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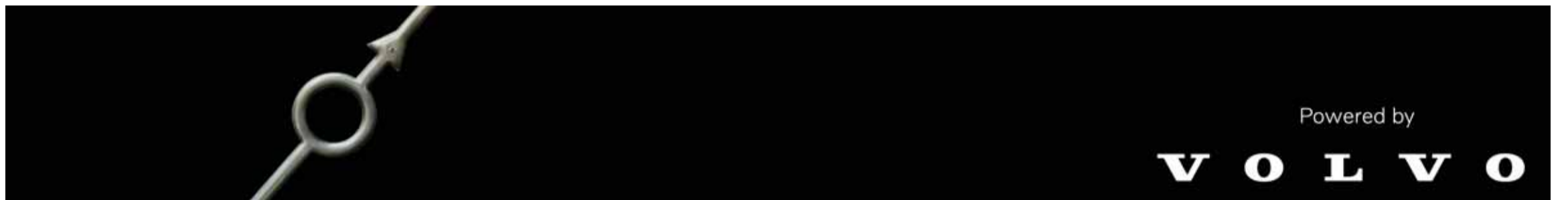
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Oil row flares as UAE rejects 'unjust' OPEC+ output deal

Row threatens to derail energy market's post-pandemic recovery

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates yesterday criticized the current oil output deal among OPEC+ alliance members as unjust, escalating a row that could derail the energy market's post-pandemic recovery. The UAE's push to increase its production baseline is reported to have derailed last week's meeting of the alliance of oil-producing countries.

"The UAE demands to have justice in the new agreement after April, and it is our sovereign right to demand reciprocity with the rest of the countries," Energy Minister Suhail Mohamed Al-Mazrouei said in a television interview. "It is unreasonable to accept further injustice and sacrifice - we have been patient," he said in an interview with

Sky News Arabia, in unusually frank comments from an official in the UAE, which typically handles disputes discreetly.

While OPEC+ leaders Saudi Arabia and Russia support extending the deal as it is until Dec 2022, the UAE wants to lock in an increase in production before agreeing to an extension beyond April when the current agreement expires. Videoconference talks were held Friday between the 13 members of OPEC proper led by Saudi Arabia, followed by a technical meeting and discussions between the 23 members of OPEC+. The wider grouping includes Russia, the world's second-largest oil producer.

The hitch in discussions came "due to the UAE

raising a last-minute objection to the Russian-Saudi Arabia deal reached earlier", according to analysts from Deutsche Bank. "The UAE, which has raised its production capacity since 2018 when the individual baselines were set, insisted on having its baseline lifted by 0.6 million barrels per day (bpd) to 3.8 million bpd, thereby allowing them a unilateral production increase within the current quota framework," according to Ole Hansen from Saxobank.

"Negotiations... will be difficult as OPEC+ knows that if the UAE is allowed to produce from a different base, other members may protest," said Louise Dickson from Rystad. OPEC+ essentially faces a choice between acceding to Abu Dhabi's demands,

or failing to reach a deal which could drive crude prices sharply higher. Also at risk is the unity of the alliance, which if broken could trigger a price war that would create global economic havoc.

OPEC said its meeting would reconvene today at the cartel's Vienna headquarters. Mazrouei said the UAE was ready to have a committee of independent bodies formed to look into its request. Bloomberg news agency reported Thursday an agreement had been floated that would raise production by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August onwards, reaching an extra two million bpd by the end of 2021.

Continued on Page 2

Lawmaker asks PM for details on state assets

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Muhallal Al-Mudhaf sent a series of questions to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah asking for details about Kuwait's state assets including the future generations fund and the general reserve fund, both of which are managed by Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA). He demanded to know the value of the assets of the general reserve fund and future generations fund and crude oil reserves, in addition to real estate assets and the difference between the value of assets in March 2020 and March this year.

He also asked the prime minister the value of liabilities on the state, including construction projects, treasury bonds, arms purchases and others. The lawmaker also demanded to know the difference between the assets and liabilities and the geographic distribution of Kuwait's investments abroad.

Mudhaf's questions come after an Assembly session that was scheduled to discuss the state's financial status on Thursday was cancelled after Cabinet ministers walked out of the meeting when opposition MPs occupied seats reserved for ministers. Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada was due to brief MPs about the figures of state reserves, which are kept confidential. Following the session, the minister said in a statement that Kuwait's official assets have posted unprecedented growth over the past 12 months, with assets in the future generations fund growing by as much as 33 percent between March 31, 2020 and March 31, 2021. Estimates have put the country's total assets at close to \$1 trillion.

The minister gave no figures because they are confidential, but based on an official document released by opposition MP Hasan Jowhar last month, the fund's assets reached KD 159 billion on March 31 last year. This means that the assets have grown to KD 211.5 billion or \$702 billion, the highest ever. The document also showed that assets in other state establishments like the Public Institute for Social Security (pension agency), Kuwait Petroleum Corp, Kuwait Fund for Arab Development, Credit Bank and others reached KD 59.5 billion on March 31 last year.

If those assets have also grown by the same percentage, their total on March 31 this year would be KD 78.8 billion or \$261 billion. The minister however did not say by how much these assets have grown, but the social security institution had also announced unprecedented growth. This would put total assets of Kuwait at \$963 billion, a record high and just short of the one trillion mark.

Continued on Page 2

Philippine military plane crash kills 45

COTABATO: At least 45 people were killed and dozens injured yesterday when a Philippine military aircraft carrying troops crashed and burst into flames after missing the runway in the country's south, officials said. Nearly a hundred people, most of them recent army graduates, were on the C-130 Hercules transport plane which was trying to land on Jolo island in Sulu province around midday.

Some of the soldiers were seen jumping out of the plane before it hit the ground and exploded into flames, said Major General William Gonzales, commander of the Joint Task Force-Sulu. It was one of the country's deadliest military aviation accidents. "This is a sad day but we have to remain hopeful," Gonzales said in a statement. "We enjoin the nation to pray for those who are injured and those who have perished in this tragedy."

Continued on Page 2



Smoke billows from the wreckage of a Philippine Air Force C-130 transport plane after it crashed near the airport in Jolo on the southern island of Mindanao yesterday. — AFP

Saudi confronts rise of 'misyar'

RIYADH: The no-strings-attached "misyar" marriage often done in secret is fast pervading Saudi society - a boon for cash-strapped men unable to afford expensive traditional weddings, but deplored by critics for legitimizing promiscuity. The practice, usually a temporary alliance in which the wife waives some conventional marriage rights such as cohabitation and financial support, has been legally permitted in the conservative Muslim kingdom for decades.

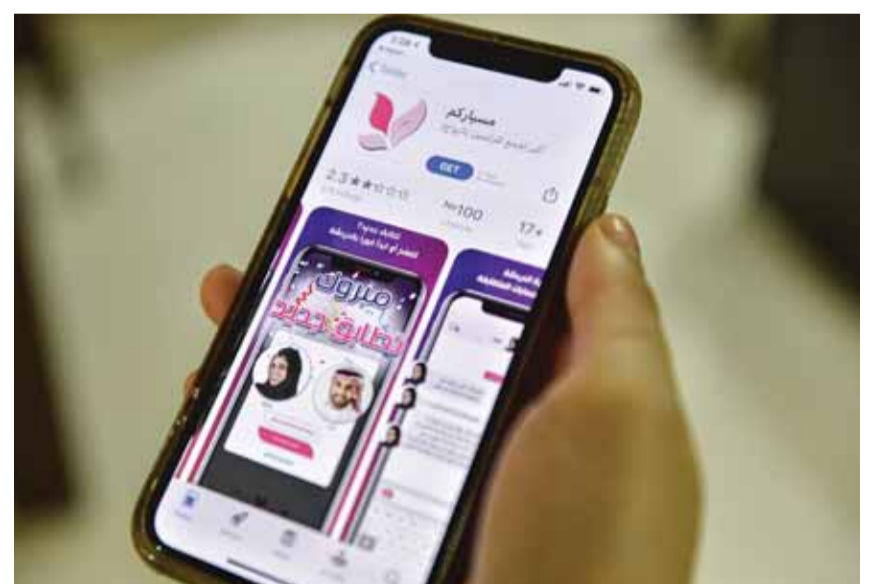
More than a dozen interviews with matchmakers and misyar couples - including grooms juggling other conventional marriages - offer a window into a phenomenon still shrouded in secrecy and shame, despite its proliferation.

The testimonies highlight how misyar is seen as a hybrid between marriage and singlehood, benefiting polygamists without the stress of maintaining a second household.

Despite its potential for abuse, it also appeals to some women keen to shun patriarchal expectations of traditional marriages, as well as unmarried couples seeking religious cover for sexual relationships, forbidden by Islam outside wedlock. "Misyar offers comfort, freedom and companionship that is halal (permitted in Islam)," said a Saudi government employee in his 40s, who has been in such a relationship with a Saudi widow in her 30s for more than two years.

He told AFP he had three children from a separate, conventional marriage, and visits his misyar wife in her Riyadh home "whenever" he wants. He did not say what she gained from the secret alliance.

Continued on Page 2



RIYADH: A woman holds a smartphone showing on its app store an app for facilitating misyar marriages on Oct 29, 2020. — AFP

Lebanon medicine importers warn drugs running out

BEIRUT: Lebanon's medicine importers yesterday said they had run out of hundreds of essential drugs and warned of more shortages, as the country's dire financial crisis batters the health sector. Lebanese are grappling with a raft of shortages, including petrol, as the caretaker government discusses lifting subsidies it can no longer afford amid what the World Bank says is one of the world's worst financial crises since the 1850s.

The local currency has lost more than 90 percent of

its value on the black market, but the central bank had been providing importers with dollars at a much more favorable official rate to cover a large part of the cost of imported drugs. Medicine "imports have almost completely ground to a halt over the past month", the association of pharmaceutical importers said in a statement.

The syndicate said the central bank has not released the promised dollars to pay suppliers abroad, who are owed more than \$600 million in accumulated dues since December, and importers cannot obtain new lines of credit. "Importing companies' stocks of hundreds of medicines to treat chronic and incurable diseases have run out," it warned. "And hundreds more will run out through July if we cannot resume imports as soon as possible."

Syndicate head Karim Gebara told AFP some drugs

to treat cardiac diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and multiple sclerosis were already out of stock. If nothing is done, "the situation will be catastrophic by the end of July" depriving "hundreds of thousands of patients" of their medication, he warned. On Thursday, President Michel Aoun said he had agreed with ministers and the central bank chief to "continue subsidizing medication and medical supplies" selected by the health ministry according to priority.

The Lebanese state is providing less than five hours of electricity a day in most areas, as it struggles to come up with the foreign currency for fuel imports. For the past months, Lebanese motorists have had to queue for hours outside petrol stations in scorching heat as fuel has become in short supply. Filling up a car with petrol has increased by 55 percent in the past two weeks, as the government has slashed fuel subsidies. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince receives Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (Integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Yousef Al-Roumi.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. His Highness

the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He also received Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber

Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness the

Deputy Amir and Crown Prince received Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (Integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Yousef Al-Roumi. — KUNA

State award reflects 'honorable image' of talented youth: Minister

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi praised yesterday the annual 'State award of admiration and encouragement,' saying it was an honorable image of the talented Kuwaiti youths. In a speech he delivered at a ceremony held at Abdullhussain Abdulredha Theater, the Minister said, "we are honoring our culture by awarding these talented Kuwaiti youths." He congratulated the winners of the state awards, wishing them success and further achievements, praising the role of the higher committee of the state award. The Minister expressed the state desire to make a comprehensive and qualitative development at the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL). The developing plan includes raising overall quality standards of culture and arts in all fields provided by the NCCAL, the Minister explained. The technical development is also on the agenda to reach higher standards of creativity and excellence.

Secretary General of the NCCAL Kamel Al-Abduljalil said that holding this annual event on its 31st edition despite the COVID-19 pandemic precautions reflects the prestige and high value of this award that aims to provide a creative, productive, civilized, and intellectual society. He stressed the role played by NCCAL in supporting and directing society by building an encouraging environment for more knowledge and learning. NCCAL aspires to provide promising opportunities and investment to enable young entrepreneurs, who own small businesses to activate and develop artistic and historic facilities that belong to the Council. The encouragement award first edition was held in 1988. Winners are granted a figurine depicting the award and KD 10,000 cash for each. The other category of the award was launched in 2000, granting each winner KD 20,000 cash.



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi speaks during the event. — KUNA

Winners of the awards hailed the country's effort to encourage the creativity of artists and talented people. The annual honoring of talented Kuwaitis encourages them to exert more efforts to develop the cultural field, a number of winners said in separate statements yesterday, on the sidelines of the ceremony. Winner of a musical award Yousef Al-Muhanna noted that the award encourages him to do better work in the future. Meanwhile, winner of plastic arts award artist Abdulredha Baqer expressed his joy over winning the prize, adding that he had taken part in different exhibitions in Kuwait and abroad. Moreover, Muthafar Rashid won a social studies award, while authors Abdullah Al-Busais and Abdulwahab Al-Hamady won literature awards. Since the honorary award was launched in 1999, 66 Kuwaiti figures have won it, while 201 others have won the state's encouragement award since 1988.

Philippine military plane...

Continued from Page 1

Among the dead were 42 soldiers and three civilians, according to the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Forty-nine military personnel and four civilians were also injured and taken to hospital. Five members of the military are still missing. Photos of the crash site released by the Joint Task Force-Sulu showed the damaged tail and the smoking wreckage of the fuselage's back section laying near coconut trees.

Images published by local media outlet Pondohan TV on its Facebook page showed the wreckage engulfed in flames and a plume of thick black smoke rising above houses located near the site. Armed Forces Chief General Cirilito Sobejana said the aircraft was carrying troops from Cagayan de Oro on the southern island of Mindanao when it "missed the runway" as it tried to land on Jolo. The plane tried to "regain power but didn't make it", he told local media.

The four-engine plane crashed near a quarry in a lightly populated area. First Lieutenant Jerrica Angela Manongdo said. High school student Almar Hajiri Aki told AFP he was standing beside a road when he heard a "loud explosion" behind him. "I thought our house was hit," said the 21-year-old, who rushed with his neighbors to help pull soldiers

from the wreckage.

Western Mindanao Command chief Lieutenant General Corletan Vinluan told AFP the aircraft overshoot the landing strip and broke into two, according to initial reports. Air force spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Maynard Mariano said the cause of the crash would be investigated, while armed forces spokesman Major General Edgard Arevalo told DZBB radio that it was being treated as an accident rather than an attack.

Most of the passengers had recently graduated from basic military training and were being deployed to the restive island as part of a joint task force fighting terrorism in the Muslim-majority region. They were supposed to report for duty yesterday, Gonzales said. The military has a heavy presence in the southern Philippines where militant groups, including the kidnap-for-ransom outfit Abu Sanyal, operate.

C-130s have been the workhorses of air forces around the world for decades, used to transport troops, supplies and vehicles. They are also often deployed to deliver humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The Hercules that crashed yesterday has the same tail number as one acquired from the United States and delivered to the Philippines earlier this year. Senator Richard Gordon said it was the fourth military aircraft accident this year with "mass casualties". "Are we buying defective crafts... (with) the people's money?" he tweeted. Lorenzana said the previous mishaps were being probed and dismissed speculation about the causes as "disrespectful" to victims and their families. — AFP

Saudi confronts rise of 'misyar'...

Continued from Page 1

"My (Saudi) friend has had 11 secret misyar wives. He divorces and marries another, divorces and marries another..." he added, trailing off.

Saudis, as well as the kingdom's expat workers, can be seen hunting on dating apps and matrimonial websites for such partners. "Misyar is cheaper. There is no dowry, no obligation," a 40-year-old Egyptian pharmacist in Riyadh told AFP. He began searching after sending his wife and five-year-old son back to Cairo at the start of the coronavirus pandemic last year, mainly due to rising living costs and an expat levy introduced by Saudi Arabia in recent years.

"Being away from my wife is hard," he said, adding he had been searching for misyar through "khatba" matchmakers on Instagram who charge as much as 5,000 riyals (\$1,333). "I gave them my preference: Weight, size, skin color... but no match so far." Such marriages are often short-lived, with most ending in divorce from anywhere between 14 and 60 days, the kingdom's Al-Watan newspaper reported in 2018, citing justice ministry sources.

It is touted by some women as a fleeting escape from spinsterhood or a chance for a fresh beginning for divorcees and widows, who otherwise struggle to remarry. A close associate of a divorced Syrian woman in Riyadh told AFP she was in a secret misyar relationship because she feared her ex-husband, a Saudi, would legally seek custody of her two children if he discovered that she had remarried.

It is impossible to estimate the number of such

marriages, many of which are undocumented. Saudi clerics say the practice has proliferated since 1996, when the then grand mufti, the kingdom's highest religious authority, legitimized it with an Islamic edict. But many question the validity of a furtive practice at odds with the main tenets of Islamic marriage, which requires a public declaration.

A prominent Riyadh cleric attributed its proliferation to men unwilling to shoulder the full responsibilities of polygamous marriage, which is permitted in Islam as long as all wives are treated equally. In a 2019 column in the Saudi Gazette daily, columnist Tariq Al-Maeena described misyar as a "license to have multiple partners without much responsibility or expense".

"Reports in the Saudi press have spoken of growing concerns over the number of children fathered by Saudi males in their trips abroad, and abandoned for all practical purposes," he wrote. Some women are forced to pursue court cases against Saudi men refusing to accept children born into misyar relationships. "A woman contacted me and said: 'I am a misyar wife and my husband does not recognize my child'," the Riyadh cleric told AFP. "He says 'the child is not my problem'. I advised her to take him to court and fight for her rights."

Still, women are encouraged socially to turn a blind eye to their husband's misyar adventures. Fahad Almuais, a matchmaker who says his clients are mostly "polygamists", spoke of one Saudi government worker who kept his misyar relationship hidden from his first wife. When he began routinely disappearing every weekend, her female neighbor advised the suspicious wife to "stay quiet". "He married misyar so he wouldn't make (your life) a living hell," Almuais told online news portal Thmanyah, quoting the neighbor. "Be patient and let him go for the weekend, and the rest of the days he's yours." — AFP

Oil row flares as UAE rejects...

Continued from Page 1

This would fit the broad strategy followed by OPEC+ since May: Gradually increasing output which it had drastically cut in reaction to the collapse in demand at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, the group has held almost monthly meetings to coordinate their response. Their strategy has succeeded in steering prices back upwards - they are now at levels not seen since Oct 2018.

The alliance has to navigate a complex market,

characterized by an uptick in demand which may yet turn out to be fragile, as well as the possible complication of a return of more Iranian exports in the medium term. But current high prices - which saw Brent crude climb above \$76 a barrel last week - are prompting grumbles from large crude consumers, such as India.

Abu Dhabi's muscular position is also pitting it against its long-time ally and neighbor Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter. The UAE reportedly floated the idea of leaving OPEC+ in late 2020, in order to pump more oil and capitalize on the huge investment it has made to expand capacity. "The UAE will push hard at this juncture to use this meeting to get their excess capacity recognized and brought back online, Roger Diwan, oil analyst at consultant IHS Markit Ltd, told Bloomberg News. "Compromise exists, but it is just how they bring their capacity, not if." — AFP

Lawmaker asks PM for details...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said yesterday he plans to file to grill HHH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah over alleged violations. Azemi said he will file the two grillings at the beginning of the next term, scheduled to start in October,

adding that the grilling of the defense minister will include agencies under his authority. He provided no details on the grilling of the prime minister.

Relations between the opposition lawmakers and the government were strained during the previous term which was closed on Thursday after Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and a minority of MPs assisted by 16 Cabinet ministers voted to delay grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022. Opposition MPs have already filed three grillings against the prime minister over a variety of alleged violations, but none of them was debated due to the controversial Assembly decision, which the opposition insists is illegal.

Local

Human rights society program helps Kuwait migrant workers

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society for Human Rights (KSHR) realized foreign workers in Kuwait are facing many problems, especially those with a low level of education, which prompted it to launch a project called 'Together' to help migrant workers in Kuwait.

The Together project started in 2016 in cooperation with the Embassy of Netherlands in Kuwait. The first phase of the project focused on awareness and included publishing the Kuwait Labor Law in five languages - Arabic, English, Tagalog, Hindi and Urdu. It also included launching the Togetherkw.org platform and a hotline.

In 2018, the second phase of Together was launched in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. This phase included practical support such as arranging legal services to defend and represent workers in their legal issues. This phase also included issuing guidelines in five languages.

The third phase of this project began on Sept 1, 2020 in cooperation with the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and will conclude on

Dec 31, 2021. This phase includes various activities such as the 'Friends of Migrants Group', which is being formed now.

"The goal of forming this group is to gather human rights and labor rights activists, especially lawyers, journalists, psychologists and other activists, or others interested in this issue, to provide consultations in their fields," Saleh Al-Hasan, Coordinator of the Friends of Migrants Group, told Kuwait Times.

"The lawyers in this group can make workers become aware of their rights. Psychologists can provide psychological consultations, while journalists and social media influencers can highlight their problems or publish awareness posts," he explained.

The hotline number is 22215150. "On calling this number, workers will get advice or consultations in five languages. We have received over 3,000 calls since January this year, while our annual target was 4,000, which means we will exceed our expectations by the end of this year," added Hasan. He concluded by saying that the support of their partners in every phase made it possible to pay the professionals that provide support to migrant workers.



Speaker receives new UAE envoy

KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem received in his office yesterday UAE's Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Motar Al-Neyadi on the occasion of assuming his new post, the parliament said in a statement. — KUNA



National Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets UAE's Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Motar Al-Neyadi.

36 centers to give COVID-19 vaccines in Kuwait

KUWAIT: A total of 36 centers are available in Kuwait to provide COVID-19 vaccines, including 31 in primary health care clinics, Health Ministry Spokesman Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Among these 31 centers, 15 are allocated to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, while the Oxford-AstraZeneca is given at the remaining 16, he added. The other centers include the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref, the drive-thru center in Jaber Causeway, the military hospital, Ahmadi hospital and Kuwait National Guard clinic, he noted.

Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases had on Saturday jumped by 1,612 to 362,018 as deaths rose by 10 to 2,005, according to the health ministry. Another 1,873 people were cured of the virus, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 341,477, ministry spokesperson Dr Sanad said in a



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

statement. The number of active cases stood at 18,536 as of Saturday, with 299 of them in intensive care units, he added, revealing that some 12,216 swab tests were conducted over the same period taking the total to 3,021,382. He went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, as the main way to halt the spread of the virus. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Paramedics attend to the man after firemen rescued him off the Salmiya beach yesterday.

Man rescued off Salmiya beach

KUWAIT: Firemen rescued a man after his speedboat was involved in an accident off

Salmiya beach yesterday. The man was knocked off his boat and carried by the currents before rescuers were able to save him. He was handed over to paramedics on the scene who attended to his injuries before transporting him to the nearest medical facility, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement.



Fire engines are seen outside a Khaitan building where a fire was reported Saturday night.

In other news, firemen battled a blaze reported in a Khaitan building Saturday night. The fire started in a storage area on the ground floor, as firemen evacuated the building before putting out the flames successfully. No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened into the fire, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement.

Kuwait Interior Ministry seizes huge amount of drugs in five months

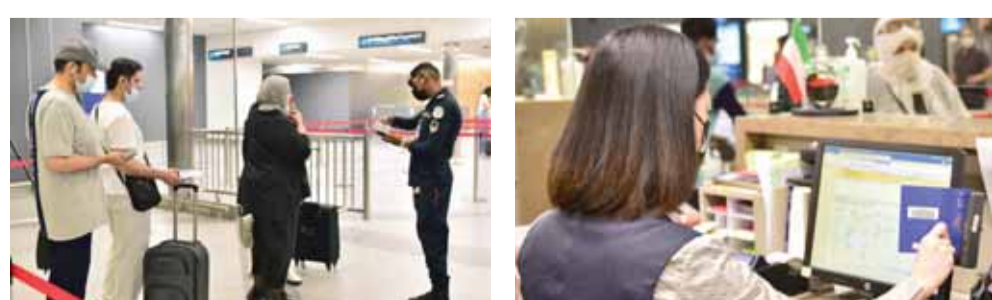
KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced yesterday the seizure and confiscation of a huge amount of various narcotics in addition to some unlicensed arms and ammunition between January 1 and May 31. The MoI said in a statement that the General Administration of Narcotics Control with the support of security services seized 650 kilograms of hashish, 22 kg and 831 grams of amphetamine (shabu) pills, 21,851 kg of heroin, between January 1 and May 31. Moreover, security personnel had seized 32,739 kg of marijuana, 28,646 kg of chemicals, 25 kg of raw chemicals, 565 grams of cocaine, more than nine million psychotropic pills, 842 stimulating pills and 183 bottles of liquor during the same period. The ministry added that 864 drug cases were registered, including 24 arrest-warrant cases, 107 cases of possession with intent to trade and 697 cases of possession with intent to use. Up to 1,099 suspects were arrested and 325 of them were deported, the MoI statement added. It also reported, covering the same period of time, that two marijuana farms were discovered and narcotics were seized, in addition to seizing 189 cigarettes emptied to be filled with narcotics, two pistols, 75 bullets, a Kalashnikov assault rifle and paper impregnated with chemical substance. Necessary legal measures had been taken to deal with these cases, the MoI affirmed. It confirmed that further security campaigns would be launched against drugs and illegal materials to protect and preserve Kuwait's society. — KUNA

Authority launches project to train youth leaders

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait's Public Authority for Youth (PAY) Dr Mishal Al-Rubaie said yesterday that the authority launched a project to train and prepare youth leaders and new graduates in a number of fields. In a statement marking the launch of the training program for lawyers' assistants, Rubaie said that project aims to create a generation of young leaders in addition to providing job opportunities for young graduates. The project is listed in the 2021-2025 state development plan, as it works on preparing integrated programs for youth within the national youth policy, approved by the Council of Ministers, he said. Regarding the launch of lawyers assistants program, Rubaie explained that the two-month program being held in cooperation with Kuwait Society of Lawyers, for 54 persons to train them to work in law firms and carry out legal advisory roles in the country, he added. This training program is the first of its kind in Kuwait, as it will give trainees skills required especially as it is a profession created by Public Authority of Manpower and Supreme Council for Development and Planning with the aim of "Kuwaitization legal jobs in the country," Rubaie said. — AFP



Dr Mishal Al-Rubaie



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways launched its Malaga, Spain line yesterday, which will be scheduled for two flights a week (Sundays and Thursdays).

Manpower fines 538 firms for violating work ban

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) yesterday issued fines for 538 companies during inspections around Kuwait for allowing workers to work under scorching sun. PAM statistics showed that 57 reports were received as 1,118 sites were inspected. The authority team issued fines for violating a ban on working in exposed areas between 11 am and 4:00 pm starting June 1 until the end of August. According to the statistics, about 879 workers violating the ban, while 425 companies fulfilled the conditions. — KUNA

Local

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DHAMAN holds blood donation drive

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) organized a campaign for its Staff to donate blood in coordination with Kuwait Blood Bank on the occasion of World Blood Donor Day. DHAMAN Acting CEO Dr Mohammad Al-Qenai said: "As part of our community role, this campaign is aimed at increasing awareness about the importance of donating blood, as we are utilizing international health days to spread overall health understanding throughout the community. During this global health-related day, we initiated this campaign in coordination with Kuwait Blood Bank with the participation of company staff to support the bank's stocks."

"The campaign witnessed the participation of many Staff who rushed to save the lives of patients in need, which shows the amount of faith they have in their health, social and humanitarian responsibilities. Such a positive and efficient response is a source of pride and joy to everyone at DHAMAN," Qenai noted.

"Simultaneously with the blood donation, DHAMAN also developed and distributed a number of awareness messages through internal tools and social media platforms to give an overview about blood donation, its significance, methodology and benefits to both patients and donors, as well as issuing an introductory publication in Arabic and English about blood donation," Qenai added.

Qenai concluded by expressing utmost appreciation and gratitude to everyone at Kuwait Blood Bank, especially the Blood Transfusion Division, for their role in the success of all blood donation campaigns, thanking the Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department for her support and primary role in the success of donation campaigns aimed at supporting the blood bank reserves in Kuwait's hospitals.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken on Saturday from Kuwait City shows a view of the sun and the sunspot lying in the solar active region "AR2835". Solar active regions are often responsible for solar flares and coronal mass ejections, storms which affect space weather near planet Earth. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Minister meets Kuwait Esports Club board

KUWAIT: State Minister for Municipal Affairs, State Minister for Housing and Urban Development Shaya Abdulrahman Al-Shaya met with members of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Esports Club, led by Abdulrahman Al-Ali, in presence of Secretary Faisal Abul and Treasurer Nada Al-Gharabally. The meeting took place in coordination with Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri. The two sides discussed the club's vision and current plans during the pandemic, along with its preparations for future events. Means of communications and development among the two parties were discussed with the aim of enhancing Kuwait's esports, the club noted in a press statement.



KUWAIT: Deputy Director General of the Public Authority for Sport (PAS) received Hussein Al-Musallam on the occasion of his appointment as president of the International Swimming Federation (FINA). Deputy Director General for Competitive Sports at PAS Dr Saqer Al-Mulla attended the meeting.

Gulf Bank participates in Bnaider Beach clean-up

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank led an extensive community and environmental clean-up campaign on Friday to clean up Bnaider Beach in Kuwait, in cooperation with the international environmental organization, Trash Hero. Gulf Bank led this campaign as part of its commitment to preserving the environment through various efforts that the Bank directs in the hopes of achieving environmental and community sustainability.

Chalet owners, beachgoers and Gulf Bank volunteers participated in the campaign, which took place on the morning of July 2 at Bnaider Beach, as part of an eventful community clean-up day that included family members, adults and children. To encourage even more participation, Gulf Bank also led a range of activities and competitions on social media.

Commenting on the campaign, Lujain Al-Qenai, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "At Gulf Bank, we make it a point to

prioritize initiatives like these not only because they bring together multiple members of our society, but also because they have such an important impact on our ability to achieve long-term sustainability. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in this campaign, which will undoubtedly benefit everyone involved and our greater community."

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the bank. Gulf Bank's social responsibility initiatives go hand in hand with international efforts, aligning with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also known as the Global Goals, the SDGs were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.



Lujain Al-Qenai



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Bangladesh's virus hotspot gasps for air as tough lockdown bites

Rescuers search for survivors in landslide-hit Japan town

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IN SPACE: This screen grab made from video released by Chinese state broadcaster CCTV shows Chinese astronaut Liu Boming stepping outside China's new Tiangong space station in orbit yesterday. —AFP

Chinese astronauts complete first spacewalk

Tiangong's construction a major step in China's ambitious space program

TIANGONG STATION: Chinese astronauts successfully performed the country's first tandem spacewalk yesterday, working for seven hours on the outside of the new Tiangong station in orbit around Earth. Tiangong's construction is a major step in China's ambitious space program, which has seen the nation land a rover on Mars and send probes to the Moon.

Three astronauts blasted off last month to become the station's first crew, where they are to remain for three months in China's longest crewed mission to date. Yesterday morning, two of them exited the station for around seven hours of work in the first spacewalk at Tiangong, the China Manned Space Agency said.

"The safe return of astronauts Liu Boming and Tang Hongbo to the Tianhe core module marks the complete success of the first spacewalk in our country's space station construction," the space agency said. Their tasks involved elevating a panoramic camera outside the Tianhe core module, as well as testing the station's robotic arm which will be used to transfer future modules around the station, state media said.

The astronauts installed foot stops on the robotic arm and, with its support, carried out other assembly work, added the space agency. In a video clip of Liu leaving the cabin, he exclaimed: "Wow, it's too beau-

tiful out here." Television footage showed the astronauts preparing for the spacewalk by donning gear and conducting health checks while exercising.

Liu and Tang were later shown opening the hatch and exiting the module separately, wearing newly developed suits said to weigh some 130 kilograms. They were supported from inside the station by the mission commander Nie Haisheng, a decorated air force pilot who is on his third space mission.

This was the first of two spacewalks planned for the mission, both expected to last six or seven hours. It was also the first time since 2008 that Chinese astronauts went outside their spacecraft. Back then, Zhai Zhigang made China the third country to complete a spacewalk after the Soviet Union and the United States.

This is China's first crewed mission in nearly five years, and a matter of huge prestige as the country marks the 100th anniversary of the ruling Communist Party this month with a massive propaganda campaign. To prepare, the crew underwent more than 6,000 hours of training. The Chinese space agency is planning a total of 11 launches through to the end of next year, including three more crewed missions. They will deliver two lab modules to expand the sta-

tion, along with supplies and astronauts.

'Beyond words'

Yesterday, state television showed footage of the astronauts' daily lives on Tiangong, including setting up an exercise bike and working out on a treadmill. One crew member was shown eating with chopsticks, while another did a handstand and somersault after mealtime. The mission attracted a flurry of discussion online, with a hashtag about the spacewalk garnering 200 million views on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo. One user wrote: "How much I'm moved by each step of achievement is beyond words."

President Xi Jinping has said the construction of China's first space station is opening "new horizons" in humanity's bid to explore the cosmos. China's ambition to build an orbiting outpost of its own was fuelled in part by a US ban on its astronauts on the International Space Station, a collaboration between the United States, Russia, Canada, Europe and Japan.

The ISS is due for retirement after 2024, although NASA has said it could potentially remain functional beyond 2028. Tiangong is expected to have a lifespan of at least 10 years, and China has said it would be open to international collaboration on the station. —AFP

Harsher sentences for Channel migrants: UK

LONDON: Britain has announced it will seek harsher sentences for migrants caught entering the country without permission amid a record-breaking surge in arrivals over the English Channel. The stricter prison sentences for both migrants and people smugglers come as part of Home Secretary Priti Patel's plans to overhaul asylum rules in a bid to prevent what her department has characterised as "asylum shopping".

The legislation announced Saturday makes it a criminal offence to arrive in the UK without permission, with a maximum sentence for those entering the country unlawfully increasing from six months to four years. Under the law set for its first reading in parliament on Tuesday, people smugglers will face life sentences, up from the current maximum of 14 years.

Patel said the plans were "fair but firm", adding that the UK would "welcome people through safe and legal routes whilst preventing abuse of the system, cracking down on illegal entry and the criminality associated with it". The bill's unveiling comes as the Britain's asylum system strains under the pressure of a record number of arrivals over the Channel.

A total of nearly 6,000 migrants have made the dangerous crossing in the first six months of 2021. The total number of 8,417 arrivals for the whole of 2020 is likely to be overtaken in the next two months if trends continue, according to figures from the domestic Press Association news agency.

The Home Office said it was "very likely that those travelling to the UK via small boat will have come from a safe European Union country in



DEAL, UNITED KINGDOM : File photo shows migrants travel by inflatable boat as they reach the shore near Deal on the south east coast of England. Britain announced it will seek harsher sentences for migrants caught entering the country without permission. —AFP

which they could have claimed asylum". "Where this is the case, they are not seeking refuge at the earliest opportunity or showing good reason for seeking to enter the UK illegally but are instead 'asylum shopping' by picking the UK as a preferred destination over others and using an illegal route to get here," it added.

The government launched plans earlier this year for what it called the biggest changes to asylum rules in decades, saying the current system was overwhelmed. The plan drew fire from refugee groups, who accused the ruling Conservatives of political cynicism. "Instead of peddling deliberately misleading myths and untruths about asylum and migration, the Home Office should be establishing safe routes for those few people escaping persecution who wish to seek asylum here," Amnesty International UK's refugee and migrant rights director said. —AFP

toral visit," Francis told pilgrims gathered on Rome's St Peter's Square for his traditional Sunday prayer.

He added that he would celebrate the closing mass of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest on September 12. Francis' visit to Slovakia will include the cities of Bratislava, Presov, Kosice and Sastin, the Vatican said in a statement.

Although more detailed plans for the trip will be announced later, there was no sign the pope intends to meet Hungary's political leaders during his stop in Budapest. —AFP

Pope to visit Hungary, Slovakia

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis said yesterday he would visit Hungary and Slovakia from September 12 to 15, including celebrating a mass in Hungarian capital Budapest. "I'm happy to announce that from September 12 to 15... I will go to Slovakia for a pas-

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International

Rescuers search for survivors in landslide-hit Japan town

Nineteen rescued and around 20 others are still missing

ATAMI: Rescuers in a Japanese holiday town hit by a deadly landslide were forced to suspend their search for survivors several times yesterday as more rain lashed the devastated area. Two women were confirmed dead after torrents of mud crashed through part of the hot-spring resort of Atami in central Japan on Saturday morning, following days of heavy downpours. Nineteen people have been rescued and around 20 others are still missing, the town's disaster-management spokesman Yuta Hara told AFP. "We are doing our best to rescue survivors while carefully checking the weather and other conditions," he said. Hara said around 130 homes and other buildings had been destroyed as the landslide swept through the residential area, leaving behind a quagmire that stretched

down to the nearby coast.

Vehicles were buried and buildings tipped from their foundations, with an air-conditioning unit seen dangling from one devastated home towards the slurry below. Hara said the landslide was one kilometre (0.6 miles) long and 120 metres (400 feet) wide at some points. Hundreds of rescue workers and military personnel were combing through the mud and debris with diggers and on foot, climbing across cracked roofs and sticking poles into the ground to check for bodies.

TV footage showed coast guard divers searching in murky seas, while police officers scoured damaged houses with sniffer dogs. Rain hampered rescue operations however, with workers forced to abandon the site multiple times as smaller landslides took place and

disaster warning alerts were issued.

Survivors at a nearby evacuation centre told AFP of their panic when the landslide began. "When I opened the door, everyone was rushing into the street and a policeman came up to me and said: 'What are you doing here, you have to hurry, everyone is evacuating!'" local resident Kazuyo Yamada told AFP. "So I went out in the rain in a hurry, without changing, with just a bag."

More landslides feared

Fisherman Hisao Shima, 58, said that when he heard the landslide warning siren, at first he "didn't think it was going to be that bad". "But when I stepped outside later, the rumbling of the ground all around was very strong," he said. Atami, around 90 kilometres (55 miles) southwest of Tokyo, saw rainfall of 313 millimetres in just 48 hours to Saturday—higher than the average monthly total for July of 242.5 millimetres, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Much of Japan is currently in its annual rainy season, which lasts several weeks and often causes floods and landslides. Scientists say climate change is intensifying the phenomenon because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, resulting in more intense rainfall. More downpours are forecast in the coming days across Japan's main island.

"This rainy-season front is expected to keep causing heavy rain in many areas. There is a fear that land disasters could occur even when the rain stops," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told ministers at an emergency meeting, NHK said yesterday that at least seven other landslides had been reported across Japan.

"Landslides can occur again and again at the same place even if the rain stops. Residents and rescuers should remain on alert," Takeo Moriwaki, professor of geotechnical engineering at Hiroshima Institute of Technology, told AFP. Town disaster spokesman Hara said 387 residents had been evacuated, with survivors in face masks seen reading newspapers with images of the disaster on the front page. Residents in many other cities in Shizuoka have also been ordered to evacuate. — AFP



ATAMI: A general view shows mud and debris at the scene of a landslide following days of heavy rain in the Izusan area of Atami in Shizuoka Prefecture yesterday. — AFP

Tropical storm Elsa churns past Haiti, headed for Cuba

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Tropical Storm Elsa churned late Saturday off the southwestern coast of Haiti, headed toward Jamaica and eastern Cuba as forecasters warned of heavy rains, flash flooding and mudslides. The weather system brought maximum sustained winds of 65 miles (100 kilometers) per hour and was moving northwest at 17 miles per hour, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

"There are fairly intense gusts of wind and light rain, but so far we have not recorded any damage," said Jerry Chandler, director of the Haitian Civil Protection Agency. Elsa was the Atlantic's first hurricane of the season on Friday, when it was a Category 1 storm, until being downgraded on Saturday afternoon.

The storm was not expected to change in strength overnight, with "some slight strengthening possible Sunday afternoon as Elsa approaches the south-central coast of Cuba," the NHC said in its 11 pm (0300 GMT Sunday) update. Forecasters had warned of rainfall of 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) across portions of southern Hispaniola and Jamaica, with isolated areas receiving 15 inches. "This rain may lead to scattered flash flooding and mudslides, some of which may be significant in nature," the NHC said. Cuba is Elsa's next target, with hurricane conditions expected on the eastern part of the island Sunday, while the southern coast could see a storm surge of 3 to 5 feet. From Sunday into Monday, parts of Cuba could get 5 to 10 inches of rain, with isolated incidents of 15 inches resulting in "significant flash flooding and mudslides," the NHC said.

Haiti on alert

In Haiti, authorities raised the alert level to the maximum red on Saturday morning, warning the entire country to remain vigilant. Officials in the impoverished nation have voiced fears that they lack emergency supplies such as food and water.

The government recently used a good part of its emergency resources in another crisis: the evacuation of thousands of people from their homes in Port-au-Prince because of raging gang violence. Many of the displaced are staying in gyms, schools, or other public buildings, and some supplies originally earmarked for hurricane season have been diverted to support them, Chandler said. Authorities want to ship emergency supplies to the southern coast, but heavily armed gangs control part of the only road leading from the capital to the south and are allowing nothing through. To reach these threatened areas, Chandler said, "we have to go through red zones," referring to gang-held territory. In 2016, Category 4 Hurricane Matthew killed more than 500 people in southern Haiti and caused nearly \$2 billion in damage.

Preparations in Florida

In the United States, parts of the Florida Keys were placed under a tropical storm watch on Saturday evening with forecasters expecting rain, storm surges, and strong winds from Elsa to affect the area and the Florida peninsula early next week. Hurricane-related weather would be bad news for the Florida town of Surfside, near Miami, where rescuers are trying to dig out a collapsed condo building in search of survivors and bodies.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis told reporters Saturday that the part of the building still standing could be demolished before Elsa's arrival to protect the safety of the hundreds of search and rescue workers at the site. The work could be completed within 36 hours, entailing "minimal work stoppage from the search and rescue teams," he said. — AFP

Four dead in Cyprus' worst forest fire

GIOI VAVATSINIAS: A huge forest blaze in Cyprus killed four people, destroyed homes and forced evacuations of villages, police said yesterday, as Greece, Israel and other countries deployed fire-fighting planes to the Mediterranean island. The Egyptian foreign ministry said the four dead were agricultural workers from the North African country, while Nicosia vowed in a tweet to "stand by the victims' families in the face of this tragedy, offering every support".

The fire broke out Saturday afternoon and swept through districts in the southern foothills of the Troodos mountains as the country grapples with a blistering heatwave. "It is a tragedy," President Nicos Anastasiades said on Twitter, describing it as "the largest fire since 1974", the year when the island was divided after Turkey occupied its northern third.

The blaze had caused loss of life and destroyed property and forest lands, Anastasiades said, adding that "the government will provide immediate assistance" to the victims and their families. More than 50 square kilometres (20 square miles) of forest and farmland had been destroyed. Thick gnarled trunks of ancient olive trees, emblematic of the holiday island, were reduced to smouldering stumps. Firefighters were successful in bringing the main fire under control yesterday, authorities said, while warning that strengthening winds could yet propel a resurgence.

Interior Minister Nicos Nouris told reporters the four Egyptians' charred bodies were found outside the village of Odos in Larnaca district. Their burnt-out car was found at the bottom of a ravine and the four bodies some 600 metres away. A policeman at the scene told AFP that they appeared to have fled the car on foot but run in the direction of the wind-fanned flames, in a doomed attempt to escape.

In areas where the fire had been tamed, charred tree trunks were visible on hillsides, while grey ash had replaced yellowed scrub as far as the eye could see in non-forested areas. A 67-year-old farmer was arrested and remanded in custody on suspicion of starting the blaze. He was seen by an eyewitness leaving the village of Arakapas in his car at the same time the fire started there on Saturday, police said. He could face charges of recklessly causing the deaths of the four Egyptians, police added.

Extended heatwave

Anastasiades visited a crisis management centre in the village of Vavatsinia, located a few kilometres east of the blaze, yesterday morning, before heading to areas ravaged by the flames, according to the CNA news agency. He said the blaze appeared largely contained but could resurge.

"The high temperatures and the wind are our biggest dangers," he said. "The whole situation is under partial control. What worries us is the possible increase of the winds." Firefighters were seen along the road leading to Vavatsinia and several helicopters hovered above the fire as a thick grey smoke obscured the sky. An AFP correspondent in the village of Ora reported seeing several burned out homes. Janez Lenarcic, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, said on Saturday its "aerial firefighting capacity" had been mobilised, with Italy and Greece sending planes to help.

Israel deployed a C-130 Hercules and two "Air Tractor" firefighting aircraft. Israel's firefighting authority said that the planes were due to land in Larnaca, where they would join the Italian and Greek teams and also Spanish and British crews.

Britain, which has military bases on Cyprus, deployed two search and rescue helicopters and was helping refuel Cypriot aircraft. Cyprus has experienced extended heatwaves and periods of drought in recent years. In the past few days, the temperature has topped 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) inland and there has been very little rain since mid-April. — AFP



GIOI VAVATSINIAS: Heavy smoke covers the sky above the village of Ora in the southern slopes of the Troodos mountains, as a giant fire rages on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, yesterday. — AFP



PERPIGNAN: French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party leader and member of parliament Marine Le Pen waves on stage during a congress of the party in Perpignan, southern France, yesterday. — AFP

Le Pen re-elected as head of RN

PERPIGNAN: Marine Le Pen won re-election as head of France's far-right National Rally (RN) yesterday at a party congress, where she is seeking new impetus for her 2022 presidential bid after performing badly in regional polls. The National Rally (RN), which had been tipped for strong gains in last month's regional elections, was left floundering after failing to win any of the 13 regions in mainland France.

The results raised questions about Le Pen's strategy of trying to detoxify her party's brand and position it as a more mainstream right-wing force. But she faced no challenge for the party leadership, with her quest for a fourth term winning the backing of 98.35 percent of members in an online and postal ballot, RN announced on the second day of its congress in the southern city of Perpignan.

The 52-year-old trained lawyer is expected to use a keynote address later yesterday to try and rally the troops ahead of the presidential vote. Polls show the election coming down to another duel between Le Pen and centrist President Emmanuel Macron, who defeated the anti-immigration candidate handily in the second round of the 2017 election.

But that scenario is no longer seen as a foregone conclusion. Macron is also seen as being weakened by the poor performance of his Republic on the Move (LREM) party in the regional election. LREM, which was founded in 2016, finished last of the big parties, winning just 7 percent of second-round votes in an election characterised by record low turnout. — AFP

10 killed in Myanmar clashes

YANGON: At least 10 anti-junta fighters and civilians were killed during clashes with the military in central Myanmar, villagers said yesterday, as locals increasingly take up arms against the regime in the coup-wracked country. Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government, with 890 people killed in a junta crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. In some areas civilians have formed "defence forces" to combat the State Administration Council, as the junta dubs itself, often using hunting rifles or makeshift weapons cobbled together from household items. The central Sagaing region has been the site of multiple skirmishes between defence forces and the military, and on Friday fighting broke out in Depayin township.

Residents told AFP that military trucks entered their area and opened fire on a village near the jungle hoping to flush out members of the local defence force. "We heard the shooting of artillery 26 times," said a villager, who added that anti-junta fighters tried to retaliate but could not fend off the attack. "They shot everyone who they saw on the road and in the village. They did not just have one target," he said. Civilians were among the dead, he added. Villagers waited until Saturday to venture out of their homes to assess the casualties, said another witness, who helped to collect the bodies around Depayin township.

"We found in one place eight people were killed, and in another area two were dead," he said. Local media reported a higher death toll, though it could not be independently verified by AFP. State-run media offered a different account of the skirmish, saying the military was patrolling the area when they were ambushed.

Soldiers fended off "armed terrorists" and later found "four mortars and six percussion lock firearms", reported the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper. In another attack in a different part of Sagaing one member of the security forces was killed and authorities were "working to stabilise the area", the paper added.

Despite the threat of crackdowns, protesters in Myanmar are still taking to the streets daily in defiance of the military regime. Yesterday residents across Sagaing held short demonstrations, flashing a three-finger salute of defiance during rapid marches through the streets. — AFP

International

Bangladesh's virus hotspot gasps for air as tough lockdown bites

Number of burials this year is much higher than at any time in the past

KHULNA: Empty oxygen cylinders are piling up almost as fast as bodies in the city of Khulna, which has become Bangladesh's coronavirus hotspot in a dire new surge. The government has ordered a strict week-long nationwide lockdown in a bid to halt the spread of COVID-19, but Khulna's hospitals cannot cope. Neither can relatives of the dead.

Mohammad Siddik leaned against empty cylinders under a hospital emergency porch, tearfully telling relatives in phone calls that his 50-year-old brother had died. The 42-year-old businessman brought his brother to hospital as his condition deteriorated. But there was no bed and no oxygen, he told AFP.

"He passed away gasping for air in the hospital corridor," said Siddik. "They didn't give him any oxygen until the end." The southwestern district bordering India's West Bengal state has seen a sharp rise in coronavirus infections blamed on the more contagious Delta variant, which was first detected in India.

On Thursday, Khulna city recorded 46 virus deaths, according to an official count, while in earlier waves the daily death toll never went into double figures. Most people in the city of 680,000 people say the real toll is much higher and, according to reports, graveyards cannot cope with the number of dead in nearby cities such as Satkhira.

The main state-run Khulna general hospital is one of four in the city treating coronavirus patients and has 400 beds but demand far outstrips supply. "We have been dealing with enormous admission pressure in hospitals," said Niaz Muhammad, chief government doctor for the Khulna region. He denied there was an oxygen shortage.

'The situation is dire'

But another grieving relative also told how her brother had died without oxygen. Afroza, who used only one name, shed tears in a hospital ward. "If only they could have given a little oxygen to my brother, he would still be alive," she said. Police and troops have patrolled the streets across Bangladesh, home to 168 million people, since Thursday to enforce the lockdown. Hundreds of people have been arrested each day for leaving their homes.

In Khulna, restrictions on movement have been in place since last month, as the infection rate has soared. But the city's factories are still open and many people say they are forced to go out to work. Student Rafikul Islam said he walked seven kilometres (four miles) to his part-time factory job as there were no buses.

"Most shops and transport are shut down. But given Khulna's serious situation, we must maintain this. There is no other way. The situation is dire," he said. Officially, Bangladesh has recorded just over 935,000 cases and 14,900 deaths in the past 15 months, but most people say the figures are drastically under-reported.

Mohammad Babu, who works in a Khulna cemetery, said he has never been so busy in his 32 years digging graves. "The number of burials this year is much higher than at any time in the past," he said. Health officials blame the surge on people's refusal to wear masks or keep social distance. "People cannot be bothered to isolate and this spreads the infection even more," said Suhas Halder, spokesperson for Khulna's main coronavirus hospital. —AFP



KHULNA, Bangladesh: In this picture taken yesterday Men unload medical oxygen cylinders at the entrance of a government hospital dedicated to treat COVID-19 patients in Khulna. —AFP

Families flee as Taliban seize key Kandahar district

KANDAHAR: The Taliban have captured a key district in their former bastion of Kandahar after fierce night-time fighting with Afghan government forces, officials said yesterday, sending scores of families fleeing from the area. The insurgents have pressed on with their campaign to capture territory across Afghanistan's rural areas since early May when the US military began its final pullout of troops from the vio-

lence-wracked country.

The fall of Panjwai district in the southern province of Kandahar comes just two days after US and NATO forces vacated their main Bagram Air Base near Kabul, from where they led operations for two decades against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies. Over the years, the Taliban and Afghan forces have regularly clashed in and around Panjwai, with the insurgents aiming to seize it given its proximity to Kandahar city, the provincial capital.

The leader of the Taliban, Hibatullah Akhundzada, hails from Panjwai. The province of Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban, who went on to rule Afghanistan with a harsh version of Islamic sharia law until being overthrown by a US-led invasion in 2001. Panjwai district governor Hasti Mohammad said Afghan forces and the Taliban clashed during the night, resulting

in government forces retreating from the area.

"The Taliban have captured the district police headquarters and governor's office building," he told AFP. Kandahar provincial council head Sayed Jan Khakriwal confirmed the fall of Panjwai, but accused government forces of "intentionally withdrawing".

'Taliban don't want peace'

Scores of families of Panjwai fled their homes after the Taliban captured the district, an AFP correspondent reported. "The Taliban fired on our car as I was fleeing with my family. At least five bullets hit my car," Giran, a resident of Panjwai told AFP as he took refuge in Kandahar city. "The Taliban are on top of the mountains and firing at any moving vehicles. The Taliban don't want peace."

Assadullah, a commander of border police in the area,

said it was only the police force that was fighting against the insurgents. "The army and the commandos who have better military equipment are not fighting at all," he said.

Panjwai is the fifth district in Kandahar province to fall to the insurgents in recent weeks. Later yesterday, the secretary of Kandahar's governor was killed when a bomb attached to his car blew up near their office compound, the Ministry of Interior said. Fighting has raged across several provinces of Afghanistan and the Taliban claim to have seized more than 100 out of nearly 400 districts in the country.

Afghan officials dispute the claims but acknowledge that government troops have retreated from some districts. It is difficult to independently verify the situation. The exit of foreign troops from Bagram Air Base, north of Kabul, has fuelled concerns the insurgents will ramp up their campaign to capture new territory. —AFP



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MONDAY, JULY 5, 2021

Business

Zain wins Gulf Breakthrough Award from Dell Technologies

During virtual MERAT Partner Summit 2021

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, received the Gulf Breakthrough Award from Dell Technologies, the global leader in technology solutions. The award recognizes Zain's Strategic Partnership with Dell in driving digital transformation within the telecom and IT sector in the region, as well as its offering of advanced solutions across its B2B and B2C platforms as per world-class standards.

The announcement was made during the virtual MERAT Partner Summit 2021, which Dell Technologies hosts every year to shed light on its top partners in the Middle East, Russia, Africa, and Turkey region. The Breakthrough Award, which is dedicated to Dell's partners in the Gulf region, reflected Zain's leadership in driving digital transformation initiatives locally and regionally. Zain expressed its pride in winning this prestigious award, which is a recognition from one of the world's biggest technology leaders in its capabilities and contributions to empowering digital transformation. The award reflects the company's leadership in adopting the highest international standards to offer advanced solutions with fantastic service quality to its subscribers and corporate customers, whom it considers an essential part of the Zain family, the biggest



family of subscribers in Kuwait. In late 2019, Zain signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Dell Technologies that enabled it to implement a variety of technology solutions that benefit clients operat-

ing in Kuwait. The MoU aimed at achieving heightened levels of productivity, efficiency, and profitability for clients as Zain continues its digital transformation journey and further enhances its role as a key supporter of

the New Kuwait Vision 2035.

As part of the agreement, Zain implemented a multi-cloud IT strategy to leverage a range of cloud-based services. Dell Technologies enabled Zain to provide value-added cloud services to customers, who benefited from modern enterprise technologies such as Infrastructure-as-a-Service, Platform-as-a-Service, workforce transformation, and more.

Zain also benefited from the seamless integration of a wide range of Dell's solutions along with Zain's internal applications. This not only unified user data and facilitated accurate user profiling, but also developed unique processes given the solutions' ability to create more focused and targeted reports and campaigns. Zain continues to achieve its strategy towards fully transforming into an integrated digital service provider, through which the company aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market. This award reflects Zain's commitment in further pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the local business sector, as the company considers itself an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait on all levels, especially within business areas.

Bezos leaves enduring legacy as he steps away as Amazon CEO

WASHINGTON: As he prepares to blast off into a new career stage, Jeff Bezos leaves an enduring legacy after transforming Amazon from a modest online bookseller into one of the world's most powerful corporations. Bezos, 57, was set to hand over the job of Amazon chief executive on Monday to Andy Jassy and turn his attention to his private space exploration firm, philanthropy and other endeavors. He will retain a key role, however, as executive chair at the technology and e-commerce colossus he founded 27 years ago. The transition comes after a spectacular streak for Amazon, which has drawn attention for its innovations.



Jeff Bezos

But the firm has also been vilified over business practices that have crushed competitors and raised concerns over treatment of a workforce of more than one million. "Bezos has been a transformational leader... in book selling, the retail market, cloud computing and home delivery," said Darrell West, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation. "He was a pioneer who introduced many of the conveniences that people take for granted, such as going to an online store, ordering something, and having it delivered to your home the next day. The whole e-commerce sector owes many of its innovations to this individual." In public appearances, Bezos often recounts the early days at Amazon, started in his garage, when he packed up orders himself and drove boxes to the post office. Today, Amazon has a market value of more than \$1.7 trillion. It posted 2020 annual revenues of \$386 billion from operations in e-commerce, cloud computing, groceries, artificial intelligence, streaming media and more.

'An instinct'

Bezos "had an instinct for the right thing" in finding the next market, said Roger Kay, analyst at Endpoint Technologies Associates. Kay said Bezos deftly transitioned from books to other merchandise to an online marketplace, and successfully built the cloud infrastructure for the company which became the highly

profitable Amazon Web Services. Amazon outlasted its rivals by forgoing profits in its early years "and reinvesting everything into expanding," Kay said.

"If you look at the trajectory now, it was all logical," Kay added. "You can say Bezos has been one of the best business architects of his time." Bob O'Donnell of Technalysis Research said Bezos "wasn't the first or the only one, but he took the concept (of e-commerce) and worked to perfect it."

Amazon was able to outdo rivals because Bezos "recognized the need to build infrastructure," including the vast network of warehouses, trucks, planes and other logistics for the business, O'Donnell said. "A lot of other companies didn't want to spend money on the messy behind-the-scenes work." The stunning rise of Amazon has made Bezos into one of the world's richest people, with a net worth close to \$200 billion, even after a divorce settlement which gave part of his stake to his ex-wife MacKenzie Scott. Bezos will step away from day-to-day Amazon management to spend more time on projects including his space firm Blue Origin—which is set to take him into space later this month.

He owns the Washington Post newspaper and has devoted time and funds to efforts to fight climate change, while also facing criticism after recent reports that he paid no income tax at all some years.

Whither Amazon?

His departure leaves questions about the future of Amazon as it faces a torrent of regulatory scrutiny and criticism from activists. US lawmakers are considering a measure that would make it easier to break up Amazon, amid concerns that a handful of Big Tech firms have become too dominant, hurting competition in a way that eventually harms consumers. Amazon was well-positioned during the coronavirus pandemic with its fast delivery of goods and groceries, and boosted its US workforce to more than 800,000.

While the company has boasted of its \$15 minimum wage and other benefits, critics say its relentless focus on efficiency and worker surveillance has treated employees like machines. The Teamsters union recently launched a campaign to organize Amazon employees, claiming its workers "face dehumanizing, unsafe and low-pay jobs, with high turnover and no voice at work." Bezos appeared to respond to worker concerns earlier this year when he called for a "better vision" for employees after a bruising battle over a unionization vote in Alabama, which ultimately failed.

He laid out a new goal for the company to be "Earth's best employer and Earth's safest place to work," in his final letter as chief executive. Yet Amazon is likely to face challenges ahead that will make it difficult to keep its trajectory. "The backlash against this sector probably will result in stronger government oversight of technology companies," said West.

Kay said Amazon might become "a victim of its own success" and be forced to break up into two or more firms. Still, he said that "each of those entities would thrive in its own market; I can easily imagine the sum of the parts being greater than the whole, so it might not hurt shareholders." — AFP



can take out of the island nation would also be restricted, it added. Sri Lanka has already banned imports of luxury goods and cars since last year to combat the foreign currency outflows. The government is planning to extend the import ban to mobile phones, computers and electronic consumer goods, local media reported recently. The central bank said in a statement that the restrictions were to "assist and maintain the financial system stability". — AFP

Sri Lanka tightens outflows of foreign currency

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank yesterday further tightened controls on the outflow of foreign currency to combat a growing cash crunch triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. Foreign exchange reserves have almost halved since late 2019 to \$4 billion after the rupee sank to a record low last year.

The economy has been badly hit by the spread of the virus and lockdowns in its worst downturn since independence from Britain in 1948. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said overseas investments by local firms would be suspended for six months.

The amount of capital that companies and citizens

Massive ransomware attack potentially hit 1,000 businesses

SAN FRANCISCO: A ransomware attack on a US IT company potentially targeted 1,000 businesses, researchers said Saturday, with one of Sweden's biggest supermarket chains revealing it had to temporarily close around 800 stores after losing access to its checkouts.

Russian-based hackers have been blamed for a string of ransomware attacks, and US President Joe Biden recently raised the threat in talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Biden ordered a full investigation on Saturday, while adding "the initial thinking was it was not the Russian government, but we're not sure yet." "I'll know better tomorrow, and if it is either with the knowledge of and/or a consequence of Russia, then I told Putin we will respond," he said.

The IT company targeted, Kaseya, said Friday evening it had limited the attack to "a very small percentage of our customers" who use its signature VSA software—currently estimated at fewer than 40 worldwide." But cybersecurity firm Huntress Labs said in a Reddit forum that it was working with partners targeted in the attack, and that the software was manipulated "to encrypt more than 1,000 companies." Ransomware attacks typically involve locking away data in systems using encryption, making companies pay to regain access. Brett Callow, an analyst for cybersecurity company Emsisoft, said it remained unknown how many companies were affected and said the scale of attack could be "without precedent." Kaseya describes itself as a leading provider of IT and security management services to small and medium-sized businesses. VSA is designed to let companies manage networks of computers and printers from a single point.

"One of our subcontractors was hit by a digital attack, and that's why our checkouts aren't working anymore," Coop Sweden, which accounts for around 20 percent of the country's supermarket sector, said in a statement. "We regret the situation and will do all we can to reopen swiftly," the cooperative added. Coop Sweden did not name the subcontractor or reveal the hacking method used against it. But the Swedish subsidiary of the Visma software group said the problem was linked to the Kaseya attack.

Immediate shutdown

Kaseya became aware of a possible incident with VSA at midday Friday on the US East Coast and "immediately shut down" its servers as a "precautionary measure," it said. It also "notified our on-premises customers via email, in-product notes, and phone to shut down their VSA servers to prevent them from being compromised." "We believe that we have identified the source of the vulnerability and are preparing a patch to mitigate it," the company said in a statement.

According to the New Zealand government's Computer Emergency Response Team, the attackers were from a hacking group known as REvil. REvil was also, according to the FBI, behind last month's attack on JBS, one of the world's biggest meat processors, which ended with the Brazil-based company paying bitcoin worth \$11 million to the hackers.

'Avoid paying'

The UN Security Council this week held its first formal public meeting on cybersecurity, addressing the growing threat of hacks to countries' key infrastructure. Several Security Council members acknowledged the grave dangers posed by cybercrime, notably ransomware attacks on major installations and companies. Multiple US companies, including the computer group SolarWinds and the Colonial oil pipeline, have also recently been targeted by ransomware attacks.

The FBI has blamed those attacks on hackers based in Russian territory. But typically, "cybercriminals operate company by company," said Gerome Billois, a



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on May 13, 2017 Network cables are seen going into a server in an office building in Washington, DC. A ransomware attack launched hours before the US Independence Day holiday weekend potentially affected 1,000 businesses, researchers said. — AFP

cybersecurity expert with Wavestone consultancy. "In this case, they attacked a company that provides software for managing data systems, allowing them to simultaneously target several dozen—possibly even hundreds—of companies," he said. Determining exactly how many is difficult, since affected companies lose their communications systems at the same time, Billois said. And Kaseya, which had urged its clients to shut down servers running its VSA platform, cannot know whether systems were turned off "voluntarily or by force." "This is one of the largest, most widespread ransomware attacks I've seen in my career," said Alfred Saikali of law firm Shook, Hardy & Bacon. "I have never seen this many companies hire us in a single day for the same incident. As a general rule, you want to avoid paying the ransom at all costs." — AFP

Woes deepen at Vodafone's India unit

NEW DELHI: Woes are deepening for Vodafone's India unit as it seeks more time to pay mobile network fees levied by the government, with creditor banks reportedly pleading with New Delhi to cut the firm some slack. The debt-ridden joint venture has long been facing stiff competition in the market of 1.3 billion people from Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani.

In a call to analysts Friday, Vodafone Idea said it has requested the Department of Telecommunications for a year's extension to pay \$2.9 billion rupees (\$1.1 billion) in mobile network fees due in April 2022.

The firm cited low tariff rates and other business environment challenges for its inability to generate sufficient cash from its operations. "I think it is only reasonable to say to the government that they have to provide an extension to the moratorium until these pricing-related issues and the stress in the industry and the sector is removed," CEO Ravinder Takkar said.

Indian banks with large outstanding loans to the firm have also reportedly written to the finance ministry expressing fears about a bankruptcy being triggered if the telecom operator is not granted relief on upcoming payments. Vodafone Idea's total debt stood at 1.86 trillion rupees at the end of March 2021.—AFP

CANNES: THE RESURRECTIONS OF DENEUVE, PENN AND JFK

If there's an early theme to this year's Cannes Film Festival, it might be resurrections. US stars Sean Penn and Val Kilmer are looking for one and French icon Catherine Deneuve is guaranteed one just by her presence, while director Oliver Stone is hoping to resuscitate some of his tinfoil-hat theories about the assassination of JFK. And, of course, the 74th edition is all about the rebirth of cinema more generally, after last year's festival was cancelled by the pandemic. Here are five key things to look out for when the world's leading film showcase kicks off on Tuesday.



French icon Catherine Deneuve



Director Oliver Stone



US star Val Kilmer



US star Sean Penn

Queen Catherine

France cannot wait to see its beloved Deneuve climb the famed stairs of the Palais des Festivals in Cannes once more. Eighteen months after being hospitalized with a minor stroke, the 77-year-old legend will be back to promote her 139th film, "Peaceful". Deneuve is synonymous with the festival, having first mounted the stairs for the 1964 Palme d'Or-winning "Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and appearing most recently at the last edition in 2019 to present the top award to South Korea's Bong Joon-ho for "Parasite".

Sean Penn's redemption?

Can the brooding actor-director pull off a comeback after his nightmarish appearance at the festival in 2016? His film "The Last Face", a romance between two humanitarians against the backdrop of an African war, was booed mercilessly when it competed for the Palme that year and was torn to shreds by critics, marking the low-point of an incredible career. The 60-year-old will be hoping to regain some glory with "Flag Day", about a con man's tricky relationship with his child, starring himself and real-life daughter Dylan.

Val: pain and glory

Hankies at the ready for "Val", the tragic tale of what happened to one of the biggest stars of 1980s and 1990s Hollywood. Kilmer had some huge roles early on, from the Iceman in "Top Gun" to Jim Morrison in "The Doors". But then things started to go wrong, with a series of stinkers like "Batman Forever" and a growing reputation as a prima donna. And then came cancer of the throat and a tracheotomy that has robbed him of his speech. Now on the mend, his story is not yet over, with the Iceman set to return this autumn in "Top Gun: Maverick".

Oliver Stone's JFK obsession

Before people got excited about Hillary Clinton's paedophile dungeon and Bill Gates implanting computer chips into everyone's arms, there was the obsession with who really killed US president John F. Kennedy. No one has done more to shift the blame away from Lee Harvey Oswald than Oliver Stone, who turned the multitude of theories into a gripping drama starring Kevin Costner in 1991's "JFK". Thirty years later, he's back at it with a new documentary, "JFK: Through the Looking Glass" that promises to rake over some recently released information about everyone's favorite conspiracy.

Wes Anderson's family of stars

One film in particular is going to keep the photographers busy at Cannes. "The French Dispatch", the latest from king of quirk Wes Anderson, somehow crowbars in yet more stars alongside his usual menagerie of regulars. His 10th film, in competition for the Palme d'Or, features Timothee Chalamet, Benicio Del Toro, Owen Wilson, Lea Seydoux, three-time Oscar winner Frances McDormand, and of course Bill Murray, among others. — AFP



Journalists take images as workers install a giant banner at the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes, southeastern France, two days before the start of the 74th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

The 74th Cannes Film Festival in numbers

Here are a few numbers related to the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, which runs from July 6 to 17:

Five

The number of times the festival has not gone ahead: in 1939 due to the Second World War, in 1948 and 1950 for financial reasons, in 1968 due to protests across France and in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Eight

The number of directors or co-directors who have won the Palme d'Or twice: Francis Ford Coppola, Shohei Imamura, Ken Loach, Bille August, Emir Kusturica, the Dardenne brothers, Michael Haneke and Alf Sjöberg.

19

The number of 18-carat-gold leaves that make up the palm of the trophy. Worth 20,000 euros (\$23,700), it is made by Swiss jeweler Chopard.

20

The contribution in euros requested from each attendee this year for the first time to offset the festival's carbon footprint, as the organizers seek to make environmental concerns a central part of the event. The money will be distributed by an independent panel of experts.

24

The number of films in competition this year. That is up on recent years but there have been more in the past. The inaugural edition in 1944 saw 44 feature films competing. Twenty-four is also the number of steps leading up to the Palais des Festivals, nicknamed the "steps of glory" in France.

20,000,000

The budget in euros for organizing this year's festival. Half comes from national and local authorities, and the rest from sponsors. — AFP

Disick and Hamlin's romance 'is growing all the time'

Scott Disick and Amelia Hamlin's romance "continues to grow as time goes on". The 38-year-old reality star and Amelia, 20, "really love each other and care for each other" and their relationship is currently in a "really good place", according to an insider. The source told Us Weekly: "Everything's going well for them. Their relationship continues to grow as time goes on." Scott and Amelia's romance has the potential to be a "long-lasting relationship" - but the insider insisted it's still too early to make any long-term predictions. The source explained: "It's hard to say where they'll be a year from now, but judging by how it's going, it can certainly be a long-lasting relationship." The loved-up duo have "exciting things planned" for the coming weeks and months. The insider said: "They love travelling and creating new memories together. They really live that luxe lifestyle." And Amelia is already developing a strong bond with Scott's children - Mason, 11, Penelope, eight, and Reign, six. The source added: "Kourtney



[Kardashian, Scott's ex-girlfriend] is cordial with Amelia and they all seem to get along well." Meanwhile, Amelia recently revealed she aspires to be "glam all the time". The actress is tired of donning loungewear during the coronavirus pandemic and she is now taking her wardrobe to the next level. She shared: "I want to be glam all the time. 'My overall fashion vibe right this second is chic and simple, a lot of pastels and just things that are super versatile from night-to-day.' Amelia gets her fashion inspiration from her mother Lisa Rinna and sister Deliah. She explained: "We're all constantly bouncing ideas off of the other, and I think that's really an amazing thing. Because we have three women in the house with three different opinions and different vibes."

Cannes' green push faces industry's rubbish record

The Cannes Film Festival has vowed to go green, even trimming its red carpet in half-but can it make any difference to an industry built around private jets and rampant consumption? Movie stars from Leonardo DiCaprio to Juliette Binoche have made environmental campaigning a central part of their image in recent years, fronting movies about climate change and using their soap boxes to call for action. Keen to show support, the organizers of Cannes, which runs from July 6 to 17, have said the environmental "emergency is at the heart of its concerns" this year.

They have banned plastic bottles, deployed a fleet of electric cars, and organized a special program of climate-focused films. Perhaps most symbolic of all, the festival is cutting the volume of its red carpet by 50 percent, and making it from recycled materials rather than the usual PVC.

But the film industry, with its non-stop, continent-skipping circus of premieres and parties, is far from getting any gold stars from Greta. DiCaprio, for instance, famously pulled off an 8,000-mile round trip in a private jet in 2016 to pick up an environmental award. Cannes finds itself in an awkward position-hosting movies about climate change followed by massive parties that generate tons of waste and relying heavily on people flying in from all over the world.

This year, it hopes to offset some of that carbon footprint with a 20-euro contribution from each participant to be disbursed by "a scientific committee of experts". But the organizers admit film festivals are "an environmental challenge" that cannot be addressed overnight.

'Epochal change'

"There is a monstrous job to do" but the efforts are "very encouraging," said French filmmaker and activist Cyril Dion. He is showing his new documentary "Animal", about the threat to global biodiversity, as part of the environmental pro-

gram this year. The festival "is sending a signal that all the others should follow," he said. "These measures reflect an epochal change for cinema." There are signs of change elsewhere in the industry. The Berlin Film Festival's red carpet is made from recycled fishing nets.

In France more broadly, film subsidies will be conditional on sustainability commitments from 2024. But with the signs of crisis mounting, is it still acceptable to gather people from around the globe for a festival? "There is really a change of mindset," said Carole Scotta, head of French production firm Haut et Court and a leading voice in the climate debate. "But it's complicated for Cannes, which has to maintain a certain amount of festivity as the leading festival in the world," she said. "We can't show up in flip-flops."

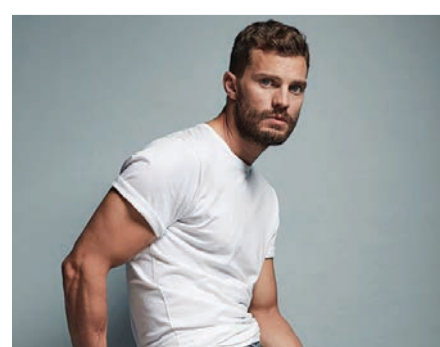


From Cannes to Venice to Sundance to Berlin, Scotta recognizes that the merry-go-round of festivals is "not good for the planet", while the pandemic has shown that digital alternatives are possible. The film industry has a certain "schizophrenia" on the issue, said Simon Valensi, of The Shift Project, a French think-tank pushing for a post-carbon economy. "If we want to respect the Paris climate accords on carbon neutrality by 2050, sooner or later the emissions created by big festivals will have to be put in question," Valensi said. But he added that despite the modest scale of the efforts so far, "it's already a major revolution that the festival is thinking about its economic impact." — AFP

Jamie Dornan: I was always so shy around women

Jamie Dornan has never been "confident" around women. The 39-year-old actor - who has three daughters with wife Amelia Warner - was always "amazed" to see how at ease his friends were around the opposite sex because he never had any "game" himself, so he would have loved to have found himself in a scenario like Anthony, his character in "Wild Mountain Thyme", who is pursued by his neighbor Rosemary (Emily Blunt). He said: "I wish I was pursued by a woman like that when I was younger! That would have been a perfect scenario

for me when I was growing up because I'm not a confident person when it comes to talking to women. I never had it in me. I never chatted. "I was always amazed watching mates of mine go up to girls in bars and just talking to them. I'd see the girls laughing and I was always like, 'What are you saying to those women?' I definitely didn't have any game at all. "When I met my wife, it all happened in a serendipitous way. "Luckily, I didn't have to be aggressively pursuing and I wasn't



aggressively pursued." Jamie felt the character shared many of his insecurities and he put his own "oddsities" into the role. He told Britain's OK! magazine: "As a character, I've probably felt closer to Anthony than anyone else I've ever played but I don't mean that we're identical or we have lots of the same traits. "However, there's something about his lack of self belief that I think we can all recognize. "Sometimes, we all hide it. Particularly in this industry and this game. You're often having to talk to people and having to put your best foot forward and show the best version of yourself - but the reality is, you're often fighting insecurities. I have insecurities. "I've got quite weird tendencies and I felt like Anthony was this platform for me to insert all of my own oddsities into someone and then let them stew within hi and elaborate in whatever way they were going to."



Simon Cowell 'calls police on suspicious character'

Simon Cowell has reportedly been living in fear that an intruder could harm his seven-year-old son. The 61-year-old music mogul is said to have recently called the police after a "suspicious character" was seen loitering at his £10 million mansion in London, with Simon fearing for the safety of his son Eric. A source told The Sun on Sunday newspaper: "There was a man loitering around outside Simon's house, and his re-appearance on several occasions was a concern. Based on that, Simon wanted to have a chat with the coppers. "He had been out at the time, but there were staff in the house and he was very concerned after he was told the man had been picked up on his CCTV. "Because of his past experience, Simon takes security very seriously. "This man could have been a stalker or could have been scoping out his house, as well as others in their neighborhood, as targets for a break-in, so Simon felt it was necessary to have a conversation with the police." Simon previously fell victim to a £1 million raid on his home. The TV star was burgled as he and his family were all in bed six years ago, and he's determined to avoid a repeat of the break-in. Simon previously admitted to stepping up security measures at his home in order to keep his loved ones safe. He said: "I've obviously had to massively increase my personal security at home with every mod-con you can imagine, and all this stuff, including a panic room. My house basically looks like something out of 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'. "We called in these guys and one of the things they suggested was a baseball bat. I'm not even joking. So I literally have a baseball bat ready to go if anyone comes in."



This photograph shows the Shahi Theatre in Shimla. — AFP photos



A projectionist works in a projector room at the Shahi Theatre in Shimla.



The Shahi Theatre in Shimla.

LAST PICTURE SHOW LOOMS FOR BRITISH INDIA'S SUMMER CAPITAL



Owner Sahil Sharma poses for a picture at the Shahi Theatre in Shimla.

With its ancient humming projector and elegant balcony, the Shahi Theatre is the last surviving single-screen cinema in Shimla, the Himalayan hill station that was once the summer retreat of British India. But like many other once-teeming movie houses across the country that were already struggling to stay afloat, the pandemic may be the final death knell for the century-old picture house. It was originally built as a theatre in British times, when the entire colonial administration would decamp from the blistering summer heat of the plains for the cool mountain climate further north. Current owner Sahil Sharma said his grandfather bought the building and turned it into a cinema after the British left in 1947, at a time when the town's other three theatres were too

expensive for ordinary people. "In those days we still had the British legacy that people couldn't go around in the evenings without good formal clothes," Sharma told AFP. "So ordinary and poor people didn't have a cinema they could call their own." Shimla was a popular destination in the golden decades after independence and its cinemas would host prime ministers and celebrities as people flocked to see the latest Bollywood flicks. "I was here in 1972 when the Pakistani president's daughter watched a movie," recalls Ashok Kapoor, 69, who started working at the now-closed Ritz Cinema as a teenager and rose to be manager. She was there, Kapoor says, because elsewhere in Shimla the leaders of India and Pakistan were meeting to defuse tensions after a brief conflict between both countries the

year before, during the Bangladesh war of independence. Satish Kumar, another old hand who has worked at the Shahi for 50 years, says a brisk black market for tickets used to cater for queues that stretched around the block. But, he adds, business has been "really bad over the last few years."

Old-world charm

Shimla has lost some of its old-world charm as the local population has grown and the town has sprawled over the hills, although the main street-The Mall-retains its colonial-era shopfronts. In recent decades cinemagoers have drifted to out-of-town multiplexes with their air conditioning, surround-sound and greater choice of films. The trend has been replicated across the country, with hundreds

of antiquated single-screen cinemas once catering to budget crowds closing their doors in recent years.

Only two Shimla cinemas were left by last year but when India went into a national coronavirus lockdown, the Ritz folded too. Movie houses were only allowed to open again last October but were forced to shut again in April after a vicious new wave of COVID cases that dwarfed the previous year's outbreak. "We aren't sure about our post-corona future," Sharma says, fearing that audiences housebound by the pandemic have permanently switched their movie habits to online streaming. "We don't even know if people would still want to come to cinemas." — AFP

'Not the end': Fans mark 50 years since Jim Morrison's death

Rockers old and young cried, shared a drink and perhaps even a joint in a stylishly overgrown cemetery in Paris on Saturday, marking 50 years since the death of 1960s icon Jim Morrison. Dozens of fans of the frontman of psychedelic rock band The Doors, who decamped to the French capital in early 1971 and died shortly afterwards of a heart attack, flocked to his grave in an overcrowded corner of Pere Lachaise cemetery. "It's important because the music lives on... it's like the music is alive today, like 'Light My Fire' was recorded last week," says Michelle Campbell, a fan from England, recalling the band's greatest hit.



People gather by the grave of The Doors frontman Jim Morrison to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death.

Proving her point, 19-year-old music student Marius de la Brosse, with tousled long dark hair and baggy linen shirt, whips out a guitar and strums a few blues chords. "I like his vision of life," the French



The grave of The Doors frontman Jim Morrison is pictured at the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

teenager says of Morrison. "He was a guy who never had a home, who travelled with dollars in his pocket and just wandered around." Some read poetry, others leave messages close to the grave-one has a lipstick kiss imprint with "one more time" written on it, a reference to the 1968 song "Five-To-One" where Morrison urged youth rebellion. But this is not the 1960s and reminders of modernity are scattered throughout-certain fans mooch around with selfie sticks and many wore the now ubiquitous face masks to protect against the coronavirus.

'Old rockers never die'

The restrictions put in place to combat the spread of the virus meant many fans could not make it. "English fans could not come, we are sorry because we've known them for about 20 years," says Catherine Dalancon, the organizer of the commemoration. Previous events have been uproarious celebrations, and 10 years ago surviving members of The Doors showed up. But this time, coronavirus ensured a more

sombre affair. "I usually meet a lot of people who are not here today," says Parisian Christelle, sitting against a tree, explaining that she visits the grave every major anniversary of Morrison's death and birth. Two small groups of police officers are in attendance to make sure nothing gets out of hand.

But they are not needed-the biggest disturbances coming with Doors music blaring from mobile phones or beer caps falling on nearby gravestones. But die-hard fans are not disheartened. Fred Verheijden, in his seventies, has made it to the grave from the Netherlands. He and his friend both wear T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Old Rockers Never Die", but he pointed to another iconic slogan on the shirt, "Light My Fire". "We named our trip to Paris 'Light My Fire' rather than 'The End' because, as you can see, with all the people here, the Morrison legend continues," he says. — AFP



People gather by the grave of The Doors frontman Jim Morrison to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death at the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris. — AFP photos

Netflix removes Australian spy show in Vietnam over South China Sea map

Netflix has pulled an Australian spy show from its services in Vietnam over scenes containing a map of the South China Sea showing Beijing's claims in the flashpoint waterway. The map-shown briefly in two episodes of "Pine Gap"-had prompted a complaint from the Southeast Asian country's broadcasting authority. China has long used its so-called nine-dash line to justify its claims over most of the resource-rich South China Sea, often to the displeasure of Vietnam, which also claims parts of the waterway.

Vietnam's Authority of Broadcasting and Electronic Information said on its website that the images shown during the six-episode drama had "violated the country's sovereignty over sea and islands". "Netflix's violations have hurt feelings and caused outrage among the entire Vietnamese people," it added. The statement also said this was the third time over the past 12 months that Netflix had been found to "distribute movies and TV shows containing content which violates Vietnam's sovereignty". It singled out Chinese rom-com "Put Your Head on My Shoulder" and the political drama "Madam Secretary".



Netflix confirmed that Pine Gap-which it describes as an international political thriller set around the Australian and American joint defense intelligence facility at Pine Gap in Australia's Northern Territory-had been removed in Vietnam. "Following a written legal demand from the Vietnamese regulator, we have removed the licensed series, Pine Gap, from Netflix in Vietnam, to comply with local law. "It remains available on our service in the rest of the world." China claims the majority of the South China Sea, often invoking its nine-dash line as a supposed historical justification to the waters, a key global shipping route.

In October 2019, Vietnamese authorities pulled the animated film "Abominable", a joint production by DreamWorks and China's Pearl Studio, from cinemas over a scene featuring a similar map showing the nine-dash line. Some films are barred in Vietnam, a one-party state where free speech is tightly controlled, while others are approved for screening only with significant edits. In the 2018 romantic comedy "Crazy Rich Asians", one of the scenes cut from screening in Vietnam featured a designer bag with a map of the world showing disputed South China Sea islands under Beijing's control. — AFP



Portrait of American poet Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, taken by David Bailey.

Passionate Plath love letters to Hughes up for sale

Possessions of Sylvia Plath from her happier early days of her doomed marriage to fellow poet Ted Hughes, including ardent love letters and their wedding rings, are to go on sale at auction, Sotheby's said Friday. The 55 lots are drawn from the private collection of their daughter, Frieda Hughes, and are estimated to raise up to £202,000 (\$280,000) when they are sold July 9-21. The love affair between the American Plath and Englishman Hughes, her trauma when he left after six years of marriage for another woman, and her suicide at the age of 30 in 1963, have been an enduring source of public fascination and spawned an industry of books and films.

The 16 letters from Plath to Hughes date from soon after they got married in 1956, when she was still studying in Cambridge and he was working in London, and according to Sotheby's are the only such letters to have survived. In one, Plath describes being "indissolubly welded" to her new husband and missing him: "Never before in my life have I been parted from one I love so immeasurably more than myself; my god, do let me be with you soon." Plath looks forward to the "shining grail" of their reunion once she has completed her final exams in June 1957 — "I shall never leave your side a day in my life after exams... I think if anything ever happened to you, I would really kill myself." The letters contain drafts of her poems, as well as critiques of the work of Hughes, who was then working on his breakthrough collection "The Hawk in the Rain". "My husband is a genius," she wrote.

In addition to their wedding rings, the collection includes family photographs of the couple with their small children-Frieda and her younger brother Nicholas-and a hawk amulet given by Hughes to Plath on their honeymoon. "This auction is really about the happiest and the most dynamic part of my parents' relationship when they were working at their best together and still very passionately in love and supportive of each other," said Frieda Hughes, 61, who is a poet and painter. "If you read my mother's letters to my father, their passion and their love is extraordinary. I'm not sure everybody finds a love like that in their lifetime." — AFP

Sports

Messi stars as Argentina set up Colombia Copa semi-final

GOIANIA: Lionel Messi scored one goal and created two others as Argentina beat Ecuador 3-0 in Goiania on Saturday to reach the Copa America semi-finals. In Tuesday's last four match, the 14-time winners will play Colombia, who beat Uruguay on penalties earlier in the day.

Messi teed up goals for Rodrigo De Paul and Lautaro Martinez before firing home an injury time free-kick to cap a stunning individual performance. The scoreline was harsh on Ecuador, who ended the game with 10 men after Pedro Hincapie's dismissal but had been competitive throughout.

"The truth is it was a very tough match. We knew the difficulty of playing Ecuador, who work hard with players who are fast, physically strong, young," said Messi. "It was a battle until we managed the (second) goal."

Argentina made a bright start and Martinez almost opened the scoring with a moment of brilliance. He chipped the ball over goalkeeper Hernan Galindez and then volleyed goalwards, only for Robert Arbolde to block the ball on the line.

Moments later Martinez had a shot deflected wide and from the resulting corner, German Pezzella volleyed into the side netting. Carlos Gruezo almost gifted Argentina a goal when his attempted back pass sent Messi clean through with only Galindez to beat, but the six-time Ballon d'Or winner saw his shot cannon back off the post.

Up the other end, goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez had to be alert to parry a stunning 20-yard volley by Sebastian Mendez. Argentina had their own let off seven minutes from half-time when Pervis Estupinan crossed from the left and Enner Valencia's flicked header narrowly evaded the sliding Alan Franco at the back post.

Messi takes control

Two minutes later Argentina were in front, with

Messi the architect. First he played in Nicolas Gonzalez on goal but when he was tackled by Galindez, Messi reacted quickest and teed up De Paul to score. There was still time before the break for Galindez to make an incredible double save from Gonzalez, before Valencia somehow headed wide from six yards out.

After the break, Valencia remained Ecuador's most likely route back into the match and the livewire forward's near post shot hit Martinez's leg before going behind. A wicked Estupinan cross was then almost turned into his own net by Gonzalez.

Messi came close to killing off the tie but his curled effort sailed just past the post, while Aston Villa goalkeeper Martinez denied substitute Gonzalo Plata an equalizer with a near-post block. Inter Milan forward Martinez finally ended Ecuador's resistance six minutes from time from Messi's pass after Hincapie was caught in possession by Angel Di Maria. And Hincapie completed a miserable few minutes as he was dismissed in injury time after dragging back substitute Di Maria when clean through, with Messi dispatching the free-kick.

Record-breaker Ospina

Goalkeeper David Ospina was the hero as Colombia beat Uruguay on penalties in Brasilia. Ospina saved two spot-kicks in the shoot-out on the day he earned his 112th Colombian cap, moving clear of the previous national record he shared with the iconic Carlos Valderrama.

He dedicated the victory to his civil strife-torn country that would have been one of the twin hosts alongside Argentina before South American football's governing body CONMEBOL moved the tournament to Brazil over coronavirus pandemic concerns and social unrest in Colombia.

"We just want to give joy to our country, a country we want to be full of peace, full of people



GOIANIA: Argentina's Lionel Messi (center) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Ecuador during their Conmebol 2021 Copa America football tournament quarter-final match at the Olympic Stadium in Goiania, Brazil, on Saturday. —AFP

sharing and enjoying, because we have a beautiful country," said Ospina, 32. There was little to report in a drab 0-0 draw over the regulation 90 minutes before the quarter-final tie went straight to penalties. Ospina saved from Jose Gimenez and Matias Vina while Colombia scored all four of their penalties.

It was a huge disappointment for Uruguay's

star forward pair Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez, who both converted their spot-kicks but almost certainly have played in their last Copa. On Friday, Brazil beat Chile 1-0 to reach Monday's semi-final against Peru, who defeated Paraguay 4-3 on penalties after an eventful 3-3 draw that saw both sides finish with 10 men. —AFP

Serbia athlete tests positive for virus at Tokyo airport

TOKYO: An athlete with the Serbian Olympic team has tested positive for coronavirus after arriving in Japan, less than three weeks before the Games, a host city official said yesterday. The member of the five-strong rowing team was found to have contracted the virus after a test at Tokyo's Haneda airport upon arrival Saturday, according to an official of Nanto, a central Japanese city, where the team planned to train ahead of the Olympics.

The athlete has been isolated, while the remaining four have been transferred to a separate facility near the airport, the official said. "The members were scheduled to arrive in our city today and start training, but the entire program is likely to be cancelled," the official told AFP. The case came as organizers prepare to tighten screening procedures at airports after two members of Uganda's team tested positive following their arrival in Japan last month.

Hidemasa Nakamura, a senior Tokyo 2020 Games official, said last week that Olympic teams should be immediately isolated if they arrive in Japan with a person infected with coronavirus. Public opinion has been firmly opposed to holding the Games this year over pandemic fears, though recent polls suggest opposition may be softening. No overseas fans will be allowed and domestic spectators will be capped at 10,000 per event. —AFP

Shocked Canada fail to jump through Olympic hoop again

PARIS: Canada spurned their final chance to bag a berth at the Olympic basketball tournament when they lost a qualifying tournament semi-final at home to the Czech Republic, who rallied from five points down in overtime to win.

The Canadians failed to get through the Tokyo qualifying hoop for a fifth time in a row as they went down 101-103 Saturday in Victoria. The Czechs advanced to Sunday night's final against Greece to decide a Tokyo Games spot. Golden State's Andrew Wiggins scored 22 points and RJ Barrett of the New York Knicks had 23 for the Canucks but that was not enough as Illinois-born Czech point forward Blake Schillb pulled out a match-high 31 points. —AFP

stc honors Mutawa for becoming most capped footballer

KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of stc, engineer Maziad Al-Harbi, on behalf of stc, honored the professional footballer Bader Al-Mutawa who plays in Qadsia SC and the Kuwait National Football Team for receiving the most international capped player title. Mutawa received the global recognition in the world of football after his 185th appearance with the national team.

The honoring ceremony was attended by stc's Corporate Communications team led by Danah Al-Jasem, and was organized by Ahmad Al-Nowaihet, Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at stc. During the event, stc's CEO expressed in a statement the Company's proud role in commemorating Mutawa's outstanding achievement in the international football world, while wishing the footballer more successes in his career and future endeavors.

Bucks out Hawks to face Phoenix in NBA Finals

LOS ANGELES: Kris Middleton poured in 32 points to power the Milwaukee Bucks into their first NBA Finals in over 45 years on Saturday with a series-clinching 118-107 win over the Atlanta Hawks. The third-seeded Bucks beat the host Hawks in the best-of-seven series 4-2 to book their first appearance in the league championship since 1974.

"As a little kid, everybody wanted to be part of this chance to go to the finals. This is amazing," said Bucks guard Jrue Holiday. Milwaukee will face the Western Conference champion Phoenix Suns in the finals which begin tomorrow.

The Bucks earned the Eastern Conference championship trophy, celebrating with it on the floor at the Hawks' State Farm Arena. "It is sweet. These guys have put the work in all year. They deserve to go to the finals," said Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer. "We've got more work to do."

The Bucks won despite the absence of two-time league MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who sat out with an injured left knee. The 26-year-old Greek forward hyperextended the joint when he landed awkwardly in game four of the series.

The Hawks got their top player Trae Young back after he missed the previous two games with

Djokovic, Federer and teenage hope top Wimbledon bill on 'Manic Monday'

LONDON: Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer headline 'Manic Monday' at Wimbledon with the two Grand Slam heavyweights looking to edge closer to a dream title showdown. World number one Djokovic, chasing a sixth Wimbledon title and record-equaling 20th major, is already halfway to becoming just the third man to complete a calendar Grand Slam.

The Serb faces Cristian Garin of Chile while eight-time champion Federer takes on Italy's Lorenzo Sonego. Chilean 17th seed Cristian Garin had never previously won a main draw match at the tournament before this year.

However, the 25-year-old from Santiago is in the last 16 of a major for the second consecutive Grand Slam. "It feels amazing. I didn't play a grass tournament before Wimbledon, so I was a bit out of rhythm and without any matches on grass," said Garin who lost his only

clash with Djokovic at the ATP Cup in 2002. "My last match on this surface was here at Wimbledon in 2019."

Federer, just five weeks shy of his 40th birthday, is in the Wimbledon last 16 for the 18th time. In all, it will be his 69th appearance in the fourth round of a Slam but he was quick to salute Djokovic's achievements. "It's just very, very impressive to see what he's doing this year," said Federer whose third round win over Cameron Norrie gave him the 1,250th victory of his career. Second seed Daniil Medvedev staged a stunning comeback from two sets down for the first time in his career to beat 2017 runner-up Marin Cilic and make the fourth round for the first time.

Medvedev faces Polish 14th seed Hubert Hurkacz. Sebastian Korda, whose father Petr made the quarter-finals in 1998, celebrates his 21st birthday today. He can reach the quarter-finals of a Slam

for the first time by beating Russian 25th seed Karen Khachanov.

Double for Italy

Denis Shapovalov, the Canadian 10th seed who put out two-time winner Andy Murray in the last round, faces Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut, a semi-finalist in 2019. Meanwhile, Italy will have two men in the last 16 for just the third time and first time since 1955.

While Sonego faces Federer, seventh seed Matteo Berrettini faces Ilya Ivashka of Belarus, the 27-year-old world number 79 who had only previously won one match at a major before this Wimbledon. Women's world number one Ashleigh Barty, trying to win the title 50 years on from fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley's maiden crown, tackles French Open winner Barbora Krejickova. The only British player left in the singles draw is 18-year-old Emma Raducanu who has defied her ranking of 338 to make the second week where she meets Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic. Germany's Angelique



ATLANTA: Giannis Antetokounmpo, Kris Middleton and Brook Lopez of the Milwaukee Bucks celebrate with the Eastern Conference Finals Trophy during Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Saturday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

Tucker hits triple

Lopez made an alley-oop dunk with 1:29 to go in the fourth to make it 113-110 and PJ Tucker nailed a clutch 23-foot three pointer with 62 seconds remaining to stretch the Milwaukee lead to 10 points and help seal the win.

The second-seeded Suns will have home-court advantage in the finals based on having a better record in the regular season. Phoenix edged the Bucks in two games during the regular season, 128-127 in overtime in Milwaukee and 125-124 in Arizona. —AFP



Novak Djokovic

Kerber, the only former champion left in the women's event, takes on Coco Gauff.

Big-hitting will be a feature of the lower half of the women's last 16 today. Belarus second seed Aryna Sabalenka faces 18th seeded Elena Rybakina. Sabalenka, yet to make a quarter-final of a Slam had 21 aces over three rounds, one fewer than Russian-born Rybakina. —AFP



KUWAIT: (From left) Danah Al-Jasem, Maziad Al-Harbi, Bader Al-Mutawa and Ahmad Al-Nowaihet.

held since 2012, marking him as the most capped international player, as mentioned in news outlets. It is worth noting that Mutawa's international career began when he was 18 years old playing against Singapore in 2003 for the 2004 Asian Cup qualifiers.

Rampant England fire warning as Euro 2020 dream heads back home

ROME: England return to Wembley two wins from a first European Championship title after recording their biggest ever victory at the tournament with a 4-0 demolition of Ukraine in the quarter-finals in Rome. Having successfully negotiated a trip to the Stadio Olimpico with a flourish, Gareth Southgate's team will have the support of some 60,000 fans when they take on Denmark for a place in the final Wednesday.

Three years on from a bitter World Cup semi-final loss to Croatia, England have the chance to move on from that disappointment and end a long wait for silverware. With the remainder of the competition to be played in London and COVID-19 restrictions severely limiting travelling fans, they are unlikely to get a better opportunity of adding to the 1966 World Cup win.

"Teams have to go on a bit of a journey and they have to go through some pain sometimes to progress," said Southgate. "We've had some great nights over the last four years but we've also had some painful ones and that's definitely helped us prepare for another tournament."

Unlike in Russia, where Harry Kane's hot start soon became a distant memory as England entered the knockout phase, the Tottenham striker looks to have rediscovered his form at the perfect moment. While the attack clicked into gear on another famous night in the Italian capital, 24 years after a goalless draw here secured qualification for the 1998 World Cup, the defense remains unbreached.

"To come here, prepare differently, play in a historic stadium on a night that was beautiful for football with the weather inspired the players," said Southgate. "They gave a fantastic performance, not only the players who started but the players who came into the game."

"The recognition in moments like tonight was that we didn't want to take a backwards step. We really wanted to grasp an opportunity. I thought the players were decisive and ruthless all night," he added.

'On the right track'

England matched their four-goal total output from their four previous games in just 90 minutes as they ripped apart a vulnerable Ukraine backline. Jadon Sancho looked sharp on his first start of Euro 2020, with Raheem Sterling again impressing, and Mason Mount showed no sign of rust after missing the past two games after being forced to quarantine.

Such was the dominance of England's display that Jack Grealish, who played a vital role coming off the bench in the victory over Germany, was kept in reserve along with Phil Foden. "We are on the right track for sure, but we haven't done nothing yet," said Kane. "We have got a massive semi-final to look forward to now at Wembley. What an occasion, what a moment to be involved in. We have a vision of where we want to be, we are taking it step by step and so far so good, so we will recover now, take the confidence from this game but look ahead to a tough team in Denmark."

Denmark are riding a wave of emotion spurred by the near-tragedy of Christian



LONDON: England's players celebrate their third goal during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Ukraine and England at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday. — AFP

Eriksen's cardiac arrest in their opening match. They are dreaming of a repeat of their 1992 triumph and could yet spoil England's party, having beaten them 1-0 at Wembley last year in the Nations League.

"It's an amazing game to be a part of. To be able to lead out a team at any

game at Wembley is special, to have a semi-final is extra special," said Southgate. "We won't win the game because we're at home. We've got to play well and we've got a fabulous opportunity. It's a chance to make history. We've never been to a European

Championship final, it's not so much pressure but it's another challenge for these players to take on." Get past Denmark and Italy or Spain would await on July 11, fittingly one of Europe's traditional powers the final hurdle standing in the way of England glory. — AFP



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