer needs and behavior.

Victory for 'net neutrality' law in California

SAN FRANCISCO: A federal judge late Tuesday cleared the way for California to begin enforcing a net neutrality law opposed by US telecom titans. The judge denied a request by cable and telecom service companies to stop implementation of the law, which is intended to prevent them from favoring their own services and blocking or slowing rival services like Netflix.

"The federal court just rejected the effort by telecom and cable companies to block enforcement of the net neutrality law I authored," state senator Mark Wiener said in a tweet.

"California can now fully protect an open internet." An alliance of telecom firms sued California, arguing the state overstepped its authority in passing the law because such regulatory power is the purview of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The judge refused to issue a preliminary injunction to stop the law from being enforced while the case works its way through court, where it was not expected to prevail. "When the FCC, over my objection, rolled back its #net neutrality policies, states like California sought to fill the void with their own laws," FCC acting chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a tweet.

"Tonight a court in California decided that the state law can go into effect. This is big news for #openinternet policy," Rosenworcel's predecessor, Ajit Pai, departed the post when President Joe Biden took office, clearing the way for a shift in oversight of the internet.

Pai's tenure as chair of the FCC had



Protestors gather on Bolyston Street in front of a Verizon store during a net neutrality rally in this file photo. —AFP

been defined by a pro-industry stance, particularly in regard to "net neutrality," leaving telecommunications firms free to block or throttle traffic.

Under his leadership, the FCC scrapped a 2015 order aimed at forcing broadband firms to treat all online traffic equally after a politically charged debate over net neutrality.

Backers of net neutrality argue the rules, which were challenged in court, prevented powerful internet providers like Comcast and AT&T from shutting out rival services and creating "fast" and "slow" lanes for online data. But others worried that such rules were a heavy-handed effort to reclassify internet providers as utilities, which could discourage investment in the fast-evolving sector.

The federal Justice Department early this month withdrew a lawsuit filed during the previous presidential administration challenging the legality of the California law.

Rosenworcel said in a tweet at the time that she supported withdrawal of the Justice Department suit.

"By taking this step Washington is listening to those who support an open internet and charting a course to once again make net neutrality the law of the land," Rosenworcel said in the tweet. —AFP

Coups creates banking woes in Myanmar

YANGON: Early bird customers of a military-owned bank queued anxiously as dawn light crept over Yangon, after a strict new limit on daily cash withdrawals fuelled rumors of a money shortage in post-coup Myanmar. Myawaddy Bank is among scores of military-controlled businesses in Myanmar facing boycott pressures since the generals ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power on February 1.

Nationwide protests have called for employees-including bank workers-to skip work, seizing up a banking sector heavily dominated by the military and its cronies ahead of the monthly payday this Friday. For those in need of cash, it does not help that no clear information has been released.

In commercial hub Yangon, private banks remain mostly closed, government banks seem partly open, and getting cash from ATMs appears to be a touch-and-go

Specter of inflation rears its head over stock markets

PARIS: Rising inflation has spooked stocks and pushed up the cost of government borrowing, leading some analysts to wonder whether the long bull run on financial markets might finally be coming to an end. An economic monster in the second half of the 20th century, inflation has not been a major issue for several decades.

But headline inflation in the 19-nation eurozone hit 0.9 percent in January—a

endeavor. The uncertainty has fuelled worries of cash shortages, said Tun Naing, a 43-year-old businessman who has queued up daily for the past week to withdraw six million Myanmar kyat—or about \$4,500—from his Myawaddy bank account.

"Because of rumors about this bank, I came to withdraw my money," he said. Despite being the sixth-biggest domestic bank in Myanmar, Myawaddy is only allowing 200 customers per branch to make withdrawals limited to 500,000 kyat a day—about \$370.

Getting a spot in the morning is key, with "some people staying at nearby hotels to queue early for tokens", Tun Naing said. Others are not so lucky.

Retired teacher Myint Myint has been queuing every day for a week but still has not been able to make a withdrawal. "I'm really fed up," the 64-year-old said.

"They should announce through (state-run media) that our money is okay... Although my savings are not much, I'm worrying because of rumors." Despite the irregular opening schedules of banks across Yangon, a notice in state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar claimed that daily services were still being provided. "People are requested to take part in this

month after prices had fallen 0.3 percent—mostly owing to a spike in energy costs. And in a little over a week, the yield on benchmark 10-year US Treasury notes has climbed to 1.39 percent, the highest in a year.

That pulled the German 10-year rate, Europe's standard, to -0.28 percent, last seen in June 2020 and a level that nonetheless still shows investors are willing to take a small loss to lend Berlin money.

The reasons for the rises are multiple, including US President Joe Biden's huge financial stimulus plan, as well as improving global economic indicators, vaccine rollouts and falling infection rates.

Together, they suggest that upward

pressure for ensuring economic stability of the country," read the Central Bank notice.

'Elevated political risk'

While the risk of cash shortages in the country is high, the timeframe is unpredictable, said Myanmar-born international business expert Htwe Htwe Thein from Australia's Curtin University.

"In the past under the previous military government, they had been known to print money and that of course hyped up inflation," she said. The pre-coup Myanmar economy was already facing severe economic headwinds from the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures.

And the situation is expected to get worse because of a civil disobedience movement that has government employees boycotting work. The generals have already been hit with sanctions by the United States, Britain, Canada and the European Union, and the larger economy is also at risk of suffering reputational damage and a decline in foreign direct investment. International credit ratings agency Fitch swiftly revised the country's growth estimates for most of 2021 down from 5.6 percent to 2 percent on the day of the coup, citing "elevated political risks". —AFP

pressure on consumer prices could increase in the months to come. "There is tension on producer prices, with a leap in cargo costs on Chinese trade routes and strong pressure on raw material prices," noted Tangi Le Liboux, a strategist at the Aurel BGC brokerage.

He said that energy prices could also pursue their current upward trend. "US consumption could rebound faster than expected," Le Liboux said, adding that "the main question is whether this price hike will be temporary and limited in nature". At any rate, the official inflation target of around 2.0 percent established by the European Central Bank and US Federal Reserve still appears to be some ways off. —AFP

Business

UK bank Lloyds logs profit slump in 2020 on COVID hit

Profit after tax nosedives 65% to \$1.2 billion last year

LONDON: Britain's Lloyds Banking Group yesterday reported a slump in 2020 profit due to "significant" economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Profit after tax nosedived 65 percent to £865 million (\$1.2 billion, 1.0 billion euros) last year, from £2.46 billion in 2019, LBG said in a results statement. The bank took a huge £4.2 billion impairment charge which reflected a "significant deterioration in the economic outlook" as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency. Pre-tax profit tumbled 72 percent to £1.2 billion, while income tanked by around one third to £29.2 billion. "The group's financial performance in the year has been impacted by the pandemic," said outgoing chief executive Antonio Horta-Osorio, who leaves later this year after a decade in charge.

"The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the people, businesses and communities in the UK and around the world in 2020 has been profound.

"We remain absolutely focused on working together with all of our stakeholders to support our customers and ensure a sustainable recovery," he said. Under Horta-Osorio's stewardship, the bank slashed

thousands of jobs and branches in a vast cost-cutting drive following the global financial crisis, refocusing on retail and business banking that helped it return to profit.

After a UK state bailout in 2008, LBG returned to full private ownership in 2017. The group confirmed yesterday that Briton Charlie Nunn would replace Portuguese national Horta-Osorio as chief executive on August 16. Nunn's appointment, already announced, comes as Horta-Osorio is due to become chairman of Swiss lender Credit Suisse later this year.

Alongside the results, Horta-Osorio said "significant uncertainties remain, specifically relating to the coronavirus pandemic and the speed and efficacy of the vaccination program in the UK and around the world". The bank added that it will bring back its shareholder dividend, which was suspended at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. The group will pay 0.57 pence per share, which is the maximum permitted under UK regulatory guidelines. Britain's biggest banks agreed to suspend shareholder dividends until the end of 2020, to preserve cash during the pandemic after the coun-

try's financial regulator urged prudence. In early London trade yesterday, Lloyds' share price added 1.2 percent to 39.67 pence. The financial services giant, whose brands include Lloyds, Halifax, Bank of Scotland and MBNA, operates mostly in Britain.

Virus-hit earnings season

Its results wrap up the annual earnings season from the UK's four main banks. Asia-focused HSBC on Tuesday reported a 30-percent slump in net profit to \$6.1 billion, which it blamed primarily on higher-than-expected credit losses and other bad debt charges.

NatWest bank, which last year changed its name from Royal Bank of Scotland but remains majority-owned by the UK government after a massive bailout, plunged into a net loss of £753 million for 2020.

NatWest also said it would shut its Ulster Bank operations in Ireland, impacting around 3,000 staff. Barclays announced a 38-percent slump in annual net profit to £1.53 billion and said expenses related to the coronavirus pandemic were set to stay high this year. — AFP



In this file photo, a signage for Lloyds Bank is pictured outside a branch in the City of London. — AFP



LuLu Exchange opens its 26th branch in Salmiya

KUWAIT: LuLu Exchange - Kuwait's leading payments provider offering cross-border remittances and currency exchange services, opened its 26th branch at Terrace Mall in Salmiya yesterday. The branch was inaugurated via an online function attended by M A Yusuff Ali, Chairman and Managing Director of LuLu Group International, and Adeeab Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Group.

Congratulating the organization, M A Yusuff Ali, Chairman and Managing Director of LuLu Group International, said, "LuLu Exchange remains committed to providing state-of-the-art financial services to the people of Kuwait. The opening of our new branch will strengthen our existing network in the country and

provide our customers much needed access to a reliable and seamless solution for their payment needs."

The branch, which is located at Terrace Mall, marks the company's third in the Salmiya area, and is the 228th Global Branch of LuLu Financial Group.

Talking about the expansion, Adeeab Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Group, congratulated the team for staying committed to their strategy for 2021 in line with evolving market dynamics. "We have full faith in the robustness of the Kuwait economy, and are focused on positioning our branches as customer engagement centers to bridge the gap between our digital services and existing offerings. Our expansion reflects our commitment to build upon our nine-year long journey of delivering excellence, as a trustworthy financial services provider to millions of people in Kuwait."

LuLu Exchange was recently recognized as a 'Best Employer' in Kuwait, as part of an internal employee engagement survey conducted by global audit firm EY. The company presently provides services such as remittances and foreign currency exchange in a timely, transparent and reliable manner.

Brazil's Petrobras rebounds partly from stock plunge

SAO PAULO: Shares in Brazil's state-run oil company, Petrobras, partly regained their losses Tuesday after diving by more than 20 percent on news that President Jair Bolsonaro was changing the firm's chief executive. The company's ordinary shares closed up nine percent, while preferential shares gained back 12.2 percent on the Sao Paulo stock exchange.

Those shares plunged by 20.5 percent and 21.5 percent respectively Monday, erasing 74 billion reais (\$13.5 billion) off the company's market value. Bolsonaro on Friday named army reserve general Joaquim Silva e Luna, a former defense minister, as the new president of Petrobras, replacing Roberto Castello Branco, an economist well-regarded by the business sector.

The move fueled fears the far-right leader would try to intervene in energy prices as he eyes re-election next year. It also appeared to widen a growing rift between Bolsonaro and the business sector, which helped him win election in 2018 thanks to his promises-many still unfulfilled-of investor-friendly reforms and free-market policies.

Bolsonaro said shortly before the change was announced that Petrobras, Brazil's biggest company, should not be constantly "surprising people" with price increases, and lashed out at Castello Branco's management. He hinted Tuesday at more shake-ups to come at Petrobras. "Whatever changes we have to make, we'll make them," he told supporters outside the presidential palace in Brasilia.

He later downplayed the turmoil around the company. "We're not fighting with Petrobras. We just want them to be more transparent and predictable. There's no need to hide increases or what the impact will be on the final price of fuel," he said. Traders had been watching for news on a closed-door meeting Tuesday of the Petrobras board, which must decide whether to accept Silva e Luna's appointment.

However, there was no word on the meeting by the close of the Sao Paulo stock exchange, whose Ibovespa index gained 2.3 percent overall. Shortly afterwards, the board meeting ended with authorization for an extraordinary general assembly to be convened on a date yet to be determined, in order to remove Castello Branco and analyze Bolsonaro's new appointee, the company said in a statement.

Petrobras has increased fuel prices four times so far in 2021 — a cumulative rise of nearly 35 percent-as global oil prices have climbed back to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels.

The price hikes have triggered backlash in Brazil, a top 10 oil producer with output of 3.67 million barrels per day in 2019. In an attempt to ease jitters and show his commitment to his promised reforms, Bolsonaro went to Congress on Tuesday to deliver a provisional decree with which he intends to accelerate the discussion of the privatization of Eletrobras, the state-owned electricity company.

"Our privatization agenda continues at full steam," he said. "We do want to reduce the size of the state, so that our economy can provide the response that society needs." The president also reiterated his support for the minister of the economy, the liberal Paulo Guedes, a key figure for the markets. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Pilot Noyan Pasin (center) and his lawyer Erem Yucel (right) speak to media in front of the Bakirkoy court-house in Istanbul, yesterday after a verdict trial against four pilots, two flight attendants and a private airline official accused of smuggling former Nissan Motor Co chairman Carlos Ghosn out of Japan. — AFP

Turkey sentences three to jail over Ghosn escape

ISTANBUL: An Istanbul court yesterday sentenced three Turks to four years and two months in prison for helping smuggle former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn in a musical instrument case from Lebanon to Japan. The court jailed two pilots and an employee of a small private airline who moved the former auto industry giant while he was out on bail facing financial misconduct charges in December 2019.

The pilots-Noyan Pasin and Bahri Kutlu Somek-and MNG Jet employee Okan Kosemen had faced a maximum 12 years in prison when charged last month with involvement in a conspiracy to smuggle a migrant. The pilots told the court yesterday that they were innocent because they never suspected that Ghosn was on board their plane. "They ask us to fly the plane and that is what we do," Pasin said.

The trial tried to piece together how Ghosn—a French-Lebanese-Brazilian national who was a global business superstar when his career came crashing to an end-managed to find his way from Japan to Lebanon via Istanbul. The 66-year-old fugitive was arrested in November 2018 and spent 130 days in prison before completing an audacious escape act that humiliated Japanese justice officials and raised questions about who was involved.

The indictment said the escape plan involved a stopover in Istanbul instead of a direct flight "so as not to arouse suspicions". Former US Green Beret member Michael Taylor and his son Peter are accused of recruiting MNG Jet and overseeing the secret operation.

The two Americans lost their appeal to get their extradition to Japan blocked by the US Supreme Court earlier this month. The indictment says Taylor and Zayek put Ghosn "in a large musical instrument case" and then took him through security at Japan's Osaka airport. The plane landed at Istanbul's old Ataturk airport and parked near another plane bound for Beirut. The court found that MNG Jet's Kosemen then disembarked the Osaka plane and boarded the one destined for Beirut together with Ghosn. — AFP

News in brief

Suzuki chairman to step down

TOKYO: Suzuki's chairman Osamu Suzuki will retire after more than four decades at the helm of the Japanese carmaker, the company said yesterday. The 91-year-old, who married into the firm's founding family, will leave the post after a shareholder meeting in June and become an adviser, it said. After he became company president in 1978, Suzuki expanded the automaker's business in India, where it has had enormous success, and steadily increased its share in Japan's small car market. He became chairman in 2000 and his eldest son, Toshihiro Suzuki, assumed the role of president in 2015. — AFP

Heathrow airport in £2.0bn loss

LONDON: London's Heathrow airport dived into a net loss of £2.0 billion last year, a result that "underlines the devastating impact of COVID-19 on aviation", it said yesterday. The loss after tax, equivalent to \$2.8 billion or 2.3 billion euros, reflected a 73-percent plunge in passenger numbers, Heathrow said in a statement. The airport, one of the world's busiest hubs, recorded a net profit of £546 million in 2019. Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye, who said passenger levels shrunk in 2020 to levels last seen in the 1970s, voiced optimism for the year ahead with Britain vaccinating millions of adults and preparing to exit its virus lockdown. — AFP

Bitcoin tumbles on Yellen warning

LONDON: Bitcoin tumbled from its record-breaking run after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that the "highly speculative" unit could be used for "illicit" purposes. At about 1500 GMT, the digital currency slid 12.57 percent to \$47,946, while rival ethereum declined 15 percent to \$1,539. Tesla boss Elon Musk-whose company has invested heavily in bitcoin-tweeted Saturday that the prices of both cryptocurrencies "seem high". Yellen hit out Monday over bitcoin, claiming it was inefficient and required a vast amount of energy-and she expressed fear it was used for "illicit" reasons. — AFP

Solvay to cut 500 jobs as profits fall

BRUSSELS: Belgian chemical giant Solvay said yesterday it would cut 500 jobs worldwide by the end of 2022 as net profit fell 42 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company, which employs more than 23,000 people in 64 countries, announced that bottom-line net profit had nosedived from just over one billion euros (\$1.2 billion) in 2019 to 618 million euros in 2020. It said the job cuts were part of a plan to reduce costs by 500 million euros a year by the end of 2024, up from a target of 350 million euros.—AFP

Accor plunges into red as virus hits

PARIS: French hotel giant Accor said yesterday it plunged into the red last year as the coronavirus pandemic devastated the hotel and hospitality business worldwide. Ranked number six globally, Accor reported sales down some 60 percent at 1.6 billion euros (\$1.95 billion), producing a net loss of just under 2.0 billion euros. Analysts surveyed by Factset and Bloomberg had expected revenues of 1.85 billion euros and a net loss of 1.26 billion euros. The company, which runs chains such as Ibis, Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure and Pullman, has seen its business devastated by the pandemic which has brought international travel and the hospitality and tourism sectors to a virtual halt. — AFP

Business

Lulu opens new store in Salmiya

Salmiya is set to welcome new retail destination



KUWAIT: Leading retailer Lulu further strengthened its presence with the opening of its newest concept store, Lulu Express Fresh Market, at Terrace Mall located at the heart of Salmiya. Adding to Lulu's growing retail footprint in the country, it increased the store count to 202 globally and 11 in Kuwait region.

Located at Salem Al-Mubarak Street, the newly-launched Lulu Express Fresh Market store was inaugurated by the Chairman of Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, in the virtual presence of Yusuffali MA, Chairman & Managing Director of Lulu Group,

Ashraf Ali M.A, Executive Director of LuLu Group, and Saifee Rupawala, Chief Executive Officer of LuLu Group, who were virtually present. In addition, other participants were Mohamed Haris, Kuwait and Iraq Director, Sreejith, Kuwait Regional Director, and Abdul Khader Sheikh, Kuwait Regional Manager. The inaugural event was held under strict COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

Spread across an area of 2226 sqm, the new convenience-focused store aims to meet the needs of its customer base for speedy and efficient shopping options, whose busy lives limit the

time able to be spent on shopping. It has dedicated sections for fresh fruits and vegetables, chilled and frozen fish and meat, delicatessen, grocery, dairy, roaster, bakery and hot-foods, as well as non-food items and health and beauty products.

Taking the dietary requirements of Kuwait residents into consideration, Lulu has acquired a diverse range of products to satisfy the customer interested in healthy choices. A remarkable feature of the express market is its specialized categories: from locally sourced food products in Kuwait to support local farmers to organic-labelled range, and gluten free products, while

also presenting imported products from the specially selection. In addition, there are food options of world cuisine made in store, baked goods that are fresh every day, healthy and diet food offerings, and a variety of seafood in stalls.

The new Lulu Express Fresh Market store's easy accessibility, its modern ambiance, clear layout, wide aisles and well-stocked shelves are all geared towards providing the utmost convenience to shoppers, as well as making shopping a streamlined experience that ensures customers save time, while enjoying the maximum benefit of shopping at Lulu.



Ferrari Roma: The Prancing Horse's new V8 2+ coupé unveiled in Rome

ROME: The new Ferrari Roma has been unveiled to the world's media. The latest coupé from Maranello features timeless and sublimely refined design and has all the power and agility required to guarantee a unique driving experience. Its signature Italian styling is a contemporary reinterpretation of the carefree lifestyle of 1950s and '60s Rome, from which it takes its evocative name, Roma.

Stylistically, the Ferrari Roma is characterized by clean and symbiotic forms. Its beautifully harmonious proportions and elegantly pure, balanced volumes are very much in line with the Ferrari mid-front-engined grand touring tradition of which the 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso and 250 GT 2+2 are the most iconic examples, and from which the car takes its inspiration. It embodies an extremely modern design language which underlines its authentic, refined styling. At the same time, its sleek lines retain the sporty vocation shared by all Ferraris.

To guarantee best-in-class performance whilst still retaining the stylistic purity of its bloodline, Ferrari's engineers developed several leading-edge technologies, most notably a mobile rear spoiler integrated into the rear screen designed to retain the car's formal elegance when retracted and guarantee the downforce essential for the Ferrari Roma's extraordinary performance by automatically deploying at high speeds.

The Prancing Horse's new 2+ coupé sports a V8 turbo engine that punches out 620 cv at 7,500 rpm, making it the most powerful in its segment. A member of the V8 family that has won the International Engine of the Year four years in a row, it features Variable Boost Management for instantaneous throttle response. With the adoption of Gasoline Particulate Filters, meticulous attention was also focused on the sound of the exhaust system which has been completely redesigned, removing the silencers and introducing new bypass valves.

The car's new 8-speed dual-clutch gearbox is more compact and 6 kg lighter than its 7-speed predecessor. As well as reducing fuel consumption and emissions, shifts are faster and smoother which makes the



car even more responsive on the open road, but also especially comfortable in town and during stop & start driving situations.

The Ferrari Roma's chassis benefits from the modular technology developed by Ferrari for its new generation models. Both bodyshell and chassis have been redesigned to incorporate the latest weight reduction and advanced production technologies. In fact, 70% of its components are entirely new. The mid-front-engined 2+ Ferrari Roma has the best weight/power ratio in its segment (2.37 kg/cv) which enhances handling dynamics and responsiveness.

The Ferrari Roma features Ferrari's cutting-edge vehicle dynamics systems, the most notable example being the Side Slip Control 6.0 (a first on a Ferrari GT car) with 5-position manettino and Ferrari Dynamic Enhancer which controls yaw angle by hydraulically adjusting brake pressure at the callipers.

The approach taken by the Ferrari Styling Centre for the Roma's exterior centres around clean design and absolute symbiosis between its various elements with harmonious proportions and pure, elegant volumes. The car is clothed in long, ultra-sleek lines that sweep back from the front bonnet, highlighting the spare silhouette of the flanks and the compact, set-back fastback cabin volume. To underscore that formal minimalism, all superfluous detailing has been removed: for example, radiator cooling is guaranteed by a monolithic surface that is perforated only where necessary, creating a new radiator grille concept. The full-LED adaptive headlights are traversed by a horizontal light strip that hints at the structure beneath the car's skin, bringing a sense of tension to the entire circumference of the car. The wraparound rear screen incorporates an active aero device to preserve that signature purity of form, while the twin taillight assembly is set like a gem into the volume.

The Ferrari F8 Spider: The evolution of the species

MARANELLO: Ferrari has unveiled the F8 Spider, the new generation drop-top sports car equipped with the most successful mid-rear-mounted V8 in history.

The Ferrari F8 Spider was designed in parallel with the F8 Tributo berlinetta and features the Prancing Horse's compact and efficient RHT (Retractable Hard Top) which influences the lines of a model that leads its category. The F8 Spider is the latest addition to an exclusive and prestigious bloodline of open-top V8 cars begun with the 308 GTS in 1977. It is less extreme than the 488 Pista Spider, but sportier than the 488 Spider which it replaces in the range.

Consequently, the F8 Spider sets a new benchmark for the "en plein air" sports car in terms of usable performance and exceptional handling, providing an incredibly rewarding driving experience. In fact, it excels in merging handling dynamics with surprising in-car comfort. This Ferrari spider thus combines the characteristics of the most lauded 8-cylinder engine in history with unparalleled driving pleasure.

The V8 has raised the performance bar to unprecedented new heights, not only for turbo engines but power units of all types. The engine is a development of the V8 that won the "International Engine of the Year Award" for four consecutive years (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019) and that was also selected as the best engine of the last two decades. An incredible feat unmatched in the history of the Awards.

The F8 Spider's greatest achievement is the fact that it unleashes its power instantaneously with zero turbo lag, whilst retaining this V8's unique and very special soundtrack. This astonishing performance and the car's disarmingly effortless handling were made possible by integrating a series of innovative, track-derived aero solutions into its design.

Engine

In the automotive world, Ferrari's V8 engine is seen as the very epitome of sportiness and driving pleasure. This is particularly the case when it is mid-rear-mounted in a two-seater. Ferrari has been honing the scope of this architecture to perfection for over four decades as it optimally balances weight for perfect handling dynamics. The V8's technical specifications are truly exceptional. The 3902 cc unit unleashes 720 cv at 8,000 rpm and also has an impressive specific power output of 185 cv/l. Its maximum torque is now higher at all engine speeds, peaking at 770 Nm at 3,250 rpm.

Today, Ferrari V8s incorporate solutions so refined they are effectively masterpieces of engineering. This power unit in particular further enhances the typical traits of all Maranello engines with smoothly progressive, limitless acceleration and zero turbo lag, combined with a unique soundtrack courtesy of a new exhaust system. The new car offers drivers pure emotions. Instantaneously accessible power is matched by exceptional handling thanks to advanced vehicle dynamics solutions. These include a new version of the Ferrari Dynamic Enhancer (FDE+) which can now be activated in the manettino's RACE position, a move designed to make performance on the limit easier to



reach and control.

To achieve the 50 cv increase in power compared to the 488 Spider, the new intake line is derived directly from the 488 Challenge. In the F8 Spider, the air intakes have been moved from the flanks to the rear where they are located on either side of the blown spoiler and are directly connected to the intake plenums. This drastically reduces losses and ensures greater air flow to the engine, thereby increasing the power. The air flow also benefits from increased dynamic pressure created by the shape

Design

Designed by the Ferrari Styling Centre, the F8 Spider continues the direction embarked upon with the F8 Tributo which acted as a bridge to a new design language that will continue to emphasise Ferrari's key characteristics of high performance and extreme aerodynamic efficiency.

When designing a spider, the choice of the top will always play a fundamental role in the car's overall look. For some years now, Ferrari has been adopting a hard top because of the comfort it provides. As a result, the design of the F8 Spider's lines was crafted around its RHT (Retractable Hard Top).

The key to the whole design was the shifting of the separation line between the car's body and the roof from its conventional position at the belt-line (occupant shoulder level) to above the B-pillar. The top itself is thus more compact and two-dimensional, with the result that it can be divided into two parts and stowed on top of the engine.

The RHT takes just 14 seconds to deploy or retract and can be closed or opened while the car is on the move up to 45 km/h.

Exterior

The goal the Ferrari Styling Centre set with the F8 Spider was to design a stylistic tribute to the Ferrari V8 engine, by evolving the contents of the F8 Tributo and taking inspiration from the most iconic mid-rear-engined V8 sports cars in Ferrari history. The result is a car with a strong personality of its own through an even sportier design clearly inspired by the car's advanced aerodynamics.

The front view of the car is characterized by the S-Duct around which the entire front end has been redesigned to highlight the extensive aerodynamic modifications made to this area of the car. The clearest example is new, more compact, horizontal LED headlights.

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A model presents a creation by Cameroonian fashion stylist Joy Ijeoma Meribe.



A model presents creation by Burundi's fashion stylist Fabiola Manirakiza.



A model presents a creation by Cameroonian fashion stylist Joy Ijeoma Meribe.



Models present creations by Senegalese fashion designer, Pape Mocodou Fall, aka Mokodu.



Nigerian fashion stylist Claudia Gisele Ntsama from the collective "Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion" poses with her models in Milan during the filming of the fashion show that will open the Milan Fashion Week yesterday.-AFP photos

Black Lives Matter designers make history in Milan

Last minute touches on a frilly white dress, a final coat of powder and it's showtime for the Black Lives Matter-inspired collective making history at Milan Fashion Week. After a years-long battle to improve diversity on the Italian catwalks, a group of five black designers made their on-schedule debut yesterday by opening the women's Fall/Winter fashion shows. All this season's shows are pre-recorded due to coronavirus, but AFP was given exclusive access to their preparations last week at Milan's Circolo Filologico library, not far from the Scala.

Is opening fashion week a victory? "I'd say it's a first step," said Michelle Ngonmo, who chose those to include in the debut show. She is a co-founder of the collective dubbed Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion, named after the anti-racism movement that swept the United States last year and reached Europe. Longer term, "we have to make the society we live in understand that the 'Made in Italy' label is not a question of skin colour but of know-how", she told AFP. On an individual level, opening Milan Fashion Week is a dream come true for the designers, all Italian but born in various African countries.

Claudia Gisele Ntsama, a 29-year-old



Models present creations by Burundi's fashion stylist Fabiola Manirakiza.

dreaming about it since I've been in fashion," Fall said. In a nod to his African origins, his collection—"works of art that I transpose on clothes"—featured satin lions and zebras in gold and red, his favorite colors.

Previously, the presentation of the collections of black designers was confined to Afro Fashion Week, which launched in Milan with a show in 2016. "For years we came up against a wall of silence when knocking on the door" of the fashion chamber, said Ngonmo, the founder of Afro Fashion Week. The catalyst for change was the death last year in US police custody of an African-American man, George Floyd, an event that triggered anti-racism protests across the US and the world. Carlo Capasa, head of the fashion chamber, acknowledged that the death of Floyd was "an important moment of awareness for the whole world".

Thanks to the collective, "we have become more aware of this theme" of racism, he said, adding: "In fact, we could have done more." The chamber now supports the collective through tutoring on design and business skills, and finances the five designers' fashion shows and the collections of three of them.



Cameroonian fashion stylist Joy Ijeoma Meribe from the collective "Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion" poses.

A YEAR INTO PANDEMIC, MILAN FASHION WEEK STAYS VIRTUAL

Fashionistas will have to log on to soak up the glamour at Milan Fashion Week, which remains online a year after the coronavirus first swept into northern Italy. No sharply dressed crowds will attend the extravaganza's opening yesterday: it's virtual catwalk shows only, with the likes of Armani and Prada presenting new women's collections for autumn and winter 2021-22. The word "coronavirus" was just starting to pop up in conversations among members of the global style elite as they gathered for the February 2020 edition of Milan Fashion Week.

Italy's first outbreak was taking hold in Codogno, an hour's drive away. That prompted Armani to announce it would present its collection behind closed doors—a first in fashion history. Covid-19 would quickly spread across Italy, prompting the first national lockdown in Europe as the crisis swiftly took on global proportions. A year later, the global luxury sector is in dire economic straits, with few reasons to dress up as comfort-wear has become the new uniform for the household. Milan organizers nevertheless intend the latest Fashion Week, which runs until March 1, to show that the industry can adapt in the face of crisis. And there is hope that the arrival of vaccines will lead to a fashion bounce-back.

Millions of eyeballs

Italy's National Chamber of Fashion has set up a dedicated online hub for the week's events, which include 68 shows and 65 collection presentations. Yesterday kicked off with "We Are Made In Italy", an event by the Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion collective, which has been pushing for greater diversity in the industry. The next six days will see a parade of online catwalk shows, either live or pre-recorded, by brands including Prada, Moschino, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana and Valentino. Kim Jones, the celebrated British menswear designer of former Dior and Louis Vuitton fame, will also present his first ready-to-wear collection for Fendi.

In the brave new world of virtual fashion weeks, the success of the latest Milan edition will be measured in terms of how many eyeballs it manages to reach. The last Milan Fashion Week, in September, reached more than 43 million views on the event's exclusive streaming channel, with partners including the New York Times and China's Tencent Video relaying the footage worldwide. According to analysis by media monitor DMR, the shows also reached more than 600 million users on social media.

Vaccines: saviors of fashion?

The Italian fashion sector's revenues plunged 45 percent in the second quarter of 2020 — the height of the lockdown—but losses for the year as a whole are estimated at 26 percent. The National Chamber of Fashion released a Fashion Economic Trends study earlier this month, looking at various factors that could shape the industry's recovery in the medium to long term. In the most optimistic scenario, a successful mass vaccination campaign and strong support for businesses as they emerge from the crisis could lead to growth of around 15 percent, the report predicted.

But if restrictions on commercial and social life continue until 2022 as authorities struggle to stamp out the virus, the bounce back could be limited to six percent growth, it said. Italy's brand-new government, led by former European Bank Chief Mario Draghi, is currently weighing the best way out of a crisis that has claimed more than 95,000 lives in the country and savaged the economy. — AFP



Burundi's fashion stylist Fabiola Manirakiza, founder of the fashion house Frida-Kiza, from the collective "Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion" poses in Milan during the filming of the fashion show.

said he has experienced racism on a daily basis. He said people often assume that he makes T-shirts, or other garments for hip-hop fashion.

"They find it hard to imagine that I work in the luxury sector," he said. But this first official show of the association gives hope to some. "It's a dream come true," says Karim Daoudi, 27, a designer born in Morocco. Of his shoes featured in the show, he said: "I hope they will go around the world." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

French film giant Gerard Depardieu charged with rape

French film giant Gerard Depardieu has been charged with rape and sexual assault, a judicial source told AFP on Tuesday, the latest in a string of such allegations against prominent figures in France. Depardieu, one of the most famous actors of his generation, is accused of assaulting and raping an actress in her 20s in 2018. An initial investigation into the rape accusations against the 72-year old Depardieu was dropped in 2019 for lack of evidence.

But it was reopened last summer, leading to criminal charges being filed in December, the judicial source said. The actress accuses Depardieu of having raped and assaulted her at his Parisian home on two separate occasions in August 2018. Depardieu's lawyer Herve Temime told AFP that the actor, who is free but under judicial supervision, "completely rejects the accusations". He also said he regretted that the case had been made public. According to a source close to the case, Depardieu is a friend of the actress's family.

'Nothing professional'

Some reports have suggested that Depardieu and the actress were rehearsing a scene of a theatre play, but the source said "there was nothing professional about the encounter". The woman's lawyer, Elodie Tuillon-Hibon, told AFP that she hoped her client's "private sphere will be respected" as the case unfolds. Besides long being a superstar in his home country, Depardieu is one of France's best-known actors abroad.

He won acclaim in French-language films such as "The Last Metro" and "Jean de Florette," but went on to perform in a range of English-language movies, including the romantic comedy "Green Card" and a film version of "Hamlet". He is famous for untiringly shooting film after film clocking up more than 200 cinema or TV films over more than 50 years. But



In this file photo French actor Gerard Depardieu poses during a photocall for the second season of the French TV show "Marseille" broadcasted and co-produced by US streaming video giant Netflix in Marseille, southern France.— AFP

over the course of his career he has often been embroiled in scandals which have hit the headlines, and thrown public tantrums.

His dark side

He knocked a paparazzi unconscious in 2005, urinated in the cabin of a Paris-Dublin flight in 2011 and attacked a motorist in central Paris in 2012. The following year he was fined for drink driving.

"The man is dark but the actor is huge," actress Catherine Deneuve, who starred alongside Depardieu in The Last Metro, said of him. Depardieu announced in late 2012 that he was "giving his passport back" to protest against French tax rates, went into tax exile in Belgium and became a citizen of Russia which he called "a great democracy", regularly praising Russian President Vladimir Putin.

After Paris prosecutors reopened the case brought by the actress, an investigating magistrate questioned Depardieu on December 16 and, finding "serious and corroborated evidence", brought the charges. Police also proceeded to a confrontation between Depardieu and his alleged victim, a judicial source said. Depardieu is the father of four, including the actor Guillaume Depardieu who died

in 2008. Besides his prolific acting career, he has also been a winemaker, restaurant owner and a singer. Just over three years since the #MeToo movement broke taboos around rape across the world, France is seeing an outpouring of stories and a wide-ranging debate about sex, power and consent.

Wave of allegations

Other big names in cinema to be accused of sexual assault or rape include director Luc Besson, whose films include "Nikita" and "The Fifth Element". Week after week new revelations have targeted the rich and powerful, with one of the country's best-known television presenters, Patrick Poivre d'Arvor, becoming the latest to be accused of rape.

The French political establishment has also been rocked by similar accusations, including against current Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. And a former French government minister, Georges Tron, last week began serving three years in prison after a court found him guilty of raping an employee during "foot massages" in his office and at the home of his co-defendant.—AFP

French film greats mired in abuse scandals

Actor Gerard Depardieu is the latest member of France's film and literary elite to be accused of sexual assault, with the 72-year-old charged with raping a young actress. While the #MeToo movement was slower to take hold in France despite some of the accusations against disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein having taken place at the Cannes film festival, there has been a dam-burst of allegations since.

Roman Polanski: Fugitive

The director of "Rosemary's Baby" and "The Pianist" has faced a number of sex assault allegations since fleeing to France from Los Angeles in 1978 after admitting to the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl. The United States has tried on several occasions to extradite the Oscar winner, who is a dual French-Polish national.

In 2019 French photographer Valentine Monnier accused Polanski of raping her in his Swiss chalet in 1975 when she was 18-year-old actress, saying he tried to give her a pill as he beat her "into submission". Polanski denies the allegations.

Luc Besson: Nine accusers

Luc Besson-once France's most powerful movie moguls-has been embroiled in two rape investiga-

tions sparked by Dutch-Belgian actress Sand Van Roy accusing him of repeatedly raping her over a two-year period. She is one of nine women who have said they were assaulted or harassed by the powerful director and producer, maker of "Nikita" and "The Fifth Element", who has always denied the accusations. Van Roy, 28, had minor roles in Besson's "Taxi 5" and "Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets". Last month Besson was named as an assisted witness in the second case involving Van Roy, which indicates that a judge considers there is some evidence to suggest culpability, but not enough to charge.

Haenel: Harassed at 12

Adele Haenel, one of the country's most acclaimed actresses, is credited with helping break an omerta in the French industry by saying she was sexually harassed as a 12-year-old by the director of her first film. Paris prosecutors opened an investigation in 2019 into the claims. Haenel, now 32, says Christophe Ruggia subjected her to "constant sexual harassment" from the age of 12 to 15, including "forced kisses on the neck" and touching during a three-year spell working on the 2002 film, "The Devils". Ruggia denied sexual harassment but was expelled from the French Society of Film Directors after admitting that his "adulation" for the actress could have proved distressing.—AFP



A poster with Apu from the show 'The Simpsons' is seen at a 7-Eleven in Burbank, California.— Reuters

FROM APU TO ALADDIN, WHY WHITE VOICES WILL NO LONGER DO

White actor Harry Shearer is stepping back from voicing the black Dr. Hibbert on "The Simpsons" after more than 30 years. While some fans are mourning his departure-the latest white actor to think better of playing non-white parts-others are shocked and surprised that Springfield's favorite medical professional was as white as his lab coat. We look at how Hollywood is realizing that black voices matter:

'The Simpsons'

Dr. Hibbert is only one of several characters of color on "The Simpsons" to have been voiced for decades by white actors including his wife Bernice, Homer's nuclear plant colleague Carlton Carlson and of course, Apu, the Indian-American convenience store owner. Hank Azaria's heavily-accented caricature of the grocer came under sharp scrutiny after comedian Hari Kondabolu's documentary "The Problem with Apu" fingered the performance as offensive. Azaria finally quit the role last year, saying that continuing to play him "just didn't feel right". Dr. Hibbert is now being played by Kevin Michael Richardson, while Carlson has been recast with another black actor Alex Desert.

'Aladdin' to 'Pocahontas'

Disney's "Aladdin" is one of the industry's most notorious examples of white-washing, with white actors voicing the title role, Princesse Jasmine, and the Genie in the 1992 film. At the time, the casting passed more or less unnoticed. But Disney caused much more controversy when its live action film version in 2018 saw extras "browned up" with makeup to appear more Arab.

The studio's 1995 animated feature "Pocahontas" seemed to signal a bigger shift in thinking, however, with indigenous actors in all major roles, though Pocahontas's singing voice was lent by Judy Kuhn. Disney has since put disclaimers on some of its classic films like "The Jungle Book", "Dumbo", and "The Lady and the Tramp" warning that they include "negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures". And this week "The Muppet Show" added a similar warning to 18 of its episodes.—AFP

Daft Punk future as mysterious as ever

Have Daft Punk really gone for good? Despite announcing their retirement on Monday, no one should write off the inscrutable pair just yet, say those who have closely followed their career. "No one's ever been able to get in their heads. It's hard to break through those robot helmets," said Patrice Baudot, author of "Electrorama," a book on French dance music. From producing Japanese anime to making their own strange cult film, Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo have thrown plenty of interesting curveballs since first taking over dancefloors in the 1990s.

Few believe the robots have permanently left Earth's orbit. "Stars are something that we see because they are dead. These guys are very much living and will continue their career," electronic music pioneer Jean-Michel Jarre told AFP, adding that he would be "very pleased" to work with them in the future. The obvious bet is that they will pursue



In this file photo French members of the band Daft Punk pose in the pits at the Monaco Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Monaco in Monte Carlo.— AFP photos

solo music projects. That has been the path for other French house duos. Air's Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoit Dunckel have multiple side projects on the go, while an album by Gaspard Auge, one half of Justice, is reportedly on the way.

The Daft Punk pair have already made a few moves in this direction, with Homem-Christo, 47, doing production work for Charlotte Gainsbourg and Sebastien Tellier. Bangalter, 46, has pulled soundtrack duties for French director Gaspar Noe, including on his controversial film "Irreversible". As a duo, they worked on several film scores, including a Tron remake in 2010 and were tentatively linked to an upcoming film by Italian director Dario Argento.

'Not joining The Voice'

They might also like to get behind the camera themselves. The eight-minute clip that announced their retirement on Monday was lifted from their 2006 film "Electroma". It was not exactly a huge hit, but the pair have never shown much concern with meeting public expectations, and having shifted millions of albums over the years, they face few limitations. "They'll be attracted to projects where they will have a lot of independence since they don't exactly need the money," said Bardot. "They have a tendency to pop up where you least expect them," he added.

Whatever happens, it is highly unlikely that they will give up their highly cautious



In this file photo Daft Punk's installation Technologic Redux from 2019 is displayed during the press visit of the exhibition 'Electro - From Kraftwerk to Daft Punk' at the Philharmonie in Paris.

approach to fame. "I don't see either of them becoming a judge on The Voice any time soon," joked Yves Bigot, who co-wrote a book about the duo, "Daft Punk, Incognito". "Guy-Manuel is a timid guy, he's the one who speaks least in interviews. And it's not like Thomas is about to become the next David Guetta," he added. Bigot couldn't help but give a little grist to the never-ending Daft Punk rumor mill: "Nothing is stopping them from reforming later. There are plenty of examples of that in music."—AFP

Scents of time: Belgrade's last craft perfumery

From a cobblestoned street in downtown Belgrade, the Sava perfumery has seen more than half a century sweep past without ceasing in its mission to keep the city's citizens smelling flowery and fresh. The artisanal shop-which mixes its perfumes in-house-is the last of its kind in the Serbian capital, thanks to the Jovanov family who are committed to keeping the craft alive.

While the city has gone through many changes, the store remains a snapshot in time, with glass bottles, mixing vials and other tools passed down through three generations. The work is a labor of love for the Jovanovs, whose other sources of income enable them to continue with the perfumery. "We have remained because of tradition, love, affection and willingness to do a job which at certain times doesn't earn you enough money to subsist," the shop's jovial owner Nenad Jovanov, 71, told AFP as he mixed a custom eau de toilette in the shop's laboratory-like back room, measuring out ingredients with beakers and pipettes.

The perfumery dates back to the 1940s but opened under its current name a decade later, when communist authorities in then-Yugoslavia reversed a decision to ban private business, allowing the family to take back ownership. In the 1950s and 60s, such perfumeries enjoyed a "golden age" in Belgrade, said Nenad, recalling more than 20 other family-run shops. But as Yugoslavia started opening up to

imports, mass-produced fragrances poured in, pushing local mixers out of business.

Crippling sanctions in the 1990s, when Serbia and other ex-Yugoslav republics broke apart in a series of wars, dealt another blow to the industry. "One by one they started shutting down. And in the end, we were the only ones to remain," said Nenad.

No labels

When customers enter the tiny store, Nenad or his son Nemanja, who also works in the film industry, help them navigate the wooden shelves of label-less

glass bottles. "We don't have brand names. We don't have brand bottles. We don't have brand boxes. We simplified our packaging and our interior as much as we could so we can allow customers the experience of discovering what they like," explained Nemanja. After enquiring about preferences-floral, citrus, sweet or musky-they use an old-fashioned pump to test different fragrances on the client's arms.

Shoppers are then encouraged to take a walk and return later to choose which perfume they like best, as the scent evolves over time after its first contact with the skin. Most of their ingredients come from France. "Men, at least those in this

region, would be terrified if they knew that many masculine fragrances-wonderful and popular fragrances-have floral components," Nenad said with a laugh.

The store stays afloat thanks to a loyal clientele, plus a growing interest from tourists interested in what Nemanja calls its "living museum". At a time when Covid-19 has taken away many people's sense of smell, an appreciation of its power has also deepened. "The sense of smell is one of the most important," mused Nenad, who works in a white lab coat. "It can transport us to another place, another time." — AFP



Nenad Jovanov poses for a picture with perfume bottles in his 67 years old perfume shop in Belgrade.— AFP photos



Nenad Jovanov (right) and his son Nemanja pose for a picture with perfumes bottles in his 67 years old perfume shop in Belgrade.

Sports

Photo of the Day



Marcus Kleveland performs during the Laax Open 2021 in Laax, Switzerland. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Doncic hits last-second winner, Bucks spoil Finch's coaching debut

Harden gets nod as a reserve for 70th NBA All-Star showcase

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic nailed two clutch three-pointers, including the game winner with one second left, to lift the Dallas Mavericks to a thrilling 110-107 victory over the Boston Celtics on Tuesday in Texas. Doncic hit consecutive go-ahead three-pointers in the final 30 seconds, draining a step-back three with 15 seconds left to make it 107-105. He repeated the feat by shooting a high arching 28-footer over two Celtics defenders with less than a second left to win it.

The 21-year-old Slovenian finished with 31 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Mavs earned their sixth win in seven games. "It felt great. We needed this win badly," Doncic said. "I know my team trusts me. If two guys go are on me and my teammates are open I will pass. It is about finding the best shot and that is what happened today."

Doncic's winner came immediately after Celtics' Jaylen Brown made a layup to level the score in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of 3,300 at American Airlines Center in Dallas. "He's just a very unique player, a very unique person," coach Rick Carlisle said of Doncic. "The wiring of people like Luka Doncic, Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Larry Bird, Kobe Bryant, guys that have this laser-like focus in these situations. It's difficult to explain how their minds and their brains work."

Dallas was able to win despite playing without Kristaps Porzingis and Maxi Kleber. Porzingis missed his second straight game with back trouble and Kleber sat out with a left ankle sprain. Jalen Brunson scored 16 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, Brown had 29 and Jayson Tatum tallied 28 for Boston, who lost their second straight. The Celtics bungled a 24-point lead on Sunday in a 120-115 overtime loss to the New Orleans Pelicans.

Furkan Korkmaz jump-started the offense and Tobias Harris closed it out as the Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers held on to beat the Toronto Raptors 109-102. Korkmaz scored 16 of his season-best 19 points in the first quarter

and Harris tallied 12 of his team-high 23 points in the fourth for the 76ers, who snapped a string of 16 consecutive regular-season road losses to the Raptors.

Sixers center Joel Embiid added 18 points and 12 rebounds to end a streak of 14 straight games in which he had scored at least 25 points. Ben Simmons chipped in 15 points and Shake Milton and Danny Green each scored 11 in the win. Norman Powell had 24 points and Pascal Siakam added 22 for the Raptors, who had their four-game win streak halted. Fred VanVleet had 12 points, Aron Baynes had 11 and Chris Boucher and OG Anunoby each scored 10 points.

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 37 points, eight rebounds and eight assists as the Bucks spoiled the coaching debut of Chris Finch with a 139-112 rout of the last-placed Minnesota Timberwolves. Antetokounmpo was one of seven Bucks who scored in double figures as they won their third straight. Finch, hired Monday to replace the fired Ryan Saunders, was previously an assistant coach with the Raptors. Milwaukee's eight-game home stand gets more difficult as they next face Denver, Los Angeles Clippers and New Orleans.

In Denver, Nikola Jokic scored 41 points, Jamal Murray had 19 of his 24 points in the final quarter, and the Nuggets outgunned the Portland Trail Blazers 111-106. Damian Lillard had 25 points and 13 assists, Enes Kanter finished with 16 points and 14 rebounds, Carmelo Anthony had 24 points and Gary Trent Jr. and Derrick Jones scored 18 each for the Trail Blazers.

All-Star reserves

James Harden headlined the list of 2021 NBA All-Star Game reserves announced on Tuesday, joining Brooklyn teammates Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving to mark the first time the Nets have had three All-Star selections.

Irving and Durant were previously named



DALLAS: Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks shoots the game-winning shot against Kemba Walker #8 of the Boston Celtics at American Airlines Center on Tuesday in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

starters for the 70th All-Star Game, to be played March 7 inside the pandemic bubble in Atlanta, Georgia. Durant will serve as captain of one select squad against Team LeBron James in the contest, where reserve players were selected by league coaches. Harden, the NBA's top scorer each of the past three seasons, was named an All-Star for the ninth straight year and Chris Paul also got the nod, making him an 11-time All-Star. The league will break from tradition because of the global pandemic and hold the game and skills events on one night instead of spreading the festivities over several days. — AFP



NEW YORK: View of Madison Square Garden prior to the New York Knicks against Golden State Warriors basketball game on Tuesday in New York City. — AFP

beloved Knicks in the running for a play-off place for the first time in several seasons. But Donahue's joy at getting back inside MSG was tinged with sadness and pain after the death of his 21-year-old sister Gianna Gregoire from brain cancer in August.

Gregoire, also a hardcore Knicks fan, would go to about ten or 15 games a season with her brother. "It was very emotional, there were a lot of tears. She was there with me spiritually like she is every second of every day," said Donahue. He said it had been "horrible" to have been locked out of the Knicks' arena over the past year while enduring such tragedy.

"The Garden is my outlet over the years. Even if

the Knicks aren't winning, life is always great when you're at the Garden. It's where I need to be. Five or six different fans found me tonight and said, 'I'm sorry about Gianna.' That really tore me up," Donahue added.

As a season ticket holder for around two decades, he got priority for the highly sought-after tickets which were selling on the secondary market for as high as \$5,127, according to TicketIQ.com. Donahue and Swift arrived three hours before the 7:30 pm (00:30 GMT yesterday) tip-off, in part to make sure their health declarations and negative COVID tests — within the past 72 hours — were in order. "I have to breathe the Garden air," said Donahue. — AFP

News in brief

Al-Nasser tops premier league

KUWAIT: Al-Nasser SC topped Kuwait's STC Football Premier League after defeating Al-Salmiya 3-1 in the 4th round of the league on Tuesday. The same round witnessed a draw between Al-Arabi and Al-Qadsia 2-2 in the derby match that was held in Sabah Al-Salem Stadium. The table currently stands at Al-Nasser SC on top with ten points, Al-Arabi second with eight points and Al-Qadsia in third place with seven points. — KUNA

Australia, Qatar out

BUENOS AIRES: Australia and Qatar have pulled out of the 2021 Copa America starting in June, South American football's governing body CONMEBOL said on Tuesday. CONMEBOL's deputy general secretary Gonzalo Belloso said that the two members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) would not be able to participate due to a clash with World Cup qualifying dates. "The Copa America is absolutely going ahead. But Qatar and Australia, who had asked to take part, will not be able to come," Belloso told Argentine radio La Red. "The Asian confederation has programmed World Cup qualification on the same dates as the Copa." — AFP

Leeds soar into top half

LEEDS: Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl branded his side's second-half performance a disaster as Leeds ran riot thanks to goals from Patrick Bamford, Stuart Dallas and Raphinha for a 3-0 win on Tuesday that took them into the top half of the Premier League. After topping the table earlier in the season, Saints are not yet safe as they have taken just one point from their last eight league games. Victory takes Leeds above Arsenal in the table and to within five points of sixth-placed Liverpool as they push for a European place in their first season back in the top flight for 16 years. Southampton remain in 14th but Fulham's upturn in form of late means they now enjoy just an eight-point cushion over the relegation zone. — AFP

Gasol goes 'home'

MADRID: Spanish basketball star Pau Gasol will make an emotional return to Barcelona 20 years after leaving, the player and club announced on Tuesday. The 40-year-old Gasol will re-join Barca, where he began his career, until the end of the season. "Pau Gasol returns to Barca. And will stay there until June 30, 2021," the Catalan club said. "I am very happy to announce that I am coming home and that I will join the ranks of FC Barcelona basketball soon," added Gasol on Twitter. "I want to use my qualities and my experience to help the club at a key moment of the season." Gasol is widely considered to be the best Spanish player in history. — AFP

Barty stunned in Adelaide

ADELAIDE: Unseeded American Danielle Collins sent an out of sorts Ashleigh Barty crashing out of the Adelaide International in the second round yesterday. Collins seized on some poor serving from the world number one to claim a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win in just 65 minutes. It was Collins' first win over Barty in three encounters and her first win against a current world number one. Barty started strongly, breaking Collins' first service game and opening up a 3-1 lead, but the Australian's first serve deserted her and Collins got back on terms, then broke Barty twice to claim the first set. Barty broke again at the start of the second, but once again Collins came back, then broke at 4-4 before holding her own serve to reach the quarter-finals, where she will play Poland's reigning French Open champion Iga Swiatek. — AFP

England collapse vs India

AHMEDABAD: Spinner Axar Patel claimed six wickets as India skittled out England for 112 on day one of a crucial day-night third Test in Ahmedabad yesterday. Patel, who recorded his second haul of five or more wickets in just his second Test, combined with Ravichandran Ashwin to end England's innings in 48.4 overs in the world's biggest cricket stadium. India's innings witnessed a power cut with most of the new LED lights at the revamped stadium going off for two minutes after which play resumed. India reached five for no loss at dinner with Rohit Sharma, on five, and Shubman Gill at the crease. — AFP

NY Knicks fans return to Madison Square Garden

NEW YORK: New York Knicks superfan Anthony Donahue made an emotional return to Madison Square Garden when the NBA side played in front of home fans for the first time in almost a year Tuesday. Donahue was one of 2,000 supporters to cheer the Knicks on during a narrow loss to the Golden State Warriors, 352 days since spectators were last allowed into the iconic venue before the pandemic shutdown. "I missed the camaraderie, I miss seeing everybody," said Donahue, who has barely skipped a Knicks game since attending his first one at age 10 in the mid-1990s.

"When you come all the time, these people here they become family. The Garden is more than just an arena. It's life for a lot of us," he told AFP. New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo paved the way for the Knicks to welcome back supporters when he announced earlier this month that he would allow stadiums to open at ten percent capacity.

Across the East River on Tuesday night, the Brooklyn Nets played in front of 300 fans against the Sacramento Kings at their home, the Barclays Center. "It's a big deal. Hopefully we're standing here in six months and there's 20,000 fans," said Nets season ticket holder Rich Schaefer.

Donahue, 37, wore a Knicks cap, sweatshirt, jacket, neck chain and of course, Knicks mask as he returned to his spiritual home, accompanied by his close friend Elgin Swift. "This is just one step towards getting back to normal," said Swift, 46.

The pair were in buoyant mood with their

Sports

Bayern Munich plot quarter final course by routing Lazio

Musiala becomes youngest English goalscorer in Champions League history

ROME: Holders Bayern Munich brushed off their recent poor domestic form by throwing down a Champions League marker with an emphatic 4-1 win at Lazio in Tuesday's last-16 first leg to take a "huge step" towards the quarter-finals. Robert Lewandowski gave Bayern an early lead before 17-year-old Jamal Musiala scored his first Champions League goal on only his fourth appearance in Europe.

Stuttgart-born Musiala, who turns 18 tomorrow, is now the youngest English goalscorer in Champions League history. A Leroy Sane strike gave Bayern a three-goal half-time cushion at the Stadio Olimpico before Francesco Acerbi scored an own goal just after the break. "We are a huge step closer to the quarter-finals," Bayern coach Hansi Flick told Sky.

Joaquin Correa pulled a goal back early in the second half to give the scoreline some respectability for Lazio. "We were aggressive from the start and went full throttle," Bayern midfielder Leon Goretzka said after his first appearance since testing positive for COVID-19. "I am happy to have played in such an awesome game after a difficult few weeks. "That was important after we had often been caught napping (in recent games). Things worked well, that was a first good step."

Simone Inzaghi's Lazio need a near miracle in the return game in Munich on March 17 to reach the last eight. "Bayern are the world champions," said Inzaghi. "They definitely did not need our mistakes to make it even easier for them." Flick pulled a surprise by starting Musiala in place of Thomas Mueller, who

was sidelined after testing positive for COVID-19. Benjamin Pavard was also out with coronavirus, while midfielders Corentin Tolisso and Serge Gnabry were both missing with thigh injuries.

Despite dropping five points in the Bundesliga last week and bringing a depleted squad to Rome, Bayern needed less than nine minutes before Lewandowski pounced on a mistake in the Lazio defense. The Poland star snapped up a weak back-pass by Mateo Musacchio — who was subbed off soon after — to dribble around Lazio's veteran goalkeeper Pepe Reina and fire into an empty net.

Lewandowski passes Raul

It was Lewandowski's 72nd Champions League goal, taking him solo third on the all-time list ahead of Real Madrid great Raul. England Under-21 midfielder Musiala, who has reportedly opted to play for Germany's senior side, then showed maturity beyond his years to calmly drill past Reina to make it 2-0 on 24 minutes. The lead was extended just before half-time when Kingsley Coman's shot was parried and Sane tapped in the rebound. "We wanted to show we were switched on from the first minute, we took our chances and played well," said Bayern winger Sane. "We used the ball well and put pressure on them at the back."

There were two goals in the space of three minutes just after the break, with Acerbi turning the ball into his own net as Bayern counter-attacked from a Lazio corner. Lazio were in danger of matching their heaviest home defeat in Europe having lost 4-0 to



ROME: Lazio's Montenegrin midfielder Adam Marusic (left) tackles Bayern Munich's English midfielder Jamal Musiala during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match Lazio Rome vs Bayern Munich on Tuesday at the Olympic stadium in Rome. —AFP

Chelsea in the 2003/04 group stage.

But Bayern's defense has often crumbled in recent weeks and Lazio forward Correa took advantage of poor marking to fire past Manuel Neuer in the 49th

minute. Bayern are now unbeaten in their last 18 Champions League games, with only a 1-1 group stage draw at Atletico Madrid last December denying them a perfect record of wins. — AFP

Giroud overhead kick gives Chelsea edge over Atletico

BUCHAREST: Olivier Giroud's magnificent bicycle kick broke Atletico Madrid's resistance and earned Chelsea a crucial away goal on Tuesday, a 1-0 victory giving Thomas Tuchel's side a slender advantage in the Champions League last 16. Giroud's acrobatic strike was initially ruled out for offside but stood after VAR showed Mario Hermoso had got the final touch, delivering a huge blow to Atletico's hopes of reaching the quarter-finals.

"I didn't know what to think about the goal, I just focused on hitting the ball," said Giroud. "I love an overhead kick and I was just pleased to see the ball hit the back of the net. I had no clue about being offside or not."

Diego Simeone's side had put on a typically disciplined defensive performance until that point but Giroud's moment of genius means they will have to score in London on March 17 if they are to avoid an early exit. It also continues a worrying dip for Atletico, whose lead in La Liga is also under threat after one win in four matches. "If you'd said to me in September we'd lose this first leg 1-0 and be top of the league, I'd have signed for that for sure," said Simeone. "The results aren't going for us so we have to work, work, work and work."

Chelsea, meanwhile, passed their biggest test since Tuchel was appointed at the end of January, backing up a strong run against lesser lights in the Premier League with a polished display against one of Europe's elite. "We knew their strengths and dealt with them," said Giroud. "We need to stay focused now and finish the job." Giroud's goal in the 68th minute was only the third Atletico have conceded in 14 home legs of the Champions League knockout stages under Simeone, even if this fixture was at home only in name.



BUCHAREST: Chelsea's French striker Olivier Giroud (left) scores during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Chelsea at the Arena Nationala stadium in Bucharest on Tuesday. —AFP

Restrictions imposed by the Spanish government meant the game had to be played in Bucharest instead of Madrid, despite the return match remaining at Stamford Bridge in three weeks' time. Tuchel admitted the switch gave his side an advantage but Simeone refused to complain on Monday, insisting he felt fortunate to play during the pandemic, "however and wherever that might be".

Spanish clubs struggling in Europe

Their defeat makes it three home losses out of three for Spain's teams in the Champions League last 16 so far, after Barcelona were thrashed by Paris Saint-Germain and Sevilla were beaten by Borussia Dortmund last week. Callum Hudson-Odoi started for Chelsea, despite Tuchel criticizing the 20-year-old's attitude against Southampton on Saturday.

Atletico started with Suarez, Joao Felix and Angel Correa but an attacking line-up took up a

typically defensive shape, a six-man wall quickly forming in front of Chelsea in the opening stages. The first half was tight, each side able only to create openings but failing to find the pass to make a chance.

Edouard Mendy's heavy touch in the opening minutes almost gave the chasing Saul Niguez a tap-in while Timo Werner's angled shot was saved by Jan Oblak and Suarez miskicked at the near post. Chelsea looked most dangerous down the flanks, where Marcos Alonso and Hudson-Odoi pushed Atletico back. Atletico had space on the break but lacked the precision to capitalize.

Felix sprung into life early in the second half, feeding Thomas Lemar and then meeting the Frenchman's cross with an acrobatic volley that flew over. The game looked destined to finish goalless only for Atletico to briefly lose shape, allowing the instinctive Giroud to take advantage. — AFP

Neil Lennon quits as Celtic boss after dismal campaign

GLASGOW: Neil Lennon resigned as Celtic manager yesterday with the Scottish Premiership club 18 points behind bitter rivals Rangers in their bid to win a historic 10th consecutive league title. The Northern Irishman took charge for a second spell in February 2019 and led the club to two league titles, two Scottish Cups and a League Cup.

But he has been under pressure all season as problems mounted on and off the pitch, with Hoops' fans calling for his head as their dream died. Celtic flopped badly in Europe and defeat to lowly Ross County on Sunday left Steven Gerrard's Rangers just seven points away from landing the club's first title for a decade.

"Celtic Football Club today announced that Neil Lennon has resigned from his position as football manager with immediate effect," said a club statement. "Neil has served the club with distinction as both player and manager, delivering numerous successes, most recently completing the domestic treble in December."

Lennon, 49, said in the statement he had worked hard but had been unable to turn the club's fortunes around. "We have experienced a difficult season due to so many factors and, of course, it is very frustrating and disappointing that we have not been able to hit the same heights as we did previously," he added.

Assistant manager John Kennedy will take interim charge of the team until a permanent successor is appointed. The Celtic hierarchy, led by chief executive Peter Lawwell, who is standing down at the end of the season, stood by their manager long after real-

istic hope of catching Rangers was gone. But Sunday's 1-0 defeat to Ross County, who started the game bottom of the table, proved the final straw.

Trophy haul

Lennon, who won 10 league titles with Celtic as a player and manager, stepped in two years ago initially on a temporary basis when fellow Northern Irishman Brendan Rodgers left to take charge of Premier League side Leicester. He saw Celtic over the line in the league as Rangers faltered in Gerrard's first season in charge at Ibrox and won the Scottish Cup to complete a third consecutive treble of domestic trophies.

Lawwell offered Lennon the job permanently in the dressing room after the Scottish Cup final in a move that was fiercely criticised by fan groups. Celtic completed another clean sweep in the 2019/20 season, with Lennon's side crowned champions under a points formula after the campaign was curtailed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It meant they had matched the feats of Celtic's greatest-ever side, who won nine consecutive titles starting in the mid-60s, and the big-spending Rangers team that dominated from the late 1980s. In December, victory on penalties over Hearts completed a fourth consecutive treble in the delayed 2019/20 Scottish Cup final and Lennon became the first man to win the Scottish domestic treble as a player and manager.

But by then the wheels had already come off Celtic's season with a string of disappointing results in Europe and Rangers building a commanding lead in the league. A 1-0 victory for Gerrard's men in the second Old Firm derby of the season on January 2 opened up a 19-point lead.

Worse was to come for Celtic as Lennon's squad immediately jetted out from defeat at Ibrox for an ill-judged mid-season training camp in Dubai. Pictures of Lennon and captain Scott Brown drinking beer



ROME: In this file photo taken on November 07, 2019 Celtic's Scottish head coach Neil Lennon looks on during the UEFA Europa League Group E football match Lazio vs Celtic at the Olympic stadium in Rome. —AFP

poolside enraged supporters and when defender Christopher Jullien tested positive for coronavirus on Celtic's return to Glasgow, 13 first-team players plus Lennon and Kennedy were forced to self-isolate.

A severely depleted squad lost further ground and Rangers' march to the title became a formality. Gerrard wished Lennon well, saying he took "no personal satisfaction" from his struggles. Former Celtic striker John Hartson said Lennon could be proud of his achievements at the club. "I'm not surprised he has resigned but feel it's the best outcome for Celtic," he tweeted. "The club now need to move quickly and get a new manager and his staff in for the challenges ahead." — AFP

Arsenal 'at home' in Athens, Leicester, Rangers eye Europa League last 16

PARIS: COVID-19 restrictions mean Arsenal will play the home leg of their Europa League last-32 tie against Benfica today in Greece, with the Gunners one of five British sides looking to secure a spot in the draw for the next round.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal went to Rome last week to play the first, away leg of their tie against Benfica due to travel restrictions between the United Kingdom and Portugal, and those same restrictions saw the return moved from London to Greece, with the Karaiskakis stadium in the Athens port of Piraeus, home of Olympiakos, the venue for today's encounter.

Perhaps ominously, it was Olympiakos who knocked the Gunners out of last season's Europa League but Arsenal will hope to get the better of Benfica after drawing 1-1 in Rome, where Bukayo Saka's equalizer gave them the advantage on away goals heading into the return.

With Arsenal sitting in mid-table in the Premier League, this competition presents the only viable route into next season's Champions League for Arteta's team. Benfica, meanwhile, are seeking solace in Europe having won just once in seven Portuguese league games to drop to fourth, a huge 15 points behind leaders Sporting.

Man Utd as good as through

Manchester United already have one foot in the last 16 after an emphatic 4-0 win over Real Sociedad last week, making the most of the fact the first leg of that tie was switched from Spain to Italy after the Spanish government introduced a ban on arrivals by air from the UK.

It hardly seems especially fair on La Real that, having been deprived home advantage in the first leg, they now have to go to Old Trafford for the return, but this match is effectively now a dead rubber after a brace by Bruno Fernandes helped Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side cruise to victory in Turin.

Meanwhile Leicester City, who are behind second-placed United in the Premier League only on goal difference, do have work still to do in the return leg of their tie at home against Czech champions Slavia Prague after a 0-0 draw last week.

Relentless Rangers

Steven Gerrard's Rangers need just seven points from their last eight games to clinch the Scottish title, and so they can focus their energy on Europe, as they look to reach the Europa League last 16 for the second season running.

The Glasgow giants came from behind twice to win 4-3 in Belgium in the first leg against Antwerp last week, with Borna Barisic's second penalty of the game, in the last minute, proving decisive. At home this season, even without fans, Rangers have been untouchable, with 18 wins and a draw in 19 games, and just seven goals conceded. The fitness of prolific right-back James Tavernier, who came off in the first leg, could be crucial. The first meeting of two former European champions in AC Milan and Red Star Belgrade lived up to expectations, with the Serbians twice coming from behind to draw 2-2 at home in last week's first leg, Milan Pavlov scoring their second equalizer in injury time. That game was overshadowed by accusations of racist abuse aimed at Zlatan Ibrahimovic, with Red Star condemning insults addressed to the veteran Swede, whose father is Bosnian. — AFP

Sport | Times

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Tiger's legendary career in jeopardy

WASHINGTON: The amazing golf career of Tiger Woods, from two-year-old prodigy to his epic comeback 2019 Masters victory, was in jeopardy Tuesday after injuries suffered in a serious solo car crash. The 45-year-old American, among the world's most famous athletes for the past quarter-century, underwent surgery for multiple leg injuries following the early morning wreck near Los Angeles.

It could mean the end of a groundbreaking career that has seen Woods win 15 major titles, three shy of the all-time record set by Jack Nicklaus, and 82 US PGA crowns, level with Sam Snead for the all-time mark. Woods has faced plenty of prior troubles off the course, including multiple back and knee surgeries, the 2009 revelation of multiple affairs that led to an emotional public apology and divorce from wife Elin Nordegren plus a 2017 reckless driving incident.

Woods was recovering from 2017 back surgery when he was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, his mug shot drawing worldwide attention. He said he had not realized how prescription drugs he was taking might interact and later pleaded guilty to reckless driving. In the 1990s, Woods put himself alongside pal and NBA star Michael Jordan as two of the world's most iconic sports stars and richest endorsement pitchmen, his fame going beyond golf lovers or sports fans.

Woods thrilled audiences with his skill as well as a winning charm and personality, global audiences inviting him into their homes through television every week, while at the same time keeping private details about his life. Woods was the first black winner of the Masters in 1997, hugging his father Earl after his historic victory in course record fashion.

In 2019, Woods would come off the

same green at Augusta National after winning his first major title since 2008 and hug his children, Sam and Charlie, in a bookend moment to signal a completed return from back surgery Woods hoped would allow him a normal life. It also gave him another chance at golfing glory.

Woods, who spent a record 683 weeks as world number one, is 50th in this week's world rankings. At age two, Woods charmed on a TV show with his putting skill. The child prodigy was a three-time US Amateur winner before turning pro in 1996 with endorsement deals and a message: "Hello world."

Woods won the Las Vegas Invitational in October 1996 to secure his place on the PGA Tour and six months later delivered a 12-stroke victory for the ages at 21 at Augusta National for a green jacket and the start of "Tiger-mania" interest that overwhelmed anything golf had ever seen. Woods had brought a youthful excitement and fitness emphasis unseen among golfers, delivering imaginative shotmaking and a big-driving game that put him among the greatest champions the sport had ever known.

'Tiger Slam' in 2000-01

He pulled off one of golf's greatest achievements in 2000 and early 2001 with the "Tiger Slam" — winning four consecutive majors. Woods won the 2000 US Open at Pebble Beach by 15 strokes, the biggest major blowout in history, then captured the Open Championship at St. Andrews to complete the career Grand Slam. He edged Bob May in a playoff at the 2000 PGA and captured the 2001 Masters to own all four major titles at once, an unprecedented feat.

Woods won the 2008 US Open at Torrey Pines on a broken leg, downing Rocco Mediate in an 18-hole playoff, and



PACIFIC PALISADES: Tiger Woods on hand at the trophy presentation ceremony after the final round of the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club on February 21, 2021 in Pacific Palisades, California. — AFP

won six 2019 titles but lost a major for the first time when leading after 54 holes at the 2009 PGA Championship. Three months later, after a low-speed crash near his home, details of extra-marital affairs by Woods became public, leading to an apology and divorce and a golf layoff until the 2010 Masters, where he shared fourth and began to rebuild his career.

Woods wouldn't win again before

2012 at Bay Hill. He won three titles in 2012 and five in 2013, but back pain began limiting him and it would take four operations and five years before Woods won again at the 2018 Tour Championship, setting the stage for his 2019 Masters victory. With his most recent triumph at the 2019 Zozo Championship in Japan, Woods matched the late Snead for the US PGA

all-time win record.

After serving as a playing captain for the triumphant 2019 US team at the Presidents Cup in Australia, Woods shared ninth at Torrey Pines, his best 2020 finish. In last year's majors, Woods was 37th at the PGA Championship, missed the cut at US Open and shared 38th at the Masters last November in his most recent tour outing. — AFP






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