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Dutch reporter ‘fighting for life’ after shooting



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EU court rules fizzy drink sound not a trademark



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Thousands flock to see dwarf cow in Bangladesh



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Martinez sends Argentina into final against Brazil





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Airport capacity increased to 5,000 arrivals, 67 flights daily

MoH: Only specific labs abroad approved to conduct PCR tests

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said it increased the daily capacity of operation for arrivals to 5,000 passengers yesterday as it prepares for the expected influx of residents who have been barred from returning to Kuwait since early March. Expatriates have been allowed to return to the country from August 1 provided they have valid residencies and have taken two doses of vaccines approved by Kuwait.

DGCA Director General Yousef Al-Fawzan said in a press statement that DGCA has received an official approval regarding increasing the operational capacity to reach 5,000 arrivals a day, starting from yesterday, while the departure capacity is open to all passengers without any restrictions. He stressed the keenness of the airport authorities to

implement health procedures for all passengers, pointing out that the operational capacity of flights has been raised to about 67 departing and arriving flights daily. Fawzan indicated that the airport is ready to receive vaccinated non-Kuwaitis following the recent decision of the government, starting from Aug 1.

Kuwait has banned the issuance of any form of visas, including visit visas. Departures out of Kuwait have been kept open for Kuwaitis as well as residents, but Kuwaiti travelers must have taken two doses of an approved vaccine. The health ministry said yesterday that people returning to Kuwait must undergo a PCR test only from authorized labs in their home countries, stressing passengers will not be allowed to board the plane without approved PCR tests taken within 72 hours of the trip.

In a statement posted on its Twitter account, the

ministry however did not name those labs. The names should be confirmed with airlines in the passengers' respective countries. The ministry said a technical team from the ministry will scrutinize the PCR certificates before uploading them to its platforms. Abdullah Al-Sanad, spokesman of the ministry, said that any test certificate from unauthorized labs will not be accepted.

The health ministry statement said passengers who had taken two doses of an approved vaccine and are fully immunized will be asked to undergo a second PCR test on the third day of arrival while under home quarantine. If the test is negative, they will be freed from quarantine. For those who are not immunized, they will be asked to take a second PCR test on arrival and again on the sixth day of arrival while under home quarantine.

Kuwait in early March slapped a total ban on the

entry of all foreigners including those who hold valid residencies as part of its efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus. Kuwaitis who have been vaccinated twice were given freedom to leave the country and return.

The health ministry also refuted rumors on social media about the ministry denying private hospitals from importing coronavirus vaccines. The ministry issued a decree in February that permits private hospitals and health centers to import approved COVID-19 vaccines. In the same context, the union of the owners of private medical professions affirmed that importation of medicines and vaccines must go through franchisees and registered medical companies; therefore, private hospitals can only administer vaccines if provided by these companies in coordination with the health ministry.

Haiti president assassinated, wife wounded

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti President Jovenel Moise was assassinated and his wife wounded early yesterday in a gun attack at their private residence, tipping the impoverished and crisis-hit Caribbean nation into a renewed state of political uncertainty. Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph declared a "state of siege" and said he was now in charge of the country, urging the public to remain calm while insisting the police and army would ensure public order.

As international outrage and shock spread over the killing, the capital Port-au-Prince was quiet

early yesterday with no extra security forces on patrol, witnesses reported. "The president was assassinated at his home by foreigners who spoke English and Spanish," Joseph said of the assault that took place around 1:00 am (0500 GMT). "They shot and killed the president, and wounded his wife." The president's wife Martine was being treated at hospital.



Jovenel Moise

Moise had ruled Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, by decree, after legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed in the wake of disputes, including on when his own term ends. In addition to the political chaos, kidnappings for ransom have surged in

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‘Tragedy king’ Dilip Kumar dies aged 98

MUMBAI: Dilip Kumar, one of Bollywood's most accomplished and respected film stars, died yesterday aged 98, sparking tributes from across Indian and Pakistani cinema, politics, sport and even animal rights. Alongside Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor, Kumar was one of three names who dominated Indian cinema's golden age from the 1940s to the 1960s, enjoying a career spanning more than 50 years and nearly 60 films.

Nicknamed "The Tragedy King" - with brooding good looks, tousled hair, and a deep voice - he played the lead in some of India's most commercially successful films of the period. But he missed out on international fame after turning down the chance

to play Sherif Ali in David Lean's 1962 classic "Lawrence of Arabia". The part went to then little-known Egyptian actor Omar Sharif.



Dilip Kumar

Kumar was born Mohammed Yusuf Khan on Dec 11, 1922, in Peshawar, Pakistan, then part of British-ruled India. His father was a fruit merchant who took his family to India's entertainment capital Bombay in the 1930s. Actress Devika Rani spotted him on his father's fruit stall, leading to a part in his first film, "Jwar Bhata", in 1944. Rani persuaded him to change his name, so he chose Dilip Kumar, allowing him to hide what he was doing from his disapproving father.

Continued on Page 2

Megaship heads out of Suez Canal after Egypt deal

ISMAILIA, Egypt: The megaship MV Ever Given which blocked the Suez Canal for six days in March headed out of the waterway yesterday as Egypt and the vessel's Japanese owners signed a final compensation deal. The ship weighed anchor and began sailing north from near the central canal city of Ismailia towards the Mediterranean Sea, shortly after 11:30 am local time (0930 GMT).

The nearly 200,000-tonne container vessel became wedged across the canal during a sandstorm on March 23, blocking a vital artery from Asia to Europe that carries 10 percent of global

maritime trade and provides Egypt with vital revenues. After a round-the-clock salvage operation to dislodge it, Egypt seized the ship and demanded compensation from owners Shoen Kisen Kaisha for lost canal revenues, salvage costs and damage to the canal.

In a ceremony attended by ambassadors and international media, Suez Canal Authority chief (SCA) Osama Rabie inked a final deal with representatives of the owners. "I announce to the world that we have reached a deal," Rabie said at the ceremony carried live on Egypt's state television. He called March's salvage operation a "race against time" to restore global shipping flows. "We were facing a tough test with the world watching," he added.

The SCA announced last month it had signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Japanese firm ahead of reaching a final deal. Khaled Abou Bakr, a prominent lawyer who headed the SCA

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Local

Kuwait Deputy Amir, Crown Prince receives Speaker, PM



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

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

Highness Sheikh Mishal also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



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

sent a cable of condolences on Tuesday to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing sincere grief toward victims of a plane that crashed in Russia's Far East. 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 the Russian President. — KUNA

Deputy Foreign Minister receives credentials of non-resident ambassadors



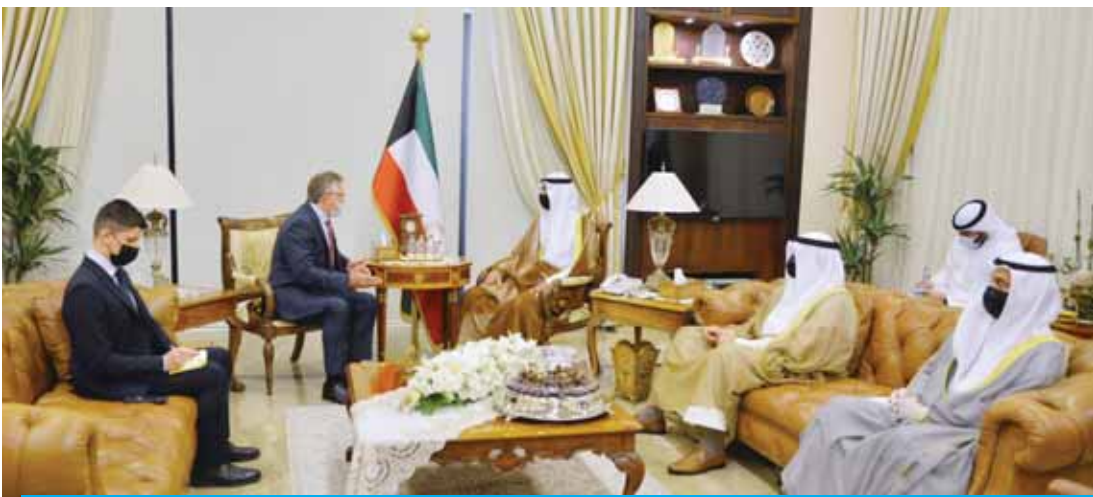
KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri receives ambassador of Finland. — KUNA photos



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri receives ambassador of Belarus.



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri receives ambassador of Panama.



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri receives ambassador of Moldova.



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri receives ambassador of Angola.

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri received yesterday credentials of the newly assigned

ambassadors of Finland, the Republic of Belarus, Panama, Moldova and Angola. These envoys are non-resident ambassadors to the

State of Kuwait. The credentials delivery ceremony was attended by the assistant foreign minister for protocol affairs Dhari Al-Ejran,

and the assistant foreign minister for the deputy foreign minister bureau affairs Ayham Al-Omar. — KUNA

Haiti president assassinated...

Continued from Page 1

recent months, reflecting the growing influence of armed gangs in the country. Haiti also faces chronic poverty and recurrent natural disasters.

The president faced steep opposition from the lavish historical romance "Mughal-e-Azam", based on the life of a great Mughal prince. It became one of Bollywood's biggest-grossing films of all time.

'Tragedy king' Dilip Kumar...

Continued from Page 1

Although "Jwar Bhata" flopped and leading film magazines criticized his performance, Kumar was undeterred and broke through with the 1946 film "Milan". One of his most memorable roles came in the 1946 film "Milan". One of his most memorable roles came in the 1946 film "Milan". One of his most memorable roles came in the 1946 film "Milan".

Kumar, who cited Hollywood greats Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper and Spencer Tracy as influences, later won acclaim in 1964 for the nationalis-

islative and local elections, Haiti was due to have a constitutional referendum in September after it was twice postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The United Nations Security Council said it was shocked by the assassination, while US President Joe Biden condemned the killing as "horrific" and said Washington was ready to assist in any way. "We condemn this heinous act, and I am sending my sincere wishes for First Lady Moïse's recovery," Biden said in a statement.

Just hours after the assassination, Joseph announced he had declared a "state of siege", which grants the executive additional powers. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned "this crime poses a risk of instability and a spiral of violence. The perpetrators of this assassination must be found and brought to justice." — AFP

tic "Leader", screened against a backdrop of recent wars against China and Pakistan. The 1970s brought fewer roles, as younger actors such as Amitabh Bachchan took center stage.

Kumar even took a five-year break after a run of flops, returning in 1981 with the hit "Kranti" (Revolution) and a part alongside Bachchan in "Shakti" (Strength) the following year, plus a string of character roles. Later he took up a more active role in politics, and in 1998 he worked to end the feuding between India and Pakistan.

The same year saw him receive the highest civilian honor in Pakistan, angering Hindu nationalists. Two years later he became an Indian lawmaker for the Congress party. Kumar credited his success to his early days in Peshawar's fabled Qissa Khwani ("Storytellers") Bazaar where travelers would relate their adventures. — AFP

Megaship heads out of Suez Canal...

Continued from Page 1

negotiating team, reiterated yesterday the "secrecy" of the final compensation package. "I can unequivocally state that we preserved the full rights of the Authority," he said. Cairo initially demanded \$916 million in compensation before slashing that to around \$550 million, but the final figure has been the subject of tough negotiations.

Egypt, which earns more than \$5 billion a year from the canal, lost between \$12 million and \$15 million in revenues each day it was closed, the SCA said. The ship's grounding and the intensive efforts to refloat it also resulted in significant damage to the canal. In April, maritime data company Lloyd's List said the blockage by the vessel, which is longer than four football fields, held up some \$9.6 billion worth of cargo each day it was stuck.

The Taiwanese-operated and Panama-flagged vessel was refloated on March 29, and tailbacks of 420 vessels at the canal's northern and southern entrances were cleared in early April. On Tuesday, the Ismailia Economic Court ruled that the seized ship and its crew was being released following a request from the SCA. It resumed its journey yesterday with its cargo of 18,300 containers intact, SCA sources told AFP.

In a Sunday television interview, Rabie said the Ever Given had suffered "no leakage". He said also Egypt would receive a 75-tonne tugboat from Shoei Kisen Kaisha as part of the compensation package, and noted that the family of a rescue worker who died during the salvage operation would be compensated. — AFP

News in brief

World passes 4m COVID deaths

GENEVA: The world passed the "tragic milestone" of four million recorded COVID-19 fatalities yesterday, the World Health Organization said, adding that the pandemic's true toll was probably higher. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the landmark had been reached, more than 18 months since the outbreak emerged in China in Dec 2019. — AFP

Palestinian figure Jibril dies

DAMASCUS: Ahmad Jibril, a leading Palestinian commander for decades, died yesterday in the Syrian capital aged 83, his son said. "He died of natural causes after suffering from illness," Bader Jibril said. Jibril was the founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command. — AFP

First Arab woman astronaut

DUBAI: The UAE's Nora Al-Matrooshi is the first Arab woman to start training to be an astronaut, one of two Emiratis picked from thousands of applicants as the Gulf nation looks to the stars. The 28-year-old mechanical engineer has dreamt about space since she was a girl, learning about planets and stars at school. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Airways increases flights to London to thrice per week



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) announced yesterday increasing weekly flights to London to three starting July 10. The corporation said on its Twitter account that the flights would be organized on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. KAC resumed operations to the British capital in the middle of the past month at a rate of a single flight a week. It has re-arranged flights to Geneva, Munich and Frankfurt effective July 9 at a rate of two flights per week. It has also declared renewing operations to Paris, Malaga and Sarajevo.

On June 15, it declared starting 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 sum-

mer 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. Yesterday, KAC relaunched its first commercial flight to Paris. Flights to this destination will operate thrice weekly on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Meanwhile, KAC announced extending working hours at its office in Farwaniya - from 8:00 am to 7:30 pm from July 11, 2021. PR and Media Director Fayeze Al-Anezi said that this step came to relieve the rush of clients at KAC's Avenues office. "This extension of working hours will provide clients better service," he said.

"All KAC sales offices provide booking of all tickets including governmental, medical treatment abroad, commercial or Oasis member tickets. Furthermore, KAC recently added a special section for tickets for medical beds and ventilators, available at the Avenues office only from 9:00 am to



3:00 pm," added Anezi.

KAC offices provide all services including issuing, canceling, changing and upgrading all kinds of tickets, and receiving complaints, inquiries and suggestions. "KAC offices also give priority to disabled and elderly clients to ensure serving them quickly," he pointed out.



Currently, there are four offices of KAC - at Kuwait International Airport T4, The Avenues mall, Farwaniya and Ministries Complex. The airport branch operates around the clock, Avenues branch from 9:00 am to 7:30 pm (2:00 pm to 7:30 pm on Friday and Saturday), and the Ministries Complex branch from 7:30 am to 1:30 pm.

Kuwait concerned about missing people in Syrian conflict

GENEVA: Kuwait on Tuesday expressed its grave concern over the destiny of those who have gone missing in the ongoing conflict in Syria. This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim in the 47th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council. Ghunaim pointed to the independent commission's reports on the large-scale enforced disappearances, including tens of thousands of women, boys and girls, over the past decade in Syria. He called on all the parties to the conflict to take measures so as to stop this act, release immediately those individuals, provide support to the victims and uncover the destiny of all missing people.

He stressed the importance for the parties to the conflict to take all required measures to pay much attention to the missing children and search for them, urging the parties to facilitate humanitarian aid access to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the besieged areas without discrimination. He noted that millions of Syrians have been suffering from the scarcity of basic needs and the coronavirus pandemic. Due to Syrians' continued sufferings, Kuwait goes on assuming its responsibility as it hosted the first donor conferences and took part in several other donor conferences during which it had pledged \$1.7 billion in aid to Syrian people, he pointed out.

Ghunaim reiterated that Kuwait believes that the political solution is the only way to end the Syrian crisis and meet aspirations of Syrian people, in line with the 2012 Geneva statement and US Security Council 2254. Kuwait condemned strongly all human rights violations against the Syrian people and called for ending this conflict which enters its second decade with no clear hope for a fair and comprehensive solution to meet aspirations of all Syrian segments, he made clear. The Kuwaiti representative called on all parties to abide by all relevant international charters, allow the safe and sustainable entry of humanitarian aid, end besieging of residential areas and stop using of starvation as a warfare method. —KUNA

Kuwait, Qatar ministers discuss boosting cooperation

DOHA: Kuwait's Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology and Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares and Qatari Minister of Municipal and Environment Affairs Abdullah Al-Subaie discussed on Tuesday means of increasing cooperation between the two countries in the public works and infrastructure fields. Speaking to the press, Fares said they have discussed some of the outstanding development projects and plans that are implemented as a part of Kuwait's new development vision. —KUNA

Kuwait mobile vaccination units immunized 60K workers in 17 days

KUWAIT: At least 60,000 people have received anti-COVID vaccine during the fourth phase of the mobile vaccination campaign, Dr Dina Al-Dhabib, head of the mobile vaccination units, said on Tuesday. This phase commenced on June 21 to vaccinate workers at gas stations, security and guard companies, public transport, restaurants, and port and navigation companies. Dhabib added in a press statement that this move aims at accelerating the pace of vaccination and immunity in the country. Preparations are underway to launch ten new vaccination centers to reach 40 centers nationwide so as to provide vaccination to people, she noted, stating that a single center can provide up to 1,000 doses of vaccine a day. —KUNA



DOHA: Kuwait's Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares meets with Qatari Minister of Municipal and Environment Affairs Abdullah Al-Subaie. —KUNA



Audit Bureau spares treasury hefty sums

KUWAIT: Kuwait Audit Bureau's keen eye on finances of authorities and bodies under its supervisory jurisdictions resulted in saving up to KD 1.08 billion (\$3.5 billion) that could have been wasted over the past four years. Yousef Al-Fozan, the bureau assistant undersecretary for overseeing accounts and financial affairs, said in a statement, yesterday, marking its 57th anniversary that the department, in line with its thrifty policy, spared the State Treasury prospected (undesired) expenditures estimated at KD 467.7 million (approximately \$1.54 billion) during the 2019-2020 fiscal year. He has indicated that the assigned auditors scrutinize projects' costs, controversial spending, among other cases and issues. The bureau is the State arm that scans expenditures and requests for financial allotment from various sectors and ventures' costs. On Tuesday, the bureau affirmed that it endeavors to maintain effective scrutiny over public funds for sake of protection and optimum employment of state money.

Marking the Audit Bureau 57th anniversary that fell yesterday, the acting undersecretary Yousef Al-Mazroui affirmed in his yesterday's statement resolve to safeguard public funds and those of the coming generations — a policy that has been literally maintained since its establishment in July 1964. The bureau closely cooperates with the departments and authorities under its supervision in line with the theme, "partners and auditors," Mazroui added, indicating that its staff help these bodies in keeping their financial and accounting tasks in order. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Secretary of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Haifa Al-Sager presented a commemorative plaque to Rana Al-Hamad in appreciation of her support. Hamad said she is impressed with the society's mission and its humanitarian activities to help the sick and needy.

News in brief

Kuwait supports Egypt, Sudan

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday said it fully backs Egypt and Sudan's efforts to "preserve their legitimate water rights," amid a dispute with Ethiopia over the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Cairo and Khartoum's attempts to solve the GERD dispute are in "accordance with the rules of international laws," said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry statement. It urged the international community to ensure that any solution to the quarrel should be "based on international conventions" that would serve the collective interests of the three countries: Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Poet still detained

KUWAIT: The public prosecution yesterday decided to detain elderly Kuwaiti poet Jamal Al-Sayer for another day pending the completion of interrogation on accusations of writing tweets deemed offensive to the Amir and for spreading false news. He is also accused of misusing his mobile. MP Muhamannad Al-Sayer, a relative of Jamal, said the lawyers have demanded that the latest amendment of the law should be applied. The amendment prohibits detaining people facing freedom of expression charges. MPs and activists have strongly criticized authorities for arresting Sayer from his home. They called for his immediate release saying that Kuwait is not a police state.

1,012 arrests in 6 months

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Relations and Security Information said the sentences implementation department issued statistics of its activities until the end of the first half of 2021. It said there were 2,882 arrest warrants, 1,882 sentence implementations and 1,012 arrests made during that period.

Fund grants KD 361,000 to support Rohingya



KUWAIT: KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer (center left) and KFAED Acting Director General Ghanim Al-Ghunaiman pose for a picture after signing the agreement. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development signed a KD 361,000 (\$1.2 million) grant agreement with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to support Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar region in Bangladesh. The fund said in a statement on Tuesday that the Acting Director

General Ghanim Al-Ghunaiman signed the accord on behalf of the Kuwait Fund for Development, while KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer inked it on behalf of the society. KFAED provides loans and development aid to developing countries in financing their projects. —KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwait '18th safest country'

KUWAIT: Global Finance has ranked Kuwait 18th worldwide and 4th among Arab countries (after the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain) in the list of the world's safest countries.

Residents' flights mechanism

KUWAIT: Kuwait airport and health ministry officials are set to hold a series of meetings to discuss the mechanism of reopening the airport for fully vaccinated residents as of August 1, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Oil barrel at \$77.22

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.27 to \$77.22 per barrel Tuesday after being at \$75.95 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of the Brent crude saw a decline by \$2.63 to \$74.53 per barrel, while the West Texas Intermediate went down by \$1.79 to \$73.37 pb.

'Honey helps lose weight'

KUWAIT: Nutritional therapy consultant Dr Hoda Ahmad stated that bee honey is used in the process of losing weight, despite the fact it contains sugar in good quantities, as it has many health benefits, which in turn provide nutrition sufficient for the obese body. She stressed that consuming honey with warm water burns fat accumulated in the body, while eating it half an hour after breakfast is very useful in the process of burning fat in the abdominal area, in addition to the fact that eating honey with cinnamon or lemon helps in the process of losing weight, and enhances the chances of obtaining a fat-free body.

KCB, long-standing history of alleviating economic burdens

At the Admission and Registration Hall in Shuwaikh

KUWAIT: Kuwait late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signed a law on July 8, 1965 establishing Saving and Credit Bank, replacing Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB), with a mandate of alleviating economic burden from Kuwaiti families by facilitating loans and credits, and giving grants. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem first signed KCB establishment law in 1960 with the purpose of facilitating real estate, industrial, and agricultural credit, as well as providing loans to Kuwaiti employees of the state. The Saving and Credit bank had its objectives altered. It emphasized raising awareness in regards to saving and investments culture. However, in 1995 the bank was reverted back to its original name, KCB, ceasing all saving activities. The bank currently operates as an independent public establishment and under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance. The bank prides itself on being a constant accompaniment to citizens' life journeys and monumental decisions. KCB General Director Salah Al-Mudhaf stated "the bank aids its beneficiaries in building their forever homes and establishing their future plans (like renovation), therefore, magnifying a sense of security in one's homeland, Kuwait."

KCB provides a variety of services to the Kuwaiti people, amongst which are real estate loans, considered to be most prominent type of loans in the bank. The bank offers Kuwaiti citizens a loan of KD 70,000 (\$232,000) with no interest,

as well as other types of loans for property developments such as refurbishing projects worth KD 12,000 (around \$40,000). Aside from property-related loans the bank also provides social loans and grants. For instance, it grants Kuwaiti women a loan worth KD 70,000 under certain conditions, and up to KD 6,000 (\$20,000) marriage loans. Additionally, the bank distributes grants for people with disabilities.

KCB has also been working in close proximity with Martyr's Bureau for 30 years. A special counter has been set up in all of the bank's locations for families of martyrs, so that they are given priority and would not need appointments to complete their paper work. KCB recently announced that an agreement with Martyr's Bureau has been made to create a coordination office to further ease the families' transactions. The bank announced last year that the total of loans and grants disbursed between January-December 2020 amounted to KD 183.8 million (about \$606.5 million). KCB announced in a September 2020 update that total loans it offered in 2010-20 amounted to KD 2.75 billion (\$9.1 billion). It also recently announced that by June 26 2021, the bank revenues over the past 10 years amounted to KD 600 million (approximately \$2 billion).

While the bank has been working tirelessly to provide optimal services to its clients, the global pandemic proved a difficult challenge. The coron-

avirus pandemic took its toll on many families causing them financial struggles, however, following the instructions of the council of ministers in deferring financial obligations for six months, the bank postponed loan payments for citizens who wished to. The first deferral in 2020 was estimated at KD 100 million (\$332 million) benefiting around 150,000 citizens. As for the latest postponement requests that took place in May 2021, they amounted to 63,118 beneficiaries out of 154,501 clients, or 41 percent of total of borrowers. Another challenge facing KCB is the most recent distribution of construction permits in Mutlaa and South Abdullah Al-Mubarak areas, with more than 31,000 residential units. The bank worked on a study with an international consultant four years ago to deal with the distributions. Based on the study, KCB has been coordinating with Ministry of Finance, Kuwait Investment Authority, Central Bank of Kuwait and National Assembly to find financial alternatives in order to ensure bank's sustainability and ability to provide residential care. KCB is a forerunner in contributing to Kuwait's 2035 vision, as it is the first government entity to transform to digital services, according to Microsoft. The bank states that 98 percent of its services could be accessed online or through mobile applications. It is also among first to implement Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies to create a smoother process and provide clients with improved services. — KUNA

NBK says managed pandemic crisis 'capably and efficiently'

KUWAIT: The "KON" social entrepreneurship program launched by LOYAC in partnership with National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) as a platinum sponsor, hosted a seminar in which Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait gave a lecture on "Crisis Management and Lessons Learnt from the Pandemic".

Ablani said that NBK exhibited exemplary management of a crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic's scale and complexity. In an early response since February 2020, formed an emergency team entrusted with setting precautionary plans and measures to effectively deal with the pandemic

across all its business units and branches.

Ablani stressed that the key lesson learned from the pandemic is that prudent investment in human capital and digital infrastructure over the past years significantly helped in NBK's success in weathering this crisis, and contributing in the recovery of the Kuwaiti economy recovery from its consequences. Throughout its history extending over seven decades, NBK capably overcame many challenges and difficult crises it faced, and was a key contributor in driving economic recovery, he pointed out.

Business continuity

Ablani explained that the bank had put in place early plans to ensure business continuity despite the partial and full lockdown and the transformation of a number of branches into call centers in the quarantined areas, noting that employees' working from home required great technical efforts to ensure business continuity, as the bank's adaptability to the exceptional circumstances imposed by these the crisis is a source of pride for everyone in the bank.

He added that working remotely was not an issue for the bank, in view of its huge digital capabilities, in addition to Group Human Resources following a strategy aligned with digital transformation plans, indicating that during the period of working from home, the bank intensified campaigns aimed to raise employees' awareness about cyber risk and related protection measures.

Back-to-normal stages

Ablani mentioned that an important part of crisis management is to ensure the gradual return to normal life without any obstacles. To this end, the bank, in cooperation with the health authorities and the Central Bank of Kuwait, implemented precautionary plans and measures that put the health of the bank's employees, customers and society as a whole as the first priority.

The bank applied stringent precautionary health measures to ensure a safe work environment through a thorough sterilization system of its different facilities and health controls at its entrances and all branches, and strict requirements to wear masks during working hours, he added.

Investment in human capital

Ablani stressed that NBK reaped the fruits of its huge investments in its human capital, whom the bank considers as the key factor of all its successes for over seven decades.

The bank continued to raise the efficiency of its employees, by providing them many online training programs and courses developed in cooperation with the most reputable institutions and universities around the world, in line with the requirements of the labor market, he noted.

National talents

Ablani explained that, despite the exceptional challenges imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, NBK continued to play its historical role in supporting and attracting national talents, with a national labor ratio of 73.8 percent.

Supporting employees

Ablani indicated that as part of NBK's endeavors to provide utmost support to its employees, the bank launched many important initiatives, covering organizational and health aspects, including a special healthcare program in which it engaged a group of physicians and specialists that focused on key areas comprising mental and general health and nutrition, as well as physical fitness.

"NBK allowed parent employees flexible working hours, at the beginning of the school year 2020-2021, to help them set up their children for online teaching. The bank also provided pregnant female employees (in the third trimester) were also granted leave," Ablani added.

He highlighted that the bank launched a campaign over the past months to encourage its employees to get the COVID-19 vaccines, which showed remarkable success, as the percentage of its employees who received one or two doses of the vaccines reached 82 percent of the total employees.

NBK constantly urges its employees to maintain their safety and health through awareness communications that frequently disseminated through the bank's various digital platforms and posters displayed all over the bank and its branches. In addition, as part of our and based on our social responsibility, we publish and support awareness campaigns through social media accounts, Al-Ablani emphasized.

Furthermore, the bank conducted many surveys during the year about employees' awareness and confidence in the health and safety measures, which showed a significant increase in the level of employees' awareness about the health and safety measures taken by the bank at 94 percent. The latest surveys also revealed a high level of employees' confidence in the procedures and measures taken in the course of the back-to-work plan, at 88 percent.

Honoring frontliners

The GM - Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait stated that, in appreciation of the great efforts exerted by the bank's employees during the pandemic, the Executive Management honored frontline employees for the dedication and commitment they showed during full lockdown period to continue serving customers during these exceptional circumstances.



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International

From hope to despair: South Sudan marks 10 troubled years

Brutal conflict has cost 380,000 lives and displaced four million

JUBA, South Sudan: From hope to war, dreams to despair, South Sudan's tortured decade since independence has left the young country more fragile than ever, wracked by political instability, violence and desperate hunger. At midnight on July 9, 2011, celebrations erupted as the new nation was born and the people of South Sudan clapped and danced to mark the end of a long and bloody struggle for statehood. "It was a new dawn and something like a miracle," said Wani Stephen Elias, recalling the joy as revelers waved the nation's new flag on the streets of the capital Juba, celebrating long into the night. But the optimism that ushered in its hard-fought independence from Sudan evaporated as the country's new leaders went to war in 2013.

The brutal conflict lasted five grinding years, costing 380,000 lives and displacing four million, shattering any illusions of a fresh start. "I've seen the greatest and the darkest of days," said Elias, 31. The political leaders who opted for war over building their nascent state are still in power today, ruling in a tenuous coalition forged under a peace deal. The power-sharing arrangement between President Salva Kiir, a former military commander from the Dinka ethnic group, and his deputy Riek Machar, a rebel leader from the Nuer people, has kept fighting between their forces largely at bay since the ceasefire in 2018.

But the old foes have violated past truces and progress on this latest "revitalized" deal has drifted, exacerbating distrust between the pair. The "united" government they belatedly formed in February 2020 under great international pressure is weak, while other crucial measures designed to avert another war have not been fulfilled.

'Quite tragic'

The political uncertainty comes as South Sudan

reels from a biting economic crisis and soaring inflation, an upsurge in armed ethnic violence, and its worst hunger crisis since declaring independence. "South Sudan is clearly at a worse place than it was 10 years ago, which is quite tragic," said Alan Boswell, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group (ICG), a conflict prevention organization. The peace agreement outlined a path towards achieving key nation-building milestones derailed by the war, including the creation of a new parliament, constitutional reform, elections and a unified national army.

But nearly three years on, few have been realized. National parliament was only convened in May, with MPs to take the oath of office on the day of the anniversary on Friday, and confidence in the new assembly is wanting after delays and broken promises. "We are saying better late than never but... we want to see impact," said Jame David Kolok, executive director of Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance. "We want to see a reduction in corruption. We want to see our budget being monitored. We want to see services being improved. We want to see that security is stabilized, and that there is an environment for dialogue."

Potential powderkegs

Little progress has been made on constitutional reform while promised elections-slated for 2022 but pushed to 2023 — could prove hugely destabilizing if arrangements aren't made to accommodate the losers. "If the elections become a showdown between the two main warring parties, this alone could be a recipe to go back to civil war," said Boswell. Another powderkeg is the failure to unite Kiir and Machar's rival troops into one army—a critical safeguard in the peace accords against future conflict, and bringing stability to lawless swathes of the country.



JUBA, Sudan: In this file photo thousands of Southern Sudanese wave the flag of their new country during a ceremony in the capital Juba to celebrate South Sudan's independence from Sudan. —AFP

Both men committed to sending their forces for retraining and graduation but "very minimal progress" had been made, said Major General Charles Tai Gituai, the interim chairman of the RJMEC, the body which monitors the implementation of the peace process. The process has lacked funding and barracks for the troops have suffered critical shortages of food, water and medicine, prompting widespread desertion. Conditions were so bad in some camps that troops starved to death or died of disease. "It is clear that the unification of forces had stalled, and the conditions in the cantonment sites and training centers have markedly deter-

riorated," Gituai said on June 24.

The peace process has flatlined as more than seven million South Sudanese—about 60 percent of the entire population—suffer from a severe lack of food. Some face emergency levels of hunger while the most critical 108,000 are "literally at risk of famine this lean season", said Matthew Hollingworth, WFP country director. A litany of other catastrophes—drought, devastating floods for a second year running, and a record-bad locust plague—have exacerbated already dire conditions in a country dependent on foreign aid to provide the most services to its people. —AFP

Heatwave stokes N America's warmest June on record

PARIS: Last month was the hottest June on record in North America, stoked by a deadly heatwave searing across parts of the region, the European Union's climate monitoring service reported yesterday, saying it illustrates the impacts of global warming. Record-breaking heat scorched from the southwest to the northwest of the United States and into Canada, where the all-time record daily temperature was broken three days in a row in British Columbia.

The region was 1.2 degrees Celsius (34.2 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 1991-2020 average in June, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S). "These heatwaves are not happening in a vacuum. They are happening in a global climate environment that is warming and which makes them more likely to occur," said C3S climate scientist Julien Nicolas.

Globally, June 2021 joins the same month in 2018 as the fourth warmest June. It was the second warmest June on record for Europe, while northern Siberia also saw extremely high summer temperatures. It is already well understood that heatwaves are occurring more frequently, are more intense, and are lasting longer than they did in the past, Nicolas told AFP. "The heatwaves that we saw last month in North America, western Russia and northern Siberia are just the latest examples of a trend that is projected to continue into the future and is tied to the warming of our global climate," he said.

Threats to life

The regions affected also had unusually dry soils, according to a report from C3S, which noted that both wildfires and heat "posed threats to life". Dozens of fires have ripped across parts of Canada in recent days, fuelled by the deadly heatwave and tinder-dry conditions. "What happened in Canada was a big jump with respect to the previous record," said Carlo Buontempo, the director of C3S. "These hot records are a powerful reminder of the impact climate change could have on our lives," he told AFP. The 2015 Paris Agreement calls for capping the increase in global temperatures at "well below" two degrees Celsius, and 1.5 degrees if possible.

Human activity has driven global temperatures up some 1.1 degrees Celsius so far, stoking increasingly fierce storms, extreme heatwaves, droughts and wildfires. In May, the World Meteorological Organization and Britain's Met Office said there was a 40 percent chance of the annual average global temperature temporarily surpassing 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures within the next five years. The past six years, including 2020, have been the six warmest on record. —AFP

Female Argentine builders breaking down barriers

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina:

Dressed in blue overalls, Barbara Burruchaga pulls a rope lifting buckets of sand up to the roof. Alongside other Argentine women, she breaks stone, mixes concrete and builds walls—they're not just constructing houses, they're breaking down barriers. "Being a builder makes me happy, we women were told 'no' for a long time," Burruchaga told AFP. "I love telling my dad, who's the person who is the most surprised and had the least faith," added the 21-year-old as she hauled materials to renovate an old cultural center on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Change is coming fast to the sector.

According to Argentina's construction workers union, the number of women in the industry increased by 131 percent from 2003 to 2010 and they now make up five percent of the workforce. That may sound like little, but compared to other Latin American countries like Mexico (0.4 percent) it's

significant. Burruchaga is one of the eight members of 'Dissident Deconstruction', a collective of women and minority genders dedicated to construction work.

One knocks down a wall as others mix concrete while they listen to music and drink the traditional local mate infusion. The patriarchal system "says we don't have the strength for these tasks," said Eva Iglesias, 36. But "not all builders are big and muscular, there are many shorties with bellies," added the petite Iglesias. Most of them suffer from back pain but "they don't say so because they're not allowed to look weak."

'Go and wash dishes'

There is an increasing number of women construction groups operating in Argentina. 'We Fix It' is a feminist collective that publishes construction workshops on Instagram and functions as a professional network. 'Dissident Deconstruction Network' is a



VALENTIN ALSINA, Argentina: Female bricklayers work in the construction of a house in Valentin Alsina, Lanus, Buenos Aires province, Argentina. —AFP

WhatsApp group with 90 members working in architecture, construction, plumbing, electricity and carpentry. Some groups, though, are designed for women that need help with their DIY. Hairdresser Valeria Salguero, 34, could not afford to hire a builder to build an extra bedroom for her daughter.

She created a Facebook group called 'Building, a woman's thing', to ask for

advice. The result was "crazy." In just one month she had garnered 6,000 followers—mostly single mothers—including from Uruguay and Costa Rica, all eager to repair their own homes. While some comments were negative—"go and wash the dishes" or "feminazi"—she was recently contacted by an international construction company that offered to train and employ an "all woman" crew. —AFP

Ex-cop Adams appears set to become New York's next mayor

NEW YORK: Ex-policeman Eric Adams was on track Tuesday to become New York's next mayor after the city's elections authorities released new results showing he had maintained his lead in the Democratic primary. The 60-year-old Brooklyn borough president claimed victory after the Board of Elections said he held a lead of one percentage point over nearest rival and fellow moderate Kathryn Garcia. The elections board website showed Adams on 50.5 percent, with 403,000 votes, and Garcia, a 51-year-old former sanitation commissioner, in second place on 49.5 percent with almost 395,000 votes.

The board, which has made mistakes in the past and

which was forced to recount some results last month, did not say how many absentee ballots were left to count. It is not due to release final official results until the middle of this month. The Associated Press news agency called the election for Adams but Garcia did not immediately concede and several local media remained cautious. "While there are still some very small amounts of votes to be counted, the results are clear: an historic, diverse, five-borough coalition led by working-class New Yorkers has led us to victory in the Democratic primary for mayor of New York," Adams said in a statement.

If confirmed the winner, Adams will take on Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa in November's mayoral election. Since New York is a Democratic stronghold, the Democratic candidate is virtually guaranteed to win. They will have to steer the Big Apple through its post-pandemic recovery. Adams ran on a public safety platform after a surge in crime in New York, as in most major US cities, since last summer. —AFP



NEW YORK: In this file photo New York City Democratic Mayoral Candidate Eric Adams smiles during an event in Brooklyn, on the eve of New York City Primary Election Day. —AFP

South Sudan refugees stranded in north decade after split

KHARTOUM, Sudan: A decade ago, South Sudanese Rosa Ghobrial packed up her life in Sudan to start anew in the newly-independent South, but she has since been stranded in a ramshackle camp awaiting repatriation. Ghobrial fled the ravages of Africa's longest civil war, between Arab-dominated northern Sudan and the largely animist and Christian south, which seceded to become the world's newest country in July 2011. She wanted to move with her family back to the south, to turn the page on grim memories of the 1983-2005 north-south conflict and build a life in South Sudan, a territory rich in oil and backed heavily by donors.

"I had moved to northern Sudan in 1983 to escape the war... and I was supposed to be repatriated with others after the South's independence," she told AFP. But South Sudan descended into its own brutal civil war just two

and a half years after winning independence, driven by a power struggle between its president and his deputy. That put repatriations on hold, even as many South Sudanese had gathered in transit camps known as "Open Areas"—haphazardly built tents that offer little protection from sweltering summer heat or heavy seasonal rains.

"I have been stuck here for a decade now with no end in sight," Ghobrial lamented, sitting in a burlap tent at al-Takamol camp on the eastern outskirts of Sudan's capital Khartoum. Thousands of South Sudanese families like hers remain stuck in limbo at such departure points, suffering shortages of food, water, and access to basic needs. "They barely get any aid, unlike refugees in other camps in Sudan" that have the status of proper camps, said Issac Al-Shafie, who supervises South Sudanese refugee sites in east Khartoum.



KHARTOUM, Sudan: South Sudanese refugees living at Sudan's al-Takamol camp, on the outskirts of the capital Khartoum, are pictured amidst tents. —AFP

'Unknown fate'

South Sudan split from the north six years after a 2005 peace deal under Sudan's then president Omar al-Bashir, whose rule was marred by multiple internal conflicts and civil war. His government sought to repatriate tens of thousands of South Sudanese after secession, but

instead refugees flowed in the other direction from late 2013. Sudan hosts the largest South Sudanese refugee population, of 792,000, more than half of whom arrived after the outbreak of South Sudan's civil war in December that year, according to the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR. —AFP

International

Taleban launch assault on Afghan provincial capital

‘Everybody was terrified when they heard the Taleban had entered the city’

HERAT, Afghanistan: The Taleban launched a major assault on a provincial capital in Afghanistan yesterday, the first since the US military began its final drawdown of troops from the country, as insurgents press on with a blistering offensive. Fierce fighting erupted in the western city of Qala-i-Naw, the capital of Badghis, with the militants seizing police headquarters and offices of the country’s spy agency. As news of the morning assault spread, social media was flooded with videos of clashes—with some showing armed Taleban fighters on motorbikes entering the city as onlookers cheered. Afghanistan’s Defense Minister Bismillah Mohammadi said government forces were in a “very sensitive military situation”, adding that “the war is raging” with the Taleban.

The onslaught came hours after Washington announced US forces had completed more than 90 percent of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, and as the Kabul government held talks with Taleban representatives in neighboring Iran. The militants have waged a dizzying campaign across Afghanistan since US and NATO forces announced the final withdrawal from the country in early May, seizing dozens of districts and stirring fears that the government is in crisis. “The enemy has entered the city, all the districts have fallen,” Badghis governor Hessemuddin Shams told reporters in a text message. He attempted to calm the residents later in another video message, appearing with a rifle—with gunfire rattling in the distance. “I assure you that we will, all of us, together defend the city,” he said. Provincial council chief Abdul Aziz Bek said some security officials had surrendered to the Taleban, while council member Zia Gul Habibi said the insurgents had entered the city’s police headquarters and the local office of the country’s spy agency.

Iran talks

Habibi said later the situation was stabilizing,

but fighting continued. “The city is not falling, but the Taleban are still in the city and airplanes are hitting their positions,” she said, adding that the military had deployed drones to strike the insurgents. “Everybody was terrified when they heard the Taleban had entered the city,” said Aziz Tawakil, a resident of Qala-i-Naw. “We could hear sounds of gunfire and explosions... Helicopters and planes are flying over the city and we can see they are sometimes hitting some areas of the city.” Hours after the attack, the defense ministry said its troops had cleared “most parts” of the city.

“In the next few hours all parts of the city will be cleared,” ministry spokesman Fawad Aman said on Twitter. Afghan vice-president Amrullah Saleh tweeted that the bodies of “tens” of Taleban fighters were lying in the streets. “I demand the respected ICRC (Red Cross) and other organizations to transfer the bodies... The weather is hot, and we do not support disrespecting the bodies,” he said. Video also showed the Taleban releasing prisoners from a city prison, but governor Shams said later most of them had been recaptured.

The fight for the city coincided with a high-level summit across the border in Iran, where an Afghan delegation met with Taleban representatives in Tehran, according to the Iranian foreign ministry. Opening the Tehran talks, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif welcomed the US departure from its eastern neighbor but warned: “Today the people and political leaders of Afghanistan must make difficult decisions for the future of their country.”

Last week, all US and NATO forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul—the command center for anti-Taleban operations—effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement that began in the wake of the September 11 attacks.



QALA-I-NAW, Afghanistan: A smoke plume rises from houses amid ongoing fight between Afghan security forces and Taleban fighters in the western city of Qala-i- Naw, the capital of Badghis province, yesterday. —AFP

Vital US air support for the Afghan forces has been massively curtailed by the handover. For months the Taleban have been effectively surrounding provincial capitals, with observers predicting the militants were waiting for the complete withdrawal of foreign forces before ordering an onslaught.

After they took much of the north in recent weeks, the fall of Badghis would further tighten the Taleban’s grip on western Afghanistan. Their forces have also inched closer to the nearby city

of Herat, near the border with Iran. If the Taleban capture Qala-i-Naw it will be of “strategic value as it creates a psychological effect of Afghan forces rapidly losing territory like dominoes against an unstoppable force”, said Afghanistan expert Nishank Motwani. Over the years, the Taleban have launched periodic assaults on provincial capitals across the country, briefly holding urban areas before being dislodged by US airstrikes and Afghan ground forces. —AFP

As lockdown bites, struggling Malaysians fly white flag for help

PETALING JAYA, Malaysia: Malaysians struggling to make ends meet during a worsening coronavirus outbreak have hoisted white flags outside their homes in a desperate plea for help that has swept the country. Authorities imposed a second strict nationwide lockdown last month in response to a surge in COVID cases, and many low-income workers who live hand-to-mouth have lost their jobs again after a ban on non-essential businesses. The flags—often little more than strips of cotton or T-shirts—have sprung up outside homes of the needy around the country in the past week, prompting an outpouring of sympathy and donations from the public.

“This month I have not paid the rent... I am afraid that I might not be able to find another place to stay in this critical situation,” said Tilda Kalaivani, a single mother of four. The 37-year-old, who was forced to stop working as a florist after

the closure of all non-essential businesses, said she at first felt “too shy” to hang a flag outside her home on the outskirts of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

“But facing such difficulty, if I don’t say anything, people won’t know—and I don’t know what will happen.” The #benderaputih—“white flag” in the Malay language—movement has expanded rapidly online, with social media groups set up to let people in need post appeals for help. Members of the public are bringing food to households that have signaled their distress, while businesses are also donating, with a noodle-maker sending workers to deliver food in worst-hit Selangor state outside Kuala Lumpur. Popular Malaysian rapper Altimet also pledged to donate food in a message to his nearly 400,000 Instagram followers. Only essential businesses, such as supermarkets and medical clinics, have been allowed to operate since last month, and the government has come under fire from the public for not providing sufficient aid.

‘Desperation point’

Growing desperation is reflected in rising suicides—police recorded more than 450 in the first five months of this year, compared to 631 for all of 2020. Referring to the figures, Malaysia’s top health official Noor Hisham Abdullah said the pandemic



KUALA LUMPUR: This picture shows single mother Tilda Kalaivani waving a shirt to use as a white flag to call for help, after being affected by COVID-19 pandemic, in her rental apartment in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

had had a “huge impact” on people’s mental health, especially those cut off from support networks of friends and family. Opposition lawmakers say the movement shows the government’s efforts to contain COVID are failing and have launched their own black flag campaign calling on Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to resign and lift Malaysia’s state of emergency. —AFP

‘Will I be alive tomorrow?’: Afghan woman photographer under threat

KABUL: Photographer Rada Akbar’s striking self-portraits are a declaration of her independence and heritage—but in Afghanistan that comes at a deadly risk. The 33-year-old artist’s latest exhibition was forced online after she faced threats for her work showcasing some of the nation’s powerful female figures. High profile women including media workers, judges and activists are among the more than 180 people who have been assassinated since September—violence the US and Afghan government blame on the Taleban.

“We are the minority who are fighting, raising our voices. By killing some of us, they will force the rest of us to be silent,” she said of the insurgents. “They are sending the message: ‘You have no place, if you want to do this you’ll get killed,’” she added. Like most of her friends, she no longer follows any routine and has restricted her move-

ments around the country. “We keep saying (to) each other that ‘ok, we need to stay alive’ because if we died, then what is the point?” she said. The militants are waging a searing offensive against Afghan forces, after peace talks between the warring sides broke down. Last week, all US and NATO forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul—the command center for anti-Taleban operations—effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement in Afghanistan.

Freedoms lost

Reminiscent of the Mexican feminist artist Frida Kahlo, Akbar is often captured wearing a crown, with heavy gold and silver jewelry prized by nomad tribes in her self-portraits, while known for her stunning photos of daily life around Afghanistan. She has been behind a series of exhibitions celebrating International Women’s

nickname after laying siege on Kabul, when multiple power players were vying for control of Afghanistan. Attempting to take the capital from forces led by then defense minister Ahmad Shah Massoud—who gained folk hero status after his 2001 assassination—Hekmatyar’s forces battered the city with rockets that left thousands dead and wounded. Decades later, victims of that assault still confront Baheer.

While speaking at a recent conference in Kabul about his childhood in exile, a woman blamed Hekmatyar for the killing of her father. “There is nothing I can say or do, except say ‘I’m sorry, it wasn’t me,’” Baheer said. Hekmatyar and Baheer’s father, Ghairat Baheer, have also faced Washington’s wrath for opposing the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Hekmatyar was designated a terrorist at the time but has been included in recent Afghan peace talks. The US military last week handed over their main Bagram Air Base near Kabul to Afghan forces, effectively completing the withdrawal of its troops after two decades of military involvement that began after the September 11 attacks. His father—who headed Hezb-i-Islami’s political bureau — was detained at Bagram’s prison after he was dragged from the family’s home in Islamabad by people Baheer said were CIA officers. —



KABUL: This picture shows Afghanistan visual artist and photographer Rada Akbar holding one of her artworks at the Darul Aman palace in Kabul. —AFP

Day at Kabul’s former royal palaces. Last year she used mannequins to portray exceptional figures including a filmmaker, a footballer and—under a gauze cape showered with pebbles—Rokhshana, a woman stoned to death by the Taleban for fleeing a forced marriage. —AFP



JALALABAD, Afghanistan: This handout photograph taken in 1996 and released courtesy of Obaidullah Baheer shows Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (top left) with his son Ghairat Baheer (top right), grandsons Abdullah Baheer (bottom left) and his elder brother, in Jalalabad. —AFP

News in brief

Indonesia expands curbs

JAKARTA: Indonesia expanded nationwide coronavirus curbs yesterday to battle its deadliest COVID-19 wave yet, as the death toll rocketed past 1,000 in 24 hours with the government warning that the worst may be yet to come. The new restrictions would apply to dozens of cities and extend from Sumatra island in the west to easternmost Papua as the highly infectious Delta variant rips across the Southeast Asian archipelago after battering densely populated Java. “Cases are also rising in other regions and we need to pay attention to the availability of hospitals” there, said senior minister Airlangga Hartarto, who added the government has decided to extend the restrictions until July 20. —AFP

Protesters mark 1962 rallies

YANGON: Protesters hit the streets across Myanmar yesterday to mark the anniversary of 1962 student protests against the country’s first junta, vowing defiance against its latest incarnation more than five months after it seized power. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals ousted Aung San Suu Kyi’s government in February, with pro-democracy protests met by a brutal military crackdown that has killed more than 880, according to a local monitoring group. The economy is in freefall with thousands of civil servants and doctors on strike and coronavirus cases in the impoverished country spiking. Around one hundred protesters moved quickly through the commercial capital Yangon early yesterday, AFP reporters said, to mark the 1962 Yangon university protests against the first imposition of military rule in Myanmar. —AFP

Sydney extends virus lockdown

SYDNEY: More than five million Sydney residents will spend at least another week in coronavirus lockdown, Australian authorities said yesterday, after detecting another 27 new cases. Stay-at-home orders have already been in place in the country’s biggest city for two weeks, as authorities try to curb an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant. State officials said progress had been made, but light-touch measures—allowing residents to leave home for work, exercise and shopping—needed to continue. “This Delta strain is a game changer, it’s extremely transmissible,” said New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian, saying it must be eradicated from the community. “We don’t want to be in a position where we are constantly having to move between lockdown, no lockdown, lockdown, no lockdown.” —AFP

Blinken meets Uyghur survivors

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday met Uyghur survivors of internment camps in China’s Xinjiang region, in a visit aimed at highlighting Beijing’s alleged “genocide” against the Muslim minority group. America’s top diplomat met seven survivors, advocates and relatives of people still detained in Xinjiang, State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a readout of the meeting. The meeting’s purpose was to help show US commitment to “calling for an end to the People’s Republic of China’s ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang”, Price said. “The United States will continue to place human rights at the forefront of our China policy and will always support the voices of activists, survivors, and family members of victims who courageously speak out against these atrocities.” —AFP

Afghan warlord’s grandson moves on from bitter past

KABUL: As a child he saw his father dragged out of their home in a midnight raid, while his grandfather—feared warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—was accused of killing thousands during Afghanistan’s civil war in the 1990s. But Obaidullah Baheer, 31, has put his family’s bitter past behind him and set his sights on a future of peace and reconciliation. “We have to let go, we have to choose a point of (new) beginning,” Baheer who now teaches a course on transitional justice at the American University of Afghanistan, told AFP in an interview. Born right before Afghanistan’s brutal civil war when anti-Soviet militant factions fought one another after defeating the Red Army, Baheer grew up in Pakistan.

His grandfather, a former prime minister and founder of the Hezb-i-Islami militia, earned the “Butcher of Kabul”

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2021



File photo shows finance ministers pose for a photo shoot after the meeting.

Global tax reform plan goes to G20

EU plans to announce its own digital tax this month

MILAN: G20 finance ministers meeting in Venice tomorrow and Saturday could rally the world's top economies behind a global plan to tax multinationals more fairly that has already been hashed out among 131 countries representing 90 percent of world output.

On the face of it, the Group of 20 — the world's 19 biggest economies plus the European Union—have already backed the framework for global tax reform, agreed on July 1 among members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) alongside China and India.

But negotiations continue behind the scenes to convince low-tax EU countries such as Hungary, Ireland and Estonia, who declined to sign up to the OECD deal to tax global companies at a rate of at least 15 percent. Italian Finance Minister Daniele Franco, whose country holds the G20 presidency, said he is

“confident” of reaching a “political agreement” among finance ministers in Venice that would “radically change the current international tax architecture”.

Taxing digital giants

The hold-out European countries have relied on low tax rates to attract multinationals and build their economies. Ireland, the EU home to tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple, has a corporate tax rate of just 12.5 percent, while Hungary has one of 9.0 percent and Estonia almost only taxes dividend payments. However, the support of these three countries is crucial for the EU, as the adoption of a minimum tax rate would require unanimous backing from member states.

The minimum rate is one of two pillars of global tax reform. The other is less controversial—a plan to tax companies where they make their profits rather than

simply where they are headquartered. It has in its sights digital giants such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple, which have profited enormously during the pandemic but pay tax rates that are derisory when compared to their income.

When the new tax regime is in place—the OECD is aiming for 2023 — then national digital taxes imposed by countries such as France, Italy and Spain will disappear. However, the EU plans to announce its own digital tax later this month to help finance its 750-billion-euro post-virus recovery plan—in the face of opposition from Washington, which sees it as discriminating against US technology giants.

It has warned the European proposal could “completely derail” the global tax negotiations. Countries have for years been debating how to stop multinational companies taking advantage of different

countries' systems to limit the amount of tax they pay.

Negotiations became bogged down during the US presidency of Donald Trump, but were revived with Joe Biden's arrival at the White House, and the G7 richest nations made a historic commitment at a meeting in London last month. “Joe Biden has put the United States back at the centre of world politics, with a multilateral strategy which made a decisive contribution to the agreement,” said Stefano Caselli, professor of banking and finance at Milan's Bocconi University. But while the agreement reached so far is “historic”, he told AFP “it marks only the beginning of the road”.

A road full of obstacles

The reforms must be implemented by parliaments in different countries—and Republicans in the US Congress, for one,

are strongly opposed. For a number of emerging economies, meanwhile, the reform does not go far enough. Argentina, a member of the G24 inter-governmental group that also includes Brazil and India, has called for a global minimum corporation tax rate of 21 percent or even 25 percent before agreeing to the OECD plan.

“This is already a very important result,” Giuliano Noci, professor of strategy at Politecnico di Milano, told AFP, saying it will be harder to go further. “The devil is in the detail. We have to wait for the implementation to assess the real scope of the agreement.”

The G20 discussions include finance ministers and central bank chiefs, including US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and will also focus on post-pandemic global recovery, inflationary risks, climate change and aid to poor countries. —AFP

UK fintech firm Wise worth £8bn on market debut

LONDON: British financial technology firm Wise entered the London stock market yesterday, valued at £8.0 billion (\$11.1 billion, 9.3 billion euros) in a key post-Brexit test for the sector. The global money transfer specialist launched at £8.0 per share under a so-called direct listing, which does not seek to raise capital but enables public trading.

The operation is cheaper and more transparent than a traditional initial public offering that involves issuing of new shares. The valuation increased in initial trading with the group's share price rising 1.6 percent to 812.52 pence.

“The Wise listing will be another test for London as a fintech hub, as the UK grapples with its post-Brexit status in an era when it has struggled to attract fast growing companies looking to launch an IPO,” said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter.

Wise, founded in 2011 as TransferWise, had previously been valued at \$5.0 billion (4.2 billion euros). The firm has six million customers and 2,400 employees worldwide. Speaking last month, Wise chief executive Kristo Kaarmann was moving money around the world “faster, cheaper, easier and completely transparent”.

He added that the direct listing allowed for “a cheaper and more transparent way to broaden” ownership of the group. Unlike many fintech companies that struggle to generate a profit, Wise has been profitable since 2017. The group has won customers during pandemic lockdowns as people sought alternative ways of transferring cash. —AFP

Lanka marks Chinese party century with costliest gold coin

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka yesterday issued its most expensive gold coin ever to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, underscoring the close ties between the countries. The commemorative 1,000-rupee (\$5) coin will be sold for 222,000 rupees from Monday, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said.

“The coins have been issued at the request of the government of Sri Lanka as an accolade for long-standing friendship and mutual trust between the two countries,” the bank said. Sri Lanka has increasingly turned to China for

financing and diplomatic support in recent years, prompting India and the United States to express concern.

One side of the 12-gram (0.42 ounces) coin marks the Chinese party's anniversary while the other celebrates 65 years of diplomatic ties between the two nations and depicts a Colombo theatre built with Chinese financing.

Sri Lanka released its last gold coin to mark 50 years of independence from Britain in 1998, but that one was only two thirds the weight of the Chinese anniversary coin. Colombo had also never before issued a coin to commemorate a political party. Beijing has made increasing trade and diplomatic inroads in South Asia in recent years.

In 2017, unable to repay a huge Chinese loan, Sri Lanka allowed China Merchants Port Holdings to take over Hambantota port, which straddles the world's busiest east-west shipping route, on a 99-year lease. —AFP



COLOMBO: This handout photograph taken and released by the Sri Lankan President's Office yesterday shows a commemorative gold coin to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of China's Communist Party in Colombo. —AFP

IMF urges G20 to avert ‘devastating’ blow to poorest

WASHINGTON: The world's richest nations must do more to help the poorest countries withstand the “devastating double-blow” of the pandemic and the resulting economic damage, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said yesterday.

Warning of a “deepening divergence” between rich and poor, she called on the G20 to take urgent steps to keep developing nations from falling further behind in vaccine access and funding to repair their fortunes. In a blog post ahead of this week's meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bankers, the head of the International Monetary Fund said “speed is of the essence” but the price tag is relatively small.

“Poorer nations are facing a devastating double-

blow” losing the race against the virus and missing out on key investments that will help lay the groundwork for economic growth, Georgieva said. “It is a critical moment that calls for urgent action by the G20 and policymakers across the globe,” she said.

While the United States is poised to grow by its fastest pace since 1984 and countries like China and the euro area are gaining momentum, the developing world is being left behind by a “worsening two-track recovery, driven by dramatic differences in vaccine availability, infection rates, and the ability to provide policy support.”

She again pressed the G20 to do more to help get vaccines to the poor countries, including sharing doses, accelerating debt forgiveness, and endorsing the goal of vaccinating at least 40 percent of the population in every country by the end of 2021, and at least 60 percent by the first half of 2022.

With less than one adult in 100 fully vaccinated in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 30 percent in advanced economies, those countries are at higher risk for emerging Covid-19 variants. The IMF estimated that low-income countries will need to deploy about

\$200 billion over five years just to fight the pandemic, and another \$250 billion for economic reforms to allow them to catch up to the richer nations.

But Georgieva said they cannot do that on their own and wealthy nations must “redouble their efforts, especially on concessional financing and dealing with debt.” The Washington-based crisis lender has proposed a \$50 billion joint effort with the World Health Organization, World Bank and World Trade Organization to expand vaccine access, “a global game-changer” she said would save hundreds of thousands of lives and accelerate the recovery.

In areas where infections continue to rise, she said it is “critical” that businesses and families continue to receive financial support, but once the virus is under control funds can shift to things like worker training programs to “help heal the scars of the crisis,” which hit women especially hard.

Georgieva also said the IMF is keeping an eye on rising prices, particularly in the United States, but as the recovery gains traction “it will be essential to avoid overreacting to transitory increases in inflation.” —AFP

German industrial output dips on supply chain woes

BERLIN: German industrial production fell for the second month in a row in May, official data showed yesterday, with bottlenecks in the supply of materials continuing to squeeze output. Federal statistics

agency Destatis said production fell 0.3 percent month-on-month in Europe's top economy, after falling by the same amount in April—revised from an initial report of one percent.

The slowdown follows an almost uninterrupted rise in industrial production since April 2020, after the shock of the first coronavirus wave. Output was up 17.3 percent compared with May 2020 but remained five percent below February 2020 levels, before the pandemic.

“Supply chain disruptions, like the blockage of the Suez Canal in April or the ongoing semiconduc-

tor delivery problems, have not left German industry unscathed,” said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. Like many countries, export powerhouse Germany is struggling with supply shortages in timber, plastics and steel. Germany's crucial car industry has also been hit by a global computer chip crunch caused by a pandemic-fuelled surge in demand for home electronics.

Between January and June 2021, the German car industry saw its second worst half-year since 1991 after national reunification. “These figures are not encouraging, but given the shortages, it is not a

catastrophe,” said LBBW bank economist Jens-Oliver Niklasch.

Germany began easing pandemic restrictions in May and has now reopened restaurants, shops, pools and museums, with the number of new Covid-19 cases over a seven-day period falling to around five per 100,000 people.

The government expects the economy to rebound in the second quarter after a 1.8-percent drop in GDP between January and March, and is predicting 3.5-percent growth in GDP for the year. —AFP

Business

Pentagon scraps \$10 billion cloud contract amid Amazon-Microsoft rift

Pentagon seek proposals from Amazon and Microsoft on a new contract

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon said Tuesday it scrapped a massive \$10 billion cloud computing contract, sidestepping a bitter dispute between Amazon and Microsoft over allegations of political bias that swayed the bidding. A Defense Department statement said the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) contract was canceled because it no longer meets current needs and that it would start a process for a new “multi-cloud/multi-vendor” computing contract.

Microsoft in late 2019 won the contract, sparking a challenge by Amazon on grounds that vengeful politics by former president Donald Trump may have improperly influenced the outcome. Officials said that instead of going forward with the deal in the face of litigation, the government would start over with the aim of getting the most up-to-date technology.

“JEDI, conceived with noble intent, was developed at a time when the department’s needs were different,” Defense Department spokesman John Sherman said during a press briefing. “Now, we want to leverage multiple cloud environments.” Sherman equated arming US “war fighters” with cutting-edge, 21st century cloud computing capabilities to providing top armor or weaponry, saying the technology landscape has shifted since the JEDI contract was stalled by litigation.

A statement said the Pentagon would seek proposals from Amazon and Microsoft on a new contract, noting that the two vendors appear at the moment to be the only cloud service providers capable of meeting the department’s requirements.

Staying on mission

The 10-year JEDI program was designed see all military branches sharing information in a cloud-based system boosted by artificial intelligence. Amazon alleged it was shut out of the deal because of former president Donald Trump’s vendetta against the company and its chief executive Jeff Bezos.

Sherman maintained that it was urgent to move ahead and that “the overriding factor is not what may

have happened in previous administrations; what was said or not said, the litigation.” Amazon had been considered the lead contender to provide technology for JEDI, with Amazon Web Services dominating the cloud computing arena and the company already providing classified servers for other government agencies including the CIA.

Amazon argued in court documents that the Pentagon’s choice of Microsoft was mystifying if not for Trump’s repeated “expressed determination to, in the words of the president himself, ‘screw Amazon.’” US defense officials will reach out to Amazon and Microsoft to solicit bids for parts of the new cloud contract, which Sherman said will have an overall value in the billions, without specifying an amount.

‘Difficult choice’

Microsoft president of US regulated industries Toni Townes-Whitley said in a post that the technology giant “respects and accepts” the decision. “The DoD faced a difficult choice: Continue with what could be a years-long litigation battle or find another path forward,” Townes-Whitley said in a post.

“What matters now is the way forward, as the DoD has a critical unmet need to bring the power of cloud and AI to our men and women in uniform, modernizing technology infrastructure and platform services technology,” Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Amazon and Microsoft have already been deemed capable of meeting defense department needs for the new cloud initiative. Defense officials planned to also reach out to Google, Oracle, IBM and other computing titans to assess whether they are will and able to enter the bidding for some of the jobs. The department aimed to begin awarding contracts early next year with a hope of having systems starting to deploy by 2025. Microsoft will be able to submit a bill to the government for terminating the JEDI contract, the amount of which has not been determined, according to Sherman. —AFP



WASHINGTON: File photo shows the Pentagon building in Washington, DC. The Pentagon said yesterday it was scrapping a \$10 billion cloud computing contract which sparked a heated dispute between Amazon and Microsoft. —AFP

Fizzy drink sound not a trademark, EU court rules

BERLIN: The sound of a drinks can opening followed by several seconds of fizzing is not a trademark, an EU court ruled yesterday in a case brought by a German company.

Ardagh Metal Beverage Holdings had applied to the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) to register the noise made by its fizzy drinks cans.

But the company was left feeling flat after being rejected on the grounds that the sound was not “distinctive” enough. “The sound made by a drinks can being opened, followed by a silence of approximately one second and a fizzing sound lasting approximately nine seconds” is not a so-called sound mark, the European General Court said in

a statement. Ardagh, which makes metal cans used in a variety of drinks including beer and wine, had appealed to the European General Court. But the court came down in favour of EUIPO in its first ever ruling on the registration of a sound mark submitted in audio format.

“A sound mark must have a certain resonance which enables the target consumer to perceive it as a trade mark and not as a functional element or as an indicator without any inherent characteristic,” the court said. “The sound elements and the silence of approximately one second, taken as a whole, do not have any inherent characteristic that would make it possible for them to be perceived... as being an indication of the commercial origin of the goods,” it added. The company may now appeal to the European Court of Justice. Famous registered sound marks include jingles such as the Intel Pentium processor tune, but also other sounds such as the MGM lion’s roar. Motorbike manufacturer Harley Davidson famously failed to get the rumble of its engines registered as a sound mark in the 1990s. —AFP

BB supports ‘Diraya’ campaign to enhance public’s financial culture

KUWAIT: Masaud Mahmoud Jawhar Hayat, Vice Chairman and CEO of Burgan Bank Group, spoke in an interview about Burgan’s support for “Diraya” campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Federation of Kuwait Banks in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks. He affirmed Burgan’s support to the efforts of educating customers and informing them more about their rights and duties in banking transactions within the framework of the bank’s sustainability strategy and as part of its social responsibility program. He also highlighted the bank’s full commitment to covering all of the campaign’s messages through its public communication channels throughout the campaign duration to enhance the financial culture and increase the awareness of the banking sector’s customers and the public in general of banking and credit operations.

What are the main points that the campaign focuses on to enhance the community’s financial culture?

The general objectives of the “Diraya” campaign include enhancing the understanding of the banking sector customers and the public in general of the basic principles and concepts in the financial and banking field. The campaign focuses also on educating bank customers to help them make optimal use of banking products and services, in addition to raising their awareness of electronic frauds and alerting them to the best ways to avoid them. This initiative also aims to support the efforts to increase the levels of financial inclusion and to reinforce the financial and economic stability.

How does the campaign approach raising the public awareness of cybercrimes and how does it help facing these threats?

Frauds and cybercrimes affect customers in a variety of ways. Scammers use emails, text messages, smartphone applications and even phone calls to obtain the customers confidential banking information such as account numbers, passwords and OTPs, for the purpose of stealing their money or personal data. As part of the “Diraya” campaign, we publish awareness advertisements across the bank’s various channels with tips and advices on ways to avoid electronic fraud and protect the banking and personal data of customers. We focus in particular on urging the customers to ignore any calls or messages from any unknown party and to refrain from sharing their personal and banking data. We regularly remind and warn our customers that the bank never asks them to share any personal banking data through phone calls, emails, text messages or any

other applications. We attach great importance at Burgan to educating our customers on these issues and to providing the highest security and safety levels to protect our customers’ accounts and data and ensure a smooth and secure banking experience. Thanks to all these efforts to ensure the safe and secure management of the bank’s sensitive data, and to safeguard the privacy and security of customers’ accounts and information, Burgan Bank information and cyber security systems have demonstrated their efficiency and earned the ISO 27001:2013 certification for information security management system.

How important is the promotion of customers’ financial culture and awareness of their rights?

I would like to praise here the role and efforts of all the Kuwaiti banks in supporting this awareness campaign that was launched at the right time in light of the growing use of electronic banking channels during the exceptional circumstances imposed by the spread of the Corona virus pandemic, which was accompanied with a significant increase in electronic scams, frauds, and data theft. It was therefore important in this campaign to focus on reminding customers of their rights and clarifying their duties as well as raising their awareness of all the aspects related to financial and banking operations, so that they can take the right decisions with regard to banking products and services including financing, loans, cards and investments. Burgan Bank has actively supported the initiative since its launch and contributed efficiently to spreading awareness among its customers and society as a whole so that any individual or entity can benefit from the banking services provided by Burgan in a framework that ensures the security of their accounts and data. At Burgan, we constantly work on enhancing the customers confidence in the bank and in banking operations by focusing on spreading knowledge of personal data security and safety issues internally among employees, which reflects positively and effectively on managing customers’ accounts and meeting their needs to the fullest. I would like to particularly commend, in this context, the Central Bank’s persistent and great efforts to enhance the financial culture of various society segments through campaigns and directives aimed at expanding the positive and effective role of the Kuwaiti banking sector and supporting banks to contribute within their social responsibility frameworks to educating customers about their banking rights.



Masaud Mahmoud Jawhar Hayat

KFH participates in 5th IILM Shariah Roundtable

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has recently participated in the 5th IILM Shariah Roundtable titled: “Towards an Effective Shariah-Compliant Repo Market: Challenges and Alternatives”. The roundtable aims to facilitate a discussion addressing Shariah issues surrounding the Islamic repo market and provide a forum to industry practitioners, lawyers, and Shariah scholars from various organizations, to exchange and share their experience with repo transactions through panel discussions. During the first session titled: “Setting the Scene: The Need for Shariah - Compliant Repo Market”, Mohammad Al Duwailah, Deputy General Manager Treasury at KFH, addressed the need for a cross border Shariah compliant repo market and the experience and role of international organizations.

He highlighted KFH’s experience and its role in developing capital markets through Shariah compliant financial products provided by the bank. Al Duwailah provided an overview of the importance of the repo instrument during market stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the importance of having a cross border Shariah compliant repo Market that is both robust and reliable in order to provide liquidity for the global Islamic finance market.

KFH’s participation in such meetings is part of its strategy to serve the Islamic financial industry and contribute to the development and structuring of innovative Islamic financial services and products as well as highlight KFH’s pioneering role as a market maker and its leadership in achieving the highest professional standards and efficient performance to contribute to the development of Islamic capital market.

Meanwhile, KFH maintained its first position as a “Top Primary Dealer” for the IILM Sukuk Program in FY 2019 on top of 11 IILM Primary Dealers of regional and global banks and financial institutions. The IILM ranking is based on certified and professional criteria. Having a track record of achievements in Sukuk market and innovative Islamic financial products, KFH’s pioneering position in the IILM primary dealers list for the fifth year in a row confirms its leading role as a market maker and reflects its leadership position in achieving the highest standards of efficiency and professionalism in developing the Sukuk market. It is worth noting that the IILM is an international organization established by central banks including the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), monetary authorities and multinational organizations to create and issue Shariah-compliant financial instruments to facilitate effective cross-border Islamic liquidity management.



Mohammad Al Duwailah

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Business

Samsung Electronics Q2 operating profit to jump more than half

Conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national GDP

SEOUL: South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics forecast an expectations-beating jump of more than 53 percent in second-quarter operating profit yesterday, thanks to strong chip prices and operations resuming at a key US factory. The world's biggest smartphone maker said in an earnings estimate that it expected operating profit of around 12.5 trillion won (\$11 billion) for April to June, up from 8.15 trillion won a year earlier.

The figures were ahead of the 11 trillion won average of estimates, according to Bloomberg News. Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebols that dominate business in South Korea, the world's 12th largest economy. The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product. The coronavirus has wreaked havoc with the world economy, with lockdowns and travel bans imposed around the

globe for many months. But the pandemic—which has killed around four million people worldwide—has also seen many tech companies boom.

Coronavirus-driven working from home has boosted demand for devices powered by Samsung's chips, as well as home appliances such as TVs and washing machines. It estimated sales for the period at 63 trillion won, up around 19 percent year-on-year. Analysts say the company has had a particular boost from memory chip price hikes.

Taipei-based market researcher TrendForce last month expected prices of memory chips, especially DRAM—widely used in servers and mobile phones—to rise through the third quarter of this year as the “severe undersupply situation persists”. Samsung's earnings “will remain solid, mostly due to increased demand for memory chips, rising DRAM prices,” Tom Kang, a research director at market researcher Counterpoint, told AFP. But Samsung Electronics shares closed down 0.49 percent in Seoul.

Factory shutdown

Power outages across Texas in the United States—caused by a severe winter storm—shut down semiconductor factories clustered around Austin in February, including Samsung's. The firm lost more than 300 billion won due to the suspension, South Korean news agency Yonhap reported. But Samsung has said the production line in Texas was “fully normalised in the second quarter”, and Kim Woon-ho, an analyst at IBK Investment & Securities, said the factory's resumption had been positive for April-June earnings.

But the company's smartphone shipments are estimated to have dropped as sales slowed for its latest flagship product, the Galaxy S21 series, launched in January. “It is estimated that Samsung's mobile production lines in Vietnam and India did not operate properly due to Covid lockdown,” Kim said in a report. Vice President at Moody's Investors Service Gloria Tsuen shared a positive outlook for



SEOUL: The logo of Samsung Electronics is seen at the company's Seocho building in Seoul yesterday. — AFP

the firm for the second half of the year. “The key earnings driver for Samsung will still be semiconductors,” she told AFP. But Samsung faces legal challenges. Its de facto leader Lee Jae-yong is currently on trial, charged with manipulating a takeover in order to smooth his succession at the top of the Samsung group. —AFP

Data democracy: What's preventing and how to achieve it

By Sailakshmi Baskaran

Data is at the center of today's businesses. An organization's ability to survive, let alone make progress, depends on its ability to put data to good use. This is not an easy task considering the 3Vs of data—volume, velocity, and variety. According to a recent IBM article, businesses generate 2,500,000,000,000,000,000 bytes of data every day—2.5 quintillion bytes of data! To give you some perspective, you would need 2.5 million 1TB hard drives to store all that data.

Traditionally, businesses rely on data analysts to access and process large volumes of data. However, this process is time-consuming and often requires an organization's leaders to make decisions based on stale data. The need of the hour is data democratization, the process of enabling everyone in the organization to access data for decision-making. By democratizing data, organizations can close the great divide between data analysts and decision makers.

Take Amazon for instance: The online retail giant deploys a clever pricing strategy that undercuts several of its competitors by selling many products at the least expensive prices and offering huge discounts. Amazon is known to change its product prices more than 2.5 million times a day, as opposed to Walmart or Best Buy that change their product prices only about 50,000 times a day. This wouldn't be possible unless the retailers democratized data and decentralized decision-making to people working in different geographies and departments.

The barriers to data democratization

Despite the numerous benefits of data democratization, organizations continue to struggle in creating a liberated, data-driven work culture due to one or more reasons:

• Antiquated data culture

Organizational culture is the biggest barrier to data democracy. Several organizations prefer to have centralized data analyst teams create reports for functional teams. This structure can lead to delays in decision-making because functional teams often have to wait for analysts to crunch data. While this is acceptable for complex problems, such delays can be avoided for less complex issues if data is democratized and decentralized.

Data democratization frees up data for use by functional teams and empowers them to make day-to-day decisions. They can still rely on data analysts for complex reporting and analysis, but data democratization enables them to make better decisions and have more control over their operations.

Always relying on data analysts to gain insights delays the decision-making process and leads organizations to miss out on potential opportunities. If Amazon had to rely on data analysts to slash product prices in response to competition, it might miss out on crucial possibilities.

• The myth that data analytics requires specialized skills

With the advent of artificial intelligence and machine learning, the notion that data analysis is a specialized task is outdated. A successful data democratization framework no longer requires extensive coding or advanced math skills. The heavy lifting can be easily delegated to a data analytics tool. So, knowledge workers can focus on generating unique insights that might otherwise be missed had the data analysis been delegated or outsourced to an external entity.

• Lack of data security and privacy policies

Organizations irrespective of their size, sector and resources are vulnerable to security threats or data leaks. In 2020 alone, a staggering 36 billion records were compromised due to data breaches. Security concerns have forced organizations to remain skeptical about democratizing data among their personnel.

Implementing a successful data democratization framework involves creating or updating a company's data security and data governance policies. With the General Data Protection Regulation and other similar privacy frameworks enacted across the globe, it's time for organizations to reassess their data governance policies, train their staff, and take advantage of data analytics.

Note: Sailakshmi Baskaran is Product Consultant at Manage Engine



Gulf Bank to conduct semi-annual Al Danah millionaire draw

KUWAIT: In exactly one week, one Gulf Bank customer will be lucky enough to become a millionaire, courtesy of the second quarterly Al Danah draw of the year. The quarterly draw is currently scheduled to take place on Thursday, July 15 in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young. The draw event will be aired live on Gulf Bank's various social media channels.

In addition to the upcoming draw, Gulf Bank's Al Danah account offers account holders multiple services and features that are designed to encourage and reward clients for saving, with periodic draws worth valuable prizes. Gulf Bank's Al Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to quarterly draws with KD100,000 prizes each, a semiannual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD1,500,000. To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al Danah account at any time. To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD200 or increase their Al Danah savings

GCC sukuk issuances to decline in 2021

KUWAIT: GCC issuances in 2020 showed flattish growth as compared to 2019 and this came despite the pandemic resulting in record decline in oil prices and record high fiscal deficits. One of the key reasons was that debt had reached record high levels in the region as well as globally and there were significant uncertainties related to the future course of the pandemic and the development of vaccines. As a result, government slowed down its issuances while corporates piled on debt during 2H-2020 for business investments as well as to take advantage of low rates.

This scenario further evolved as we entered 2021 with the successful development of several vaccines in addition to a slowdown in the spread of the virus as a result of the restrictions and lockdowns. The pace of vaccinations has accelerated globally and in the GCC with close to 0.3m vaccination doses being administered daily in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. New cases have also shown a significant decline in the region, although uncertainties relating to new variants continue to haunt authorities resulting in new travel restrictions.

The trend this year has so far remained in line with 1H-2020 levels with total issuances at \$80.0bn. However, unlike last year where governments dominated the fixed income market, the bulk of the issuances this year were from corporates. Private businesses raised close to \$50bn as against \$30bn from the government in 1H-2021. The motivation behind higher cor-

porate issuances were apparent including the low interest rates, recovering economy and a push from the regional government to accelerate vaccinations and kick start the economy.

Expectations for the remainder of the year remains slightly muted. We expect government issuances to slow down, led by higher oil prices that is easing pressure on the fiscal front, although we can still see opportunistic issuances from the government to take advantage of low rates. Corporates, on the other hand, are expected to see growth vs. last year but that may not fully offset the decline from government issuers during 2H-2021. Data from Bloomberg showed that GCC government and corporate fixed income instrument maturities at \$22.3bn for the remainder of the year. This will easily push issuances over the \$100bn mark for the full year. In addition, there are significant deals in the pipeline that would add to total issuances but is expected to fall short of last year's levels.

Investment Strategy & Research Rating actions and interest rates

The lifting of restrictions and the economic recovery had minimal impact on sovereign rating actions by credit rating agencies. According to data from Bloomberg, this year almost 28 sovereign ratings downgrade actions were taken by the rating agencies as against 11 upgrades. Sovereigns continue to have largely lose monetary policies by keeping interest rates at extremely low levels in order to provide a boost to spending and investments and, as a result, fiscal deficit has increased.

Nevertheless, the US has hinted on unwinding of its low interest rate policies and could make rate hikes in 2023. One of the key reasons for the earlier-than-expected rate hikes could be the rising inflation in the US that is higher than the long-term average as tar-

reduce energy consumption by more than 20 percent. The project also includes Boursa Kuwait's intention to cooperate with a specialized organization to manage the recycling of the discarded wall screens and utilities to reduce the environmental impact of its operations, reinforcing the company's position as a socially responsible institution that operates in line with the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

Commenting on this, Naser M Al-Sanousi, Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Boursa Kuwait, said, “We take pride in our commitment to sustainability and take the necessary action to ensure that Boursa Kuwait reduces its environmental footprint by keeping sustainability at the heart of everything we do. Over the years, we have adopted various initiatives that highlight the importance of sustainability amongst corporations. Through this project, we reflect our support to the twelfth goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on responsible consumption and production.”

The Boursa Kuwait revamps will also feature a designated “Ring the Bell” platform, with a mechanical brass bell that has been manufactured specifically for the exchange and engraved with patterns inspired by the Kuwaiti Sadu traditional weaving. The platform will be dedicated to



Naser M Al-Sanousi

Numerous benefits



Mohammed Al-Qattan

The Al Danah 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 Al Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply. 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.

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al Danah 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 Al Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

geted by the US Fed. According to a report from FT, economists are expecting at least two rate hikes in 2023 and this is in line with the latest dot plot, although the US government insisted that it would keep the policy highly accommodative. The so-called “commodity super cycle” was reflected in the Bloomberg Commodity Spot Index that is currently at a 10-year high. Commodity prices had increased across the board globally, although some commodities have now cooled off after peaking in May-2021.

Sovereign ratings for the GCC countries have remained largely stable this year but there were a few outlook revisions mainly to a ‘Negative’ outlook. Bahrain's outlook was downgraded to ‘Negative’ from stable by S&P in May-2021 mainly reflecting the pace of fiscal reforms. Earlier in April-2021, Moody's also downgraded Bahrain's outlook to Negative highlighting larger-than-earlier-expected weakening in fiscal metrics and the ongoing uncertainty around the timing and the size of the augmentation of the financial support package for Bahrain from the GCC countries. The outlook on Kuwait was also revised to Negative by Fitch in February-2021 reflecting near-term liquidity risks associated with the depletion of liquid assets in the GRF due to the government's inability to borrow. Kuwait, nevertheless, enjoys the highest credit rating in the region from Fitch, along with Abu Dhabi, at AA. In a recent report, Moody's said that the GCC countries would remain heavily dependent on hydrocarbon production in the near future that would be a key credit constraint for the region. The agency said that although the pace of diversification would accelerate, it would be affected by reduced availability of resources to fund the diversification effort in a low oil price environment. In terms of interest rates, key policy rates in the GCC have remained stable over the last one year after witnessing cuts across the board ranging from 125 bps to 175 bps during 1H-2020.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) events to raise awareness on environmental and social causes in addition to listing events and other corporate proceedings. Overlooking the bell-ringing platform will be a fully equipped media hall to cover CSR and media related events such as press conferences and televised interviews.

As part of the renovations, the auditorium and training hall will be equipped with the latest audio and video technology to host myriad training seminars and financial literacy programs, in collaboration with specialized local and international companies. This is in line with Boursa Kuwait's commitment to raising financial literacy and increasing capital market awareness in the State of Kuwait as part of the Education pillar of its CS strategy, and corresponds with Goal 4 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of achieving inclusive and quality education for all.

Boursa Kuwait's corporate sustainability strategy stipulates that the initiatives taken on by the company are to be compatible with its CSR governance, best practices as per sector standards, and investors' expectations. It also specifies the establishment of strong and sustainable partnerships with companies that support Boursa Kuwait's overall success and allow it to benefit from the strengths and capabilities of those partners with expertise in different areas. It also aims to integrate the CSR efforts of those companies with that of Boursa Kuwait's culture, to achieve long term impact and instill those values within the day-to-day operations of the exchange.



Saira Banu (third left), wife of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar, mourns near his body at her residence along with Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray (left) and actor Dharmendra (right) after he died at the age of 98 in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP photos



People pray for late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar, who died today in Mumbai at the age of 98, outside his ancestral home in Peshawar.

TRIBUTES POUR IN FOR BOLLYWOOD VETERAN DILIP KUMAR

Tributes poured in yesterday from actors, politicians, sports stars and even an animal rights group after much-loved Bollywood veteran Dilip Kumar died aged 98. Born Mohammed Yusuf Khan in Peshawar-now part of Pakistan — in 1922, Kumar became a major star in Indian cinema's golden age between the 1940s and 1960s, starring in nearly 60 films in a career spanning 50 years. He died in a Mumbai hospital early yesterday. "Dilip Kumar... will be remembered as a cinematic legend," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter.

father's stall in Bombay-now Mumbai-by actress Devika Rani, who convinced him to try acting.

Changing his name to hide his profession from his disapproving father, he went on to become a beloved household name who transcended generations, as well as India's social and religious divides. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "saddened" by the news, and praised Kumar's charity work. Amitabh Bachchan, Bollywood's biggest star, called Kumar his "idol" and said on Twitter: "An epic era has drawn curtains... Never to happen again." "An institution



Saira Banu, wife of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar, sits in a car as she leaves her residence for his funeral after he died.

across the Indian subcontinent and among the global diaspora. Former Pakistan cricket captain Shahid Afridi said his death was a "huge loss" for his fans in Pakistan "and across the globe". "He lives on in our hearts," Afridi added. India cricket captain Virat Kohli, who is in England to lead the national Test squad for a series against the hosts, said, "today, an icon who was loved by generations passes away. Rest in peace Dilip ji. My condolences to the family."

Animal rights group PETA India offered its condolences too, saying "animals everywhere have lost a great friend". The organization said Kumar had helped it enact a ban on the entry of elephants into Mumbai, "sparing them violence and cruelty and ensuring the safety of Mumbai's human residents". In Mumbai, the center of India's film industry, fans joined in the tributes. "All the Bollywood greats like Shahrukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Anil Kapoor and others-all of them learned from him and progressed in their careers. He was a superstar," Nurul Amin Siddique told AFP. "He was my favourite hero." And Manoj Waghmare said: "In the coming 100 years of Bollywood, it is impossible to have another gentleman actor like him, maybe even for the next 200 years." — AFP



In this file photo taken on September 03, 2008 India's President Pratibha Patil (left) presents The Life Time Achievement award to Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar (right) at the 54th National Film Awards Function in New Delhi.

"He was blessed with unparalleled brilliance, due to which audiences across generations were enthralled. His passing away is a loss to our cultural world." Indian President Ram Nath Kovind said: "Dilip Kumar summarised in himself a history of emerging India. The thespian's charm transcended all boundaries, and he was loved across the subcontinent. With his demise, an era ends." The young Kumar was spotted selling fruit at his

has gone. Whenever the history of Indian cinema will be written, it shall always be 'before Dilip Kumar, and after Dilip Kumar'," Bachchan added. Akshay Kumar, another of modern Bollywood's biggest luminaries, said: "To us actors, he was The Hero. #DilipKumar Sir has taken an entire era of Indian cinema away with him. My thoughts and prayers are with his family."

The veteran actor enjoyed a following



Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor (left) arrives to pay respect at the residence of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar.



Bollywood film producer and director Karan Johar arrives to pay respect at the residence of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar.



Actor Anupam Kher arrives to pay his respect at the residence of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar.



Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan (center) arrives to pay his respect at the residence of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar.



Bollywood actors Johnny Lever (left) and Mehmood Junior (right) arrive to pay their respect at the residence of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar.



In this file photo taken on December 11, 2011 Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar (left) and actress Priyanka Chopra sit together during Kumar's 89th birthday celebrations in Mumbai.



Bollywood actress Saira Banu (left), wife of late Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar who died today at the age of 98, mourns next to actor Shah Rukh Khan (right) at her residence.



In this file photo taken on December 11, 2011 Bollywood actors Dilip Kumar (left) and Shah Rukh Khan attend Kumar's 89th birthday celebrations in Mumbai.



In this file photo taken on May 04, 2012 Bollywood actors Dilip Kumar (left) and Amitabh Bachchan attend the 143rd Dadasaheb Phalke Academy Awards 2012 in Mumbai.



In this file photo taken on November 12, 2012 Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar (left) and his wife Saira Banu pose on the red carpet at the premiere of the Hindi film 'Jab Tak Hai Jaan' in Mumbai.



A domestic cattle stands next to a dwarf cow named Rani, whose owners applied to the Guinness Book of Records claiming it to be the smallest cow in the world, at a cattle farm in Charigram, about 25 km from Savar. — AFP photos



People take pictures of a dwarf cow named Rani, whose owners applied to the Guinness Book of Records claiming it to be the smallest cow in the world.



A dwarf cow named Rani (bottom), whose owners applied to the Guinness Book of Records claiming it to be the smallest cow in the world.

Thousands flock to see dwarf cow in Bangladesh

Thousands of people are defying a nationwide coronavirus lockdown in Bangladesh to see Rani, a 51-centimetre (20-inch) tall cow whose owners claim it is the world's smallest. The 23-month-old dwarf cow has become a media star with scores of newspapers and television stations throwing the spotlight on the tiny bovine at a farm near Dhaka. Pictures of Rani on social media platforms have set off a tourist frenzy. Despite a nationwide transport shutdown because of record coronavirus infections and deaths, people are flocking in rickshaws to the farm in Charigram, 30 kilo-

meters (19 miles) southwest of Dhaka.

"I have never seen anything like this in my life. Never," said Rina Begum, 30, who came from a neighboring town. Rani is 66 centimeters (26 inches) long and weighs only 26 kilograms (57 pounds) but the owners say it is 10 centimeters shorter than the smallest cow in Guinness World Records. M.A. Hasan Howlader, manager of Shikor Agro farm, used a tape measure to show dozens of onlookers how Rani dwarfs her closest rival Manikyam, a cow in the Indian state Kerala that currently holds the world record.

"People come long distances despite

the coronavirus lockdown. Most want to take selfies with Rani," Howlader told AFP, adding Guinness World Records had promised a decision in three months. "More than 15,000 people have come to see Rani in the past three days alone," he said. "Honestly speaking, we are tired." Guinness World Records said Manikyam, from the Vechur breed, was 61 centimeters high in June 2014.

Rani is a Bhutti, or Bhutanese, cow which is prized for its meat in Bangladesh. The other Bhuttis on the farm are twice Rani's size. "We did not expect such huge interest. We did not think people would

leave their homes because of the worsening virus situation. But they have come here in droves," the manager said. Sajedul Islam, the government's chief vet for the region, said Rani is a product of "genetic inbreeding" and was unlikely to become any bigger. Islam said he had told the farm to restrict the tourist influx. "I told them they should not allow so many people to crowd the farm. They may carry diseases here that threaten Rani's health," he said. — AFP

Spitting image: Cannes grossed out by festival spit tests

Cannes-the glamour, the pop of champagne corks, the endless parties ... and now the dawn chorus of Hollywood stars hocking up to spit into plastic funnels. The new ritual is the latest addition to the layers of ceremonial that surround the world's biggest film festival. Every day thousands of festival goers from the highest paid actors to the humblest film blogger have to undergo Cannes' "gross" COVID spit tests. Everyone from outside the EU is subject to the indignity if they want to set foot in the Palais des Festivals, where all the red carpet premieres are held.

Americans have found the experience particularly humiliating, with the movie industry bible Variety branding the tests "disgusting". "You need to spit in a plastic tube over and over again even if you've been vaccinated," wrote its executive editor Ramin Setoodeh. "And it's gross and surprisingly difficult." Setoodeh was "ushered into a large room and handed a plastic container, along with a funnel... and instructed to aim your spit behind a socially-distanced partition. Some missed, hitting the floor or their clothes."

Many, like The Guardian's film critic



US actress and director Jodie Foster (center) poses on stage with Spanish director Pedro Almodovar (left) and South Korean director Bong Joon-Ho after she received a Palme d'Or Life Achievement Award during the opening ceremony of the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.

Peter Bradshaw, could not summon up enough spittle after trudging through crowds on the baking sea-front road, the Croisette. "That's not enough spit, Monsieur," the test lady told me sternly," said Bradshaw. "Spitting into a plastic cup doesn't exactly say the glamour of the Cannes film festival," he told AFP. "It is not

likely to go into the showreel with Jeanne Moreau and Fellini, but needs must," he added, after the festival was cancelled last year because of the pandemic.

Scandal

Fellow British critic Guy Lodge was able to boast on Twitter that his "spittle

donation" was deemed "parfait" by the testing official. "But shouldn't there be some saliva-inducing visual aids?" he suggested. Like a picture in the booths of a particularly dishy director or "a shelf of freshly baked baguettes? Just a thought, Cannes". "No one is exempt. Everybody has to submit to the rules," Cannes director Thierry Fremaux insisted, even the biggest names. Yet Fremaux himself was at the center of a mini-scandal when he kissed Hollywood actress Jessica Chastain on both cheeks on the red carpet on opening night.

His "naked"-that is maskless-embrace with Cannes' last Palme d'Or winner Bong Joon-ho, the South Korean director of Parasite, also raised eyebrows. As of Tuesday night, none of the thousands of movers and shakers who have descended on the Croisette had tested positive, biologist Dr Guillaume Armana told AFP. "But we have to be careful. The place is hopping and we know that the Delta variant is there," he warned. — AFP



In this file photo, a member of Paris auctioneer Tajan displays a previously undiscovered drawing by Leonardo da Vinci at the auction house in Paris. — AFP

Sale of rare da Vinci drawing triggers legal battle in France

A small pen-and-ink drawing attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, which lay buried unrecognized in a box for decades, was at the center of an acrimonious battle between its owner and France's culture ministry in a case that opened in a Paris court yesterday. The court began hearing if the drawing of a martyred Saint Sebastian lashed to a tree is allowed to leave France for eventual purchase by a foreign buyer, as desired by the owner, named only a Jean B, but contested by the French state.

The piece was among several drawings and engravings that Jean B, now 86, received as a gift from his father for passing his medical school exams in 1959. Being more of a rock enthusiast than an art lover at the time, the young doctor put it aside and promptly forgot about it for over half a century. Stumbling across the box of drawings again during a move in 2016 he decided to give them to the Tajan auction house to have them valued. The head of Tajan's Old Masters department, Thaddee Prate, quickly identified the hand of a master, without specifying who, and valued it at between 20,000 and 30,000 euros (\$17,000-\$25,000).

If Jean B thought he was lucky then, he was about to become far more fortunate. Another expert, Patrick de Bayser, concluded that the two-sided drawing-the other side is inscribed with scientific studies of candle light-was by none other than da Vinci, an opinion backed by a third specialist, Carmen Bambach of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. "The attribution of the Saint Sebastian drawing to Leonardo is absolutely solid," she told The New York Times, noting that it was complementary to other drawings of Saint Sebastian by the artist. — AFP



US director and Jury President of the 74th Cannes Film Festival Spike Lee (center) arrives with Jury members (from left) South Korean actor Song Kang-Ho, French actor Tahar Rahim, French-Canadian singer Mylene Farmer, US actress Maggie Gyllenhaal, French actress and director Melanie Laurent, Austrian director Jessica Hausner, Brazilian director Kleber Mendonca Filho and French-Senegalese director Mati Diop for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Annette" at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.



Indian-born and Dubai-based fashion and beauty influencer Farhana Bodi arrives for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Annette".



US model Bella Hadid arrives for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Annette".

Sports

Virus emergency to be imposed in Tokyo during Olympics: Reports

TOKYO: The Japanese government plans to impose a virus state of emergency in Tokyo during the Olympics, reports said yesterday, meaning spectators could be barred from venues. The emergency measures — less strict than a blanket lockdown — would be in force until August 22, several Japanese media outlets reported, following a rise in cases less than three weeks before the Games begin.

“The government decided to declare the fourth state of emergency for Tokyo and communicated the decision to the ruling parties,” public broadcaster NHK said. Ministers will consult with experts today and make a formal decision at a virus task force meeting later that day, it added.

Kyodo News, citing a senior government official, said it was now likely the Olympics would be held

behind closed doors. The pandemic-postponed 2020 Games will take place under strict anti-infection rules, with overseas fans already banned.

Organizers set a limit last month of 10,000 fans, or half of each venue’s capacity, but recently warned that a closed-door Games remains an option as the virus situation worsens. Japan’s COVID-19 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 Games begin.

Around 15 percent of Japan’s population is fully vaccinated against the deadly respiratory disease. The announcement of the results of a ticket lottery for oversubscribed events has been pushed back to Saturday — less than two weeks before the July 23 opening ceremony.

Fans have also been urged not to line the route of the Olympic marathon in the northern city of Sapporo. Tokyo and other regions are currently under softer virus restrictions, due to end on Sunday, that cap spectators at non-Olympic sports events at 5,000, and limit bar and restaurant opening hours.

The capital has already had a state of emergency, which gives local authorities more powers to request business closures, imposed three times since the pandemic began. The last emergency had been successful in bringing cases down in Tokyo, but infections have risen since it ended last month, with fears growing over the spread of new variants.

Games participants have already begun arriving in Japan, with 11,000 Olympic athletes from around 200 countries set to take part. International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach is due to arrive in Japan today, and will isolate for three days on arrival. He had initially been expected to visit Tokyo in May, but that trip was cancelled over virus restrictions. — AFP



Sha'Carri Richardson

Richardson out of Olympics after USA relay snub

LOS ANGELES: Sha'Carri Richardson will play no part in the Olympics after being left out of the United States’ 4x100m relay squad. USA Track and Field (USATF) confirmed on Tuesday, Richardson had been ruled out of competing in the individual 100m in Tokyo after receiving a 30-day ban for testing positive for marijuana following her victory at the US trials last month. But the prospect of competing as a member of the relay team had been left open, with Richardson’s suspension ending before the opening rounds of the discipline get under way in Tokyo.

USATF rules allowed for the 21-year-old to be selected as one of two coach’s picks alongside the top four finishers from the women’s 100m final at the US trials. However, that door was slammed shut by USATF on Tuesday after 2016 Olympic 4x100m relay gold medalist English Gardner and Aleia Hobbs were named as the two discretionary picks to complete the six-strong relay pool. In a statement, USATF expressed sympathy for Richardson’s case but said it had a responsibility to “maintain fairness” for all athletes. “First and foremost, we are incredibly sympathetic toward Sha'Carri Richardson’s extenuating circumstances and strongly applaud her accountability – and will offer her our continued support both on and off the track,” USATF said. “While USATF fully agrees that the merit of the World Anti-Doping Agency rules related to THC (marijuana) should be reevaluated, it would be detrimental to the integrity of the US Olympic Team Trials for Track & Field if USATF amended its policies following competition, only weeks before the Olympic Games,” it added. “All USATF athletes are equally aware of and must adhere to the current anti-doping code, and our credibility as the National Governing Body would be lost if rules were only enforced under certain circumstances.”

‘Emotional pain’

Newspaper USA Today reported Gardner and Hobbs were told of their selection in the US team before Richardson accepted a reduced one-month suspension for her doping case. That meant that adding Richardson to the squad with one of the discretionary places would have required either Gardner or Hobbs to be bumped from the team.

Richardson’s failed drugs test shocked the world of athletics after it was confirmed by the United States Anti-Doping Agency last Friday. Richardson is one of the rising stars of track and field and had been regarded as a potential gold medalist at the Olympics.

The charismatic Texan later told NBC television that she had taken marijuana to cope with a “state of emotional pain” after learning of the death of her biological mother during the US trials last month in Eugene, Oregon. “I would like to say to my fans, my family and my sponsors I apologize,” Richardson said. “I apologize for the fact that I didn’t know how to control my emotions or deal with my emotions during that time.” —AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait’s football national team captain Bader Al-Mutawa poses while holding an award during a ceremony honoring him for becoming the world’s most capped international player with 185 matches, in Kuwait City on Tuesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

‘Little Chicken’ carries Vietnam’s hopes for Olympic boxing glory

HANOI: When a 13-year-old Nguyen Van Duong stepped into the ring for the first time he weighed just 33 kilograms and was promptly nicknamed “Little Chicken” by the coach. More than a decade later, he will travel to Tokyo as the first Vietnamese boxer to compete at an Olympic Games since Seoul 1988.

“I come to the Olympics with the ultimate target — winning a medal,” the 24-year-old featherweight (57kg) fighter told AFP from his training camp in Ho Chi Minh City. Duong’s extraordinary journey from Vietnam’s Bac Giang — an industrial northern province home to factories supplying Samsung and Foxconn — to Tokyo later this month has astounded even the athlete himself.



HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam: This handout photo courtesy of Vu Truong Giang released on June 25, 2021 shows boxer Nguyen Van Duong posing after a training session at the Ho Chi Minh City National Sports Training Centre. — AFP

Tokyo scraps Olympic torch relay legs in capital

TOKYO: The Olympic torch relay has been scrapped on Tokyo’s public roads, officials announced yesterday, as virus concerns continue to plague the Games just over two weeks before they begin. The latest setback comes only a day before International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach is due to arrive in Japan for the postponed mega-event. And with coronavirus infections on the rise again in Japan, the government is expected to this week extend restrictions that are likely to affect how many fans — if any — can attend the Games. The Olympic flame arrives in Tokyo on Friday, but private torch-lighting ceremonies will replace the relay across the capital to prevent crowds gathering to watch, the city government said.

Right up to the opening ceremony on July 23, the torch ceremonies will be streamed online, with authorities urging spectators to watch them “in the comfort of your home”. Only the relay leg in the Ogasawara islands — a remote archipelago some 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) south of Tokyo — will go ahead in public as scheduled.

The nationwide torch relay has been fraught with problems since it began in March, with almost half the legs disrupted in some way. The relay was forced off public roads in famous tourist cities such as Kyoto and Hiroshima over fears that crowds of fans could spread the virus. And it has also met with some public opposition, with a 53-year-old woman arrested on Sunday for squirting liquid from a water pistol towards a runner. Tokyo 2020 was delayed by one year by the pandemic and will take place under strict anti-infection rules, with overseas fans banned and local spectators

A ruthless performance in 2020 against Thailand’s seasoned Chatchai Decha Butdee — which saw him dispatch his opponent in just 47 seconds to qualify for the Olympics — totally surprised him. “I couldn’t believe that I won the match that quick,” he said. He had lost to the same fighter in a unanimous decision in the Southeast Asian Games final a few months earlier.

Small but lethal force

As a pint-sized 13-year-old who was towered over by other kids his age, Duong initially found it hard to be taken seriously as a boxer. When he appeared one day to train with the national police team, the coach turned to the teenager’s cousin and said: “You brought this little chicken here — how long will it take to turn him into a boxer?”

The moniker stuck. But Duong soon surpassed all expectations — winning the National Youth Boxing Championship in 2010, joining the national youth team and becoming a small but lethal force in the ring. This year, Duong has been almost completely locked down for months on end at his training camp, with no athletes allowed out due to the latest coronavirus wave in Ho Chi Minh City.

Rising at 5.30 am each day, he works hard on his fitness – running and hoisting dumbbells, aware of the huge challenge that lies ahead of him. “The qualifiers and Olympics Games are totally different, so I must improve in terms of technique, tactics, speed... everything.”

But the pandemic has made preparations particularly tough, he admits, and he has previously spoken about the huge psychological and physical toll of the last year. With local tournaments cancelled, crucial match practice opportunities were lost. “When I got the ticket for the Olympics, I was in my best form, physically and mentally... I wanted to keep fighting, but the Games were postponed and I felt a little bit down.” Still, he remains determined as he counts down the days to Tokyo. “I will try hard to deliver my best performance,” he said. “To bring victory to my homeland, my country and to all boxing fans.” — AFP

limited. Participants have already begun arriving in Japan, with 11,000 Olympic athletes from around 200 countries set to take part. Bach, who will isolate for three days on arrival, had initially been expected to visit Tokyo in May, but that trip was cancelled over virus restrictions.

Fan limits

Organizers set a limit last month of 10,000 fans, or half of each venue’s capacity, but recently warned that a fully closed-door Games remains an option as the virus situation worsens. Japan’s COVID-19 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 Games begin.

The government is this week expected to extend anti-virus measures in Tokyo and other regions — likely until after the Games begin — with a further decision on Olympic fans to follow. Current restrictions cap spectators at non-Olympic sports events at 5,000 and limit the opening hours of bars and restaurants.

Media reports say fans are likely to be banned from the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, with events taking place in the evening also held behind closed doors. The announcement of the results of a ticket lottery for oversubscribed events has already been pushed back to Saturday — less than two weeks before the opening ceremony.

And even non-ticketed events are affected, with the public urged not to line the route of the Olympic marathon in the northern city of Sapporo. The Japanese team held a stripped-down, socially distanced send-off ceremony on Tuesday, with almost all of the 582 athletes taking part online. But star gymnast Kohei Uchimura appeared underwhelmed by the event, complaining that it felt “a bit unsatisfying”. “I’ve done a lot of online interviews recently, so I’m used to it,” he told reporters. “But to do a formal ceremony online feels a bit unsatisfying.” — AFP

Mostar’s teenage Games swimming hope aims to emulate hero

MOSTAR: She may lack an Olympic-size swimming pool in which to train in the Bosnian town of Mostar but that did not prevent 15-year-old Lana Pudar qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics where she hopes to compete with the best in the 100m butterfly. Pudar’s dream is to win Bosnia’s first ever Olympic medal, but her coach and her mother say she heads to Japan without pressure and calm of mind. The teenager hopes to reach the final alongside her hero — Sweden’s Sarah Sjöström, 27, holder of four world records.

“She has always been my idol,” Lana told AFP in an interview by the dilapidated 25-metre (82-foot) pool where she trains in a suburb of Mostar, the town in southern Bosnia known for its world heritage bridge. Sjöström was also only 15 years old when she began to have good results, the young Bosnian swimmer pointed out. “I want to take a picture with her and I also hope to be her rival,” she said. Pudar began to make a name for herself in March when she qualified for the Olympics at a competition in Belgrade. Her time of 57.37sec was at the time the second fastest in the world this year.



MOSTAR: Bosnian swimmer Lana Pudar takes part in a training session in Mostar, on May 28, 2021. — AFP

‘Competing with myself’

“Lana has for a long time been achieving results that are at the level of Europe’s and the world’s best in her age group and even in the higher categories,” Damir Djedovic, head of her swimming club Orka, told AFP. Her time in Belgrade time was the same as that of France’s Marie Wattel and Greece’s Anna Ntountounaki when they tied for victory in at the European Championships in May. In Bosnia, Pudar holds records in almost all styles. Since she turned 13 she has been breaking marks held by competitive swimmers in all age groups, notably in 50m and 100m butterfly. “I don’t count (records) anymore, I get lost,” grins Lana. “My mother takes care of that. As far as the butterfly is concerned, almost all national records are mine. Now, I’m competing with myself.” Pudar discovered her penchant for swimming when she was splashing about in Mostar’s tiny municipal pool at the age of five. “I took her there to learn to swim before going to the sea,” said her father Velibor Pudar, a former football goalkeeper.

Only a few days later the swimming club’s coach approached him. “He told me that they wanted to put her in the club right away, that she was talented. “Twenty days later he came back and told me: ‘She’s a real dolphin’,” he recalled, making a reference to the regional name of the butterfly style.

Modest and smiling, Lana admits that a “little fame” makes her feel good. “It’s nice when people recognize me, congratulate me. But I try to stay focused on the goal,” she said. Her mother stressed that the “desire for a medal is there and she will do her best, but she will go to Tokyo relaxed. “She doesn’t have much experience and has to go carefully.” The podiums may come later, her coach agreed. “Lana is the ‘project’ for the next three Olympic cycles,” Djedovic said. Her earning a berth for the trip to Japan is partly due to the coronavirus pandemic that delayed the Olympics by a year, admitted Alena Cemalovic, Lana’s main coach. Pudar “got closer to the norm only near the end of 2020,” she explained. —AFP

Sports

Paul powers Suns over Bucks in NBA Finals opener

PHOENIX: Chris Paul made sure his long-awaited NBA Finals debut would be one to remember, scoring 32 points and adding nine assists to spark the Phoenix Suns over the Milwaukee Bucks 118-105 in Tuesday's opening game of the championship series.

The 36-year-old backcourt maestro, in his 16th season, delivered clutch scoring and added nine assists while Devin Booker added 27 points and 22-year-old Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton had 22 points and 19 rebounds in dominating the Bucks. "I just kept trying to be aggressive and my guys got going," Paul said. "It's trust. We've played like this all season. We just have to stay locked in."

Phoenix will try to grab a 2-0 edge when the best-of-seven showdown continues tonight. "There was a lot of energy coming into this game," Paul said. "We got one. We've got to get another one." The Suns, in the NBA Finals for the first time since 1993, seek their first league title while the Bucks, in their first finals since 1974, won their only crown 50 years ago. "We'll look at the film," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "We'll get smarter. We'll get better for game two."

Milwaukee started Greek star forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, who had missed two games with a hyperextended left knee, and he contributed 20 points and 17 rebounds in 35 minutes. "It was tough. Had to do my best to get back," Antetokounmpo said. "Did the right treatment. Took care of my body. Supported my teammates. Now I'm back. Felt great. I had my balance. Felt my knee was stable. I did not feel pain. I felt good." But even with 29 points from Khris Middleton, it wasn't enough against Paul and a swifter, more defensively aggressive Suns squad. "I just think Chris

Paul got a little too comfortable," Bucks standout Jrue Holiday said.

Paul, with the second-most games of any NBA player making his finals debut, went 12-of-19 from the floor, 4-of-7 from 3-point range, and 4-of-4 from the free throw line. "I'm just so locked into the game," Paul said. "I'm staying in the moment. I'm just focused on the task at hand."

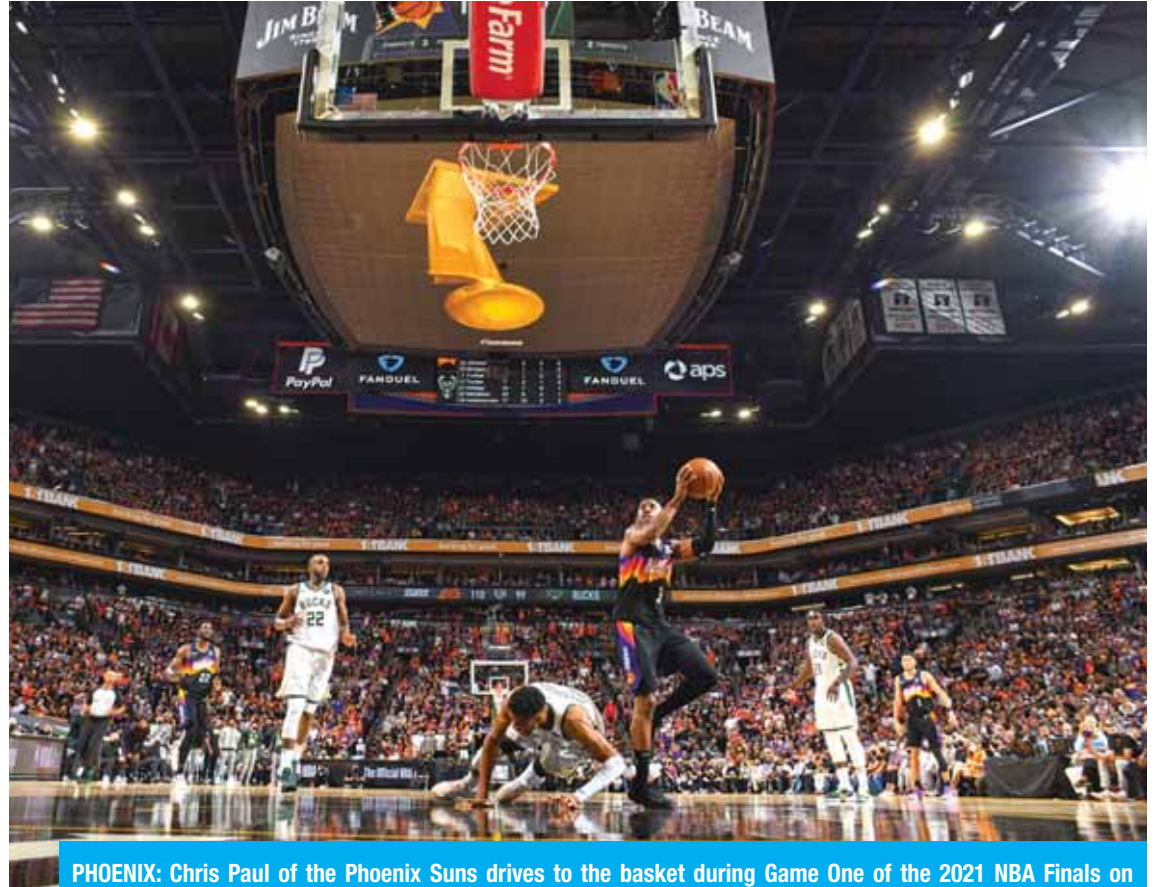
Paul went 6-of-7 for 16 points in the third quarter, when the Suns stretched the lead as large as 20 points. Antetokounmpo scored off a rebound to pull Milwaukee within 101-94 in the fourth quarter, but a steal and hoop by Paul helped keep the Bucks at bay.

Energy and juice

"To win the first game, it gives you a level of confidence," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "It was just having the energy and the juice that we typically play with. It's important. Our guys understand that." Ayton became the first player with 15 points and 15 rebounds in his NBA Finals debut since Tim Duncan in 1999.

The Suns went 25-of-26 from the free throw line, missing only the last to keep them from an NBA Finals record. The Suns, who haven't lost in 11 playoff games when leading by 10 or more, opened a 65-52 lead early in the third quarter.

Phoenix led 30-26 after the first quarter and 57-49 at halftime. Booker had 16 points in the first half and Paul added 11, six of them in a 10-4 run to give the Suns a 45-38 edge. Antetokounmpo had eight points, five rebounds and two assists in the first quarter, making a solid start after being a game-time decision. — AFP



PHOENIX: Chris Paul of the Phoenix Suns drives to the basket during Game One of the 2021 NBA Finals on Tuesday at Phoenix Suns Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

Keeper Martinez sends Argentina into Copa final against Brazil

BRASILIA: Goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was the hero as Argentina defeated Colombia on penalties on Tuesday to set up a dream Copa America final against Brazil. Argentina stopper Martinez saved three penalties in the shoot-out after a bruising 1-1 draw in Brasilia.

Hosts Brazil beat Peru 1-0 in Monday's first semi-final meaning their star forward Neymar will line up against Lionel Messi's Argentina on Saturday at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium. Two years ago a Brazil team missing the injured Neymar knocked out Argentina in the semi-finals before winning their ninth Copa title on home soil.

For Messi, 34, time is running out to win a first major international title with his national team, having previously lost in three Copa finals and the 2014 World Cup final. For once he wasn't his country's main hero, although he did create the opening goal for Lautaro Martinez on seven minutes, before Luis Diaz equalized just after the hour mark.

In the shoot-out, goalkeeper Martinez three times dived to his left to save penalties from center-backs Davinson Sanchez and Yerry Mina, as well as midfielder Edwin Cardona. And although Rodrigo De Paul skied his penalty for Argentina, Messi — who finished with blood seeping visibly from his left ankle — was amongst the scorers to give them a 3-2 victory on spot-kicks. Saving penalties "is a question of luck and today it was my turn to be the glorious one," said Martinez. "We said it the first day, we want to play the final and what better than playing Brazil on their pitch."

Argentina and Colombia were actually supposed to be joint hosts but South American football's governing body CONMEBOL switched venues at the 11th hour due to the coronavirus pandemic and social unrest in Colombia. Despite the defeat, Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda was feeling positive, saying their performance "invites us to dream, to think we're on the right path."

"We should lift our heads, look each other in the eyes and know we have nothing to reproach ourselves about," he added.



BRASILIA: Argentina's Lautaro Martinez (left) celebrates with teammates Lionel Messi, Nicolas Gonzalez (right) and Rodrigo De Paul after scoring against Colombia during their Conmebol 2021 Copa America football tournament semi-final match at the Mane Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia, Brazil, on Tuesday. — AFP

Fast Argentina start

Messi produced some early magic to beat three players and cross for Martinez to head wide. Colombia didn't heed the warning and on seven minutes, Giovanni Lo Celso found Messi in the box, the diminutive star held off the giant Mina and picked out Martinez to fire into the far corner. Colombia almost hit back immediately but goalkeeper Martinez was down quickly to keep out Juan Cuadrado's low strike.

After Argentina's fast start, Colombia started to dominate and Cuadrado sent a free-kick just over the bar. The Cafeteros cranked up the pressure and hit the woodwork twice in quick succession. After Wilmar Barrios's half-volley deflected off Lo Celso's hand and struck the post, Mina headed the resulting corner onto the bar. But Argentina were a whisker away from doubling their advantage on the stroke of half-time when Nicolas Gonzalez powered a header from a Messi corner goalwards, with Colombia goalkeeper David Ospina somehow scooping the ball over the bar.

Di Maria impact

Colombia remained the better side after the break with Duvan Zapata having a shot blocked and substitute Miguel Borja firing wide. But they deservedly equalized on 61 minutes when Cardona took a quick free-kick from inside his own half and sent Diaz scampering away to hold off German Pezzella and dink a clever finish over Martinez.

Argentina brought on Angel Di Maria for Gonzalez and the tricky winger immediately brought more urgency to his side's attack. But Di Maria and Martinez contrived to butcher a glorious chance to give Argentina the lead again.

Daniel Munoz's wayward back pass sent Di Maria scampering towards goal. He dribbled round Ospina and teed up Martinez whose shot was blocked on the line by Barrios before Di Maria blazed the rebound over. Di Maria then played in Messi who thudded a shot off the post before De Paul's follow up was charged down by Sanchez. Messi shot a late free-kick into the wall but after the 90 minutes were up, it was Martinez who took center stage. — AFP



LONDON: Australia's Ashleigh Barty practices on the Aorangi Practice Courts on the ninth day of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. — AFP

Barty has Kerber on her mind, Pliskova prepares for Sabalenka

LONDON: One is motivated by a significant anniversary, another rediscovered the grass is definitely greener for her form, a third is driven on by "brutal" critics and the fourth, the girl with a tiger tattoo, finds herself in unknown Grand Slam territory. The stage is set for the women's Wimbledon semi-finals today with three of the contenders new to the experience.

Headline names such as 2019 champion Simona Halep, four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka and seven-time Wimbledon champion Serena Williams are missing but there is the present world number one and two former number ones in the last four.

Ashleigh Barty's clash with Angelique Kerber would be fit for a final, pitching the world number one against the 2018 Wimbledon champion. The other semi is an intriguing duel between former world number one Karolina Pliskova and the powerful second seed from Belarus, Aryna Sabalenka. Barty is motivated by a higher purpose. For it is 50 years ago her fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley won the first of her two Wimbledon titles.

Barty has worn a specially-designed dress as a tribute to the 'iconic' scallop one her "friend and mentor" wore in that 1971 final. "It's a really special anniversary for a lot of Australians, but for indigenous Australians in particular," said Barty at the outset of her not always convincing campaign. "I think this is a really special one." Barty's serve has been found wanting at pivotal moments — even her quarter-final opponent Ajla Tomljanovic broke her twice in their second set — but she believes her form is coming together. "I think obviously play on grass is very different," she said after her quarter-final. "The grass season for me, it's one tournament, pretty cut-throat. I certainly wasn't as loose as I have been with errors and kind of ill-timed lapses. But I felt really sharp today."

'Huge drama'

Barty, though, knows she will have to move up a gear if she is to see off Kerber. The 33-year-old German has bounced back to top form after first round exits at both the Australian and French Open. "I know one of Angie's greatest assets is the fact that she can run and hunt and put the ball in an awkward situation to nullify my aggression and my weapons at times," said Barty. "It's a really fine balance."

Kerber, 33, has improved as the Championships have progressed from earning along with her second round opponent Sara Sorribes Tormo a five minute standing ovation for their three hour marathon. The 25th seed has gone on to impressive wins over higher-seeded duo Coco Gauff and then Karolina Muchova. "I have always in my career had some ups and downs but I was always believing I could come back because I know what I can do," said Kerber. Pliskova too has never doubted herself despite dropping out of the top 10 — she is ranked 13 — after being a regular since 2016. A first appearance in a Wimbledon semi-final has justified that self-belief — she is yet to drop a set and has only had her serve broken three times. The 29-year-old Czech has hit 40 aces and she served one with full force directed at her doubters after she beat Swiss Viktorija Golubic on Tuesday. — AFP

Jabeur 'honored' to represent Africa as Wimbledon dream ends

LONDON: Ons Jabeur will not be lifting the Wimbledon women's singles trophy this year but she said she was "honored" to have represented Africa with such style and gusto. Aryna Sabalenka ended Jabeur's historic run at Wimbledon, the second-seeded Belarus player's power getting the better of the guile of the Tunisian 6-4, 6-3 in 74 minutes.

Jabeur, though, took a lot of positives from the remarkable last few weeks which saw her become the first Arab woman to win a WTA event — the grass-court tournament in Birmingham. She then beat three former Grand Slam title winners — Venus Williams, Garbine Muguruza and Iga Swiatek — on her run to her second Grand Slam quarter-final.

"I'm honored," she said about representing Africa at such a huge profile global sports event. "Also trying to represent a whole continent for me is very important. I try to behave well and give the right example for the young generation, for people following. We're going through tough times in Tunisia with COVID and everything. I'm glad that I'm giving positive thoughts to people there." Jabeur departs having lost in her second Grand Slam quarter-final — the 2020 Australian Open being the previous one — a "barrier" she hopes to get across next time. However, the 26-year-old has done wonders in her goal to use her exploits to encourage young Arab women — especially North African — to take up the sport.

"I know that since 2011, since I won the junior Roland Garros title, I know that there are many girls wanted to play tennis and are dreaming more," said Jabeur. "I feel like I've been carrying a great message trying to represent my country as best as I can. I think right now they are dreaming even bigger and they want to be here, they want to be me and follow in my steps."

'It's really tricky'

Sabalenka may sport a tiger tattoo — which prompted her parents not to speak to her for a week in 1998 — but the broadcast of smiles spread across her face as she soaked up the reality of her achievement. The 23-year-old, who had only won one match on her three previous visits to Wimbledon, will play former world number one Karolina Pliskova who eased into the last four with a straight sets win over Viktorija Golubic.

She will try and go one better than compatriot Viktoria Azarenka who twice reached the last four in 2011 and 2012. "I mean I am really happy with this win," she said. "It's always tough against Ons, she's an amazing player and person. I'm happy it looks like everything is working for me. It's really tricky, shots on the grass. It's sometimes hard to do anything with the ball. It fits my game and I'm really enjoying my time on the court." — AFP



LONDON: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur reacts against Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka during their women's quarter-final tennis match on the eighth day of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on Tuesday. — AFP

Mancini delights in defying expectations as Italy reach final

LONDON: Having taken over Italy at their lowest ebb, Roberto Mancini reveled in defying expectations after the Azzurri made it through to the final of Euro 2020 with a dramatic penalty shoot-out win over Spain on Tuesday.

Italy's transformation under Mancini in the last three years has been extraordinary, from a team that failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup to one that has gone on a national record of 33 games unbeaten including their Wembley semi-final.

They were made to fight all the way against Spain, taking the lead through Federico Chiesa's brilliant goal but being pegged back as Alvaro Morata's equalizer made it 1-1 and forced extra time before the Azzurri prevailed 4-2 on penalties. However, they merit their place in Sunday's final against England or Denmark having been the outstanding side thus far at this European Championship. After putting seven goals without reply past Turkey, Switzerland and Wales in the group stage they ground out an extra-time win over Austria, then beat Belgium in the quarter-finals despite losing star left-back Leonardo Spinazzola to a torn Achilles tendon. Now they are closing on a second European Championship title.

"When you play in a World Cup or a European Championship it is intense, and there always comes a game where you have to dig in and suffer to win," said

Mancini. "It can't all be smooth as our progress had been up to now.

"We knew this was the one that was going to be really tough and that is why I think the players and everyone who has worked with us over the last three years deserves a lot of credit because it has not been easy by any means. Almost nobody believed we could do it and yet we are in the final, so we are pleased for Italians everywhere."

Italians took to the streets across the country to celebrate while 11,000 of their fans — all UK-based as restrictions prevented supporters abroad from travelling — were inside Wembley to see Jorginho score the decisive kick in the shoot-out.

The complete side

Italy were in a mess after losing to Sweden in a 2018 World Cup qualifying play-off and Mancini had to pick up the pieces from that. He has rebuilt them, and at this Euro they have been almost the complete side: from the veteran center-back pairing of Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci to brilliant attacking full-backs, a gifted midfield trio of Marco Verratti, Jorginho and Nicolò Barella, and a livewire front line.

"The players wanted to play a brand of football that people enjoyed and thus far they have managed to do exactly that," added Mancini. Whether it is England or

Denmark on Sunday, Italy should fancy their chances on current form and their record at getting to major tournament finals is enough to strike fear into any opponent.

Euro 2020 will see them make their 10th appearance in a final, with six at the World Cup and three at previous European Championships. But while they have lifted the World Cup four times, their only continental triumph to date came as hosts of the four-team event in 1968. Since then there have been two final losses that were painful in different ways. In 2000 they were floored by a French golden goal in extra time in Rotterdam, while in 2012 Spain tore them apart to win 4-0 in Kiev. "There is still one step to go and now we have to rest up because this really was very challenging," added Mancini. "When you go into your sixth match with all the travelling it does become very tiring."

Italy will hope the seventh is even more memorable. "Playing for my country in matches like these, representing 60 million Italians, was an unbelievable dream," said Juventus forward Chiesa, the son of Mancini's old Sampdoria team-mate Enrico Chiesa. Asked who he would rather play against in the final, Italy's goal-scorer insisted he was not worried. "We need to just think about ourselves, as we have done in this tournament. That is what has got us so far." — AFP



LONDON: Italy's coach Roberto Mancini celebrates after winning the Euro 2020 semi-final football match between Italy and Spain at Wembley Stadium in London on Tuesday. — AFP



LONDON: Italy's defender Giorgio Chiellini shakes hands with Spain's defender Jordi Alba after the coin toss prior to the penalty shootout in the Euro 2020 semi-final football match between Italy and Spain at Wembley Stadium in London on Tuesday. — AFP

Three things we learned from Italy v Spain

LONDON: Italy sneaked past Spain 4-2 on penalties to reach the Euro 2020 final after a 1-1 draw at Wembley on Tuesday. A near-60,000 crowd saw Federico Chiesa's stunning strike open the scoring before Alvaro Morata sent the game to extra time. However, Morata and Dani Olmo missed in the shoot-out as Italy progressed to the final.

Morata hero and villain

Morata once described training against Giorgio Chiellini at Juventus as "being put in a cage with a gorilla and you have to steal his food". With 10 minutes left, Morata left the 36-year-old trailing with a calm finish completely out of keeping with his demons in front of goal throughout the tournament.

Even before the Euro began, Morata had to listen to chants of "how bad are you" from his own fans in a pre-tournament friendly against Portugal. He missed a penalty and a host more chances as Spain failed to win either of their opening group games, but came good with a stunning finish to turn a rollercoaster last-16 tie against Croatia, which La Roja eventually won 5-3, back in his side's favour in extra time. Often criticised for his faith in the Juventus striker, Luis Enrique left him on the bench for the first time in the tournament as he opted instead for a strikerless system with Olmo, Mikel Oyarzabal and Ferran Torres forming a flexible front three. But that trio were all wasteful as Spain dominated but failed to take their chances and looked set to exit when Chiesa showed them how to be clinical with a sumptuous strike on the hour mark.

Morata was immediately summoned from the sidelines by Luis Enrique and finally produced some reward for Spain's dominance of the ball when he played a neat

one-two with Olmo and nonchalantly slotted past the grounded Gianluigi Donnarumma. However, Donnarumma was the hero of the shoot-out as he saved Morata's meek penalty low to his left and Jorginho rolled home the next spot-kick to ensure Italy return to Wembley at the weekend.

Expats bring the house down

Despite travelling fans from both countries being shut out due to quarantine rules, 60,000 supporters were allowed into Wembley as part of the biggest sporting crowd in the United Kingdom since the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2019. Any fears that of a flat atmosphere were dispelled well before kick-off, with thousands of Italian and Spanish expatriates draped in flags and shirts coloring the home of English football red and blue. The presence of English supporters was heard with a short-lived rendition of "football's coming home" that was quickly drowned out by boos from both sets of fans.

Until April, top-level football in England had been largely forced behind closed doors for over a year. But it was like turning the clock back as both sides scored in front of masses of their own support in a pulsating second half worthy of the stage of a European Championship semi-final.

Spain dance to Pedri's beat

Had Euro 2020 gone ahead as planned 12 months ago, the 18-year-old from Tenerife would not have been close to Luis Enrique's squad. But winning just his 10th cap, the Barcelona midfielder again showed why he is a fitting heir to Andres Iniesta for club and country.

One sumptuous through ball cut through the normally impenetrable Italian defence early on and deserved a better finish from Mikel Oyarzabal. Italy's 33-match unbeaten run has been built on the midfield trio of Jorginho, Marco Verratti and Nicolò Barella controlling games. But Spain again showed no country is as prolific at producing midfield maestros as Sergio Busquets's experience and Koke's energy complemented Pedri's poise. In the 90 minutes, he completed all of his 55 passes.—AFP

Profligate Spain pay the penalty against Italy

LONDON: Spain's Euro 2020 ended in familiar fashion, with a blunt attack unable to deliver the result a dominant performance between both boxes deserved, as Italy progressed to the final on penalties. Luis Enrique's men enjoyed 65 percent possession and had 20 attempts on goal to the Italian's 11, but were once again punished by the lack of a clinical finisher to make the difference in the final third. In keeping with his tournament, Alvaro Morata was both hero and villain. The Juventus striker came off the bench to score a late equalizer to make it 1-1 and take the game to extra time, but missed the decisive penalty in the shoot-out.

Morata misfiring was how Spain began the Euro with two disappointing draws on home soil with Sweden and Poland. La Furia Roja looked to have turned a corner with 10 goals in two games against Slovakia and Croatia in the last 16. But after squeezing past 10-man Switzerland on penalties in the quarter-finals, they ended the tournament having won just one of their six games in normal time.

"For me it is not a sad night," said Luis Enrique. "This is elite sport and you have to know how to win and lose. I said before the tournament we were one of the eight favorites (to win the competition). I don't think I was wrong. We go home with the reassurance of knowing we competed and we were among the best." After a tumultuous three years on and off the field, just making the last four was no disgrace for a Spain side in transition.

'Illogical' Pedri

Luis Enrique was appointed to oversee a changing of the guard in 2018 after the side that won three major tournaments between 2008 and 2012 grew old and stale. Tragic personal circumstances saw him briefly leave the role when his daughter was diagnosed with bone cancer and died aged just nine in 2019.

After leaving out long-time captain Sergio Ramos from his squad, he shrugged off criticism as "child's play" compared to what he had been through. Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba were the only survivors in this squad from Spain's last major tournament triumph at Euro 2012, when they thrashed Italy 4-0 in the final.

The Azzurri may have won the night in front of 60,000 fans as Wembley at last sounded like it used to on the big occasion before the coronavirus pandemic. However, there were plenty of positives to suggest Spain could have the brighter future heading to the World Cup in 18 months if they can find a goalscorer.

Italy's 33-game unbeaten run under Roberto Mancini owes much to the midfield control offered by Jorginho, Marco Verratti and Nicolò Barella. But Spain took the ball from them with 18-year-old Pedri pulling the strings to cap a sensational tournament.

The Barcelona midfielder completed all of his 55 passes in the 90 minutes despite being pushed to the

physical limit by his manager. Despite Spain's campaign ending with three straight games that went to extra time, Pedri sat out for just one of his side's 630 minutes across six matches. "What Pedri did, I have not seen of an 18-year old in any major tournament," added Luis Enrique. "How he performed, how he read the game, his quality, his personality for these type of games. It is something illogical."—AFP



LONDON: Spain's forward Pedri argues with German referee Felix Brych during the Euro 2020 semi-final football match between Italy and Spain at Wembley Stadium in London on Tuesday. — AFP

'We'll be back', says Busquets after Spain's bitter Euro exit

LONDON: Spain captain Sergio Busquets said the team will return stronger after gaining vital experience during their run to the Euro 2020 semi-finals, despite losing on penalties to Italy on Tuesday. "It's a shame, we would've have liked for our tournament not to end today but that's football," Busquets told Radio Marca. "The team was very good, we were the better team for almost the whole match. We can be proud, I feel pride for my team-mates. Everyone was making Italy favorites, but we showed we're better."

Alvaro Morata came off the bench to equalize late on for Spain at Wembley and cancel out Federico Chiesa's opening goal on the hour. But Morata and Dani Olmo missed in the shoot-out after the match finished 1-1 following extra time, with Italy advancing to the final 4-2 on penalties. "With lots of young players it will serve to give them confidence. This team will be back," said Busquets. "On the whole I believe we were better, but football is like that and we have to congratulate them (Italy). There's still a year and a half to go until the World Cup, but we're on the right track."

Busquets, now 32, was the only current squad member to play at the 2010 World Cup, where Spain beat the Netherlands in the final. The Barcelona midfielder refused to be drawn on his international future. "It's not the moment to think about me. It's the moment to be sad and proud at the same time. It's not the moment to think about me, but of the group." — AFP

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Sport | Times

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2021

Jorginho sends Italy past Spain into Euro final

LONDON: Italy beat Spain 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in a magnificent Euro 2020 semi-final at Wembley on Tuesday, as Jorginho converted the decisive kick to take the Azzurri through to the final. Italy were not always on top though, with Spain the better side for long spells of an epic contest before Federico Chiesa, the Juventus forward, gave Italy the lead with a fabulous finish an hour into a match watched by a crowd of almost 58,000.

The much-maligned Alvaro Morata, who was dropped from the starting line-up, came off the bench to equalize with 10 minutes of normal time left. No further scoring in extra time meant penalties again for Spain, who had beaten Switzerland in a shoot-out in the quarter-finals.

They had also beaten Italy on penalties at Euro 2008, but this time misses from Dani Olmo and then Morata saw Spain give up the advantage they had been handed when Manuel Locatelli failed with the first kick in the shoot-out.

The Italians celebrated at the end with a large contingent of their UK-based supporters, and a team that has been rejuvenated under Roberto Mancini continues to dream of winning a first European Championship since 1968.

Now unbeaten in 33 games, they go through to Sunday's final to face either England or Denmark, who met in the second last-four tie late last night. "I have to thank the players because they believed right from day one that we could do something incredible," said Mancini. "We haven't yet done everything we need to though, there is still one step to go."

It is nine years since Spain mauled Italy 4-0 in the Euro 2012 final in Kiev to win a third consecutive major tour-

namment, and this was the fourth successive Euro in which these powerhouses had met. Spain won the first two of those meetings, but the last two have now gone to Italy. "It is not a sad night for me by any means," said Spain coach Luis Enrique. "We can go home knowing we competed and were among the best teams."

Wembley comes to life

This meeting took place in the chill of a damp July evening in London, but the atmosphere at Wembley was no damp squib. There were no travelling supporters, given the obligatory quarantine for all visitors to the United Kingdom.

However, the large Spanish and Italian communities already in Britain meant a combined 20,000 fans of the two teams were in the 57,811-crowd allowed inside Wembley. They added a noise and color so sadly lacking at major sporting events since the pandemic began, and that provided the perfect stage.

The football itself was absorbing and of the highest quality, particularly in midfield where Italy's outstanding trio of Jorginho, Marco Verratti and Nicolò Barella met their match in Spain's Sergio Busquets, Koke and the brilliant Pedri, a frightening talent at just 18. But it was Italy who reached their 10th major tournament final and ended Spain's hopes of a record fourth European crown.

Southgate's England 'breaking barriers'

Standing in the Azzurri's way will either be England, who have never reached a Euro final, or Denmark, playing in their first major semi-final since surprisingly winning the competition in 1992. Yet to concede a goal in their five unbeaten matches in the tournament, England underlined their



LONDON: Italy's midfielder Jorginho (center) celebrates with teammates after scoring in a penalty shootout and winning the Euro 2020 semi-final football match between Italy and Spain at Wembley Stadium in London on Tuesday. —AFP

potential with a 2-0 last-16 win against old rivals Germany.

In the quarter-finals, a 4-0 rout of Ukraine in Rome fuelled dreams of Euro glory and ensured Gareth Southgate's men would be heading back to Wembley. "We don't have as a good a football history as we like to believe sometimes," said England manager

Southgate. "These players are making massive strides and breaking barriers all the time, we have broken barriers in this tournament and we have another opportunity to do that tomorrow."

Rocked by the cardiac arrest suffered by their star midfielder Christian Eriksen during their first match against Finland, Denmark went into their last group game

without a point. But, with Eriksen on the mend after the shocking incident, Kasper Hjulmand's team have embarked on a three-match winning run which has taken them to a first semi-final in 29 years. "We still play for and with him. There's no doubt about that. That's the only thing I can say about Christian," said Danish coach Hjulmand. —AFP






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