



3 Each patrol vehicle should have two armed policemen



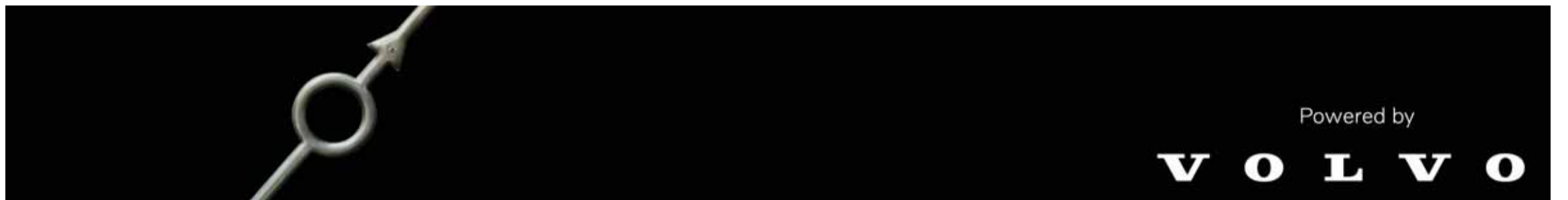
9 Rebel-held Syria shifts power - towards solar



12 'Talibanned': Popular Afghan pastimes again under threat



13 History-making Jabeur beats Swiatek, will face Sabalenka



MoH: Over 2.3 million COVID vaccine doses administered

ICU occupancy up 10% • Frontliners to be rewarded • Nod to recruit Pakistani medics



KUWAIT: A medic administers COVID-19 vaccine doses to people queuing in their cars at a drive-thru inoculation site at Jaber Causeway yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: More than 2,375,455 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Kuwait since the beginning of the vaccination campaign, Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said on Sunday. The number of those who have received a single dose of the vaccine reached 1,452,148, while 923,307 others received two shots, he added in a press statement, stressing the continuation of the campaign.

Dr Sanad hailed the efforts of all medical, technical and voluntary teams, as well as cooperation of all state bodies over the past period. He affirmed continuation of providing services to the country's targeted segments so as to reach herd immunity.

Dr Sanad also said the average occupancy rate of COVID-19 wards in hospitals increased nine percent last week, while it increased by 10 percent for intensive care units (ICU). He called on the public to abide by health precautions and register for COVID-19 vaccinations. Dr Sanad expressed his trust in the awareness of the public to find a way out of this pandemic with the best results.

The health ministry yesterday said 1,977 people were infected with the novel coronavirus over the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 365,649. The

death toll from the virus climbed to 2,029 after registering 12 more mortalities (11 unvaccinated and one fully vaccinated) in this period, Dr Sanad said. Some 1,841 people recovered in the same period, taking total recoveries to 345,106. On Sunday, Kuwait reported 1,654 new cases and 12 deaths.

Meanwhile, the Civil Service Commission announced yesterday that the finance ministry has received lists of civil servants and personnel eligible for financial rewards from 16 departments and authorities for serving on the frontlines against COVID-19. Some of lists have been approved as they are free of any remarks, according to regulations, the CSC said in a statement. The commission noted that other lists delivered by various departments and sectors with names of personnel nominated for financial awards will be examined.

The CSC addressed the minister of finance on Sunday on setting mechanisms and measures for the disbursement of rewards, in line with law 4/2021 stipulating approval of state departments for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, with additional allotments for the extra payment for frontliners and personnel who served in the back-up ranks.

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News in brief

Nearly 8,000 deported in 6 months

KUWAIT: Kuwait deported 7,808 in the first half of 2021, the interior ministry said. The deportees were in violation of residency and traffic laws, in addition to committing other felonies and offenses, the ministry's relations and security information department said in a statement without elaborating.

Policeman stabbed in Jahra

KUWAIT: Police arrested a man who stabbed a traffic patrolman in Jahra, the interior ministry announced yesterday, adding that the policeman sustained a shoulder wound and is in stable condition. The suspect had stopped behind a vehicle that had broken down and approached the policeman attending to it. The cop suspected the man was inebriated, so he asked him for his ID, at which point the man grabbed a sharp tool from his vehicle and hit the policeman on his right shoulder.

England to lift COVID curbs

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday revealed plans to lift most of England's legal coronavirus restrictions, including facemasks and social distancing from July 19, urging personal responsibility rather than government edict. — AFP

Bushehr plant back online

TEHRAN: Iran's only nuclear power plant has been brought back online, its manager said early yesterday, after two weeks off-grid amid a power shortage and rolling blackouts across the Islamic republic. The Bushehr plant's shutdown was initially blamed on a "technical fault" that required repairs. — AFP

Priest dies in custody

NEW DELHI: An ailing 84-year-old rights activist and Jesuit priest detained for nine months without trial under Indian anti-terrorism laws died yesterday ahead of a bail hearing. Father Stan Swamy, who campaigned for marginalized tribal communities, was arrested last year for allegedly inciting violence between different Indian castes in 2018. — AFP

OPEC+ postpones meeting to end oil output impasse

LONDON: After failing last week to agree on crude oil output levels, the 23 members of the OPEC+ group of producers called off a meeting planned yesterday to overcome the impasse, a source close to the alliance told AFP. No new date was given for them to reconvene. Since May, the group has raised oil output little by little, after slashing it more than a year ago when the coron-

avirus pandemic crushed demand.

At stake is the current proposal that would see the world's leading oil producers raise their output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to December. That would add a further two million bpd to markets by the end of the year, helping to fuel a global economic recovery as the coronavirus pandemic is brought under control.

But that plan risks being delayed or even failing over a further proposal to extend the cap on incremental increases through to the end of 2022. "The market is now fearing several scenarios," said Bjarne Schieldrop, a Norway-based analyst with SEB. In one, there is no deal and no increase in production, sending oil prices shooting up, he said. Another sees a "free-for-all (in) production and a

collapse in the oil price". North Sea Brent and West Texas Intermediate, the most widely traded crude oil futures contracts, rose to their highest levels since Oct 2018 after the meeting was postponed. Brent traded 1.16-percent higher at \$77.05 a barrel, while WTI was up by 1.34 percent at \$76.17. Holding out against the new deal however, is the United Arab Emirates, which on Sunday criticized the terms of that extension as unjust.

Oil prices, which had already been sliding owing to concerns about the global economy, plummeted in April 2020 as coronavirus spread around the world and battered global consumption, transport and supply chains. OPEC+ decided to withdraw 9.7 million bpd from the market and to gradually restore

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Biden marks 'independence' from COVID

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden celebrated US Independence Day on Sunday with an upbeat assessment of a country he said is roaring back to post-pandemic life, even if COVID-19 has yet to be fully "vanquished". Speaking before a festive crowd of 1,000 guests on the White House South Lawn, Biden drew a comparison between the declaration of independence from the British Empire in 1776 and today's rapid recovery from the coronavirus.

"Two hundred and forty five years ago, we declared our independence from a distant king. Today, we are closer than ever to declaring our independence from a deadly virus," he told the crowd of invited military members and essential workers. "We've gained the upper hand against this virus," he said. But he added, "Don't get me wrong: COVID-19 has not been vanquished."

Continued on Page 2



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, daughter Ashley Biden and granddaughters Finnegan Biden and Naomi Biden pose for a selfie during Independence Day celebrations at the White House on Sunday. — AFP

Norway fund sells off assets linked to Zionist settlements

OSLO: Norway's largest pension fund announced yesterday it had divested assets in 16 companies for their links to Zionist settlements in the West Bank, including telecom equipment giant Motorola. "Motorola and oth-

er companies risk complicity in international law violations in occupied Palestine," KLP, which manages some \$95 billion worth of assets, said in a statement.

The divestment follows the February 2020 UN publication of a list of 112 companies with activities linked to Zionist settlements, considered illegal under international law. The Zionist government has denounced the publication of the list - which included companies like Airbnb, Expedia, Motorola and Tripadvisor - as a "contemptible effort". "Divesting from Motorola Solutions was a very straightforward decision over its surveillance role in the occupied territories," KLP said, argu-

ing the company provide software used in border surveillance. KLP also divested telecom operators offering services within the West Bank as they contributed to making "the settlements attractive residential areas".

These included Bezeq, Cellcom and Partner Communications, and Alice Europe - which was delisted from the Amsterdam stock exchange in January. Also included are five banks that facilitated or financed the construction of housing and infrastructure in occupied territories, as well as engineering and construction groups, including the French multinational Alstom.

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Local

Deputy Amir, Crown Prince receives Chamber Chairman, Kuwait Airways Board



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Kuwait Airways Corporation Chairman Ali Mohammad Al-Dakhan and members of the Board of Directors. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday the Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager. His Highness the Deputy Amir also received Kuwait Airways Corporation Chairman Ali Mohammad Al-Dakhan and members of the Board of Directors on re-operating flights after stopping due to the coronavirus pandemic. They explained to His Highness the Deputy Amir the obstacles that the company faced during the pandemic's peak, their future plans and upgrading services to its customers, while His Highness wished the company further success.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to Pope Francis of the Vatican yesterday on the successful surgery he had recently, wishing him a long healthy life. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Pope Francis.

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-

Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed Monday a cable of condolences to emperor of Japan Naruhito and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga over the victims of the landslide that hit West of Tokyo. In the cable, His Highness wished the injured speedy recovery and hoped for Japan to overcome effects of this natural disaster. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences Sunday to Cyprus President of the Republic Nicos Anastasiades, expressing his heartfelt sorrow over the tragic wild fires in Limassol and Larnaca regions. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished mercy for the deceased and speedy recovery for the injured. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Cyprus leadership expressing similar sentiments.

The blaze, which began Saturday afternoon outside the village of Arakapas, spread quickly amid



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager.

strong winds and forced the evacuation of at least eight mountain villages, destroying homes and scorching 55 square kilometers (21 square miles) of pine forest and orchards. "We are experiencing the

most destructive fire since the founding of the Cyprus republic," Cyprus Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said, adding that 50 homes were damaged so far. — KUNA

Kuwait Airways resumes flights to Geneva, Munich, Frankfurt

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) announced yesterday resuming flights to Geneva, Munich and Frankfurt effective July 9 at a rate of two flights per week. KAC Public Relations and Information Director Fayeze Al-Enezi said in a press statement the KAC scheduled flights to Geneva starting Friday (July 9) with two flights a week. There will be two flights per week to Munich as of July 17 in addition to two others to Frankfurt beginning early August. The corporation has decided to resume flights to London, Paris, Malaga and Sarajevo as part of a strategy for gradual restoration of regular operations. The KAC had said in a previous press statement it would organize three flights to Paris per week on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays as of July 7. There will two flights per week to Malaga on Sundays and

Thursday effective July 4 and two flights per week to Sarajevo Saturdays and Wednesdays starting June 30. The corporation has recently declared relaunching flights to London with a single flight a week. On June 15, it started staging three flights per week to Bodrum on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. And on June 18, it began organizing three flights a week to Trabzon on Sundays, Mondays and Fridays, in addition to the regular flights to Istanbul. Moreover, the national carrier declared two flights per week to Tbilisi on Mondays and Fridays, in addition to several summer tourism destinations. The corporation has affirmed its readiness to restore full operations of commercial flights in line with approval of the health authorities and resumption of air navigation in other countries. — KUNA



MoH: Over 2.3 million COVID...

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The commission added that state departments whose lists have been endorsed and submitted to the finance ministry are advised to take delivery of the disbursement guidelines regarding payment mechanisms. A commission will be formed to

receive complaints from employees whose names were not included in the lists of eligible beneficiaries. Excluded personnel must explain in writing why they deserve to be financially rewarded, in line with the terms for eligibility.

In a related development, the Cabinet, during its weekly session yesterday, approved a request by the health ministry to employ Pakistani doctors, nurses and technicians to support the health sector. The Government Communication Center said on its Twitter account that the decision to recruit the sixth batch of Pakistani medical personnel is in line with continuing efforts to back up the national health system.

the reference level used to calculate the amount by which it must reduce output, Energy Minister Suhail Mohamed Al-Mazrouei told the WAM news agency. The UAE's 3.17 million bpd reference level, set in Oct 2018, was well below its effective potential output level of 3.8 million bpd in April 2020, just before the cuts took effect.

It was this issue that caused last week's talks to break down. The meetings, more used to big hitters Russia and Saudi Arabia setting the agenda, were confronted with the UAE's refusal to toe the line. "It is the whole group versus one country," Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV.

In a separate interview with Al-Arabiya television aired late on Sunday, Prince Abdulaziz called for "a bit of rationality and a bit of compromise". RBC Capital Markets analyst Helima Croft went further. "The prospect of a no-deal outcome - as well as a UAE OPEC exit - has risen materially, even if it has not yet fully entered into firm base-case territory," she wrote. — AFP

OPEC+ postpones meeting to end oil...

Continued from Page 1

supplies by the end of April 2022. Benchmark oil prices rebounded as a result, and have lately been hovering around \$75 a barrel, up by about half since the beginning of this year.

But the return to pre-pandemic production levels has stalled several times because of the shifting fortunes in the fight against COVID-19. The alliance is still pumping 5.8 million bpd less than it was before the pandemic. The April 2022 deadline on capping output now seems too close, and some members want to extend it until Dec 2022 - and this is what Abu Dhabi objects to.

The United Arab Emirates has said it wants to revise

Norway fund sells off assets linked to...

Continued from Page 1

In total, the Norwegian fund's divestments of shares and company bonds amounted to \$32 million. "Companies have a responsibility to respect and protect human right in all countries that they are operating in, regardless if the state itself is upholding these rights," KLP analyst Kiran Aziz said. "Conflict can mean a partic-

ularly high risk of human rights violations. Companies operating in conflict zones must therefore exercise particular caution to avoid involvement in human rights abuses and to protect vulnerable individuals," she added.

In late June, KLP announced its divestment of the Indian port and logistics group Adani Ports because of its links to the Burmese military junta. Another Norwegian fund, the sovereign wealth fund, which is the largest in the world, has also excluded several companies in the past because of their connections to Zionist settlements. More than 600,000 Zionist settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where tensions often flare up between settlers and the Palestinian population. — AFP

Biden marks 'independence'...

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We all know powerful variants have emerged, like the Delta variant."

Biden paid tribute to those who have lost their lives, with the staggering number of deaths in the United States now at more than 600,000. But he struck an overwhelmingly optimistic note, suggesting that under his leadership the country - bitterly and at times violently divided during the Donald Trump presidency - was "coming back together". "Over the last year, we have lived through some of our darkest days," Biden said. "We are about to see our brightest future."

Large crowds packed the National Mall for a huge fireworks display in yet another sign that the United States is looking to its July 4th holiday as a moment to put the virus in the rear view mirror. During last year's holiday, with the pandemic near its summer peak and towns across America reeling from anti-racism and anti-police protests, Washington and other big cities held only muted celebrations.

Despite the atmosphere of Sunday's victory party, the Biden administration says it is concerned about the large numbers of people who have still not got vaccinated. The heavily promoted White House goal of getting seven in 10 adults their first shot by Independence Day has narrowly failed. And when it comes to full vaccinations, only 46 per cent of Americans have taken the two doses. That lag comes as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread. Public health officials are eyeing swaths of rural America where hospitals are starting to fill up again, especially in Utah, Missouri, Arkansas and Wyoming. — AFP

Local

News in brief

KNPC raises ultra fuel price

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced on Sunday raising the price of the Ultra Octane-98 fuel to 175 fils instead of 165 as of July 7 for three months. The move was taken upon a decision of the Ministry of Finance's subsidies committee, the company wrote on its Twitter account, noting that the price of other kinds of fuel is unchanged.

Kuwait airport aviation resumes

KUWAIT: Aviation via Kuwait International Airport was restored after a brief stoppage due to a technical cause, Directorate General of Civil Aviation said yesterday. The airport's radar had suddenly stopped functioning resulting in halt of the air navigation that lasted for a short period. Aviation to and from the airport is now proceeding regularly.

Sewage plant wins award

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works won the best project award on sewage water treatment 2020 for the Umm Al-Hayman project, presented by Infrastructure Journal. Receiving the award is part of Kuwait's efforts to develop the country's sewage treatment projects, the ministry said yesterday. The Umm Al-Hayman project was launched to meet growing need, increase capacity of water treatment and close the treatment plant in the southern area of Kuwait.

NCCAL mourns poet Ali Al-Sabti

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) mourned poet Ali Al-Sabti, who passed away yesterday, after years of contributions to the culture and literature fields. NCCAL official spokesperson Dr Essa Al-Ansari conveyed the condolences of Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi to the deceased's family, as well as to the Kuwaiti, GCC and Arab literati. Kuwait lost one of its most prominent poets, who enriched the field with many great works, he noted. His works were also the focus of other poets and authors who worked on analyzing and studying them, he added. Sabti had received Kuwait's honorary award for 2006.

Central Bank maintains Information Security ISO Certification



The Central Bank of Kuwait.

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait yesterday announced the maintenance of its information security certification ISO/IEC 27001:2013. This main global standard specifies the requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining and continually improving data security management systems within the context of the organization, particularly amid challenges posed by rapid developments in the banking and financial services sectors. This comes after years of standardized practices in information security by the CBK.

It is a testament that the Bank satisfies all technical criteria for this global standard. It also stresses that CBK's data security management system meets the requirements for protection of information and data centers and enhances the information security level throughout the bank. The certificate covers areas of human resources, technical and information centers, and information technology services and users of such services at CBK Headquarters. ISO 27001 contributes to the development and monitoring of information security systems through the analysis and examination of systems and evaluation of their importance, as well as through the assessment of risk expected and provision of technical or operational solutions to help manage risk efficiently and effectively.

The CBK had listed ISO 27001 certification within the requirements of the "Cyber Security Framework for the Banking Sector in the State of Kuwait", requiring local banks to secure this certification in the areas of information security, operational systems, networks, policies, and measures related to information technology. The CBK requires banks to maintain and renew this certification and to provide evidence to that effect through a recognized authority.

This all falls within the bank's strategy aiming to bolster the resilience of the banking sector's cyber and information security. The CBK is always keen to develop digital systems and infrastructure, be that on the bank's or the sector's level, in line with international best practices that would enhance operational efficiency across all fields of banking and finance within the State of Kuwait. —KUNA

Kuwait police can use guns to control violent persons; two patrolmen per vehicle

KUWAIT: Kuwait police may use firearms to subdue individuals who exhibit violent behavior or attempt to resist arrest, the Interior Ministry said in new instructions made in the aftermath of the stab murder of a traffic policeman last week. The new instruction also stipulates that each patrol vehicle must have two officers when sent out on duty, and they must be armed at all times while on patrol.

According to the internal letter issued by Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security Maj Gen Faraj Al-Zaabi, directors general of security departments in governorates, directors of operations and patrol departments and area commanders shall inform the police force in case a patrol is sent out in response to calls or to implement operations and special service orders to send out patrols or to remain temporarily in certain places, to comply with the following:

First: Rules for the security patrol going out:

1. The patrol must be with two policemen, and it is not allowed to only have one individual.
2. Policemen on patrol must be equipped with all supplies including handcuffs, batons, firearms and ammunition.
3. Policemen on patrol must be vigilant and cautious, and should be strict with any action that may violate law and order.
4. Policemen on patrol must have good military leadership and treat the public well.

Second: Rules for using firearms:

Comply with instructions and special orders to use firearms mentioned in item (2) of ministerial decision 727/2019 as per the following situations:

1. To arrest a convicted individual in a felony case.



KUWAIT: Traffic policemen man a checkpoint at a highway during curfew hours in this March 15, 2021 file photo. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

2. To arrest a suspect in a felony or misdemeanor case if they resist or try to escape.
3. To arrest a suspect who has an arrest warrant against them, if they resist or attempt to escape.
4. To arrest a prisoner who attempts to escape.
5. To break up gatherings of seven and more, held with the purpose of committing a crime or endangering individuals' lives and properties, in case the gathering does not disperse after being warned, and attempts to disperse them by other means fails.
6. In case of self-defense.
7. When dealing with hysterical individuals or those suffering from bouts of anger that may cause loss of self-control, self-harm or harm to others, be it in a public or private place.

Interior Minister hosts citizens with complaints

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah affirmed yesterday that the ministry will continue its "open door" policy in accepting complaints from citizens and finding the right solutions, especially the humanitarian cases. The minister met with several citizens to discuss their complaints, referring them to the concerned authorities and specialists to find the best legal solutions within the framework of the laws, the ministry's security media and public relations department said in a press statement. He stressed on serving citizens in the best way possible, and in becoming a role model for other sectors in achieving fast results with precision. The Minister of Interior receives citizens every Monday in the Ministry's headquarters in Sabhan, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm by scheduling an appointment via phone call (25200641), Whatsapp (96031116), Email or personal attendance. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah meets a citizen in his office at the Interior Ministry yesterday. —KUNA

Defense Minister meets outgoing Senegal envoy

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah praised yesterday contributions of Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Senegalese Ambassador in Kuwait Abdulhad Mbacke that strengthened bonds of cooperation, friendship and joint work between the two countries. During a meeting on Mbacke's end of his tenure, Sheikh Hamad applauded the efforts of Ambassador Mbacke, wishing him success and the friendly Republic of Senegal further progress and prosperity. Meanwhile, Ambassador Mbacke expressed thanks and appreciation to Kuwait's leadership, government and people for the welcome he received during his tenure, wishing Kuwait more progress, development and prosperity. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Senegalese Ambassador in Kuwait Abdulhad Mbacke. —KUNA

Foundation stone laid for Kuwait-funded clinic in Yemen



ADEN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) supervised yesterday laying the foundation stone for a health center project in the Yemeni province of Marib — the third of its kind in the country. Marib governor's deputy Abdullah Al-Bakri, in a press statement, appreciated KRCS's supervision of placing the first stone for late Fatima Hussain health center project, construction of which was funded by a donor from Kuwait, considering it as a noteworthy contribution to the health sector in Yemen. Meanwhile, Director-

General of KRCS Abdulrahman Al-Oun said that the health center would consist of obstetrics, a gynecology clinic, children's clinic, internal medicine ward, emergency ward, a laboratory and other sections. In the past two weeks, the KRCS inaugurated construction of two schools one named after the Kuwaiti citizen Hamad Abdullah Al-Joan in Hadhramout Governorate and another named after Abrar Marzouq Al-Ghanem in Shabwah Governorate, with funding from donors in Kuwait. —KUNA

Council approves plots to build workers' houses

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council yesterday approved during a regular session specializing five land plots at Al-Shuaiba Port to build housing units

for expatriate workers, heeding a Cabinet decision. The board has also approved a request by the ministry of electricity and water to mark a plot of land for building a new power station and a water desalination plant in Al-Nuwiseeb region. It also blessed a request by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to choose a location for constructing a mosque and a parking lot in Al-Wafra. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipal Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi (center) speaks during a session yesterday. —KUNA

Local

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Audit Bureau participates in ARABOSAI meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwait State Audit Bureau (SAB) will participate with a delegation headed by SAB's President Faisal Al-Shaya, in the 62nd meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), to be held for two days in the Qatari capital, Doha. Director of Training and International Relations at Kuwait SAB Dr Saud Al-Zamanan said in a press statement that the meeting will include signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ARABOSAI and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). ESCWA is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations to stimulate economic activity in member countries, strengthen cooperation between them, and promote development.

The meeting will discuss the report of the Chairman of ARABOSAI about the Council's activity, as well as the report of the General Secretariat since its last meeting. Zamanan pointed out. The development initiatives proposed by the Presidency of ARABOSAI will be reviewed, also the estimated budget for the year 2021 will be approved, in addition to presenting the bodies' reports on their participation in the work of committees and working groups emanating from International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), he said. ARABOSAI was established in 1976 with an aim to develop cooperation between member agencies, strengthening ties between them, plus encouraging the exchange of ideas, viewpoints, experiences, studies, and research among the member institutions in the field of auditing and work to promote auditing in both scientific and practical terms while raising awareness within the Arab world. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture showing high-rise buildings in Kuwait City. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

GCC, 'smart city' District 2020 sign partnership to support start-ups

RIYADH: The Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced yesterday the signing of a partnership with District 2020 to provide support to start-up businesses across the region through District 2020's Scale2Dubai global entrepreneur program. The agreement was signed by GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and Reem Al Hashimy, the UAE's Minister of State for International Cooperation and Director-General of Expo 2020 Dubai, said the Secretariat General in a statement. The alliance underlines the commitment of District 2020 - the future of Expo 2020 Dubai that will evolve into a human-centric smart community and a global innovation ecosystem - to support the growth of entrepreneurship in the UAE and across the GCC region.

"This is an important and strategic collaboration for the GCC's present and future, as we commit to working alongside partners like District 2020. The fact that start-ups and small businesses contribute significantly to the GCC's GDP is well known, meaning such companies are crucial to creating sustainable economic progress in the future," said Hajraf. "Together with District 2020, we will stimulate the growth potential of the region and enable a start-up ecosystem to flourish. We will do this by identifying the most promising companies and giving them District 2020 as a platform. Here, they will be exposed to collaborative innovation

across key industries and technologies, which will in turn stimulate job creation and drive competition in the wider economy," he added.

Hajraf pointed out that this agreement signifies the strong alignment between District 2020's mandate to support the local and regional start-up ecosystem, and the mission of the GCC to promote economic, security, cultural and social cooperation among the Arabian Gulf states. It also recognizes the pivotal role of start-ups and small businesses in driving transformative, innovation-led ideas and growth. "As part of ongoing efforts to diversify their economies, Gulf nations are looking to entrepreneurs and innovators to develop new sectors and approaches, and supplement government initiatives through a sustainable and shared vision," Hajraf said.

Meanwhile, Hashimy said that building partnerships that will reinvent economies, fuel prosperity and create better lives for people across the UAE, the region, and the world is Expo 2020's mission. This pivotal alliance between District 2020 and the GCC will foster entrepreneurship and give start-ups and small businesses the opportunity to realize their full potential in a supportive, connecting ecosystem - a powerful launch pad for growth and a demonstration of Expo's meaningful, long-term legacy.

District 2020 is bringing together regional and global entities comprising Fortune 500 companies, SMEs, start-ups, academic institutes, labs, accelerators and venture capitalists to curate an ecosystem that is focused on spurring innovation. Through this partnership, the GCC will support in identifying and channeling to its Scale2Dubai program a pipeline of high-potential start-ups and small businesses that are aligned with District 2020's ecosystem focus areas. Scale2Dubai is designed to facilitate a soft landing within Dubai through an easy set up within District 2020's ecosystem, and aims to help start-ups and small businesses overcome the most challenging

aspect of growth: scaling.

Each year, the equity-free program is expected to support between 80 and 100 of these businesses, with the first cohort being selected during Expo 2020 Dubai. It will offer successful applicants two years of free work space, business setup support and guidance needed to scale up, while also providing access to funding, deal flow, networking opportunities and connections with big-name global players such as Siemens, DP World, and Terminus Technologies. District 2020 will actively facilitate opportunities for cross-industry collaboration between these large and small businesses, driving mutually beneficial exchange and providing a launchpad from which to access the Middle East, Africa and South Asia region (MEASA) and global markets.

District 2020's enabling environment will be an ideal home for budding businesses and entrepreneurs, and is designed to stimulate creativity, knowledge exchange and innovation. Businesses will become part of District 2020's human-centered smart urban community, which will provide a fully integrated destination to live and work. Promoting a balanced and social lifestyle, the mixed-use community combines the best of the physical and the virtual, by integrating next generation connectivity, flexible workplaces, modern urban living, experiential events, culture, learning, retail, hospitality, and F&B offerings, in one destination.

The Scale2Dubai program is currently accepting expressions of interest from local, regional and international start-ups through the District 2020 website: www.district2020.ae/scale2dubai. The application and short-listing process will follow, with the first cohort of successful applicants announced during the six months of Expo 2020 Dubai. Those chosen to be part of the program will be able to move into their workspaces at District 2020 shortly after Expo 2020 closes, when District 2020 begins its phased opening by October 2022. —KUNA

Critical research on Suad Al-Sabah's 'Usage of Poetic Structures'

KUWAIT: The book "Usage of Poetic Structures with Suad Al-Sabah" has seven critical research items, and was released recently in Kuwait. The research specialized in rhythmic structural approach in the "Fatafeet Emraah" poems, which was supervised, prefaced and critiqued by Modern Arab Literature Professor Dr Hamad Doukhi.

Huda Aziz, Ahmad Shaheed, Waad Musaher, Munjid Ramadan, Shaima Iyad, Raheed Ahmad and Saad Sarhat participated in presenting the research. The research focused on the rhythmic aspect in the poetic experience of Suad Al-Sabah. Her "Fatafeet Emraah" anthology includes research on headlining rhythm, repetition and visual rhythm, dialogue rhythm, color rhythm, narrative rhythm and finally rotation and psychological rhythm.

In his foreword for the book, Dr Hamad Doukhi writes about the rhythmic structure in the poems of Suad Al-Sabah. He said preoccupation with the rhythmic paragraphs in the "Fatafeet Emraah" anthology is due to the "Tafeelah" system that represents the poet's longings.

With this discreet diligence in the rhythmic structure, and confidence in achievement, the poet (Suad Al-Sabah) confirms her constant artistic flair towards modernity and the aspirations of civilized representation of the human expression represented in the most sublime beautiful image - which is poetry - because it is the peak of expression and its goal, Doukhi said. She utilizes all this power that was available to her out of her creative keenness, loyalty to her heritage and humanitarian poetic legacy, he added.

Huda Aziz said the poet was able in her "Kuwaitiya"

poem to deliver poetic action to the world that does not know anything about the Kuwaiti woman through the headline rhythm, with the help of a visual rhythm that enabled her to describe and deliver her idea that ended with her choice that she wanted to be congratulated for.

About the title of the "Five o'clock Tea" poem, she focused on the bond between the headline and the text, and the extent of the rhythmic interaction between them, as the headline was repeated more than once within the text, in addition to the poet's employment of the counterpoint method through mentioning antonyms - "my blessing and my curse" and "my smile and my tear".

About the dialogue rhythm, Monjed Ramadan believes the dialogue worked to elaborate poetic texts of Suad Al-Sabah with its monologic style, that worked to transfer the internal ideas of the poet and criticize the patriarchal society that deprives a woman of her rights. The poet defended her through this internal voice that comes out into reality, in effect calling for changing the status quo.

Ramadan said Suad Al-Sabah also portrayed some of her life's stages through her texts that are full of love, and she worked through the internal dialogue to reflect the beauties of love and life through rhythmic tunes that she worked on, which gives the texts deliberate symbolism through suggestive language that used dialogue extensively to pass her ideas.

As for the color rhythm, Shaima Ahmad finds that color is effectively present in Suad Al-Sabah's poems through the multiplicity of its forms, as she represents the color spectrum in most of her poems. She points out that this is a new study that reveals the variety of the color present in the poet's anthology. It also reveals the dimension of beauty formed by the color, which enriches the text indicatively and morally.



Suad Al-Sabah

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Kuwaiti academic gains G3ict membership

KUWAIT: Dr Zeinab Al-Meraj, Assistant Professor at Information Science Department at College of Life Sciences, affiliated to Kuwait University (KU), gained membership of the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict). KU said in a press statement on Sunday that Dr Meraj's representation of the university in the (G3ict) boosts the approach, in digital environment, toward achieving rights of people with disabilities in Kuwait and countries of the region. G3ict is a global initiative that was launched back in 2006 via the United Nations' Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities (CRPD), it added.

This membership will offer Dr Meraj an opportunity to increase awareness of the ability to reach the information technology at the national and international levels, as well as supporting policies' makers, it added. It will also help in facilitating and exchanging good practices and innovation, as well as enhancing interoperability on a global scale. It will further contribute to boosting skills of reaching others, it said. Furthermore, the statement quoted the Acting Head of the Information Sciences Department at the College of Life Sciences, Prof Ahmad Al-Lafi, as saying Dr Meraj's membership is a great achievement, taking into consideration her distinguished contributions and researches. Dr Lafi expressed his deepest thanks and congratulations for Dr Al-Meraj for this accomplishment, wishing her further progress and success. Dr Meraj won two international certificates of expertise in the Human Computer Interaction field, which allows her to be the first expert in Kuwait in that domain, and one of the elite professionals in the field in the Gulf region. — KUNA



Over 1,000 Afghan troops flee Taliban into Tajikistan

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NKANDLA, South Africa: Former South African president Jacob Zuma walks back to his home after addressing his supporters in front of his rural home on Sunday for the first time since he was given a 15-month sentence for contempt of court. —AFP

Zuma refuses to surrender by deadline

Interpol issues 'red notice' against Zuma's allies, the Guptas

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's police minister was yesterday awaiting court instructions on whether to arrest ex-president Jacob Zuma, who has been given a 15-month jail term for contempt of court. The country's top court last week convicted Zuma for contempt and ordered him to turn himself in by end of Sunday to start his sentence. If he failed to do so, the police would be told to arrest him within the following three days.

But Zuma on Friday lodged a last-ditch application to halt execution of the arrest order. The application will be heard in a high court today. "We hope that we will be getting the clarification, because when we were given the instruction there were no other legal activities taking place," Police Minister Bheki Cele told reporters yesterday. In responding documents, the investigators slammed Zuma's latest attempt to evade jail as "a continuation of a pattern of abuse by of the court process". "Courts should not entertain such abuse any longer," it said. Zuma, 79, has also pleaded with the Constitutional Court order to reconsider and rescind its decision to jail him. That challenge will be heard on July 12.

Despite a raging coronavirus pandemic with new daily infections peaking at record highs of 26,000 at the weekend, Zuma's case has pre-occupied the continent's worst-hit country. Crowds of supporters have rallied outside Zuma's rural home in recent days, defying all COVID-19 restrictions imposed by President Cyril Ramaphosa to curb the spread being fueled by the highly-contagious Delta variant.

All gatherings are banned except for funerals, but hundreds of supporters in ruling African National Congress (ANC) party regalia and traditional Zulu warriors converged outside Zuma's Nkandla home in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Without a mask and wearing a black shirt embroidered with ANC colors, Zuma addressed scores of mask-less

chanting supporters before breaking into his signature liberation struggle rendition Awlethu Mshini Wam, which translates to 'bring me my machine gun'.

'Treasonous'

Police did not disperse the crowds at Nkandla and the minister said they understood that around 100 of the supporters had firearm and acted circumspectly to avoid "bloodshed" or another Marikana scenario. He was making reference to the incident in 2012 where police brutally broke up a wildcat labour strike leading to the loss of 34 lives - the worst massacre since the end of apartheid in 1994.

A Zulu elder and opposition politician Mangosuthu Buthelezi, 92, lambasted the crowds congregating in support of Zuma in the midst of a pandemic as "the greatest irresponsibility of all" adding that what was going on in Nkandla was "treasonous". "With all due respect for the sympathy people may have for Mr Zuma's plight, challenging the state and risking lives is unacceptable," said Buthelezi.

Speaking from Nkandla on Sunday night, Zuma vowed he would not hand himself to the police by the set deadline because of the pending court applications. "I'm very concerned that South Africa is fast sliding back to apartheid-type rule," he said. "I am facing a long detention without trial," he added. "Sending me to jail during the height of a pandemic, at my age, is the same as sentencing me to death."

The defiant politician has repeatedly attacked the judiciary and did not hold back from lashing out again. "I'm very concerned that South Africa is fast sliding back to apartheid-type rule," he said. "I am facing a long detention without trial," he added. "Sending me to jail during the height of a pandemic, at my age, is the same as sentencing me to death."

Interpol 'red notice'

Meanwhile, South African prosecutors yesterday announced a key step in their bid to extradite Indian-born brothers who were allegedly at the center of a massive web of corruption. The three Gupta brothers - Ajay, Atul and Rajesh - are at the center of a long-running probe into the embezzlement of state assets under Zuma.

In a statement, the prosecution authority's chief investigator, Hermione Cronje, said Interpol had issued a "red notice" against two of the brothers, Atul and Rajesh. Red notices are a global alert enabling law enforcers to arrest a person sought for prosecution or serving a sentence and detain them pending extradition.

The three brothers are at the center of a 2016 graft report by South Africa's anti-corruption watchdog, which claims they paid bribes in exchange for massive state contracts and influence ministerial appointments. They fled South Africa shortly after a judicial commission started in 2018 and are suspected to be in the United Arab Emirates. Last month South Africa said it was close to finalizing an extradition treaty with the UAE.

The third brother, Ajay, who is not named in the red notice, is part of a separate case, Cronje's office said. His siblings Atul and Rajesh Gupta are being sought in connection with a 25-million-rand (\$1.76 million) contract paid to a Gupta-linked company, Nulane Investments, to conduct an agricultural feasibility study, it said. The red notice also applies to Atul Gupta's wife, Chetali. In 2019, the US Treasury slapped sanctions on the Guptas, effectively freezing their assets under US jurisdiction, and forbade Americans - particularly international banks with any US operations - from transactions with them. —AFP

150 Algeria bathers sick after sea polluted

ALGIERS, Algeria: Nearly 150 people were hospitalized after swimming on Sunday in seawater suspected to have been polluted at Tenes in north-western Algeria, a regional official said, quoted by local media. Three beaches and a desalination plant have been closed and an investigation launched in Chlef, a locality that includes Tenes, the reports said. Local government official Lakhdar Seddas told the privately owned Echourouk TV channel that "149 people suffered nausea, fever and redness of the eyes and were taken to hospital".

Seddas said that around 50 people had since left hospital, and that polluted seawaters may have made them ill. Suspicions centered on a ship carrying livestock that had arrived recently at Tenes port, he added. The website Ennahar Online named the ship as the Tanzanian-flagged Barhom II, and said it had arrived from the southern French port of Sete. Twenty-eight divers and seven civil defense workers who were sent to investigate were also reported to have become unwell. An official statement said an environment ministry team had taken air and water samples from the port at Tenes, beaches and other locations. —AFP

Pope Francis, 84, recovering after colon operation

ROME, Italy: Pope Francis, 84, was recovering in hospital yesterday from surgery for an inflamed large colon, a potentially painful condition that could see him bed-bound for several days. The pontiff was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital Sunday for a scheduled operation under general anesthetic for symptomatic diverticular stenosis of the colon. Afterwards, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said he had "reacted well to the surgery". The Vatican press office told AFP yesterday it expected to issue a fresh medical bulletin around midday (1000 GMT).

A week earlier, on the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Francis seemed to hint at the upcoming operation, saying: "I ask you to pray for the pope, pray in a special way. The pope needs your prayers". The Argentine is likely to stay in hospital for at least five days, according

to Italian news agency ANSA. The Vatican said it could not confirm how long the stay would be.

The pontiff has already put his Wednesday general audience on hold for the summer, and has no other official appointments in his calendar until next Sunday, when he is to lead the Angelus prayer. Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi sent Francis "affectionate get well soon wishes" yesterday, as did the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Sheikh Ahmed el Tayyeb, who wished him "a speedy recovery".

Francis is in the same suite on the 10th floor of the Gemelli hospital used by Pope John Paul II, according to Catholic website Cruxnow.com. The late pope underwent surgery there several times, including after an attempt on his life in 1981, and for a tumor in the colon in 1992, it said. Francis's condition causes potentially painful inflammation of the diverticulum, a pocket that can form on the colon walls and which tend to multiply with age.

"Stenosis" here means an abnormal narrowing of the colon, and patients with diverticulitis may experience lower abdominal pain, fever, or rectal bleeding.



ROME, Italy: A night view of the Policlinico A. Gemelli Hospital in Rome, where Pope Francis arrived in the early afternoon to undergo a surgery on Sunday. —AFP

The condition may be caused by high pressure within the colon or a diet low in fiber and high in red meat, according to the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. The pontiff had arrived at the clinic in the afternoon accompanied by his driver and one close aide, and Italian media said he was in the operating room a few hours later. Born on December 17, 1936 in Argentina, Francis lost part of his right lung at the age of 21. He also suffers from a hip problem and sciatica. —AFP

Gunmen kidnap 140 school students in northwest Nigeria

KADUNA, Nigeria: Gunmen kidnapped 140 students from a boarding school in north-western Nigeria yesterday, a school official said, the latest in a wave of mass abductions targeting schoolchildren and students. Heavily-armed criminal gangs often attack villages to loot, steal cattle and abduct for

ransom in northwest and central Nigeria, but since the start of the year they have increasingly targeted schools and colleges. The attackers opened fire and overpowered security guards after storming the Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna state in the early hours of yesterday, abducting most of the 165 pupils boarding there overnight.

"The kidnapers took away 140 students, only 25 students escaped. We still have no idea where the students were taken," Emmanuel Paul, a teacher at the school told AFP. Kaduna state police spokesman Muhammed Jalige confirmed the early yesterday morning attack, but could not give

details on the number of pupils taken. "Tactical police teams went after the kidnapers," he said. "We are still on the rescue mission."

Police said they had safely rescued 26 people, including a female teacher. Around 1,000 students and pupils have been abducted in Nigeria since December. Most have been released after negotiations with local officials, although some are still being held. Often, gangs target rural schools and colleges where students stay in dormitories and security is light, allowing them to easily transport large numbers of victims to forest hideouts to negotiate ransoms. —AFP



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International

The American South: A weak link in the COVID vaccination campaign

Alabama has some of the country's lowest vaccination rates

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama: With a sizable Black minority traditionally mistrustful of vaccines and with many conservative rural whites convinced that the vaccine is more dangerous than COVID-19 itself, Southern US states like Alabama have some of the country's lowest vaccination rates, leaving the disadvantaged region vulnerable to dangerous new virus variants. But some people are trying their best to change that. With a small team and an energy level that belies the crushing Southern heat, county commissioner Sheila Tyson knocks on the doors of modest homes in Memorial Park, a mainly Black neighborhood of Birmingham, Alabama's largest city.

"This Sunday, I want you all out there (in the park)," Tyson, a leader of the Alabama Black Women's Roundtable, tells anyone who opens their door. "We will have free food as long as it lasts, when it's gone it's gone, and we are going to have vaccine shots—have you had your vaccines?" Despite an injured foot, Tyson is one of the few local officials to actively campaign for vaccine acceptance, tirelessly visiting parks, schools, day-care centers and stadiums in some of the area's poorest neighborhoods.

'Dropping like flies'

"We are in a race against living and dying," she says. When COVID cases spiked in Alabama in December and January, people were "dropping like flies," she says. And as the Delta variant of coronavirus spreads across the United States, she says, "We are very concerned, not only about the Black and brown people but about all people." Tyson has heard the conspiracy theories that keep some people from getting the vaccine, including the notion that "the vaccine would sterilize African American men." Such baseless ideas stem from a grim history of discriminatory healthcare practices—not least the infa-

mous syphilis experiments carried out by the US government from 1932 to 1972 on hundreds of unwitting Black men in Tuskegee, 120 miles (200 kilometers) from Birmingham.

As a result, many African Americans—who represent 27 percent of the state's five million inhabitants—have a "wait and see" attitude toward the vaccines, said Janice Cobb, a 60-year-old seamstress in Memorial Park. Given such widespread suspicion, ultra-local efforts like Sheila Tyson's are the most effective approach, said state health officer Scott Harris—but they are not enough to substantially raise vaccination rates.

As of today, only 40 percent of Alabama residents aged 12 and above have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine, a rate only marginally above those of other Southern states like Louisiana (38 percent) and Mississippi, which at 36 percent has the lowest rate in the US—with all of them far behind the national average of 64 percent. Those states played a considerable role in preventing the Biden administration from reaching its declared goal of having 70 percent of Americans vaccinated by this July 4 holiday weekend.

Fear of being 'forced'

Harris is not surprised by the lagging results of the region, which is among the poorest in the country. "We are at or near the bottom in just about every health indicator," whether in terms of cancer, cardiovascular disease or child mortality, he told AFP. But the extent of vaccine hesitancy among white men has surprised him. The belief that the vaccine carries higher risk than the disease is widespread in some rural areas. "We didn't really anticipate the degree to which we would see that resistance," Harris said. Frank Arant, a barber in Oneonta, a small town north of Birmingham, is among the vaccine skeptics. As a 70-year-old dia-



BIRMINGHAM, Alabama: A sign encouraging COVID-19 vaccination is seen outside a park. —AFP

betic, he is particularly vulnerable to the virus. Still, he is convinced the vaccine could kill him. "We have had a lot of people in our barber shop to die from taking this shot," he said. "They would be here that week and saying, 'I'm going to get my shot,' and then three days later—dead. That scares people."

Despite such anecdotes, health experts say that with millions of doses already administered, the vaccine has proved extremely safe. Oneonta is in Blount County—where 90 percent of voters supported Donald Trump last year—and vaccine resistance there has an undeniable political component. People are "worried about being forced to take it, with President Biden telling everybody 'You got to do this,'" said Arant.

But, he added, "It's our lives and we are not going to take it. The people in the South make their own decisions." To J.D. Davidson, a 22-year-old soldier from Birmingham's Homewood suburb, "a lot of it stems from the anti-authoritarian stance of Southerners that has long been rooted in Southern culture." As political divisions increase, it becomes that much more important to not do it because it helps strengthen your identity." He believes that when prominent Democratic figures like First Lady Jill Biden visit the South to encourage vaccination, "it only makes things worse." Given the context, Harris does not expect a major increase in vaccination rates in the next few months. —AFP

World's safest place? Vermont leads US vaccine race

BURLINGTON, Vermont: Vermont — known for Bernie Sanders, maple syrup and the birthplace of Ben and Jerry's ice cream — has a new claim to fame: America's most-vaccinated state against COVID-19. Home to red farmhouses and signs warning drivers of moose, the US's second-least populated state recently became the first to partially vaccinate 80 percent of eligible residents. "It makes us probably the safest place in the country and maybe the world," says health commissioner Mark Levine, who has a bobblehead of top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci on his desk.

The rural, northeastern state has administered at least one vaccine dose to 82 percent of residents aged 12 and over, well above the US's national rate of 64 percent. Its vaccination rate is more than double that of the worst-performing state Mississippi. Officials and locals credit Vermont's success to widespread vaccine clinics, trust in political leaders and science and residents' strong sense of responsibility to their community. "Vermonters prioritize their health, which is a good starting point," Levine tells AFP at the state health department offices in Burlington on Lake Champlain.

"And building upon that, Vermonters are very cooperative and compliant," he adds, citing a tradition of town meetings and "civic engagement" across New England, including Maine and Massachusetts where vaccine rates are also high. Vermont, whose population is 94 percent white and which has one of the highest levels of education in the United States, has registered only around 250 deaths from COVID-19. The United States overall has suffered more than 605,000 COVID-related deaths.

Moderate Republican Governor Phil Scott lifted all remaining restrictions when Vermont reached the 80 percent milestone last month, after lifting the state's mask mandate in May. Evan David Warner, a busker on Burlington's main Church Street, agrees that Vermont's tight-knit population of just 640,000 was key to life returning to normal. "Vermonters believe that we all have a responsibility to keep each other safe. It's a social moral code," the 23-year-old guitarist says between songs.

Vermont's scattered populace and mountainous terrain, popular with hikers in summer and skiers in winter, presented vaccinators with the challenge of reaching everyone. As shots slowed at main sites, pop-up clinics were set up on farms, lakeside beaches, state parks and raceways to help reach people in rural areas, including migrant farm workers.

"We realized we had to go out to them," explains nurse Ellen Monger, as she waits for walk-ins at a farmer's market in Northfield, population 6,000. "Sometimes that means traveling on dirt roads in the middle of nowhere and going to someone's home where they're homebound. I've literally been to places I never expected to as a nurse," she adds, as locals stock up on organic teas, jarred pickles and freshly picked strawberries. Fifteen miles (24 kilometers) away in Websterville, the National Guard administers the single-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine to employees at Vermont Creamery. —AFP

Cyprus says huge forest blaze fully 'under control'

NICOSIA, Cyprus: Firefighters in Cyprus said yesterday they had brought under control the island's worst blaze on record, which ripped through mountain forests and farmland, killing four people and destroying scores of homes. Water-bombing planes from Greece and Israel and British aircraft from bases on the Mediterranean island helped douse the huge fire, which blackened 55 square kilometers (21 square miles) of the Troodos Mountains. The Cyprus Forestry Department said yesterday that "the fire that broke out on Saturday... came under full control today" at 8:00 am (0500 GMT).

Four Egyptian farm laborers aged in their 20s and 30s were killed by the flames as they tried to escape on foot after their car plunged into a ravine. The wildfire, described as the worst since the Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960, destroyed 50 homes, damaged power lines and

forced the evacuation of 10 villages, authorities reported. "Everything was a nightmare and pure hell here, the village was surrounded by fire," said Akis Giorgiou, 45, from the hamlet of Arakapas.

The fire, fanned by strong winds and exacerbated by a heatwave that has baked the island in temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), sent up a vast cloud of smoke that was visible from sea and from the other side of the Troodos mountain range. More than 600 people from the emergency services and army were involved in tackling the blaze, along with a dozen aircraft and 70 fire trucks as well as a reconnaissance drone, the forestry department said.

Firefighters were still deployed en masse yesterday around the badly-hit village of Arakapas, near Limassol, to tackle any potential new outbreaks, the department said. AFP reporters had seen thick gnarled trunks of



ARAKAPAS, Cyprus: Trees burn in a forest on the slopes of the Troodos mountain chain, as a giant fire rages on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, during the night of July 3, 2021. —AFP

ancient olive trees reduced to smoldering stumps and grey ash replacing yellowed scrub as far as the eye could see. A 67-year-old farmer was arrested and remanded in custody on suspicion of having unintentionally started the enormous blaze while burning stubble, a charge he denied.

Police said an eyewitness had seen him leaving Arakapas in his car at the

time the fire started there. He could face charges of recklessly causing four deaths. Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said the four Egyptians' charred bodies had been found outside the village of Odos in Larnaca district. Their burnt-out vehicle was discovered at the bottom of a ravine and the four bodies were some 600 meters (yards) away. —AFP

Rest of Florida apartment block demolished

SURFSIDE, Florida: A controlled explosion brought down the unstable remains of the collapsed apartment block in Florida late Sunday ahead of a threatening tropical storm, with the confirmed death toll at 24 and 121 people missing. Video footage showed the rest of the 12-story Champlain Towers South in Surfside, outside Miami, being demolished just after 10:30 pm local time (0230 GMT). Preparing the site for demolition ahead of the possible arrival of Tropical Storm Elsa early next week had required that the search for victims be halted on Saturday. Most of the building collapsed in the early hours of June 24, sending up a huge cloud of dust and rattling Americans unprepared for such a deadly urban disaster.

Authorities had said the unstable remaining structure posed a threat to search and rescue teams still at the scene, though hopes of finding anyone

alive have diminished. The video footage of the demolition showed smoke, dust and other debris blowing away from the site after the building came down following two loud booms. Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava had announced the schedule at an earlier press conference, saying the operation would use "small, strategically placed explosives." "The demolition itself is confined to the immediate area around the building," she said. "However, there is dust and other particles that are an unavoidable byproduct of all types of demolition and, as a precautionary measure, we're urging residents in the immediate vicinity to stay indoors."

Storm threat

With Tropical Storm Elsa rumbling northward through the Caribbean, authorities accelerated the demolition schedule. County mayor Levine Cava said "bringing the building down in a



SURFSIDE, Florida: This combination of pictures created on July 4, 2021 shows the rest of the Champlain South tower just before being demolished (top L) and as it is demolished by a controlled explosion in Surfside. —AFP

controlled manner is critical to expanding" the search operation as teams have been unable to delve further due to the risk of further collaps-

es. President Joe Biden visited the scene last week and met grieving relatives and rescue workers, hailing their resilience and strength. —AFP

Ethiopia's Abiy boasts of military might despite rebel gains

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said yesterday his government could easily recruit one million new fighters but wants to foster a period of "silence" in the country's war-hit Tigray region. The 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner's remarks came one week after Tigray's capital Mekele fell to the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) rebel group and Abiy's government declared a unilateral ceasefire in the eight-month-old conflict. The TDF has described its seizure of

Mekele and most of the rest of the northern region of Tigray as a major victory, while Abiy and other officials have countered that federal forces executed a strategic pullback to focus on other threats.

"In one, two or three weeks, 100,000 trained, armed and organized special forces can be mobilized," Abiy told lawmakers. "If said special force isn't enough, if a militia is needed, in one or two months half a million militiamen can be organized. One million youths can be mobilized and trained." But Abiy also said officials had "decided there should be a period of silence for everyone to think".

Tigrayan leaders on Sunday issued their first formal response to Abiy's ceasefire call, saying they would only accept it if forces from Eritrea and Ethiopia's Amhara region—who have been backing the Ethiopian army—also withdrew from the region. They also called for "proceedings" to hold Abiy and

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki accountable for "damage" inflicted during the fighting, which has been marked by grisly massacres and widespread sexual violence.

Abiy did not address those conditions yesterday. Thousands of people have been killed in the conflict and hundreds of thousands face hunger in Tigray, an important economic and industrial region in the Horn of Africa nation. Last week the TDF paraded what it said were thousands of captive Ethiopian soldiers through the streets of Mekele. In his remarks yesterday, however, Abiy said the TDF seized territory only because the army decided to leave, a process he said unfolded for more than a month. He also offered fulsome praise for the army. "Our defense forces are not paid enough. They climb up and down mountains. In the rain, in the sun they fight for the dignity of the country," Abiy said. —AFP

International

Over 1,000 Afghan troops flee Taleban into Tajikistan

Afghan govt has vowed to launch counteroffensive in north

KABUL: More than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into neighboring Tajikistan yesterday following clashes with the Taleban, as the insurgents amassed momentum on the battlefield. The exodus of troops followed another weekend of fighting across much of the northern countryside where the Taleban have overrun dozens of districts, spurring fears that Afghan forces are in crisis.

"They did not want to surrender. They had asked for reinforcements but their call was ignored," said Abdul Basir, a soldier based with a battalion in Badakhshan province that had members flee over the border. The United States announced Friday that it had handed over Bagram Air Base - the center of its operations - to Afghan security forces, effectively wrapping up operations in the country following nearly two decades of fighting.

Tajikistan's national security committee said that 1,037 Afghan government troops had fled into the ex-Soviet country "to save their lives" after clashes with the Taleban during the night. "Taking into account the principle of good neighborliness and adhering to the position of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the military personnel of the Afghan government forces were allowed to enter Tajik territory," said the statement, published by Tajikistan's state information agency.

Afghan troops had already crossed into Tajikistan following earlier clashes that saw the Taleban take control of a major border crossing between the countries. The Afghan government has vowed to launch a counteroffensive in the north. Hamdullah Mohib, the country's national security advisor, told Russia's RIA news agency that an operation was "absolutely" in the works.

'Emergency situation'

Already thinly stretched with supply lines strained, Afghan security forces have been crumbling in the face of the Taleban onslaught, with several bases and outposts surrendering to the insurgents without firing a shot. "Afghan forces have lost their morale," said analyst Atta Noori in Kabul. "They are confused - in almost every district that the Taleban capture, they send a team of elders to talk to the soldiers and get them to surrender."

"It is an emergency situation for the Afghan government. They need to step up their counteroffensive as soon as possible," he added. With vital air cover from the Americans massively curtailed by the closure of Bagram air base, the Taleban pressed on with their offensive across the north over the weekend, seizing most of Badakhshan and Takhar provinces with government forces holding little more than the provincial capitals.

The speed and ease of the Taleban's effective takeover of the provinces represent a massive psychological blow to the Afghan government. Both provinces had once served as the strongholds for the anti-Taleban Northern Alliance during the gruesome civil war in the 1990s and were never routed by the militants.

The dire situation in the north was accompanied by reports that the Taleban were also inching closer to the provincial capitals in their southern strongholds of Kandahar and Helmand, with key districts on the outskirts of both cities taken by the group. "We are so tired of this war. At least today the right thing was done, and one side should take control," said Shir Mohammad Barezai, a resident of Helmand's Nawa district that was seized by the



Afghan policemen sit on an armored vehicle at a checkpoint in Panjwai district of Kandahar province on Sunday after the Taleban captured a key district in their former bastion of Kandahar. —AFP

Taleban early yesterday.

Since May 1 when the US military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, Afghan troops and the Taleban have clashed fiercely across the rugged countryside as peace talks in Doha stalled.

Despite the Taleban's rapid gains, the United States has pressed ahead with its withdrawal in accordance with President Joe Biden's decision to pull all forces from Afghanistan by this year's 20th anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks. —AFP

Death toll in Philippines plane crash rises to 52

PATIKUL, Philippines: Philippine security forces searched among coconut trees on a remote southern island yesterday for the flight data boxes of an aircraft that crashed and killed 52 people in one of the country's worst military air disasters. The C-130 Hercules transport plane was carrying 96 people, most of them recent army graduates, when it overshot the runway on Sunday while trying to land on Jolo island in Sulu province - a haven for Islamist militants.

The plane "skidded" and burst into flames in a village, killing 52 people including 49 military personnel and three civilians, said military spokesman Major General Edgard Arevalo. Another 51 were injured, most of them soldiers. It was not clear if the pilots were among the survivors. "This is one of the worst tragic incidents that happened in our armed forces," Arevalo said.

The three civilians killed were not on the flight and had been working in a quarry, village leader Tanda Hailid told AFP. They were relatives of Agga Ahaddi, who was lucky to survive the crash. He and

his child were outside when the plane ploughed through their house and then a neighbor's home. "We ran away, we just left," Ahaddi told AFP.

Photos of the scene released by the military's Joint Task Force-Sulu showed the damaged tail and smoking wreckage scattered in a coconut grove. "We have people on the ground to make sure the integrity of the pieces of the evidence that we will retrieve, most particularly the flight data recorder," Arevalo said. "Aside from eyewitness accounts, we are also looking for recordings, radio conversation recordings between the pilot and the control tower."

Arevalo said the military had secured the crash site and would ensure militants on the island do not disrupt search efforts. Dental records were being used to help identify the charred remains of victims. Most of the passengers recently graduated from basic military training and were being deployed to the restive island as part of a counter-insurgency effort in the Muslim-majority region. The military has a heavy presence in the southern Philippines where militant groups, including the kidnap-for-ransom outfit Abu Sayyaf, operate.

'Worst crash'

C-130s have been the workhorses of air forces around the world for decades, used to transport troops, supplies, and vehicles. The second-hand Hercules that crashed Sunday was acquired from the United States and delivered to the Philippines



Philippine military personnel inspect the wreckage of the ill-fated Philippine Air Force C-130 transport plane that crashed near the airport in Jolo town, Sulu province during search and retrieval operations yesterday. —AFP

earlier this year. It was one of four in the country's fleet and was in "very good condition", the military said. Two others are being repaired while the third has been grounded following the crash.

"These are all seasoned and experienced pilots, that's why we are also unable to immediately say how this... (happened)," said Arevalo. "Even if these (military assets) are not brand new... these are airworthy." "This ranks as the worst crash of a Philippine military aircraft," Jose Antonio Custodio, a military historian and analyst, told AFP. —AFP

One dead, 29 injured in Bangkok factory explosion

BANGKOK: An explosion near Thai capital Bangkok's international airport yesterday left a plastics factory in flames, killing at least one firefighter and wounding 29 people, officials said. Heavy plumes of black smoke could be seen rising up to the sky from the city's downtown 35 km away, as helicopters continued to dump fire suppression foam from the air on the site.

The blast occurred around 3 am at Taiwan-based Ming Dih Chemical Co, located on the outskirts of Bangkok near Suvarnabhumi airport. By noon, 500 residents near the area were moved to two shelters, including a nearby school about 9 km away, where elderly residents in wheelchairs waited to return to their homes.

Rescue workers drove around surrounding neighborhoods in emergency vans, telling thousands of residents via loudspeakers to leave for their safety. The public have been ordered to stay away from a radius of at least 500 m around the blast site, said

Lieutenant General Ampon Buarubporn. "We do not know if there is anything left to explode," he said, adding that authorities are still working to get the fire under control. The cause of the explosion is still unknown.

Air quality

According to officials, Ming Dih Chemical Co produces expanded polystyrene - colloquially known as Styrofoam - and has been in operation since 1985 in Bang Pli district. Besides being the site of Suvarnabhumi airport - which saw massive black clouds above its airport runways yesterday - the 500-metre radius around the factory is also home to some 300 factories and residential neighborhoods housing 240 communities.

"We have sent air quality vehicles to check the air around the area and will work together with the pollution control department," said Industrial Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit. Around 5 pm - 15 hours after the pre-dawn explosion - the fire was still raging and sending billowing clouds of smoke into the sky. Multiple fire trucks, water trucks and two helicopters were deployed to quell the blaze, which left a wreckage of debris and gnarled metal beams.

"Two flights carried 6,000 tons of firefighting foam to put out the fire," said deputy interior minister Nipon Boonyamane. "We are supporting the oper-

still have not seen the peak yet," he told AFP.

Bangkok has so far reported nearly 950,000 infections and more than 15,000 deaths, figures experts say are likely to be three to four times less than the actual caseload and fatalities. Under the lockdown imposed at the start of the month, and now extended until July 14, Bangladesh's 168 million people can only leave home for emergencies and to buy essentials. The army and police are patrolling the streets, there is no public transport and shops and offices are shut. Food markets can open for a few hours a day.

In the capital Dhaka, home to some 20 million people, authorities have arrested more than 2,000 people for breaching lockdown rules. Garment factories, a key pillar of Bangladesh's export-oriented economy, are exempted from the shutdown. The health department said some 50 percent of infections are occurring outside the cities, with districts bordering India, where the Delta variant first originated, worst hit. "The situation is worsening every day. The lockdown



BANGKOK: A helicopter dumps water onto the site of an explosion and fire at a plastics factory yesterday. —AFP

ation with our full capacity so the situation will be in control as soon as possible." Traffic around the area was thrown into chaos as authorities closed a main road running parallel to the airport, while strong fumes of burning plastic permeated the area.

Thitipong Choke-umnuay, whose workplace is about 10 km away from the factory and escaped the impact, said his family members living closer were not so lucky. His aunt had evacuated to his office after the impact of the explosion caused severe damage to her home. —AFP



DHAKA: Passenger ferries are seen parked during a strict weeklong nationwide lockdown patrolled by police and troops as a preventive measure against COVID-19 yesterday. —AFP

seems to be working. We hope the extension of the lockdown will improve the situation," a spokesman of the health department said. —AFP

Virus-hit Indonesia orders oxygen for jammed hospitals

JAKARTA: Indonesia yesterday called for the nation's oxygen supplies to be sent to hospitals overflowing with coronavirus patients as fresh cases and deaths hit new records. Oxygen producers had been told to allocate their stocks to the medical sector as the country is battered by an unprecedented wave of infections driven by the highly contagious Delta variant, said senior minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan.

"We have enough oxygen supply, but demand is up three-to-four fold so there have been distribution gridlocks," he said. "There's supply from five oxygen producers and we've asked them to allocate 100 percent of their oxygen to the health sector," he added. Southeast Asia's worst-hit nation may turn to imports if supplies dry up, he added.

Apart from hospitals, the steel and mining industries are major buyers of mineral-rich Indonesia's oxygen supplies. An emergency refilling station was set up in central Jakarta, while rickshaw drivers in the city of Bandung delivered tanks to homes where virus patients were isolating. Yesterday, the country reported 29,745 new infections and 558 deaths, both daily records, after the government last week ordered fresh virus curbs in the hard-hit capital Jakarta, across Java and on holiday island Bali.

Mosques, parks, shopping malls and restaurants were shut in hotspot areas, while non-essential employees were ordered to work from home. Dozens in Jakarta were arrested yesterday for operating cafes and entertainment venues in violation of the new rules. In Java's Semarang city, authorities sprayed water hoses at street-side restaurants still serving customers.

The world's fourth most populous nation has seen its daily caseload more than quadruple in less than a month and its tally stands at 2.3 million cases and 61,140 deaths. But that figure is widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures. Indonesia's overwhelmed healthcare system has been teetering on the brink of collapse as jammed hospitals turned away patients, forcing desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home.

Daily COVID burials in the hard-hit capital Jakarta are up 10-fold since May, the government has said, and patients are increasingly dying in isolation at home. Independent virus data group LaporCovid has said at least 269 people in 10 provinces have died while in self-isolation. Jakarta's health agency said 45 people had died at home on Friday alone. There are no official national statistics on the number of COVID deaths at home. —AFP



BEKASI, Indonesia: Gravediggers bury a coffin of a COVID-19 victim at a cemetery on Sunday. —AFP

Bangladesh extends lockdown as cases hit new record

DHAKA: Bangladesh yesterday extended a strict nationwide lockdown, confining people to their homes for another week as coronavirus cases and deaths both hit new records. Authorities said a record 164 people had died in the previous 24 hours, while almost 1,000 tested positive - the most single day-infections since the first case was detected in March last year.

Nazrul Islam, a top virologist and member of a high-powered national technical committee that asked the government to extend the lockdown, said the situation is "extremely bad". "The Delta variant is responsible for 70 percent of the infections. This variant is highly transmissible. And we

Business

TUESDAY, JULY 6, 2021



STOCKHOLM: People walk past a shuttered Coop supermarket store in Stockholm, Sweden, during an ongoing "colossal" cyber-attack affecting organisations around the world. —AFP

Hackers demand \$70m after Kaseya attack

FBI warn 'ransomware' attack is so large

PARIS: Hackers were yesterday demanding \$70 million in bitcoin in exchange for data stolen during an attack on a US IT company that has shuttered hundreds of Swedish supermarkets. Researchers believe more than 1,000 companies could have been affected by the attack on Miami-based firm Kaseya, which provides IT services to some 40,000 businesses around the world.

The FBI warned Sunday that the scale of the "ransomware" attack — a form of digital hostage-taking where hackers encrypt victims' data and then demand money for restored access — is so large that it may be "unable to respond to each victim individually". Sweden's Coop supermarket chain was among the most high-profile victims, with "a majority" of their 800 stores still closed three days after the hack

paralysed its cash registers, spokesman Kevin Bell told AFP.

Coop is not a direct customer of Kaseya's, but its IT subcontractor Visma Esscom was hit by the attack. Bell stressed that the situation was looking "positive compared to a few days ago", but the few hundred stores that have reopened were relying on alternative payment solutions, such as customers paying using their smartphones.

Experts believe the attack was probably carried out by REvil, a Russian-speaking hacking group known as a prolific perpetrator of ransomware attacks. A post on Happy Blog, a site on the dark web previously associated with the group, claimed responsibility for the attack and said it had infected "more than a million systems".

The FBI believes that REvil, which also goes by the name Sodinokibi, was behind a ransomware attack last month on global meat-processing giant JBS, which ended up paying \$11 million in bitcoin to the hackers. The blog post claiming responsibility for the Kaseya attack said the hackers would post a decryption tool online "so everyone will be able to recover from attack in less than an hour" — if they were handed \$70 million in bitcoin.

Kaseya describes itself as a leading provider of IT and security management services to small and medium-sized businesses. The company said Sunday that it believed the damage had been restricted to a "very small number" of customers using its signature VSA software, which lets companies manage networks of computers and printers from a single point.

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". Kaseya said it had "immediately shut down" its servers after detecting the attack on Friday and warned its VSA customers to do the same, "to prevent them from being compromised." The company has released a tool allowing its customers to find out whether their own computer systems have been compromised by the attack.

Russia-linked hackers strike again?

In recent months numerous US companies, including the computer group SolarWinds and the Colonial oil pipeline, have been the victims of high-profile ransomware attacks blamed by the FBI on hackers based in Russian territory.

US President Joe Biden recently raised the threat in talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, and on Saturday he ordered a full investigation into the Kaseya attack. While "the initial thinking was it was not the Russian government", Biden said, "if it is either with the knowledge of and/or a consequence of Russia, then I told Putin we will respond."

Loic Guezo, head of Clusif, a French association of cybersecurity experts, said the Kaseya attack bore a strong resemblance to last year's spectacular attack against SolarWinds, a software company. But he added that it was unclear why the hackers were this time demanding such a massive sum of money, and suggested it may have been done with political objectives to put pressure on the Biden administration. —AFP

VW, Daimler, Volvo team up to build truck chargers

BERLIN: The truck manufacturing units of Volkswagen, Daimler and Volvo announced yesterday they will team up to build a network of 1,700 charging points for heavy-duty vehicles in Europe using green electricity.

The initial plan foresees a 500 million euro (\$600 million) investment to drive the five-year project, but the companies said they hoped to bring in additional partners and obtain public funding to build additional charging stations for long-haul trucks and buses using batteries.

The high-performance charging stations will use electricity from renewable sources and be located close to highways as well as at logistic and destination points. They will also be open to all brands of commercial vehicles.

The project will be managed by a joint venture that is planned to begin operations next year. The companies said they hope the project "will act as catalyst and enabler for realising the European Union's Green Deal for a carbon-neutral freight transportation by 2050 — both by providing the necessary infrastructure and targeting for green energy at the charging points."

They pointed to a recent report by an industry body that called for the installation of 15,000 high-performance charging points in Europe by 2025 to enable haulers to begin shifting to electric vehicles. The chief executive of Volkswagen's truck unit Traton, Matthias Gruendler, was quoted in a statement as saying "it is clear that the future of transport is electric".

He said the initiative was a first step to accelerate the transition to a fossil fuel-free future for the long-haul transport sector. "The second step should be a strong engagement of the EU for the full scale-up of a charging network across Europe," he added.

This is not the first such collaboration between truck and bus manufacturers in Europe.

Daimler and Volvo in March announced a joint venture to develop hydrogen fuel cells for heavy trucks. —AFP

UK supermarket Morrisons set for mega takeover

LONDON: The UK supermarket sector, which has benefitted hugely from a shift to online shopping during the pandemic, is set for a further shakeup with Morrisons heading for a multi-billion-pound takeover.

Britain's fourth biggest supermarket on Saturday said it had accepted a £6.3-billion (\$8.7-billion, 7.3-billion-euro) takeover offer from a consortium of investment groups. And yesterday, US private equity firm Apollo Global Management revealed it was mulling a rival bid.

It comes after Morrisons last month rejected a £5.5-billion offer from US private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice. The British supermarket "is seen as a bargain compared to overseas peers, with its deep integrated supply chain and the fact that it owns much of its store estate", noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "The company is already a prince in Amazon's e-commerce empire." Reflecting the fresh interest in the group and a potential bidding war, Morrisons' share price jumped 11 percent in London morning deals.

Apollo yesterday said it was "in the preliminary stages of evaluating a possible offer for Morrisons" on behalf of investment funds. It comes after a consortium comprising Softbank-

Chip shortage driving French industry lower

PARIS: The global shortage of semiconductors that has been plaguing the automobile industry is helping drive industrial production lower in



LONDON: File photo shows a man walking past a Morrisons supermarket in Stratford, east London. Britain's fourth biggest supermarket said it had accepted a £6.3-billion (\$8.7-billion, 7.3-billion-euro) takeover offer from a consortium of investment groups —AFP

owned Fortress, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and Koch Real Estate Investments, had their takeover bid accepted.

Morrisons is Britain's fourth biggest supermarket chain in terms of sales, according to data group Kantar. Trailing leader Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda, it nevertheless has almost 500 stores and more than 110,000 employees in the UK.

France, data showed yesterday. Manufacturing of motor vehicles fell by 7.9 percent in May from the previous month "due to shortages of raw materials in the automotive industry", the national statistics agency INSEE said.

That helped drag down overall industrial production by 0.3 percent during the month. Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns caused a shift in consumer spending towards electronics and a spike in demand for the semiconductor chips

At the end of last year, US retail giant Walmart agreed to sell Asda to the billionaire Issa brothers and a private equity group for £6.8 billion. While UK supermarkets have enjoyed strong sales during the pandemic, they have faced hefty added costs with having to employ thousands of extra staff to meet rising demand for online food shopping. —AFP

that run them.

Modern automobiles can use dozens of such chips in their various electronics systems, and carmakers have had to slow or idle factories when they have run out of supplies. French motor vehicle production was down 29.2 percent in May from its level in February 2020, just before the pandemic lockdowns began. Overall, French industrial production was 5.6 percent lower from its pre-pandemic level. —AFP

Business

European stock markets falter after Asian markets decline

US markets shut for Independence Day holiday

LONDON: European stock markets faltered yesterday after a mainly downbeat Asian session, but London rose on takeover news and rising oil prices before an OPEC output decision. In early afternoon eurozone deals, Frankfurt stocks dipped and Paris flatlined, as investors eyed poor Chinese data.

With US markets shut for the Independence Day holiday, no momentum was expected from the other side of the Atlantic. London however advanced with sentiment boosted by news of a possible bidding war for British supermarket chain Morrisons. The energy sector was also buoyed by rising oil prices, as top crude producers struggled to reach a deal on lifting output.

China doubts

"Risk-off sentiment is dominating the markets at the start of the week," noted analyst Sophie Griffiths at the OANDA brokerage. "Weaker-than-expected China data is overshadowing signs of economic recovery in Europe," she added.

"The China Caixin services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) revealed the sector grew at its slowest pace in 14 months in June. "The weak print comes following Thursday's manufacturing equivalent, which also revealed that growth was slowing," Griffiths said.

Back in London, Morrisons shares jumped 11 percent after US private equity firm Apollo Global

Management revealed it was mulling a counter-bid for the food retailer. Britain's fourth biggest supermarket on Saturday accepted a separate £6.3-billion (\$8.7-billion, 7.3-billion-euro) takeover from a consortium of investment groups.

That came after Morrisons last month rejected a £5.5-billion offer from US private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice. "We have now got confirmation of three parties interested in Morrisons—and fear of missing out could attract further interest," noted Russ Mould, investment director at stockbroker AJ Bell.

OPEC's output row

Oil markets edged up as the United Arab Emirates battled with OPEC and other producers over the rate and timing of their next output increase. Saudi Arabia is engaged in a rare public spat with its Emirati allies, escalating tensions before another meeting of the OPEC+ alliance of oil producing countries.

The UAE has bitterly opposed a proposal by the alliance to raise production, causing a stalemate that could derail efforts to curb rising crude prices amid a fragile post-pandemic recovery.

"It's the whole group versus one country, which is sad to me but this is the reality," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg television, suggesting the UAE were isolated within



TOKYO: Women walk past an electronic board, showing the stock market indices of various countries, outside a brokerage in Tokyo. — AFP

the 23-member OPEC+ bloc. Officials have laboured for days over an agreement to pump more as demand picks up with the global recovery and supplies shrink,

with fears that failure to find common ground could send prices soaring. Crude prices are now around levels last seen in 2018. — AFP

Gulf Bank announces winners of AIDanah monthly draw for June

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its monthly AIDanah draw on Sunday, to announce the winners for June. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each. The winners are:

Sarra Abdulmajeed Dashty
Abdullah Joudah Sayer Sagheir
Amer Taher Jasim Alqattan
Mohammed Ali Jaber Alenzi
Sumaya Abdullah Mohammed Sakeen
Essa Adnan Khaled Alaslawi
Alanoud Saad Obaid Faleh Al Rasheedi (Minor)

Ali Mohammad Almasri
Ruaa Ghazi Ibrahim Alenzi
Rudaina Abdulla Bader AlKharafi
The AIDanah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's AIDanah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous Benefits

The AIDanah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year,

which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank.

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing AIDanah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young. Customers can deposit to win AIDanah cash prizes throughout the year.

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their AIDanah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's AIDanah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an AIDanah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an AIDanah account today with only KD 200. To open an AIDanah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more



convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an AIDanah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Deposit More for More Chances to Win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an AIDanah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

Gulf Bank's AIDanah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for

customers to be eligible for the upcoming AIDanah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's AIDanah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 Million.

To deposit into an AIDanah account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated AIDanah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.

Croatia's Rimac takes majority stake in Bugatti

BERLIN: Croatian electric carmaker Rimac Automobili will take the controlling stake in Bugatti, in an ownership swap arrangement with the French race-car brand's owner Volkswagen, the companies said yesterday.

Under the deal, Rimac and Volkswagen will set up a joint venture focused on Bugatti. Rimac will hold 55 percent of shares in the new company, while Volkswagen will then delegate its stake of 45 percent to its luxury sports car unit Porsche. The new company will be headquartered in Zagreb and be known as Bugatti-Rimac.

It will be founded in the fourth quarter of 2021, subject to approval from competition authorities, the companies said. No financial details of the transaction were disclosed. Porsche itself holds a minority stake in Rimac. It bought direct shares in the Croatian company in 2018 and has gradually increased its stake to the current level of 24 percent.

Mate Rimac, founder and CEO of Rimac, said the project was "a really exciting moment" that "takes the company to a whole new level". The venture will combine "Bugatti's strong expertise in the luxury car business with Rimac's great innovative strength in the promising field of electric mobility", Porsche CEO Oliver Blume added.

Mate Rimac will be the chief executive of the new company, which is to employ around 300 staff in Zagreb and 130 at Bugatti's existing site in Molsheim, France. It will initially produce two luxury car models—the Bugatti Chiron and the all-electric Rimac Nevera—with more models planned for the future. The European Union is to unveil tougher 2030 CO2 emissions targets and regulatory proposals on July 14, which are expected to force carmakers to speed up the transition to electric cars. Volkswagen said last month it plans to stop producing cars with internal combustion engines in Europe for its eponymous flagship brand between 2033 and 2035. — AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KWD (240) million for (6) months with Rate of Return (1.250%).

Vitasoy shares tumble on China boycott calls

HONG KONG: Shares in Hong Kong's Vitasoy plunged yesterday as the beverage brand was hit by online boycott calls from Chinese consumers after an employee stabbed a policeman and then killed himself. The 81-year-old soy milk manufacturer saw as much as 15 percent wiped off its share price before closing some 12 percent down, its worst performance since the 2008 global financial crisis.

The sudden plunge illustrated the precarious situation many businesses face when they get caught up in Hong Kong's febrile politics as authorities carry out a sweeping crackdown on dissent in the financial hub. Chinese consumers called for a boycott over the weekend after a 50-year-old Hong Kong employee of Vitasoy attacked a policeman with a knife on Thursday night in what local authorities said was a "lone wolf domestic terror" attack.

An internal memo was sent out by a Vitasoy employee mourning the "tragic death" of the man and extending condolences to his family, sparking online anger in mainland China. Vitasoy quickly distanced itself from the memo, saying it did not represent the company and had used "extremely inappropriate wording".

But consumers in China, where the company makes the vast majority of its profits, rounded on the brand. By yesterday afternoon, the topic "Get out of the Mainland, Vitasoy" had some 120 million readers on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform.

China's authoritarian government has cultivated a hyper-nationalist internet where consumer boycotts have been extremely effective at hammering any brand perceived to be disloyal to Beijing.

Hong Kong police said a company on the same street where Vitasoy's headquarters is located also received a false telephone bomb threat yesterday. Hong Kong is a deeply polarised city after huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago were stamped out with arrests and a new national security law.

Many residents view the city's police force as instrumental in the sweeping political crackdown and over the weekend some residents tried to leave flowers for the currently unnamed attacker. Hong Kong's government warned that such gestures could lead to arrest for "sedition" or "supporting terrorism". The police officer who was attacked needed surgery for a punctured lung but is expected to survive his injuries. Hong Kong's new national security unit has taken over the case. — AFP



DANA: This aerial view shows solar panels on the rooftops of buildings in this town east of the Turkish-Syrian border in the northwestern Idlib province on June 10, 2021. — AFP

Rebel-held Syria shifts power towards solar

KILLI, Syria: Huge solar panels poke out of pumpkin and tomato fields in Syria's rebel-held northwest, where after infrastructure was destroyed during a decade of war, many have switched to renewable energy. "We used to rely on diesel-powered generators, but it was a struggle with fuel shortages and price hikes," said Khaled Mustafa, one of dozens of farmers who set up panels in the Idlib region. "So we opted for solar power instead," he said.

More than three million people live in the Idlib region in Syria's northwest, much of which is controlled by jihadist forces and other rebels. Across Syria, at least 90 percent lack a stable power supply, according to the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP). In rebel areas, there is little hope of state-provided electricity.

Instead, the dark blue silicon panels have become common - installed on roofs, in hospitals or between tents in massive displacement camps. Once small and smoky diesel generators used to power

many homes. But with regular fuel shortages sending prices soaring, solar panels are now viewed as a cheaper, more efficient and reliable alternative.

In Mustafa's plot, solar panels hooked to rotating metal plates turn to follow the movement of the sun. They are among 200 solar panels purchased two years ago by an agricultural cooperative of nearly 20 farmers, costing some \$4,000. The panels power water pumps from a well, irrigating three hectares of cooperative farmland, as well as neighboring fields. "Even if (state) electricity is restored, solar energy will remain cheaper," said Mustafa.

Syria's electricity production was slashed by at least half during the conflict, but as fighting has calmed, renewable energy sources have increased, the UN says. "Since armed clashes have decreased, and most of the country is in a more stable situation, solar energy production has spiked as a valid alternative," UNDP said. In regime-controlled areas, solar panels provide power for both homes and public institutions like universities.

As for those under rebel control, one survey found eight percent used solar as the main source of power in their homes, according to a report in the Education and Conflict Review, published by Britain's University College London. It also found a tenth of people used solar for heating water, and a third of people used solar as a secondary source of power, for lighting and charging batteries. — AFP

China extends probe into US-listed technology firms after Didi blow

Country's major internet firms wield massive influence among its army of consumers

BEIJING: Beijing widened a crackdown on its embattled technology sector yesterday by announcing probes into two more US-listed Chinese companies, a day after banning ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing from app stores following its huge New York initial public offering.

The country's major internet firms wield massive influence among its army of consumers, but have in recent months had their wings clipped in a regulatory crackdown that has scuppered listings and hit business as the government seeks to rein in their influence. The latest targets are newly listed companies Full Truck Alliance — a merger between truck-hailing platforms Yunmanman and Huochebang — and Kanzhun, which owns online recruitment platform Boss Zhipin.

"The overarching message here from regulators is, you need to have your house in order domestically before listing abroad," said Kendra Schaefer, head of tech policy research at Beijing-based consultancy Trivium China. The three platforms have been told to stop new user registrations during the investigation "to prevent security risks to national data, safeguard national security and protect public interest", the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said.

Hours earlier, the watchdog ordered the removal of Didi from app stores following a similar probe, which it said found the firm's user data collection and use in "serious violation" of regulations. It also cited national security for the probe, an unusual move against a domestic tech firm. However, there were few details on the probe or Didi's alleged violations.

Didi has pledged to rectify any problems, and

said that the takedown "may have an adverse impact on its revenue in China". The move does not prevent existing users from booking through Didi, but throws a wrench in the company's growth plans after its bumper New York IPO last week raised \$4.4 billion, one of the biggest in the US over the past decade. The investigation was announced just after China wrapped up tightly-choreographed celebrations for the centenary of its ruling Communist Party. It also comes at a time of heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington with the tech sector a key issue of disagreement.

Dubbed China's Uber, Didi was founded just nine years ago by former Alibaba executive Cheng Wei. It has gone on to dominate the country's ride-hailing market after winning a costly turf war against the US titan in 2016 and taking over Uber's local unit.

Shifting landscape

It now claims more than 15 million drivers and nearly 500 million users, with services available in 16 countries, including Russia and Australia. But its rise also comes amid what Kevin Kwek, senior analyst on Asian financials at Bernstein, called a clear "trend towards tightening on tech".

Chinese tech companies fell in Hong Kong yesterday as investors assessed the situation, with e-commerce platform Meituan down 5.6 percent, Alibaba dropping nearly three percent and Tencent — which has a stake in Didi — sliding 3.6 percent.

Tokyo-listed SoftBank, which has a 21.5 percent stake in the firm, plunged 5.4 percent. Didi, with a near monopoly on ride-hailing, is "the most high



BEIJING: A driver uses the map on the Didi Chuxing ride-hailing app on his smartphone while driving on a street in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

profile cyber security case" of its kind, University of Hong Kong law professor Angela Zhang told AFP. But the action was lauded by state-run Global Times, which said the country must not allow "any internet giant to become a super database of Chinese personal information even more detailed than the state".

A top Didi executive took to social media over the weekend to rebuff rumours the firm had been sharing domestic data with the United States, calling it "absolutely impossible". Last year, authorities pulled the plug on a planned record \$34 billion IPO by Alibaba's financial arm Ant Group, before launching an anti-monopoly probe into the tech behemoth. — AFP

Sydney Airport gets \$17bn takeover bid

SYDNEY: Sydney Airport received a multi-billion-dollar takeover bid from a consortium of Australian investors yesterday, sending its share price soaring. The consortium of infrastructure investors and Australian pension funds offered Aus\$8.25 per share — or Aus\$22.3 billion (US\$17 billion).

The proposal "has been made during a global pandemic which has deeply affected the aviation industry and the Sydney Airport security price", the airport's board said in a statement to the Australian Securities Exchange. "The indicative price is below where Sydney Airport's security price traded before the pandemic." The investors — calling themselves the Sydney Aviation Alliance — confirmed the approach, saying they invested on behalf of more than six million Australian pension fund members.

The alliance said the proposal would ensure substantial ongoing Australian ownership of the country's biggest airport, contending it was "in the long-term interest of Sydney and the travelling public". Sydney Airport's share price spiked more than 30 percent on the offer, which is now being considered by the company's board. — AFP

NBK's Economic Update

Trade recovery is getting underway in 2021

KUWAIT: Total trade in goods (exports plus imports) increased by 20% q/q in IQ21, compared to 5.8% in the previous quarter. In addition, the trade balance (total exports minus imports) recovered to near its IQ20 level at KD 1.6 billion compared with KD 0.8 billion in 4Q20. Trade growth was driven by both exports and imports, with the former jumping by 30% q/q (2.6% y/y).

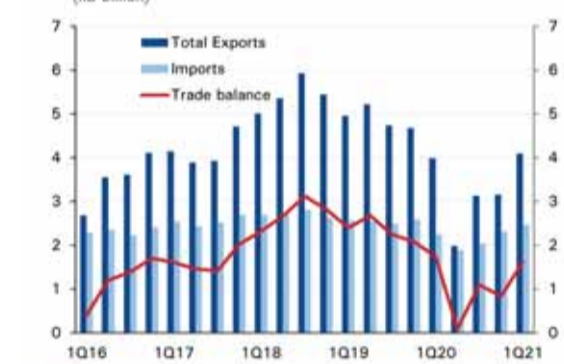
• Oil exports (92% of total exports) increased by

34% q/q mainly due to a higher KEC oil price, which surged by 36% q/q (15.7% y/y) to reach \$60/bbl during IQ21, while oil production was little changed. Non-oil exports (domestic exports plus re-exports) fell by 6.3% q/q mainly due to the decline in capital goods (-28% y/y) and intermediate goods ex. oil (-8.7% y/y). On the other hand, consumption exports increased by 12.9% q/q on higher re-exports of passenger cars, which rose by 27% q/q.

• The rise in imports by 6.8% q/q reflects the continued, albeit gradual, normalization of demand and improvement in the broader economy. Consumption goods - worth around half of all imports - rose 6.7% and were back above pre-pandemic levels helped by a further rebound in car imports, which had dropped sharply last year. Imports of capital goods however saw renewed decline (-4.4%) likely reflecting the continued sluggish pace of domestic investment.

• In terms of trade direction, China remained the main trading partner for Kuwait, acquiring around

Chart 1: Kuwait trade (KD billion)



Source: CSB

7% of total Kuwaiti trade (excluding oil exports) in IQ21, followed by the UAE, the US, Saudi Arabia, and India.

stc participates in virtual Digital Leadership Summit

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its participation in the virtual Digital Leadership Summit - MENA, organized by TM Forum, an alliance of over 850 global companies working together to break down technology and cultural barriers between digital service providers, technology suppliers, consultancies, and system integrators. The summit aimed at sharing insights on the different growth opportunities operators in the Middle East, and other regions around the world, are exploring to create new value and sustainable growth for customers through connectivity solutions.

stc released a statement highlighting its participation in the "Successfully operationalizing the enterprise opportunity" panel, where Anoud Muthaib, General Manager of Strategy & Marketing at solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, added to the discussion by highlighting some of the favorable developments and opportunities available in the market. Throughout the panel discussion, Muthaib focused on some of the key points that have transformed the services offered by the company to meet the diverse needs of customers. These progressive steps also reflect stc's business model and strategy to introduce and capitalize on the latest technologies to radically transform the telecom industry through pioneering digital solutions.

The panel discussion covered the strategic direc-

tion taken by stc throughout the past couple of years to invest in and develop a strong 5G infrastructure and network. Since then, the Company had been exploring innovative ways to monetize its 5G infrastructure through advanced Business Support Systems, including upgrading to the Huawei Convergent Billing System. The upgraded system enabled solutions by stc to pursue multi-dimensional capabilities in monetizing its solutions, ranging from connectivity to service segments such as Slice SLAs, Support Service Levels, as well as leveraging data aggregation for AI and cloud storage. These functions are expected to provide a competitive advantage in the local and regional markets.

The new technologies are expected to enable the multi-faceted monetization of capabilities including connectivity speed, latency, slice SLA, high-value content, edge charging and AI processing.

In terms of the 5G evolution to Stand Alone (SA), Muthaib emphasized that the new core architecture opens the door to new monetizing and development opportunities for various business models, promoting CPS progress in the 5G enterprise value chain going beyond connectivity. The possibility cases of the 5G SA network through stc provide low latency, massive connectivity capabilities and enhanced services. This in return enables solutions by stc, the Company's business arm, the capacity to introduce new and innovative services to enterprise customers. 5G SA serves as a vital ingredient in accelerating and maximizing monetization by expanding the offering line and introducing new-to-market services. Virtual reality (VR), Intelligent Analytic Services through AI, mobility solutions that enable smart vehicle applications, in addition to other transformative services have been launched by solutions by stc due to 5G SA's low latency, higher uplink, and downlink abilities.

Another vital topic discussed during the panel was the impact of empowering Multi-access Edge Computing (MEC) deployment to enhance applica-

This partnership brings together two leaders in their respective fields. Petal Search is a one-stop search engine integrated into Huawei devices, delivering a convenient, smooth, GDPR-compliant search experience. Wego harnesses powerful technology to find and compare results from hundreds of airline, hotel, and travel agency websites.

Adam Xiao, Managing Director of Huawei Mobile Services in the Middle East and Africa, said: "We believe that this partnership will transform the holiday and travel planning process for Huawei users as they consider their next trip. Travellers who search for destinations, flights, and hotels on Petal Search can be confident that they will get the best results, as well as the best deals available, from Wego. The timeliness of this is noteworthy, especially as international travel begins to reopen and families and individuals in our region plan their summer schedules."

MamounImedan, Managing Director, MENA and India, Wego, said: "This is an exciting development for customers of both Huawei and Wego, as Wego pres-



tion performance under the network. 5G SA will enable solutions by stc to become both Cloud-Native and Edge Native. This transition will allow service aggregation near the premises of enterprise customers, helping them realize use cases such as enterprise campus, industrial control, and massive IoT for a well rounded and enhanced experience.

Commenting on its role in the summit, stc indicated that the highly valued event served as a platform to showcase the ongoing developments in the industry, while exploring the various technologies that are shaping the digital solutions and telecom sectors. With 5G playing a major role in enabling digital transformation across various sectors, stc will continue to enhance and develop its 5G network, an initiative that also coincides with Kuwait's 2035 vision. As for its business arm, solutions by stc has been progressing within the value chain from "just connectivity" to "ICT solutions" for its enterprise customers. This supports the launch of distinctive services like 5G DDA, 5G VSaaS, and 5G Live Bus, leveraging on the key future savvy attributes of stc's world class network and IT infrastructure.



ents an unbiased comparison of all travel products and prices offered in the marketplace. We believe that partnerships like this one can play an important part in rebuilding consumer confidence and enthusiasm for travel. I am confident that we will see a steady increase in bookings over the coming months as people rediscover the love of travel."



BB announces winner of the Al-Thuraya salary account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Mohamed Naguib Abdelhadi as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.

Customers wishing to open the Al-Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details, or simply call the bank's call center.

Huawei, Wego collaborate on one app travel experience

DUBAI: Huawei's Petal Search, the easy-to-use application and search engine pre-installed on Huawei smartphones, has inked a partnership on 01 July 2021 with Wego, a leading travel marketplace in the MENA and APAC regions.

With this, Huawei device users will see best deals and instant booking options for transport, stay, and attractions from Wego based on their searches, which they can instantly click to book. This enables a true one-app travel planning experience, and integrates the power of Petal Search with Wego's leading portfolio of deals and options. Users in 18 markets will benefit from this, including consumers in UAE, Egypt, and KSA.

Lifestyle | Features



French actress Isabelle Huppert (center) performs during a rehearsal of Anton Tchekov's "La Cerisaie" by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, in Avignon, southern France, ahead the 75th Festival d'Avignon.



Actors perform during a rehearsal of Anton Tchekov's 'La Cerisaie' by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, in Avignon.



French actress Isabelle Huppert performs during a rehearsal of Anton Tchekov's "La Cerisaie" by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, in Avignon. — AFP photos

Avignon masks up for return of feted French theatre festival

One of the world's biggest theatre festivals gets underway yesterday in the southern French city of Avignon after a year-long hiatus caused by COVID-19, with masks compulsory for audiences but organizers relishing a return to relative normality. Theatregoers and troupes have expressed excitement at being reunited for the 75th edition of the Avignon theatre festival, which rivals Edinburgh for the title of the world's biggest showcase of performing arts. "I feel euphoric, as if this is my first festival," said festival director Olivier Py, who has run the event since 2013.

Being deprived of last year's edition

had shown both the public and performers alike "how precious it is", he said. The festival opened yesterday with a hugely-anticipated production by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues of Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard", starring French screen legend Isabelle Huppert and staged at the Papal Palace main festival venue. Rodrigues, 44, whose work at Lisbon's Dona Maria II national theatre has made him one of the most sought after directors in Europe, will take over the running of the festival from its 2023 edition, French Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot announced.

The pandemic still looms large over the three-week-long theatre extravaganza. A South African dance performance by celebrated choreographer Dada Masilo was pulled from the program on the eve of the opening night after members of the troupe tested positive for the virus or were contact cases. Avignon, a picturesque walled city which was the seat of Catholic popes in the 14th century, has put in place several measures to try prevent the festival becoming a giant cluster. Mask-wearing will be obligatory outdoors as well as in for the duration of the festival. And venues will be ventilated for 40 minutes between each performance.

'Renaissance'

Audience members will not need to show proof of vaccination or clean COVID tests to be able to take their seats—except for shows at the Papal Palace. The festival's outlook brightened further on June 30 when the government lifted capacity limits on most public spaces, meaning venues were allowed sell all their remaining seats. For Py the move, which sparked a run on tickets, spelled nothing short of a "renaissance" for the festival, which runs to 50 productions across 21 venues as well as hundreds of other shows in the even bigger "Avignon Off" fringe festival.

The fate of this year's edition of the Off festival had at one point been uncertain. With the all-clear only coming in May, this year's Off offering of street and stage theatre, mime, dance and song comes to just a little over 1,000 shows, down from nearly 1,500 in previous years. "We don't know how it is going to go off," Sebastien Benedetto, head of the association that runs the Off festival, admitted to AFP. He cited the spread of the highly infectious Delta variant in France as a threat to the festival. "But we're happy to be back in Avignon, which is where the whole French theatre world meets up," he said. — AFP

Oscar-winning Russian director Menshov dies of COVID at 81



Russia's Oscar-winning film director Vladimir Menshov died yesterday aged 81 after testing positive for coronavirus. Menshov, who won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1981, died as a result of complications from COVID-19, Moscow film studios, Mosfilm, confirmed in a statement. "We knew he was suffering from COVID-19, but in a mild form. It is absolutely horrible and unexpected," film director Vladimir Khotinenko told AFP. "His death leaves a huge vacuum in our shared cultural space," Khotinenko added. Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin said Menshov's death represented "a huge loss for our cinema and our culture".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin

"expresses his deepest condolences". Menshov was born in 1939 in Baku, then the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan. He worked as an actor and then a director and gained international fame for his film "Moscow does not believe in tears" which won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1981. It was only one of two Soviet films to win an Oscar—the other being "War and Peace". Menshov was beloved in Russia for his comedy "Love and Pigeons", released in 1984 and still one of the most watched films on Russian television. Menshov, who directed 10 films, taught directing at VGIK. — AFP

Anti-colonialist preacher to stand over Trafalgar Square

A sculpture of African baptist preacher John Chilembwe, who led an uprising against colonial rule, will look over London's landmark Trafalgar Square for the next two years, the mayor's office said yesterday. "Antelope", by Samson Kambalu, restages a 1914 photograph of Chilembwe and European missionary John Chorley as a sculpture. In the sculpture, a larger-than-life Chilembwe is shown wearing a hat, defying a colonial rule that forbade Africans from wearing them in front of white people.

"By increasing his scale, the artist elevates Chilembwe and his story, revealing the hidden narratives of underrepresented peoples in the history of the British Empire in Africa and beyond," said the office of mayor Sadiq Khan. The "fourth plinth", which marks one corner of Trafalgar Square, is one of the most coveted art commissions in the world, and is often the source of controversy. Each work stays in



An undated handout picture received in London shows a sculpture titled 'Antelope' by Malawian artist Samson Kambalu which has been chosen to occupy the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar square in London. — AFP

place for around two years before being replaced. Kambalu's work will be unveiled in 2022, and will make way for Teresa Margolles' "850 Imprints" in 2024, which features casts of the faces of 850 transgender people from around the world. The masks will be arranged in the form of a tzompantli, a skull rack from ancient Mexican Mesoamerican civilizations. — AFP

'F9' STAYS ATOP BOX OFFICE AS UNIVERSAL MANAGES RARE HAT TRICK

Universal's "F9: The Fast Saga" remained at top speed over the weekend, earning an estimated \$23.8 million to hold its lead in North American box offices, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. That total, covering just the first three days of the four-day July 4 holiday weekend, was down sharply from the zoom-bang-bam action film's opening total of \$70 million. Still, this ninth installment in the "Fast and Furious" franchise—starring Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez and John Cena—fended off two strong new challengers. In fact, Universal pulled off a rare hat trick, dominating all three top box-office spots.



In this file photo US-Taiwanese director Justin Lin arrives for the world premiere of "F9: The Fast Saga" at the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood. — AFP

That studio's animated sequel "The Boss Baby: Family Business" placed second, at \$17.3 million. The latest yarn about a can-do "boss baby" who energizes-or infuriates—all around him features the voices of Alec Baldwin, Eva Longoria, Jeff Goldblum, Lisa Kudrow and Jimmy Kimmel. In third was horror film "The Forever Purge," headed for a \$12.8 million take. This fifth, and purportedly last, in the "Purge" series is again set in a dystopian near-future where all crime, including murder, is made legal one day a year. Ana de la Reguera and Tenoch Huerta star. Fourth spot went to Paramount's "A Quiet Place: Part II," at \$4.2 million. This was the first weekend since the John Krasinski-directed horror film's release six weeks ago that it placed out of the top two.

And in fifth was a Lionsgate sequel, "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard," at \$3 million. The action comedy has Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson and Salma Hayek reprising their roles from 2017's "The Hitman's Bodyguard." As Hollywood claws its way back from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, studios have yet to release the usual full menu of summer blockbusters. The \$70.7 million combined gross of this weekend's top 12 films was less than half the normal from past July 4 weekends. Rounding out this weekend's top 5 were:

- "Cruella" (\$2.6 million)
- "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" (\$2.3 million)
- "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" (\$1.3 million)
- "In the Heights" (\$1.3 million)
- "Zola" (\$1.2 million) — AFP

Cambodian PM orders return of defanged lion to Chinese owner

A defanged and declawed lion trafficked to an upscale neighborhood of the Cambodian capital was yesterday returned to its owner following the unlikely intervention of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The 18-month-old cub, weighing 70 kilograms (154 pounds), had been imported from overseas, officials said. It was raised by its owner, a Chinese national, who named it Hima. Authorities learned of the unlikely pet after seeing TikTok videos of Hima playing in a Phnom Penh villa.

The lion was confiscated on June 27 and brought to a wildlife rescue centre.

Wildlife Alliance, an animal rescue NGO that aided in the raid last week, had said that private residence was "inappropriate" for a wild animal, and that the owner had removed the lion's canine teeth and claws. A couple of days later, a video of the lion's owner Qi Xiao visiting Hima in the centre went viral. In the video, Hima kept nudging Qi as he fed it meat, a seemingly affectionate behavior that sparked calls on social media for them to be reunited. By Sunday evening, Hun Sen announced on his official Facebook page that Qi could have his lion back on the condition that he "build it a proper cage to ensure the safety of the people in the house and neighbors".

He also ordered authorities to reimburse any fine paid by the owner. Qi thanked the premier in a comment on the post, and also expressed gratitude to "Cambodian people for helping and supporting our Hima". "Lastly, I wish that

Cambodia and China stay strong friends forever," he wrote. The lion was transported yesterday afternoon to Qi's villa. "I feel very happy, very touched... I didn't expect to get him back," Qi told reporters as the lion and his dog wandered around his background. But not everyone was pleased by this outcome.

"(The return is) undermining legislation preventing ownership/trade in endangered wildlife, harming global efforts to tackle Illegal Wildlife Trade, to say nothing of stress & suffering of inappropriate captivity," UK ambassador to Cambodia, Tina Redshaw, said in a tweet. Cambodian authorities declined to comment on how much the owner was fined or what prompted the legal change of heart. Prime Minister Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-serving leaders, is a staunch ally of Beijing, and Cambodia receives billions of dollars in soft loans and investment from China. — AFP



A worker plays with a defanged lion and pet dog upon its controversial return back to its home.



A defanged lion approaches a worker upon its controversial return back to its home.



Members of the media take pictures and video of defanged lion upon its controversial return back to its home in Phnom Penh yesterday. — AFP photos



Qi Xiao (center), the owner of a defanged lion, strokes the big cat upon its controversial return to his home in Phnom Penh.



In this photo a kite vendor shows his merchandise inside a warehouse in Shor Bazaar in the old quarters of Kabul. — AFP photos



Manizha Talash (left), the only female member of a group of breakdancers comprised of mostly Hazara boys, looks on as a fellow troupe member breaks a move in Kabul.



In this photo a bride wearing a traditional costume for her marriage poses for a picture at a beauty parlor in Kabul.

‘Talebanned’: From kite-running to breakdancing, Afghan pastimes again under threat

The Taliban outlawed dozens of seemingly innocuous activities and pastimes in Afghanistan during their 1996-2001 rule—including kite flying, TV soap operas, pigeon racing, fancy haircuts, and even playing music. These have made a comeback in the years since, but fears are growing they will be banned again if the hardline Islamists return to power. The insurgents have made enormous military and territorial gains since US troops began their final withdrawal in May, and their leaders say they want Afghanistan to return to being an Islamic emirate ruled by religious elders. AFP looks at some of the activities the Taliban banned, and the fears of those now taking part in them.

The musician

Sayed Mohammad makes a living as a professional musician playing the jupani, a traditional Central Asian stringed instrument he first picked up as a boy. He still remembers the evening two decades ago when the Taliban broke into a house where he and his friends were playing music and singing songs. According to the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam, only the human voice should produce music—and only in praise of God.

"I was young, so I was beaten less than my friends," said Mohammad, now 40 and a resident of the former insurgent bastion of Kandahar. "I was still unable to stand for three days," he added. He was lucky, he said, describing how on another occasion the Taliban cut off the fingers of one of his friends for playing the jupani. When the insurgents were ousted, Mohammad celebrated by attending a concert. "When the music played, I felt a tremor passing through my body out of sheer joy," he said. "Joy that our country was free and that people were now free to start a new life."

Since then, many Afghans like Mohammad have become professional musicians and singers. "There is no pleasure in life if we live in fear," the father of eight told AFP. He is determined to pursue his passion—even if the Taliban return to power. "It's like an addiction. Even if they cut our fingers we will still play music."

The makeup artist

In a small shop in the Afghan capital Kabul, beautician Farida transforms a shy young Afghan woman into a radiant bride-to-be. Oversized false eyelashes are delicately glued on, followed by the application of a rich carmine-red lipstick. Next comes eyeshadow, before beige and



A beautician paints the nails of a Pashtun bride for her marriage at a beauty parlor in Kabul.

ochre blush is delicately brushed on. Despite its bustling popularity, Farida's beauty parlor is one of hundreds across the country that face an uncertain future. The Taliban severely restricted the movement and activities of women and girls during their rule, and banned beauty parlors from operating in public. "If they come back, we'll never have the freedom we have now," said 27-year-old Farida, who asked not to be further identified. "They don't want women working." Farida's shop is busiest on Thursday and Friday—the

adding she would love to move to Canada given a chance.

The kite-maker

In a bustling Kabul market shop, surrounded by hundreds of colorful kites of all sizes, Zelgai says he is determined not to give up the business his family has run for generations—and he has flown close to the wind before. The Taliban outlawed kite flying on the grounds it distracted young men from praying and other religious activities, but Zelgai and his family kept operating. "Of course, we did it in secret," the 59-year-old told AFP at his shop in the capital's Shor bazaar.

His colorful store has hundreds of fragile ready-made kites for sale, and he also takes orders for elaborate custom designs. And business has soared in the years since the Taliban were ousted. "This is freedom... we are able to showcase and sell our kites openly without any fear," Zelgai said. The much-loved national pastime earned a reputation abroad after Afghan author Khaled Hosseini's 2003 bestselling novel "The Kite Runner" was turned into a film. Today, when the wind is



A Pashtun bride wearing a traditional costume for her marriage is pictured inside a beauty parlour in Kabul.

weekend in Afghanistan, when hundreds gather for huge wedding ceremonies. Out of the sight of men, the women come to be pampered for a few hours.

Beauty comes at a price, however. At Farida's salon, one of Kabul's most popular, a full treatment package can cost up to \$300. "I think the Taliban will force us to leave when they come," Farida said,

right, thousands of kites can be seen fluttering in Afghanistan's clear blue skies. Some are engaged in fights, with the pilots trying to outwit each other with their flying skills and some using glass-encrusted twine to cut the strings of their opponents. "People would suffer if it is banned. Thousands of families survive on this,"



A general view of a beauty parlor in Kabul. Zelgai said.

The breakdancer

The day Manizha Talash took up breakdancing she knew she would become a target for the Taliban. Talash is the only female member of a group of mostly Hazara boys who practice breakdancing in Kabul—usually in secret. The 18-year-old has the support of her mother, who has several jobs to support the family after her husband went missing a few years ago.

But for Talash, who dreams of representing Afghanistan at the Olympics, the risks of continuing are multiple. Not only is she a girl taking part in a forbidden activity, she is also a member of the Hazara community, considered heretical by some Muslim radicals. "If the Taliban have not changed and they lock women at homes and trample their rights, then life would be meaningless for me and for millions of other women of Afghanistan," said Talash.

Despite the risks—the troupe was forced to switch practice venues after receiving death threats—she is determined to pursue her passion. There have been women pioneers in many fields in Afghanistan, and Talash now sees herself as one of them. "We had no women police officers before; now you see them everywhere," she said, dressed in a t-shirt, cap and black leggings—an outfit that would be anathema to the Taliban. "I took the risk of becoming a target. I have fear in my heart but I won't give up."

The shisha smoker

On the bank of a river flowing through the eastern city of Jalalabad, Mohammad Saleem and his friends gather every evening to smoke shisha, an ancient pastime enjoying something of a renaissance across the world. "Smoking shisha is very normal at the moment in Afghanistan,"

said Saleem, puffing the vapors of fruit-flavored tobacco from a bubbling hookah.

But the Taliban say it is an intoxicant—something prohibited by the Koran. Shisha cafes have popped up across the country since the fall of the Taliban, serving hot saffron tea to customers occupied with their pipes. Cafe owner Bakhtyar Ahmad believes the habit is a good way to keep youngsters off the streets—or from indulging in worse vices, such as drugs. "There is peace here. We serve shisha and we play music in the cafe," Ahmad said. "If the Taliban come back with their old ideas then they will stop us." Shisha smokers agree. "It will not be possible to go for a picnic or smoke shisha by the side of a river like now," Saleem said.

The barber

Business is brisk at Mohammad Ghaderi's salon in the western city of Herat, with young men lining up for a shave or fancy haircut that matches their favorite Bollywood or Hollywood actor. "Afghanistan has entered a new world," said Ghaderi, a men's hairstylist for nearly 10 years. "There are more hairdressers now, more young people taking to fashion... the government is not against it like the way the Taliban were." While men in rural areas tend to stick to Islamic styles—a shaved top lip, a beard longer than a man's fist-city slickers are a parade of the latest fashion. But Ghaderi and his customers fear their individualism will end if the Taliban return.

"We are afraid that if the Taliban enter the city and the bazaar, they might be the same as they were 20 years ago," he said. "Again women will be in burqa and young men would not be free to do what they want," added Sanaullah Amin, a regular customer. — AFP



Manizha Talash (center), the only female member of a group of breakdancers comprised of mostly Hazara boys, poses with two members of her troupe in Kabul.



In this photo a beautician (left) tends to a customer at a beauty parlor in Kabul.



Kite vendors wait for customers at a shop in Shor Bazaar in the old quarters of Kabul.



In this photo professional musician Sayed Mohammad (right) rehearses with his jupani, a traditional Central Asian stringed instrument, along with harmonium player Ghulam Mohammad at his music studio in Kandahar.



A kite vendor carries his merchandise inside a warehouse in Shor Bazaar in the old quarters of Kabul.



A kite vendor displays his merchandise for sale at a shop in Shor Bazaar in the old quarters of Kabul.



In this photo Manizha Talash, the only female member of a group of breakdancers comprised of mostly Hazara boys, practices a move in Kabul.

Sports

Judo legend Nomura hopes 'king' Riner can match Olympic hat-trick

TOKYO: France's Teddy Riner can cement his place as judo's "king" by winning his third Olympic gold in Tokyo — according to the only person ever to achieve the feat: Tadahiro Nomura. The retired Japanese judoka told AFP he would love to see Riner match his own triple tally at Tokyo's historic Nippon Budokan arena, and wants the French giant to "give a performance worthy" of his talents. Riner won his second Olympic title in 2016 in low-key fashion, beating Japan's Hisayoshi Harasawa in the +100kg final after a defensive display that drew boos from the Rio crowd. Nomura urged the French superstar to win with a touch more panache in Tokyo, even if it means Riner edging out his Japanese compatriot for the title again.

"It would be tough to see a Japanese fighter lose, but I'd also be happy to see Riner win the title," said Nomura, who won his first Olympic -60kg title at the 1996 Atlanta Games and defended it in Sydney and Athens. "My ideal would be for him not to be booed by the crowd, but to give a performance worthy of him as the king — to win his third title with strong judo."

Nomura said Riner will compete with "wounded pride" after his almost 10-year, 154-match unbeaten streak was ended by Japan's Kokoro Kageura in February 2020. That will make the French superstar "a scary prospect" for opponents in Tokyo, Nomura believes, and defeat may have helped refocus his mind.

"He has a different look in his eyes, and his body is different — he's sharp," Nomura said. "He wasn't in his best condition and he wasn't prepared, and he lost. He

knows that. It's wounded his pride and he'll be coming to win in Tokyo."

Knockout 'danger'

Nomura, still looking trim and toned under his sharp suit, has managed athletes and worked in the media since retiring at the age of 40 in 2015. He knows Riner well, having first met him on a trip to France in around 2007. He describes the French heavyweight as an "awesome athlete" who is "very kind and charming", and says Riner's 10 world championship titles make him "the king, definitely".

But Nomura remains the only athlete ever to win three Olympic judo gold medals — at least for now. And the Japanese legend knows first-hand how difficult it will be for Riner to match his achievement. Nomura says he expected Atlanta to be his first and last Olympics when he made his debut in 1996, but he grew in confidence as the competition progressed and ended up taking home the gold medal. He was at the top of his game in Sydney four years later, but the pressure that followed persuaded him to relocate to the United States in a bid to take the heat off. There, he rediscovered his love for judo, and decided to move back to Japan to aim for a third title in Athens.

"Many times, people said Nomura was finished, asked how long I was planning to cling on or told me I should retire," he said. "It was a question of if I believed in myself, and how serious I was about wanting it."

Nomura thinks Riner should already have won three Olympic gold medals, but points to his 2008 Beijing Games semi-final defeat to Uzbekistan's Abdullo Tangriev as "the danger of knockout competition". Instead, he thinks the "hallowed ground" of the Nippon Budokan, which hosted judo at the 1964 Tokyo Games, would be a fitting place for the Frenchman to finally complete his hat-trick. "Just going to that venue gives me a special feeling — I've only seen video footage of Olympic judo at the Budokan, so I'm really excited to see it with my own eyes," said Nomura. "Riner has said he's really looking forward to competing in Japan — the birthplace of judo. I'd love to see Harasawa against Riner in the final." — AFP



Rui Hachimura

NBA star, wrestling champ to carry Japan flag at Tokyo Olympics

TOKYO: NBA star Rui Hachimura will carry Japan's flag at the Tokyo Games, Japanese Olympic chiefs said yesterday — although fans might not be allowed into the stadium to watch the opening ceremony. The Washington Wizards forward will carry the flag along with twice-world-champion wrestler Yui Susaki at the July 23 opener for the pandemic-postponed Games.

But with concern growing again over rising coronavirus cases, organizers have said they may need to rethink attendance limits for Olympic events to reduce infection risks. Yesterday, Games chiefs said they would push back the announcement of results of a ticket lottery for oversubscribed events to Saturday — less than two weeks before the opening ceremony. The 23-year-old Hachimura, whose father is Beninese and mother is Japanese, said carrying his nation's flag was "a great honor".

"I'd love this to be an opportunity for kids and everyone else in Japan to watch me and my teammates playing at the Olympics, and take even more of an interest in basketball and sport as a whole," he said in a statement. In May, Hachimura hit out at racism on social media, saying he receives racist messages "almost every day".

Details of the opening ceremony have been kept under wraps, with local media reporting it will be half an hour longer to allow for COVID-19 countermeasures such as distancing. However it is still unclear how many seats, if any, will be filled at the national stadium. Organizers have set a limit of 10,000 domestic fans, or half of each venue's capacity. But Games president Seiko Hashimoto warned Friday that "having no spectators is an option".

No overseas spectators

Japan's coronavirus outbreak has not been as severe as in some countries, with around 14,800 deaths, but experts say another wave could stretch medical services as the Olympics begin. Media reports said Monday the government this week was likely to extend anti-virus measures in Tokyo and elsewhere, with a decision on Olympic fans to follow.

The current restrictions — which cap spectators at sports events to 5,000 — are due to end on Sunday but could now be in place during the Olympics, the reports said. No more tickets will be sold and spectators from overseas are barred. Olympic athletes have begun arriving in Tokyo, and on Sunday a Serbian rower tested positive for the virus at the airport. A member of the Ugandan team also tested positive for a second time, after being discharged following a period of isolation. On Sunday, a 53-year-old woman was arrested for spraying a runner in the nationwide torch relay with liquid from a water gun. The woman, who squirted the unspecified substance as the runner passed with the flame, said she was opposed to the Olympics being held. — AFP



TOKYO: This picture taken on June 25, 2021 shows Japanese judoka and Olympic gold medalist Tadahiro Nomura posing with gold medals from the 1996 Atlanta (left), 2000 Sydney (center) and 2004 Athens (right) games during a portrait session at AFP in Tokyo. — AFP

Osaka says preparing for Olympics, will do news conferences

TOKYO: Tennis star Naomi Osaka said yesterday she wants to be on top form at the Olympics and will take part in press conferences, after pulling out of several tournaments citing her struggles with depression and anxiety. The world number two told Japan's national broadcaster NHK she was getting ready to play on home turf at the pandemic-postponed Tokyo Games, after having withdrawn from Wimbledon and the French Open.

"I am preparing myself little by little so I can be at the top of my game for the Olympics," the 23-year-old wrote in a message published by the broadcaster. "Since getting the attention of the world, I've always had bouts of anxiety. This is especially the case in the lead up to big competitions."

Osaka set off a debate about mental health in June after abandoning her French Open campaign just one match in over a dispute on media duties. The Japanese player had said post-match news conferences were detrimental to her mental health and likened them to "kicking people when they're down".

She later revealed her battle with depression and anxiety in a post on social media, saying she wanted to take time away from the game to get better. In the message published by NHK, Osaka said she was "proud" to play for her country at the Games, adding that she would take part in news conferences while giving consideration to her mental health.

She was fined \$15,000 and threatened with disqualification from Roland Garros after refusing to honor mandatory media commitments. French Open organizers protested that they had treated her with "care and respect" after they were accused of being heavy-handed.

Osaka's agent said last month that she had withdrawn from Wimbledon to spend time with friends and family. But he added that she was "excited to play in front of her home fans" at Tokyo 2020, which begins on July 23. — AFP



LONDON: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur throws the ball to serve against Poland's Iga Swiatek during their women's singles match of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships in Wimbledon, southwest London yesterday. — AFP

History-making Jabeur beats Swiatek, will face Sabalenka in last-eight

LONDON: Ons Jabeur's historic Wimbledon campaign saw her reach the women's quarter-finals yesterday, beating Poland's 2020 French Open champion Iga Swiatek 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 in their fourth round match.

The 26-year-old is the first Tunisian woman to reach the last eight at Wimbledon and will face Belarus second seed Aryna Sabalenka who defeated Elena Rybakina 6-3, 4-6, 6-3. Sabalenka will be playing in her first Grand Slam quarter-final.

Jabeur showed great poise to stay in the match after she let slip a 5-4 lead and serving for the first set only for the Pole to reel off three games on the bounce. Swiatek, after a flat opening, had taken note of a young Polish fan holding up a board inscribed 'Jazda Iga' ('Come on Iga'). "It was a great match and I had to stay calm rather than get angry when I failed to close out the first set as getting angry would not have helped my cause," said Jabeur. "Today I decided to change my game a bit as everyone knows I am doing drop shots and being aggressive was key today." Jabeur never looked back once she had got over the loss of the first set. Her breaking her 20-year-old opponent in the first game of the second set set the tone for the rest of the encounter. — AFP



Kuwait hosts women's Paralympic championship

KUWAIT: The first local women's championship for Paralympic athletes was held in Kuwait recently under the patronage of Marzouq Al-Ghanem Committee for the Disabled. The championship included competitions in athletics, table tennis, and badminton and was

organized by the Paralympic Committee, Honorary Chairwoman of Kuwait Disabled Club Sheikha Sheikha Al-Sabah, Honorary Chairwoman of Irada club Sheikha Suhaila Al-Sabah, Deputy Chairman of the Paralympic Committee Faraj Marzouq and other dignitaries attended the closing ceremony.

Results of the tournament were as follows: Zainab Al-Khaldi won the gold medal in table tennis, meanwhile Malak Al-Enezi won the pioneers medal, Sarah Al-Salem won the gold medal in badminton, Basma Najem won the gold medal in shot put and the javelin throw, Latifah Al-Wazan won the gold medal in discus throw standing, and Sarah Al-Mutairi won the gold medal in the javelin throw standing.



KUWAIT: The Irada club's fencing team is getting ready for the Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, which takes place in Warsaw, Poland from July 7 to July 12.

Sports

Title-hungry upstart Suns and Bucks meet in NBA Finals



ATLANTA: In this file photo Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks reacts from the bench against the Atlanta Hawks during the second half in Game Six of the Eastern Conference Finals at State Farm Arena on July 3, 2021 in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

PHOENIX: Two long-frustrated franchises, the Phoenix Suns and Milwaukee Bucks, will meet in the NBA Finals starting tonight and one of them will put an end to an epic title drought. The Bucks captured their only title half a century ago while the Suns have never claimed the crown since the club began play in 1968. With star guard Chris Paul reaching the best-of-seven championship series for the first time in his 16-season career, the Suns have reached the NBA Finals for the first time since 1993. A Charles Barkley-led Suns squad lost to the Michael Jordan-sparked Chicago Bulls 28 years ago and the Suns also dropped the 1976 NBA Finals to the Boston Celtics.

Many thought Paul, an 11-time NBA All-Star and two-time Olympic champion, was too far past his prime at 36 to spark a title run. Instead, the poised veteran leader averaged 16.4 points, 8.9 assists, 4.5 rebounds and 1.4 steals a game for the Suns after arriving in a trade from Oklahoma City last November. "I've wanted to be part of this all of my career," said Paul, who writes "Can't give up now" on his shoes before every game.

The Bucks had not reached the NBA Finals since 1974 and won their only title in 1971, when legendary center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — still known then as Lew Alcindor — sparked a sweep over the Baltimore Bullets. Greek superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo, the Bucks' new dominating big man, has reached the NBA Finals after taking NBA Most Valuable Player honors the previous two seasons only to suffer play-

off disappointment. Whether or not the 26-year-old will be able to play, however, is another question. Antetokounmpo missed the last two games of the Eastern Conference finals after hyperextending his left knee in game four against Atlanta.

The Bucks went a league-best 60-22 in the 2018-19 campaign and won a playoff series for the first time since 2001. They reached the Eastern Conference finals and grabbed a 2-0 lead only to drop the next four games and fall to eventual NBA champion Toronto. The next season, Antetokounmpo sparked the Bucks to a league-best 56-17 mark, but suffered a right ankle injury and missed most of the last two games as the Bucks lost to Miami in five games in the second round. While they didn't produce the league's best record this season, the Bucks did reach the final despite Antetokounmpo's injury. "Certainly any time you lose you've got to be honest with yourself," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "When this group hasn't been able to advance it has hurt, it has been hard and the off-season the guys have put the work in — but there's still more to be done."

'Like a storybook'

The Bucks and Suns outlasted teams with more wins to reach the final, but only one fairy tale run is going to have a happy ending. "This is like a storybook, going somewhere I've never been," Suns star Devin Booker said. "It has been a long time coming to get to this moment. This is nice right here, but we still

have work to do." Suns coach Monty Williams, who says he likes Booker's "fearlessness" and killer instinct, is enjoying seeing Paul and others revel in the moment. "I'm enjoying watching our players enjoy this moment," Williams said. "I know how badly (Paul) wants to win."

Booker is averaging 27.0 points, 6.4 rebounds and 4.8 assists a contest in the playoffs while Paul is contributing 18.1 points, 8.7 assists and 3.9 rebounds a game in the post-season to make the Suns bright. Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton has 16.2 points and 11.8 rebounds a game.

The Suns will enjoy five days off before the NBA Finals opener while the Bucks will have only two. "We've had kind of long, extended pauses between each round and I'm kind of excited to try it without one," Budenholzer said. "Maybe we can be the team that's in a rhythm. It's a quick turn, but we'll be ready."

Antetokounmpo has averaged 28.2 points, 12.7 rebounds and 5.2 assists a game but has had great support from Khris Middleton — with 23.4 points, 8.0 rebounds, 5.1 assists and 1.5 steals a game — and Jrue Holiday with 17.6 points, 8.4 assists and 5.6 rebounds a game. "To get to the finals is amazing," Holiday said. "It's a feeling I've never felt before."

"Everybody stays ready. Everybody plays together. Everybody stays locked in," Middleton said. "That's all you can ask for." Phoenix won both regular-season games against Milwaukee but only by one point each time. — AFP

Kuwait Olympic Committee inks deal to insure athletes

KUWAIT: Kuwait Olympic Committee and Gulf Insurance Group inked yesterday an agreement for insuring over 250 Kuwaiti athletes. Speaking at a news conference marking the deal, Kuwait Olympic Committee Chairman Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said insuring the athletes for pitch injuries will encourage youth to get engaged in sports, boost morale of the athletes and nudge them for greater achievements. The agreement that stipulates medical insurance for all Kuwaiti male and female athletes will enhance their morale to excel in local and external competitions and lift the name and flag of Kuwait aloft at sports quarters, Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser said. He expressed gratitude to Sheikh Hamad Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his distinctive efforts for backing up the Kuwaiti athletes. Meanwhile, Khaled Al-Hassan, the group CEO, said in a statement during the news conference that the deal was necessary and in line with the company responsibility toward the society, namely the athletes. Insurance coverage for the Kuwaiti sportsmen and women have become necessary due to possible accidents that inflict short or long term injuries. The one-year deal, effective as of early July, benefits some 263 players of national teams. — KUNA

NBA star Doncic leads Slovenia into Tokyo Olympics

PARIS: NBA star Luka Doncic delivered a triple-double to lead Slovenia over Lithuania 96-85 on Sunday and into their first Olympic basketball tournament. Slovenia punched their ticket to Tokyo with the victory in the FIBA Olympic qualifying tournament in Kaunas, Lithuania. Doncic, 22, scored 15 of his 31 points in the second quarter and added 11 rebounds and 13 assists to lead Slovenia. Lithuania, led by NBA stalwarts Domantas Sabonis and Jonas Valanciunas, twice clawed back from double-digit deficits.

But Slovenia took control for good with a 14-0 scoring run bridging the third and fourth quarters and the Lithuanians will miss out on the Games for the first time. "We worked hard for this," said Dallas Mavericks star Doncic, who was named Most Valuable Player of the tournament.

"I don't care about the MVP," Doncic said. "We won here, we're going to the Olympics, the first time in our country. "It's amazing," he added. "I think every kid in Slovenia dreams about being in the Olympics, I did, too." The event in Kaunas was one of four men's basketball qualifiers concluding on Sunday. In Split, Croatia, Germany cooled off red-hot Brazil to book their first Olympic berth since 2008. — AFP



SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD, Austria: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen crosses the finish line to win the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, on Sunday. — AFP

Verstappen celebrates 'insane' win in Austria to pull clear in title race

SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD, Austria: Max Verstappen reeled off his third win in a row from pole in the Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday to consolidate his world championship lead over Lewis Hamilton who after finishing fourth said his toiling Mercedes team were "miles away from Red Bull".

Second place in the ninth round of the season went to Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas with McLaren's Lando Norris a fine third after picking up a five second time penalty. Verstappen's latest step towards ending Hamilton's hold on the drivers' title triggered a carnival atmosphere in Formula One's first capacity crowd since the coronavirus pandemic struck with most of the 100,000 in attendance decked out in his Dutch orange colors. "To see so much orange in the stands is incredible, it's an extra motivation, thank you" Verstappen told his cheering congregation at the Red Bull-owned Spielberg circuit. "The car was unreal," added the 21-year-old threat to Hamilton's bid for an unprecedented eighth world crown who was following up his win at the track last week. "It's insane - I'm a bit amazed myself how today went. I didn't expect it to be like this. Incredible job by everyone to deliver something like this."

After his fifth win of the season Verstappen moved on to 182 points in the standings, 32 clear of Hamilton ahead of the seven-time world champion's home British Grand Prix next month. Hamilton, without a win since Barcelona in early May, had forecast after qualifying Saturday that beating Verstappen looked unlikely. Aside from his Red Bull rival's superior pace, damage to Hamilton's car late on in the race cost him a likely second place. "We're miles away from them Red Bull. We need all hands on deck. They have brought a lot of upgrades over the last few races - and we haven't brought any," he said.

Flawless

Verstappen enjoyed a flawless in the Austrian mountains alive with the sound of his supporters who had come to watch his latest attempt towards a possible world title. He was clean away at lights out from Norris but by turn three the safety car had to be deployed after Esteban Ocon's race came to a premature end when his Alpine was nudged by Antonio Giovinazzi's Alfa Romeo. Racing got back under way on lap four with Verstappen gliding clear with Norris fending off an attack on his second spot from Sergio Perez in the other Red Bull. The Mexican, in his 200th Grand Prix, paid dearly for his audacity, going off on to the gravel to drop to 10th.

On lap 20 Norris was dealt a double blow. He was told race stewards had handed him a five second penalty over the Perez incident, and was then overtaken by Hamilton despite valiantly trying to fend off his compatriot. "Such a great driver, Lando," Hamilton told his pits. After all the leaders had pitted for the first time Verstappen was over 15sec clear of the chasing Hamilton, with Bottas now up to third. Down in mid-field it was Perez's turn to pick up a five second penalty for aggressively shutting out the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc. Bottas was told by the pits not to overtake Hamilton whose car had picked up damage to his rear left tyre. But by lap 52 the Finn heard over the radio he was clear to race his teammate and, fighting for his job next season, nipped by him.

Norris meanwhile, having served his time penalty, had Hamilton's wounded Mercedes in his cross hairs and he duly swept past to cement his fourth podium finish. "It was a lot of fun, a good race," said the man leading McLaren's revival - he is the only driver to score points in all nine races staged this season. He added: "It was exciting but also disappointing because I felt we should have been in second place. "Should have, would have, could have in the end. It's nice to know that we can race them, first time in many years we have been able to keep up with the Red Bulls and Mercedes." Another English driver George Russell, the man Bottas is in a 'drive-off' with to be Hamilton's teammate next season, went desperately close to earning his first point for Williams only for Fernando Alonso's Alpine to pass him on the final lap. — AFP

Japan's Ohtani adds pitcher role to his historic All-Star debut

LOS ANGELES: Two-way player Shohei Ohtani became the first player in Major League Baseball history on Sunday to be selected to the All-Star game as both a position player and pitcher. The Japanese sensation, who leads MLB in home runs with 30, was chosen as a starting pitcher for the American League team, receiving 121 votes in balloting by players, coaches and managers. Ohtani had already been selected in fan voting as a designated hitter for the AL squad and is entered in the Home Run Derby on All-Star weekend. "The guy's going to participate in Home Run Derby, pitch in the game and hit in the game. That doesn't happen, like, ever," Angels manager Joe Maddon said. "Even the non-baseball fan can really latch onto this and become interested."

Ohtani has drawn comparisons for his two-way play to the legendary American Babe Ruth, who retired in 1935 after 22 seasons. Ruth, nicknamed the 'Sultan of Swat', ended his career with 714 home runs and 10 World Series titles. But Ruth didn't pitch much after the 1919 season and the All-Star game didn't come into being until 1933.

Heading into Sunday, Ohtani had a .278 batting average and 66 RBI along with a 3-1 record and a 3.60 ERA in 12 starts on the mound to go with 83 strikeouts in 60 innings. He will join fellow starting pitchers Gerrit Cole of the New York Yankees, and Lance Lynn and Carlos Rodon of the Chicago White Sox in the All-Star game July 13 at Coors Field in Denver, Colorado. Maddon said earlier in the week that he expects Ohtani to pitch at least one inning in the mid-season showcase. "Of course, he'd only pitch one inning, and he'd maybe get one at-bat," Maddon said. "Let him hit and pitch. People want to see that." — AFP



Shohei Ohtani



BANGKOK: Mateus Castro (4L) of Japan's Nagoya Grampus celebrating with teammates after scoring a penalty against Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim during their AFC Champions League group G football match at the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok on Sunday. — AFP

Nagoya make last 16 as Ratchaburi hold Pohang

DOHA: Nagoya Grampus became the first team to progress to the Asian Champions League's round of 16 from the continent's eastern half after they beat Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim 2-1 to secure top spot with one match to spare in Group G on Sunday.

The Japanese club's fifth victory in as many matches put them in an unassailable position with 15 points after their main rivals Pohang Steelers were held to a goalless draw by Thai debutants Ratchaburi FC. Only the group winners and the three best second-placed teams from each group qualify for the last 16 after the AFC expanded the tournament to give teams from Southeast Asia a chance to test their skills against the continent's big guns. Group stage matches in Asia's western zone were completed in the COVID-19 impacted tournament in April.

Nagoya went ahead at the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok on Sunday through Brazilian Mateus, who scored from the penalty spot in the third minute after he was brought down inside the box by Adam Nor Azlin. Yuki Soma and Kazuki Nagasawa missed chances later but Nagoya managed to consolidate in the 28th minute after Hiroyuki Abe got past the defence and beat Johor goalkeeper Hazik Nadzli all ends up.

The Malaysians however were not spirited and pulled a goal back in the 42nd minute with Ramadhan Usman scoring on the rebound with a simple shot after Corbin Ong's earlier effort was parried by Nagoya's Australian goalkeeper Mitchell Langerak. Johor could have got the equalizer midway through the second half but Ahmad Bakri could only watch in agony as his thundering shot from inside the box hit the crossbar. That was the last time Johor got close to the Nagoya goal as they remained on three points with just one win from five matches. Pohang Steelers, meanwhile, were clear favorites against Ratchaburi but the Koreans failed to convert any of the numerous chances that came their way to share points and take their tally to 11 points with one match remaining. — AFP



Spain's 'leader' Luis Enrique out to settle old scores with Italy

LONDON: Luis Enrique's belligerent self-belief has led Spain to the semi-finals of Euro 2020, but the former Barcelona boss has another personal score to settle in tonight's last four against Italy. His playing career at major tournaments is best remembered for the vicious elbow from Mauro Tassotti that left blood flowing from his burst nose over his white Spain shirt at the 1994 World Cup.



SAINT PETERSBURG: Spain's coach Luis Enrique gestures during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Switzerland and Spain at the Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg on July 2, 2021. — AFP

Tassotti escaped without punishment at the time - Spain denied a stoppage time penalty and the chance to take the game to extra-time as the Azzurri ran out 2-1 winners. The Italy defender was subsequently banned for eight games by FIFA, but the damage was already done for Spain as they exited at the quarter-finals.

That was a familiar story for Spanish football at the time as generations of talented players came and went without leaving a trace at major competitions. All that changed in 2008 as a last eight win over Italy on penalties opened the door for Luis Aragones's side to win the European Championship.

Vicente del Bosque then took over to win the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012. But by the time Luis Enrique got the call, Spain had fallen rapidly from grace. In the previous three major tournaments, they failed to even reach the quarter-finals as the generation of a glorious era grew old together.

Luis Enrique's contentious call to leave out former captain Sergio Ramos for Euro 2020 broke the last remaining link to the 2008 team. Without Ramos, or any other Real Madrid player for the first time in Spain's history at a major tournament, the Madrid press cried foul, claiming La Furia Roja would lack leadership. "I am one of the leaders, like all coaches," said Luis Enrique in response. "If that is not the case, it is a bad signal."

Big calls come good

It has not been a totally smooth ride. A case of coronavirus for Sergio Busquets in the days before the tournament began meant the coach's decision not to take his full complement of 26 players was further

questioned. Spain have also only won one of their five games in 90 minutes. Yet, a number of Luis Enrique's biggest calls have come through for him when it mattered most.

Alvaro Morata had to listen to his own fans chant "how bad are you" in a pre-tournament friendly against Portugal. After a host of missed chances, including a penalty, in the group stages, the Juventus striker produced a stunning finish in extra-time to turn the last 16 tie against Croatia back in his side's favor. Unai Simon's comical own goal in that game to open the scoring when he failed to control a simple back pass from Pedri reopened the debate over who should be Spain's number one.

But the Athletic Bilbao goalkeeper made two penalty saves in the shootout win over Switzerland in the quarter-finals. Nationalized just weeks before Euro 2020 kicked off, center-back Aymeric Laporte has made vital contributions in both boxes as has Cesar Azpilicueta on his international recall after three years.

Further forward, Paris Saint-Germain winger Pablo Sarabia has more than justified his surprise place in the squad with goals against Slovakia and Croatia, while Ferran Torres, Dani Olmo and Mikel Oyarzabal have all made telling contributions when introduced as substitutes.

"I always said we were one of the eight candidates to win the European Championship and now we are among the four best," said Luis Enrique. "It would be ridiculous to be in the semi-finals and not think about taking one step more. This is the objective." A familiar foe stands in his way at Wembley, but win or lose, Luis Enrique will do it his own way. — AFP



BURTON-ON-TRENT: England's coach Gareth Southgate attends an England training session at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, central England, yesterday. — AFP

England ready to end semi-final jinx at Euro 2020: Southgate

LONDON: Gareth Southgate says England are ready to end their semi-final hoodoo as they prepare to face Denmark in the last four of Euro 2020, bidding to reach their first final at a major tournament since 1966. England topped their group and beat old foes Germany in the round of 16 before ratcheting up expectations with Saturday's thumping 4-0 quarter-final win against Ukraine in Rome.

England have fallen at the penultimate hurdle at major tournaments on four occasions since winning the World Cup in 1966, including their defeat by Croatia at the World Cup in Russia three years ago. But Southgate believes his side have learned from that disappointment and are ready to take the next step.

"We've knocked off so many hoodoos or perceived barriers already and I feel like this group of players will feel this is just the next challenge," he said. "I guess the interesting part for us is we won't feel totally satisfied if it's just a semi-final for us, whereas maybe three years ago, although there was massive disappointment after the semi-final, there was a feeling we'd come a long way. Now we've replicated what we did there, but that won't be enough to fulfill the group. That's a positive sign."

A key difference from 2018 is heightened expectation, with Southgate himself admitting their benchmark in Russia was to end England's 12-year wait for a knockout victory. The former international defender now has more knockout wins than any previous England manager and will go looking for another in tomorrow's semi-final bolstered by a boisterous partisan crowd of 60,000-plus at Wembley.

"It's great to be coming back now," said Southgate, who expects teenager Bukayo Saka to return to training on Monday after missing the Ukraine match with a slight knock. "To go and have that different environment, preparation, focus was definitely helpful. But now to be coming back to Wembley is a great thing for us."

Southgate says going through "real-life experiences together" such as the sickening racism experienced in Montenegro and Bulgaria in Euro 2020 qualifiers has helped create a bond among his players. Semi-final opponents Denmark have also been brought closer together following Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest in their group opener. The Inter Milan player needed resuscitation on the pitch before a successful operation in hospital.

"We talk about perspective in sport but we rarely have it," Southgate said. "This was a moment that brought it home for all of us. I can also imagine what it has done for the Danish team, their bond. We are talking about the things we have been through but what they went through that day — the way their captain was and the way the group was — and how that would have connected with their supporters. That's pretty powerful." — AFP

Peter Schmeichel backs son Kasper to thrive at Euro

LONDON: Peter Schmeichel says son Kasper will be ready for penalties if needed when Denmark take on England in the Euro 2020 semi-finals tomorrow, warning the Danes should not be underestimated. The former Manchester United goalkeeper was part of the Danish team that stunned the world in 1992 when they won the European Championship for the first and only time after receiving a late call-up to the tournament when the former Yugoslavia were disqualified. Schmeichel senior kept a clean sheet against England in a Group One stalemate but more crucially was able to deny Marco van Basten from the spot in a 5-4 penalty shoot-out success over the Netherlands in the last four before he shut out Germany in the final to help his country claim silverware.

"I am sure he would feel the same as I did — that it is yet another challenge," the 57-year-old told ITV when asked how Leicester goalkeeper Kasper would feel about penalties. "You have to deal with that and it is part of the job you've chosen to do. You know how significant it is and how big it is but at the end of the day you can only do so much as a goalkeeper and he will be prepared for it. I think one thing he will think of is the last time Denmark was in the European Championship semi-finals, Denmark did win on penalties so he can bring that into it."

England are favorites to progress at Wembley tomorrow and reach a first-ever European Championship final but Schmeichel warned Gareth Southgate's side not to underestimate Denmark, who have recovered from the trauma of Christian Eriksen's on-pitch cardiac arrest to reach the last four. "You have to realize you are playing a good team when you reach the semi-final," he said. "Any team you play will be a quality team, there is no doubt about that. We could have played Italy or Spain, they are equally as strong but I think what we have proven in our campaign is that we are a strong team as well and we can be a danger to anyone." — AFP



MUNICH: Belgium's midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (left) battles with Italy's midfielder Jorginho during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Belgium and Italy at the Allianz Arena in Munich on July 2, 2021. — AFP

Brazil-born Jorginho, Italy's beating heart at Euro 2020

MILAN: A discreet but 'irreplaceable' midfield presence Jorginho has been the cornerstone of Italy's revival from World Cup flops to Euro 2020 contenders with a semi-final against Spain awaiting in the London of his club side Chelsea on tonight.

One of the Azzurri's Brazilian contingent along with domestic teammate Emerson Palmieri and Atalanta defender Rafael Toloi, Jorginho, born in the southern town of Imbituba, has brought the technical flair of the country of his birth to his adopted Italy. "With Jorginho, everything seems simple. He is essential to this team, untouchable," said midfield partner Marco Verratti.

"Jorginho and Verratti are two phenomena and make the team turn," continued Inter Milan midfielder

Nicolo Barella, who scored the opener in a 2-1 win over favorites Belgium which fired Italy into the final four. "This midfield, together with that of (Serie A champions) Inter Milan, is among the strongest I've ever played in. Between us we create rivalries that push each other to do better and win," Barella added.

Against the three-time European champions it will be another battle as Italy look to push their unbeaten run to 33 consecutive matches and move within one step of a title they last won in 1968. "With Spain it will be a difficult game, we are two similar teams who both want to play the ball," continued Barella.

Left-back Leonardo Spinazzola, another of the motors behind Italy's Euro 2020 run, will be out after rupturing his Achilles tendon against the Red Devils. Santos-native Emerson, another Champions League winner with the Blues, will likely step into that role this week.

Jorginho qualifies for the Azzurri thanks to his grandfather who hails from the northern region of Vicenza. "I feel that I've got the Brazilian technique with the ball, but the Italian mentality to always train hard and win," said Jorginho. — AFP

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Home advantage pays dividend sat unique Euro 2020

LONDON: Euro 2020 has delivered more drama than even then-UEFA president Michel Platini could have envisaged when he announced the event would be held around Europe nine years ago, but it has still been slammed as a "joke" and "not really fair".

The tournament has been played across 11 cities in 11 countries as the culmination of Platini's plan for a continental-wide celebration of the championship's 60th anniversary, albeit a year late due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the unique set-up of the Euro — which by goals per game is the highest-scoring since 1976 — has led to criticism and a semi-final line-up constituting of four of the nine host nations to qualify.

While England, Spain, Denmark and Italy all played all three of their group matches on home turf, others had to travel thousands of kilometers between games. Wales played their first two matches in Azerbaijani capital Baku before a near 4,000-kilometre (2,480 miles) trip to Rome to face Italy.

An exhausted side, who reached the semi-finals in 2016, were then thrashed 4-0 by Denmark, who had played all their group games in Copenhagen, in the last 16 in Amsterdam. Due to travel restrictions, Welsh fans from the UK could not even attend that tie, while the Danes were roared on by thousands of supporters.

"Written off before a bag of air was kicked, 3,000 miles from home," said Wales full-back Chris Gunter. "Every nation had fans wherever they went. You and us deserved more from this joke set-up of a tournament, but who said life was fair."

Switzerland made it to the quarter-finals despite a similarly hectic schedule. Vladimir Petkovic's men started their campaign against Wales in Baku, then travelled to Rome, before flying

back to Azerbaijan. Remarkably, they still managed to defeat world champions France, who had played their Group F games in Munich and Budapest, on penalties in the last 16 in Bucharest, before losing a shoot-out to Spain in Saint Petersburg.

"Tomorrow will be the fourth time that we will change time zone. It is not great in terms of preparation," said Swiss coach Petkovic after the group stage, before praising his players' attitudes. "We travelled a lot. We moved often and each time we had to adapt the biological rhythm of the players. I want to congratulate them for having shown so much flexibility, because nobody is complaining. Besides, you journalists, you haven't talked much about it, I think."

England take advantage

England did not play away until their 4-0 quarter-final victory over Ukraine at the Stadio Olimpico on Saturday, and they will be back at Wembley, which will also hold the final, next Wednesday to take on Denmark in the last four.

If England win that match, they will have played six of seven games at home. "England, for me, are still the big favorites," Belgium coach Roberto Martinez told ESPN. "They are playing every game at home. You know that when the games are tight in the knockout phase, it's a big advantage to play at home."

It is the first time England have reached a European Championship semi-final since they hosted Euro 1996, while they still have not made a major tournament final since winning the 1966 World Cup at Wembley.

Tournaments are usually hosted by one or two nations, giving them a seemingly unfair advantage, but the last time a host team lifted the European



LONDON: England's forward Harry Kane celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between England and Germany at Wembley Stadium in London on June 29, 2021. — AFP

Championship title was France in 1984. The difference this time, though, is the added travel for certain teams and coronavirus rules — usually sides would at least have a training base in the host country and fans would travel there in their thousands.

Croatia manager Zlatko Dalic, whose side were in Group D with England and fellow hosts Scotland, said the coronavirus pandemic made it more unfair because of the tight restrictions on fans travelling to Britain.

"We are harmed because we are

playing without our fans," he said. "With our fans we are way stronger. This is not really fair, we have to travel, stay in a bubble." But the signs are that this will be a one-off, with Germany to host the Euro in 2024 for the first time since West Germany in 1988. — AFP



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