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V O L V O



Kuwait trying to avoid lockdown amid 'disturbing' COVID figures

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Local

Repairmen of Kuwait



Watchmaker Ali Asgar repairs a watch at a shop in Souq Watiya in Kuwait City.

Watch sales winding down, but repairs still essential

By Ben Garcia

In today's age of technology and smartphones, wristwatches are no longer a necessity. Many shops selling wristwatches closed down, discontinued their sale or changed their businesses to something else. However, even if wristwatches are unnecessary nowadays, many still use them as accessories.



"Wristwatches are of no use nowadays, since mobile phones display the time accurately and automatically switch between time zones. Besides, you can probably forget your wife and kids, but never your mobile," quipped Ali Asgar, a watch repairer at Souq Watiya in Kuwait City. Asgar recalled the peak era of wristwatches when the shop opened in the complex in 1997. "At that time, we had many customers daily because wristwatches were a necessity - but not anymore," he said.

Asgar's shop was formerly known as Barat Shop, referring to a unique Filipino word of endearment when haggling for an unimaginable discount. "At that time, we also had a repairman on the side of our shop," he told Kuwait Times. "Many of our customers were Indians, Egyptians and Filipinos," he added.

Towards the end of the 1990s, mobile companies penetrated the global market and sales of wristwatches started to decline. "Till the late '90s, everyone had to have a wristwatch. But today you can live without it. So we shifted from being an exclusive watch shop to selling novelties, and changed our shop's name from Barat Shop to Time World," Asgar said.

Nonetheless, according to Asgar, the wristwatch industry is still alive, and so is the repair business. "If there are wristwatches being sold every day, repairs must be available too. So our company offers repair services too," he said.

Hailing from Rajasthan in India, Asgar said he studied watch repair when he was in college. "Since I started as a repairman, there hasn't been a day without a client, except of course when we were forced to close down last year due to the lockdowns and curfews," he said. "Most of the repair services we provide deal with adjusting the size of the strap. We sell batteries too and repair the pendulum or mechanism of the watches. Repairing is easy, but we need time to make a watch work again," he told Kuwait Times.

"Our customers are not affluent people, so repair is vital. Many locals and others do not bother repairing their watches, but those availing our services are low-income people, and it is important for them," Asgar said.

The shop sells and repairs high-end to low-end brands of watches. "Brands from the US, Switzerland and Japan are mostly expensive, and we normally provide a one-year warranty for them. For every 100 watches we sell, usually only one comes back with a problem or damage," Asgar said. "Most of the repair jobs we get are from random customers for minor issues like dead batteries, strap replacement and changing the clasp or glass. These are all easily done by us," he said.

Kuwait's summertime superheroes: AC techs

By Nawara Fattahova

One of the most important jobs in Kuwait, especially during the unbearably hot months of summer, is of air conditioning repairmen. These men (and they are almost exclusively men) mostly hail from India, Egypt, Bangladesh and the Philippines, and are heroes for the many offices and homes that suffer sudden crises of AC malfunctions in the midst of 50 C heat.

Ahmad Ali Al-Jihlan is one such superstar. A 40-year-old AC technician with a talent for quick mechanical work, he arrived in Kuwait in 2008 and has worked in the same job with the same company for the last 13 years.

"Every day I leave the house before 7:00 am to either go the office or directly to a repair job, depending on the schedule. On average, I go to three or four locations daily during summertime. For some orders I have to go repeatedly when spare parts are needed to fix the problem. Sometimes I spend over two hours at one place, and in some cases I spend almost the entire day in one location," Jihlan told Kuwait Times.



AC technician Ahmad Ali Al-Jihlan services an air conditioner.

Local



As most of the mechanical parts of an air conditioner are located on the roof or outside of buildings, that is where Ahmad spends most of his time. Ahmad can repair all kinds of air-conditioning systems. “Usually at the company, the technicians are divided into groups. I’m specialized in split units and window ACs, while other colleagues repair central ACs. I sometimes repair central ACs too, but this happens rarely - only when we have a shortage of technicians,” he pointed out.

The hardest time of work is during the holy month of Ramadan. “The majority of my work is outdoors. It’s exhausting when I have to do repairing and fixing on the roof of a house or the yard under the sun when the weather is so hot, and I can’t even drink water. But I still love my job as this was my hobby since I was young. I graduated from a technical institute for cooling and air conditioning in Egypt. I also used to fix the ACs of my friends back home,” noted Jihlan.

His family complains that he doesn’t spend much time with them, as he is busy all the time. “In my job as a technician, I have to work overtime on most days during the summer. I get paid for the additional hours I spend working, but on the other hand my family always complains that they only see me very little,” he said.

Winter is a time of relief for Ahmad. “During winter, I don’t work overtime, as work is much less due to the pleasant weather. But some people still use the AC, even in winter-time. Also during winter, we have clients who are constructing new buildings; the cooling system is part of the construction, and they prefer finishing this work before summer,” explained Jihlan.

“Winter is the season when I have more time to spend with my family, as I’m always home by 5:00 pm. I can also practice my hobby that I love very much - fishing. Also because the weather is nice, I can enjoy time outdoors with my kids,” he added.



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FEATURE



Visitors observe scuba divers in the aquarium at The Scientific Center yesterday.

An immersive experience

PHOTO

Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Museums and cultural institutions and facilities - including The Scientific Center - reopened last month after being closed for more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visitors must be vaccinated and adhere to all health measures to make the experience a safe and pleasant one for everyone. Kuwait Times visited The Scientific Center's aquarium yesterday, which is one of the largest aquariums in the Middle East with over 100 different species of animals, plants and marine life.





Mullet fish



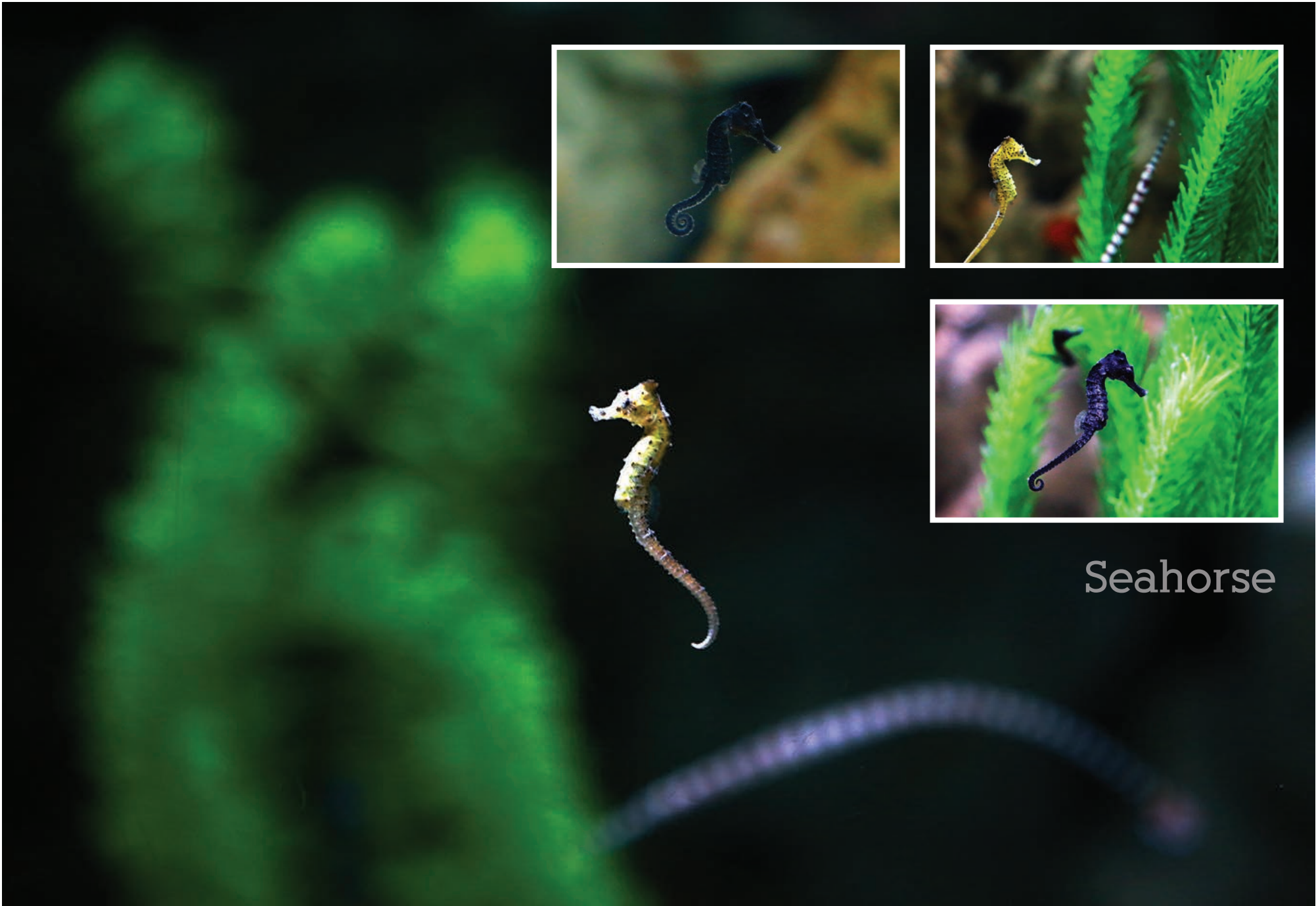
Snowflake moray eel



Jellyfish



Spotted garden eels



Seahorse



Arabian horned viper



Veiled chameleon

1st



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Local

25,000 packets of tobacco found in asphalt container



KUWAIT: Shuaiba port customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle 25,000 bags of chewing tobacco hidden in a container of asphalt. The 40-ft container arrived in Shuaiba from Dubai's Jebel Ali Port, originating from India. Officers became suspicious, so it was passed through the scanner, which indicated something was amiss. The container was thoroughly searched and 36 parcels were found, 16 of which had 500 bundles, with each bundle containing 50 packets of chewing tobacco, which is banned in Kuwait.

Rescuers free worker's hand from meat mincer



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force said technical rescue men freed the hand of worker from a meat mincer on Wednesday. The worker, an Asian, was rushed to Adan Hospital, where rescue men used special tools to free his hand.

Fire guts 3 boats

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force said fire and sea rescue men isolated and put out a fire which started on three boats at Kout marina in Fahaheel at dawn yesterday. Firemen from Shuaiba, Salmiya, Fahaheel and sea rescue participated in fighting the blaze. The three boats were isolated and moved away from the rest of the boats. Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the fire.



Local

Kuwait trying to avoid lockdown amid disturbing figures: Minister

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Defense Minister and head of the coronavirus emergency committee Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah yesterday said authorities are trying to avoid the imposition of another lockdown to counter a serious increase in the number of new cases.

The minister told reporters that the committee, which makes recommendations to the government over actions on the coronavirus pandemic, will meet next week to discuss the developments of the disease and propose measures. "We intend to avoid a lockdown in any possible way and are trying to find alternatives, mainly vaccinations," said the minister, who called on the public to get the vaccination as soon as possible.

Asked what recommendations the committee is likely to make to the Cabinet, the minister said "we are trying to avoid going for closures or lockdowns", adding that "figures are very disturbing whether for intensive care units or wards". The minister ruled out the possibility of opening up, saying various sectors are likely to remain as they are. He however said that he believes "we are reaching the end of the tunnel".

Reports on social media have indicated that the government was likely to impose a



KUWAIT: File photo taken on March 7, 2021 shows a road after a partial curfew was imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19. — Xinhua

lockdown in the country or in some areas to contain a sharp increase in the number of new COVID-19 cases. For over a week, the ministry of health has been reporting more than 1,700 new cases with ICU cases reaching 307 and those receiving treatment in wards crossed the 1,100 limit.

But Head of the Kuwaiti Government Communication Center Tareq Al-Mezrem said late Wednesday that media reports saying that the government is planning to introduce additional COVID-19 measures are "incorrect". "No meeting was held in this regard," Mezrem added in a state-

ment published on the center's official Twitter page.

In a related development, MP Ahmad Al-Hamad asked the health minister why the ministry has approved only four vaccines and when it plans to accept other vaccines approved by the World Health Organization. He said that the ministry's policy of restricting the use of only Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines has resulted in a shortage of supplies, calling for approving Chinese and Russian vaccines as well.

Opposition MPs demand emergency Assembly term over arrest of poet

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs yesterday demanded that the National Assembly hold an emergency term to discuss the arrest and detention of elderly Kuwaiti poet Jamal Al-Sayer. The demand came after a meeting attended by 22 MPs to discuss the decision of the public prosecution to charge Sayer with writing tweets considered offensive to HH the Amir and spreading false news.

The prosecution has decided to detain Sayer for 21 days pending trial. The opposition MPs said the emergency term will discuss violations committed by the public prosecution, approve a draft law to be able to challenge the judiciary and approve another draft law to Kuwaitize leading posts at the judiciary and the prosecution.

Holding an emergency term requires the approval of a simple majority of the house, which is 33 members. The opposition holds just 31 votes, and unless two more MPs sign the petition, the term will not be held.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The sun sets behind electricity pylons on July 6, 2021 in Jahra. — Xinhua



IRBIL: Amputees take part in a ceremony to mark the completion of the fitting of prosthetic limbs. — KUNA

Kuwait-funded limbs change lives of Iraqi amputees

IRBIL: More than 100 Iraqi amputees are relying on the use of prosthetics funded by Kuwait as a lifeline in the wake of their harrowing experiences, the country's consul general in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region said on Wednesday. This humanitarian endeavor aims to provide healthcare aid for hundreds of hapless amputees, allowing them to enjoy a semblance of normality in their lives, Dr Omar Al-Kandari told KUNA.

Thanking Kuwait for the aid, Kwestan Mohammed, the Kurdistan Regional Government's Minister of Social Affairs, said such altruistic deeds have become synonymous with Kuwait, with the beneficiaries of prosthetic aid in the region numbering more than 100. Kuwait has funded a myriad of aid programs directed by the World Health Organization in Iraq, which run the gamut from awareness campaigns to other healthcare projects. — KUNA



Mary Akrami, fighting to keep Afghan women's shelters open

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Dubai authorities probe port explosion that shook the city

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ESTCOURT, KWAZULU-NATAL: Officials are seen at the Estcourt Correctional Centre, where former South African president Jacob Zuma began serving his 15-month sentence for contempt of the Constitutional Court, in Estcourt, yesterday. — AFP

Zuma jailed after landmark ruling

South Africa's first post-apartheid president to be jailed

JOHANNESBURG: Jacob Zuma yesterday began a 15-month sentence for contempt of court, becoming South Africa's first post-apartheid president to be jailed after a drama that campaigners said ended in a victory for rule of law.

Zuma, 79, reported to prison early yesterday after mounting a last-ditch legal bid and stoking defiance among radical supporters who had rallied at his rural home. His battle transfixed the country, placing a spotlight on the issue of impunity and tensions within the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

South Africa's top court on June 29 slapped Zuma with a 15-month term for refusing an order to appear before a probe into the corruption that entangled his nine years in power. As police warned he faced arrest from midnight Wednesday, Zuma handed himself in to a jail in the rural town of Estcourt in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Many South Africans hailed his incarceration as a watershed moment for the young democracy. Former corruption buster Thuli Madonsela hailed it as "a giant development to the country's rule of law journey".

"But at a human level, it's a sad moment because it's something that could have been avoided. We didn't have to have a 79-year-old former head of state and former liberation struggle stalwart go to jail just because just he doesn't want to be held to account," she told AFP.

The opposition Democratic Alliance said, "the law cannot be mocked and challenged with impunity. If the leader can go to prison, then so can anyone." But, it cautioned, the contempt sentence did not address the wider corruption, fraud and racketeering that proliferated under Zuma.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation struck a similar note. "His

legal strategy has been one of obfuscation and delay, ultimately in an attempt to render our judicial processes unintelligible," it said. "It is tempting to regard Mr Zuma's arrest as the end of the road" rather than "merely another phase... in a long and fraught journey," the foundation warned.

Flawed president

Born into poverty, Zuma started out as an uneducated herdboy who joined the ANC, becoming its intelligence chief in its anti-apartheid struggle. His charisma and courage, including 10 years in jail on notorious Robben Island, placed him alongside Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and other liberation heroes.

In 2009, he became democratic South Africa's third president, but it proved to be a tenure darkened by divisions and the stench of corruption. In 2018, Zuma was forced out by the ANC and replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa, a former trade union leader who became a tycoon after apartheid was finally dismantled 30 years ago. Investigators say that under Zuma, billions of dollars in state assets were siphoned off by cronies.

But their efforts to get Zuma to testify ran into a wall. Critics labelled him the "Teflon president" for his perceived ability to sidestep justice.

Defiance

Zuma had been given a deadline of Sunday night for turning himself in. Failing his surrender, police were given three days—until midnight Wednesday—to arrest him. Zuma filed a last-ditch petition to overturn the arrest and pleaded with the Constitutional Court to rescind its sentence. The court will hear the plea on Monday.

Defiantly bucking the first deadline, Zuma declared at the

weekend that he was prepared to go prison, even though "sending me to jail during the height of a pandemic, at my age, is the same as sentencing me to death." "I am not scared of going to jail for my beliefs," he said. "I have already spent more than 10 years in Robben Island, under very difficult and cruel conditions".

As the Wednesday deadline loomed, police were prepared to carry out the arrest order. Just minutes before midnight, Zuma left his house in a convoy of cars speeding through dark rural roads "to comply with the incarceration order" and hand himself in.

But he may be back home before Christmas as he will be eligible for parole in just under four months. After visiting the prison, Justice Minister Ronald Ramola said Zuma is in "very good spirits and has taken his breakfast, ...his medication. He looks well and fine." "He is being taken care of, his jolly good self, laughing," Ramola said.

ANC stress

The drama has fuelled tensions with the ANC, where Zuma supporters have clamoured for the defence of their hero while others have demanded the law be allowed to run its course. "Be strong now because things will get better," Ace Magashule, a Zuma stalwart, and suspended ANC secretary general over fraud charges, said in a tweet.

"It might be stormy now, but it can't rain forever. We soldier on." In a statement, the party said "without doubt this is a difficult period in the movement" but appealed for members "to remain calm and respect the decision" taken by Zuma to abide by the court rulings. Zuma also faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering in an arms procurement scandal dating to 1999, when he was vice president. — AFP

International

Dubai authorities probe port explosion that shook the city

Flames doused within 40 minutes, no casualties

DUBAI: Dubai authorities were yesterday investigating an explosion on a container ship carrying flammable materials, which unleashed a fireball at one of the world's busiest ports and sent shock waves through the city. Firefighters rushed to the scene at Jebel Ali Port to tackle the blaze that broke out on a large vessel stacked with containers which authorities said had been preparing to dock.

Flames and smoke poured from the ship but authorities said it was doused within 40 minutes and that there were no casualties, with all 14 crew members evacuated in time before the explosion. "Thank God, everything is safe. But this is a natural accident that happened in one of the containers, which was also carrying some flammable materials. There was no other reason," Mona Al Marri, director of the Dubai Media Office, told Al-Arabiya television.

She said there will be an investigation into the cause of the blast. Police vehicles and fire trucks were still parked close to the heavily damaged vessel, with burned containers visible on the quayside. Residents of apartment towers and villas that line the city's coast reported hearing a loud bang in the night and then felt windows and doors shaking after the fireball shot into the sky, with some filming the spectacle from their balconies.

An AFP correspondent at the scene saw a helicopter circling overhead as columns of smoke rose from the tightly secured facility after the blast. Dubai police said three of the 130 containers on the ship held flammable materials.

"Initial reports indicate that... friction, or heat, may have led to the blast", Dubai police chief Abdullah al-Marri told Al-Arabiya, adding that there were no radioactive substances or explosives present in the containers.

Such events are a rarity in the ultra-secure Gulf emirate, one of seven which make up the wealthy United Arab Emirates. Jebel Ali port is capable of handling aircraft carriers and was the US Navy's busiest port of call outside of the United States in 2017, according to the US Congressional Research Service.

Global logistics giant DP World tweeted that "operations are running seamlessly" across the port, thanking the local authorities for "their swift response in resolving the fire incident".

'Windows shaking'

"I was outside on my balcony. My friend saw something yellow coming (like) the sun. I took the picture and after (there was) a sound," said Clemence Lefaix, who was staying near the blast site and posted a photo of a bright orange light against the night sky in front of



JEBEL ALI: This handout picture provided by the Government of Dubai Media Office yesterday, shows civil defence firefighters at the scene of a blaze that broke out at Dubai's main port of Jebel Ali following an explosion. —AFP

apartment buildings.

"I was really scared." A resident of Dubai's Marina district, close to Jebel Ali port, told AFP that they "saw the windows shaking". "I have been living here for 15 years and this is the first time I've seen and heard this."

There are 8,000 companies based in the

Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA) which contributed 23 percent of Dubai's gross domestic product last year. It is the Middle East's largest trade zone. The glitzy Gulf emirate of Dubai transformed itself over the past 50 years from a sleepy port town to a regional travel, trade and financial services centre. —AFP

Red Crescent warns of 'inhuman' Syria aid route closure

ANKARA: The Turkish Red Crescent chief yesterday denounced as "inhuman" a possible closure of a key aid route into Syria caused by Russia wielding its UN Security Council veto. The Bab al-Hawa crossing from Turkey into Syria will close on July 10 unless it receives authorisation from the UN body to stay open for another year.

Russia, a major ally of President Bashar al-Assad, prefers to see the aid delivered from Damascus, arguing that the crossing is used to supply rebel fighters with arms.

"The fate of millions of people in need is likely to be affected negatively by a veto ... Such a decision will be unfair and inhuman," the NGO's president, Kerem Kinik, told AFP.

Turkey has supported rebel fighters against Assad throughout the decade-long conflict and has a military presence in northern Syria.

Last month, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey wanted the border crossing to remain open, adding that he was holding talks at the UN to address Russia's reluctance. A Security Council vote scheduled for yesterday has been postponed possibly to today in order to soften Moscow's stance.

Kinik said failure to extend the cross-border aid risks triggering a new wave of migrants at Turkey's door.

"We are carrying out a major operation to keep (Syrians) in their own territory," he said. "In case of a possible closure of this border, the population will be deprived of support and



ANKARA: The president of the Turkish Red Crescent and vice-president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Kerem Kinik speaks during an AFP interview in Ankara yesterday. —AFP

we'll face the risk of migrants."

On a visit to a Turkish town on the border with Syria, EU Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic also called for keeping the border crossing open.

"This is a critical time for what is one of the largest humanitarian operations out there," he told journalists in the town of Reyhanli in southern Turkey.

"This operation means life for millions of people on the other side of the border — where 3.5 million people depend on humanitarian assistance provided through this border crossing." The commissioner urged members of the council to agree on the renewal of the authorisation for the humanitarian operation. — AFP

Zionist razes home of Palestinian shooting suspect

TURMUS'AYYA: The Zionist army said yesterday it demolished the home of a Palestinian woman with US citizenship whose estranged husband stands accused of fatally shooting a Jewish student in the occupied West Bank.

"Overnight... troops demolished the residence of the terrorist [Montasser] Shalabi, in the village of Turmus Ayya, northeast of Ramallah," an army spokesperson said.

The demolition comes despite US discouragement of the policy.

Shalabi, 44, was arrested by Zionist forces in May after he allegedly fired on waiting passengers at a bus stop at Tapuah junction south of Nablus in the northern West Bank. The attack killed Yehuda Guetta, 19, a student at a seminary in the Itamar settlement and wounded two of his friends.

Sanaa Shalabi, 40, told AFP troops arrived at 1:00 am to place explosives around her home. She said the demolition lasted through the night. "This is our life. What happened to us is normal. We were prepared for it," she said.

She called her husband a "hero". Montasser Shalabi did not live in the home that was destroyed, according to the Zionist human rights organisation Hamoked, which unsuccessfully contested its demolition before Zionist's Supreme Court.

Executive director Jessica Montell said the couple were estranged. Sanaa lived in the home with three of their seven children. The whole family are dual US nationals.

"The man accused of the attack doesn't live in the house, he lives in the US and he comes once or twice a year," Montell said. — AFP

International

Bulgaria rocked by corruption claims ahead of election

‘We knew something was wrong, now we see the full size’ of the problem

SOFIA: From kidney transplants for rich foreigners at state hospitals to big companies tapping government loans meant for smaller firms, graft in Bulgaria is outraging citizens afresh, a year on from huge anti-corruption protests. The scores of examples, revealed in daily press conferences by interim Prime Minister Stefan Yanev’s administration, have confirmed most of the allegations from those who took to the streets, with ramifications for Sunday’s snap parliamentary election.

Yanev was appointed after an inconclusive April 4 general election that saw three-time premier Boyko Borisov come out first but unable to find partners to govern. Though primarily tasked with organising the new vote, the interim government has also set out to make thorough checks of Borisov’s almost 10 years in office.

Yanev says these efforts are a bid to answer protesters’ demands for transparency and suspicions about massive graft. Borisov says they’re part of a political witch hunt by his bitter foe, President Rumen Radev, who appointed Yanev’s administration. Either way, the accusations are having an impact as public opinion appears to be shifting away from Borisov’s GERB party.

Parallel authority

“We always knew something was wrong, now we see the full size” of the problem, Yanev said in an interview last week with public BNR radio.

He also complained that state agencies allied to the previous administration have been “trying to sabotage” the corruption probes.

Like the state-owned development bank that refused to give information about its loans, or the chiefs of the national security and surveillance agencies who took lengthy leave to dodge answering requests. And in the case of the Sofia hospital where wealthy visitors from Israel, Japan and Oman were given kidney transplants from live donors, the head even challenged his sacking in court, Yanev said.

According to political analyst Evgeniy Daynov this is part of a “parallel authority” established and entrenched by Borisov that was now trying to subvert the efforts of Yanev’s administration.

‘Boiling point’

On top of the scandals within the country, the US Treasury earlier this month blacklisted several prominent Bulgarians, including notorious lawmaker and power broker Delyan Peevski. He was one of six individuals, along with fugitive gambling tycoon Vasil Bojkov, who were added to the US’s sanctions list due to “their extensive roles in corruption”.

The move was described by the Treasury as “the single largest action targeting corruption to date” under the Magnitsky Act, a law under which Washington punishes foreign government



SOFIA: A woman with her child waits on a bus station near campaign posters in Sofia yesterday, ahead of the parliamentary elections. Bulgaria holds snap parliamentary elections Sunday after failing to form a government after the last vote in the spring 2021. —AFP

officials implicated in corruption or human rights abuses. “This is a sign that corruption in Bulgaria has reached a boiling point... that state capture has reached an extent that can no longer be tolerated,” Vessela Cherneva from the European Council on Foreign Relations think-tank told the TV+ television station.

Fourteen years after joining the European

Union, Bulgaria remains the bloc’s most graft-prone member, according to Transparency International’s most recent Corruption Perception Index. The group’s Global Corruption Barometer published last month showed that 48 percent of Bulgarians polled late last year thought that corruption had increased in the previous 12 months. — AFP

Saudi prince sees Blinken in low-key US reception

WASHINGTON: Saudi Arabia’s deputy defense minister met Wednesday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken on a low-key visit to Washington focused partly on Yemen as the United States takes a greater distance with its ally.

Khalid bin Salman—the younger brother of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman —was the highest-ranking visitor from the kingdom to visit Washington since President Joe Biden took office.

The State Department said the prince met senior State Department officials Victoria Nuland and Derek Chollet and that Blinken participated in only part of the meeting—similar to Prince Khalid’s reception a day earlier at the Pentagon.

Blinken spoke with the prince about “efforts to achieve a comprehensive, nationwide ceasefire and transition to a political process in Yemen,” where Huthi rebels have mounted a deadly offensive, the State Department said in a statement.

The group also discussed “the need for economic reform and humanitarian relief for the Lebanese people and other key bilateral issues, including human rights,” a State Department



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

statement said.

The prince also met Tuesday with Jake Sullivan, Biden’s national security adviser, who discussed the “US commitment to help Saudi Arabia defend its territory as it faces attacks from Iranian-aligned groups,” the White House said.

As Crown Prince Mohammed retains the title of defense minister for himself, it would not be a breach of protocol for Prince Khalid, his deputy, to lack full-fledged meetings with cabinet members.

But the lateness of the trip also reflects a hardening of US attitudes toward Saudi Arabia under Biden, who took office vowing to end the carte blanche to the kingdom granted by his predecessor Donald Trump, who visited Riyadh on his first foreign trip. —AFP

Independence supporter voted in as president of New Caledonia

NOUMEA: A New Caledonia independence supporter was voted in as president of the French Pacific territory yesterday, just months ahead of a third and final referendum on a breakaway. Louis Mapou, 62, said it was “an honour and a privilege” to take up the position. It is the first time a supporter of independence has held the role since the “Noumea Accord”, a decolonisation plan signed in 1998 that granted the archipelago autonomy.

That agreement ended a deadly conflict between the mostly pro-independence indigenous Kanak population and the descendants of European settlers. It also allowed for up to three independence votes by 2022 if requested by at least a third of the local legislature, the third of which will be held in December.

The first, in 2018, saw 57 percent vote to remain part of France, but a second in October 2020 saw that share decrease to 53 percent. Pro-independence leaders this year gained a majority in the New Cale-

donian government for the first time since the Noumea Accord.

But five months of political deadlock followed, as the two pro-independence parties on the executive battled over who should take the role of president. French overseas territories minister Sebastien Lecornu congratulated Mapou and invited him to meet soon to discuss, among other things, the “structural difficulties of New Caledonian public finances” — a reference to the territory’s budgetary crisis.

New Caledonia has been under French control for almost 170 years, during which it served as a penal colony for criminals and political prisoners, an Allied military base in World War II and a source of commodities, notably nickel. France, which is more than 16,000 kilometres (10,000 miles) away from the territory, subsidises New Caledonia with around 1.5 billion euros (\$1.75 billion) every year, the equivalent of more than 15 percent of the territory’s gross domestic product. — AFP

International

Haiti police hunt down president's assassins

Four gunmen killed and two more taken into custody

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haitian police were yesterday hunting for more gunmen behind the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse after killing or capturing six “mercenaries”, with the nation under a state of siege. Security forces engaged in a fierce shootout with the suspected assailants in the capital, Port-au-Prince early Wednesday after the overnight attack on the president’s private residence.

Four gunmen were killed by Haitian police, and two more taken into custody, while other members of the hit squad are at large, Police Chief Leon Charles said. Officials have not identified the suspects or said what their motives were for shooting dead Moïse and wounding his wife Martine, who survived. The assassination has pitched the already impoverished and violence-plagued Caribbean nation into further turmoil. Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph declared a national “state of siege” and said he was now in charge. The UN Security Council was due to hold an emergency meeting over the crisis yesterday as Haiti enters a two-week mourning period for the head of state.

Charles, the head of Haiti’s national police, vowed to catch the perpetrators. “We are chasing them so that either in the exchange of fire they will be killed or we will apprehend them,” he said. He added that three police officers who had been taken hostage had been recovered. The

airport was closed in Port-au-Prince, but witnesses said the city was quiet with the streets deserted and no extra security forces on patrol. The attack took place around 1:00 am (0500 GMT) at Moïse’s home. Shell casings could be seen on the street outside as forensics experts combed the scene for evidence. A nearby car was peppered with bullet holes.

Magistrate Carl Henry Destin told the *Nouveliste* newspaper that the president’s body had twelve bullet holes in it, from large caliber rifles and smaller 9mm weapons, to the forehead, chest, hips and abdomen. “The president’s office and bedroom were ransacked. We found him lying on his back, blue pants, a white shirt smeared with blood, his mouth open, his left eye gouged out,” he said. Moïse’s wife was first treated at a local hospital then rushed by air ambulance to the Ryder Trauma Center in Miami. Joseph said she was “out of danger”, later adding that “her situation is stable.”

Their daughter Jomarie was in the home during the attack but hid in a bedroom, Destin, the magistrate, said. He said a maid and another domestic staff member had been tied up by the commandos who allegedly shouted “DEA operation” as they burst in. Joseph said the president was “assassinated at his home by foreigners who spoke English and Spanish.” “This death will not go unpunished,” Joseph said in an address to the



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: Members of the Haitian police and forensics look for evidence outside of the presidential residence Haiti. —AFP

nation. Haiti’s ambassador to Washington, Bocchit Edmond, also said the killers were “professional” mercenaries disguised as US Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

The unpopular Moïse had ruled Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, by decree after legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed. In addition to the political chaos, kidnappings for ransom have surged in recent months. The cap-

ital’s streets were at a standstill in the hours after the assassination, with just a handful of citizens outdoors. “We didn’t expect it. This is another earthquake in Haiti,” said a mother of two who gave her name only as Bernadette, referring to deadly 2010 quake. “I can’t believe it, I can’t believe it,” said 50-year-old Jacquelyn. Haiti will observe two weeks of national mourning from yesterday. —AFP

For war-scarred Iraq, climate crisis the next great threat

BASRA, Iraq: As Iraq bakes in the blistering summer heat, its hardscrabble farmers and livestock herders are battling severe water shortages that are killing their animals, fields and way of life. The oil-rich country, scarred by wars and insurgencies over the past four decades, is also one of the world’s most vulnerable to climate change and struggles with a host of other environmental challenges.

Upstream dams in Turkey and Iran have diminished the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which are also heavily polluted with sewage, waste and agricultural runoff as they flow southeast through Iraq. Drought has hit the Mesopotamian marshes, said to be the site of the biblical Garden of Eden, where water buffalos and their owners once found respite from summer heat above 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit). In southern Iraq, where the two big streams merge into the Shatt al-Arab, the reduced flow has caused saltwater intrusion from the Gulf, degrading the waterway that is shaded by lush palm groves on its banks.

“Everything we plant dies: the palm trees and the alfalfa which normally tolerates salt water,” said Rafiq Taufiq, a farmer in the southern riverside city of Basra. The saline water encroaching ever further upstream has already destroyed thousands of hectares of farmland. This year, the trend has worsened again, said Alaa Al-Badran, an agricultural engineer in Basra province. “For the first time the salt entered as early as April, the start of the farming season,” he said.

‘Risk of displacement’

The problems are exacerbated as decades of military conflict, neglect and corruption have destroyed irrigation systems and water treatment plants. According to the United Nations, only 3.5 percent of Iraq’s farmlands are watered with irrigation systems. Rivers are meanwhile often polluted with viruses and bacteria, oil spills and industrial chemicals. In Basra, where freshwater canals are clogged with garbage, more than 100,000 people were hospitalised in 2018 after drinking water polluted with sewage and toxic waste.

The heat and the water shortages have been a blow to Iraq’s agricultural sector, which accounts for five percent of the economy and 20 percent of jobs, but provides only half of the food needs of Iraq, which relies heavily on cheap imports. In a nation of 40 million people, “seven million Iraqis have already been affected by the drought and the risks of displacement that it entails,” President Barham Saleh wrote recently.

In Chibayish, in Iraq’s marshlands, buffalo herder Ali Jasseb said he now has to travel great distances to keep the animals producing milk, his family’s only income. “Every two or three months, we have to travel to find water,” he told AFP. “Because if the buffaloes drink salty water, they get poisoned, they stop producing milk and sometimes they die.” Raad Hmeid, another buffalo herder, pointed to the sun cracked ground below his feet. “Until 10 days ago this was mud, there was water and even greenery,” he told AFP.

Years of drought

In Iraq’s east, cereal farmer Abderrazzaq Qader, 45, said he had seen no rain “for four years” on his 38 hectare (94 acre) farm in Khanaqin near the Iranian border. The years of drought, he said, had led many local farmers to abandon the land to take jobs as la-



KHANAQIN, Iraq: A farmer digs with a shovel in an agricultural field in his farm in the Khanaqin area, north of Diyala, in eastern Iraq. —AFP

borers. In total, “69 percent of agricultural land is threatened with desertification, meaning it is being rendered unfit for cultivation,” Sarmad Kamel, a state forestry official working on the issue, told AFP. Iraq’s agricultural lands are shrinking further as farmers are selling their unprofitable plots to developers, said economist Ahmed Saddam. “On the one hand, there is more and more demand for housing, while on the other hand cultivating land no longer creates sufficient income,” he said. Rather than continue their back-breaking work for little pay, many farmers near Basra have sold their plots, often for “between 25,000 and 70,000 euros ... huge figures for farmers,” he says. —AFP At this rate, “every year, 10 percent of agricultural land disappears to become residential areas”, he added. —AFP

International

UK lawmakers clear PM of conduct breach over luxury holiday

Johnson has faced multiple watchdog investigations over various issues

LONDON: A British parliamentary standards committee yesterday cleared Prime Minister Boris Johnson of breaching a lawmakers' code of conduct over a luxury Caribbean holiday, but criticised his handling of the matter. After a months-long probe, the House of Commons Committee on Standards concluded Johnson had accurately declared how he paid for the controversial trip with his then fiancée-now wife-Carrie Symonds to the privately owned island of Mustique over Christmas 2019.

However, the cross-party panel of MPs said it was "regrettable" that a full explanation of the opaque arrangements that saw a Conservative Party donor fund their holiday accommodation had not been provided earlier.

It noted the British leader has been previously admonished over other financial interest declarations, and urged all lawmakers "to avoid seeking or accepting gifts or hospitality on the basis of complex and unclear funding arrangements".

"This matter could have been concluded many months ago if more strenuous efforts had been made to dispel the uncertainty," the committee stated in a 47-page report on its probe. "Given that Mr Johnson was twice reprimanded by our predecessor Committee in the last Parliament in the space of four months for 'an over-

casual attitude towards obeying the rules of the House', we would have expected him to have gone the extra mile to ensure there was no uncertainty about the arrangements."

Johnson has faced multiple watchdog investigations over various issues since becoming prime minister in 2019, and has long been dogged by questions about the luxury holiday. In the register of MPs' interests, he claimed the £15,000 (\$21,200) worth of accommodation on the island was provided by David Ross, a businessman and donor to his ruling Tory party, who owns a villa there. However, the committee was asked to investigate following a complaint that Johnson had inaccurately or only partially declared how the trip was paid for, amid reports he stayed in a different property.

The investigating lawmakers, and a separate probe by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards Kathryn Stone, found Johnson did stay in another villa. The report notes they eventually discovered there was "an ad hoc agreement in place" for Ross to subsequently provide the use of his own villa to the island's management company to compensate for the cost of alternative accommodation.

"It is regrettable that a full account and explanation of the



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson attending the weekly session.

funding arrangements for Mr Johnson's holiday accommodation has only come to light as a result of our own enquiries rather than at an earlier stage," the report said. — AFP

Exiled Turkish journalist attacked outside home

BERLIN: Turkish journalist Erk Acarer, one of several reporters critical of Ankara living in exile in Berlin, said yesterday he was attacked and injured outside his home and told to stop writing.

Acarer said in a video posted to Twitter that three armed assailants ambushed him in the courtyard of his building late Wednesday in an account confirmed by police.

A unit that investigates political crimes has taken over the probe. The reporter, a columnist for the left-wing Birgun newspaper, said he was treated in hospital and released.

Acarer, who has lived in Germany since 2017, said he recognised the attackers and that one warned him against continuing to write. Accusing the ruling AKP and the nationalist MHP of involvement in the assault, Acarer vowed to keep working as a journalist.

Turkish authorities have issued multiple arrest warrants against Acarer with regard to his articles and social media messages, including one accusation of "insulting the president" over a news article published in 2020.

Fellow Turkish dissident writer Can Dundar, who fled to the German capital in 2016, slammed the assault on Twitter as a "direct message" from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to show that Ankara "can even attack a journalist in Berlin who is critical of the regime". A Turkish court in December sentenced Dundar, the former editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily, to more than 27 years in jail on espionage and terror charges for one of the reputable paper's stories.

Journalist Mesale Tolu, a German citizen who in 2017 spent several months in jail in Turkey, also spoke out in Acarer's defence. "So many people seek protection in Germany and are still subjected to aggressive violence here," she tweeted. "That's got to stop." Turkish press workers' union DISK Basin-Is tweeted its support for Acarer. "You cannot cover up the truth through such attacks," it said. "We stand by Erk Acarer." — AFP

Sweden, Estonia begin new probe of 1994 ferry wreck

STOCKHOLM: Two ships from Sweden and Estonia yesterday left port to begin preliminary surveys for a new examination of the wreck of ferry MS Estonia which sank in the Baltic Sea in 1994. The ship, which was sailing from Tallinn to Stockholm, went down in the early hours of September 28, 1994.

There were only 137 survivors and 852 people perished in one of the worst maritime disasters of the 20th century. After deciding not to salvage the wreck, Sweden, Estonia and Finland agreed in 1995 to designate it a final resting place and make it illegal to disturb the site.

But the laws banning dives were recently amended in order to allow a re-examination of the wreck after a documentary cast doubt on the findings of an official investigation into the sinking. The new probe is being conducted by accident investigation authorities in Sweden and Estonia. Jonas Backstrand, chair of accident investigations at the Swedish Accident Investigation Authority (SHK), told AFP the two ships involved in the study would leave port on Thursday and converge near the site, which is in international waters, around midnight.

"The actual diving begins tomorrow," he said. After a preliminary examination, a larger survey would be conducted at a later date, which SHK estimates will be completed in the spring of 2022. The original inquiry concluded that the disaster was caused by the bow door of the ship being wrenched open in heavy seas, allowing water to gush into the car deck, and the countries involved have been reluctant to re-examine the issue. Survivors and relatives of those killed have fought for over two decades for a fuller investigation. — AFP

France warns citizens to avoid Spain, Portugal over Delta variant

PARIS: France warned its nationals yesterday against travelling to Spain or Portugal on holiday because of a spike in COVID-19 cases caused by the highly contagious Delta variant. France currently allows people to travel to all other EU members as long as they are fully vaccinated or present a negative PCR or antigen test on their return. But Europe Minister Clement Beaune pointedly advised the French against crossing the Pyrenees mountains to Spain or Portugal. "For those who have not yet booked their holidays, avoid Spain and Portugal as a destination," he told France 2 television. "It's better to remain in France or go to other countries."

Beaune added that France, which fears being hit by a fourth wave of coronavirus infections this summer, was weighing restrictions on travel in Europe over the spread of the highly infectious Delta mutation. "We have to be careful... the pandemic is not over," he said. "We will decide in the coming days, but we could put in place reinforced measures."

Germany already has a ban on incoming travellers from Portugal, where the Delta variant has become dominant. Only its own citizens or residents are allowed in from Portugal, and they must quarantine for two weeks upon arrival. Beaune said France was "closely following the situation in countries where the flare-up (in infections) is very fast," singling out the Spanish region of Catalonia, where Barcelona is situated and "where many French people go to party and for holidays."

The Catalonia region this week reimposed curbs on nightlife to try to tame a surge in infections, especially among unvaccinated young people. Nightclubs there will be closed from this weekend and a negative Covid-19 test or proof of vaccination will be needed to take part in outdoor activities involving more than 500 people.

Last week, nearly half of Portugal's population was again placed under night-time curfews after the number of daily new cases topped the 2,000 mark for the first time since mid-February. — AFP

International

‘Just a dream’: Hope for S Sudan dashed after horror decade

Aspirations shattered by civil war, chronic instability, economic ruin

JUBA: In July 2011, Nunu Diana smiled through tears as South Sudan gained independence, envisioning the future for her homeland: a great nation, peaceful and prosperous, brimming with hope and opportunity.

Ten years later, with those aspirations shattered by civil war, chronic instability and economic ruin, Diana looks back on that youthful optimism with resignation. “I think it was just a dream,” the 33-year-old social worker and mother of four told AFP in Juba.

As celebrations broke out in the capital, and the flag of a newly-independent South Sudan waved high, Diana watched the festivities on television from a refugee camp in Uganda, where her family had fled years of seemingly endless war.

The declaration of independence meant an end to the bloodshed between Sudan’s predominantly Muslim north and its overwhelmingly Christian and animist south—and a chance to finally return home. “July 9 actually made me more independent than South Sudan itself, because I knew I will come to my country,” said Diana. The happiness of that moment, she said, and the hope for her country and its people was like “a new baby was born”.

Lost hope

Growing up, Diana listened in wonder at speeches by venerated leaders fighting for independence from Sudan: “It gave me hope that one day we would be a great nation,” she said. Upon independence, the possibility appeared limitless. South Sudan was rich in oil, blessed with fertile land and abundant water from the White Nile, a land of fantastic natural wealth and potential.

“I envisioned a South Sudan where the health system would be very powerful given that we have our natural resources,” Diana said. “I also envisioned South Sudan where we had the human resources, especially young South Sudanese, who came from different countries to come and build the country in a more peaceful

manner.” Importantly, too, she saw for her children the chance to study and learn, opportunities she was denied growing up in war and misery. Diana returned hopeful and ambitious to South Sudan in early 2012 — but it did not take long for the mirage to fade.

By the end of 2013, simmering tensions over control of the new state between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar exploded into the open, with their respective troops opening fire on each other. South Sudan was at war with itself. On December 20, Diana entered Uganda once more as a refugee, taking her young son with her.

“We had all our hopes for South Sudan, that our children will not go through what we went through,” she said. “Taking my son to Uganda was one of things that made me lose hope in South Sudan.” The war lasted five years, fragmenting along ethnic lines, subjecting South Sudan’s war-weary civilians to terrible atrocities. Nearly 400,000 people died in the conflict while another four million—a third of the entire population—were forced to flee like Diana, some to safer parts of the country and others over borders.

‘Things are getting worse’

Diana returned in 2014, and founded a nonprofit organisation to assist people living with HIV/AIDS four years later. But over this time, she kept her four children in Uganda, where at least their safety and education was assured, she said.

In South Sudan meanwhile, conditions deteriorated. Nearly three-quarters of all school-aged children were not getting an education, according to UNICEF, while one in 10 does not live past the age of five.

“I think things are getting worse,” Diana said. Hunger has reached levels not seen since independence. Some 60 percent of the population—around seven million people—are enduring severe



JUBA: This video grab from an AFPTV shows Nunu Diana, 33, a social worker and mother of four, talking during an interview at her house in Lemon Gaba, near Juba. — AFP

food shortages, according to the UN’s World Food Programme.

More than 100,000 are on the brink of famine. A currency crisis, and runaway inflation, has made day to day living hard even for those in the capital. Diana started planting okra, peanuts and other vegetables in a small garden to try to save costs, and can only able to afford to cook once a day. “What we eat at lunch, will have to take us to supper,” she says. Droughts, floods, and locusts have destroyed harvest seasons and pushed entire communities to the very edge. Man-made horrors, particularly pervasive levels of armed inter-ethnic violence, have meanwhile killed scores and forced many to constantly relocate. — AFP

Ethiopia’s controversial mega-dam

PARIS: Ethiopia’s construction of a massive dam on a tributary of the Nile River, which the UN Security Council meets about yesterday, is raising regional tensions notably with Egypt, which depends on the Nile for 97 percent of its water supply.

Ten countries

At 6,695 kilometres (4,160 miles), the Nile is one of the world’s longest rivers and a crucial supplier of water and hydropower in a largely arid region. Its drainage basin of more than three million square kilometres (1.16 million square miles) covers 10 countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The two main tributaries — the White Nile and the Blue Nile — converge in Khartoum before flowing north through Egypt and into the Mediterranean Sea. Around 84 billion cubic metres of water is estimated to flow along the Nile every year.

Africa’s biggest dam

Ethiopia in 2011 launched construction of the

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, roughly 30 kilometres from the border with Sudan. The \$4.2-billion dam will produce more than 5,000 megawatts of electricity, making it Africa’s biggest hydroelectric dam and doubling Ethiopia’s electricity output. Ethiopia began the first phase of filling the reservoir for the 475-foot (145-metre) dam in mid-2020.

Egyptian thirst

Egypt, an arid nation of nearly 100 million people, depends on the Nile for most of its water needs, including for agriculture. Cairo claims a historic right to the river dating from a 1929 treaty between Egypt and Sudan represented by colonial power Britain, that gave Egypt veto power over construction projects along the river. A 1959 treaty boosted Egypt’s allocation to around 66 percent of the river’s flow, with 22 percent for Sudan.

Ethiopia was not party to those treaties and does not see them as valid. In 2010 Nile basin countries, excluding Egypt and Sudan, signed another deal, the Cooperative Framework Agreement, that allows projects on the river without Cairo’s agreement.

Flashpoint

Ethiopia, one of Africa’s fastest growing economies in recent years, insists the dam will not affect the onward flow of water. But Egypt fears



GUBA: File photo shows a general view of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) under construction, near Guba in Ethiopia. — AFP

its supplies will be reduced during the time it takes to fill the 74-billion-cubic-metre capacity reservoir.

Egypt considers the dam as a threat to its existence and Sudan has warned millions of lives will be at “great risk” if Ethiopia unilaterally fills the dam. A decade of negotiations have failed to result in a deal.

Earlier this week, Egypt and Sudan said Ethiopia had started the second phase of filling the reservoir, an operation as yet not confirmed by Addis Ababa. The Security Council meeting yes-

terday was requested by Tunisia on behalf of Egypt and Sudan.

Tigray tensions

Another source of regional tension is the conflict since November in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region, which has sent some 60,000 refugees fleeing into Sudan, a nation struggling with its own economic woes. The Sudanese and Ethiopian armies have recently remilitarised the fertile Fashaga border region where Ethiopian farmers have long cultivated land claimed by Sudan. — AFP

Malaysian party withdraws support for embattled PM

Japan landslide toll rises to nine

TOKYO: The death toll in a landslide that hit the Japanese resort town of Atami rose to nine yesterday, local officials said, as hundreds of rescuers continued the search for missing residents. "Today, two more people were confirmed dead, with the number of victims now totalling nine," disaster-management spokesman Yuta Hara told AFP. There were still 22 people unaccounted for, said a spokesman for Shizuoka prefecture, where the town is located. Dozens of homes were swept away in the disaster that hit on Saturday morning, when a landslide descended in several violent waves. It came after days of intense downpours in and around Atami, which is about 90 kilometers (55 miles) southwest of Tokyo.

Much of Japan is currently in its rainy season, and many parts of the country are vulnerable to landslides because homes are built on slopes where ground can loosen and collapse suddenly after heavy downpours.

Scientists say climate change is also intensifying Japan's rainy season because a warmer atmosphere holds more water. Confirming the number of people missing after the disaster has been complicated—many families have summer homes in Atami but primarily live elsewhere, while elderly residents may have moved to care homes, local media said.

But with several dozen people still unaccounted for, rescue and recovery efforts involving about 1,700 police officers, firefighters, soldiers and coast-guard members were continuing. They have been using shovels and buckets to remove mud from mangled houses and soil from wrecked vehicles in an effort to find survivors or the missing.

Persistent rain in the area has at times forced rescue teams to pull back and suspend operations for fear of further mudslides. —AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: The biggest party in Malaysia's ruling coalition said yesterday it was withdrawing support for the embattled prime minister and urged him to step down. There was no immediate reaction from Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, but analysts said he was likely to hold on to power in the short term. His administration has been racked by instability for months—it only has a razor-thin majority in parliament, and is beset by infighting between different factions. Pressure has mounted since a state of emergency was declared in January to fight the coronavirus under which parliament was suspended, with critics charging Muhyiddin was using the crisis to cling to power.

After a meeting of its top decision-making body that stretched into the early hours of yesterday, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the biggest party backing the premier, withdrew its support. "UMNO respectfully urges Muhyiddin Yassin to step down to allow a new prime minister to be appointed for a limited period," party president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said in a statement.

The new leader would steer the country through a worsening virus outbreak, before fresh elections can be held, he said. "This is important to allow a new government that is truly stable and holds the mandate of the people to be formed," he added. The UMNO leader listed a string of what he said were missteps by the government, that included botched handling of the pandemic and failing to provide for those affected by on-off lockdowns. Muhyiddin, who leads a party called Bersatu, took power last year following the collapse of a reformist administration.

'Fighting for political life'

UMNO held 38 of the 115 parliamentary seats in Muhyiddin's National Alliance coalition, although allegiances have been changing rapidly in recent months. A party needs 112 to command a majority. But UMNO itself is deeply divided, with some such as Zahid pushing for Muhyiddin to quit while others still support his government. Just hours before Zahid's announcement, Muhyiddin promoted two leading



PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia: In this file photo Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin unveils his new cabinet at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya. —AFP

UMNO figures in his cabinet—including naming one as his deputy—in an attempt to ease tensions.

James Chin, a Malaysia expert from the University of Tasmania, said Muhyiddin had chosen the "option of fighting for his political life and dividing UMNO further". "He's got no choice but to hang on." Universiti Sains Malaysia's professor Sivamurugan Pandian said UMNO's own divisions "gives time for Muhyiddin to make his next move". The leader agreed earlier this week to reconvene parliament on July 26, before the state of emergency ends in August, under growing public anger and following pressure from the king. But the sitting is short—just five days—and analysts believe he can avoid a no-confidence vote. —AFP

Rajapaksa family tightens grip on crisis-hit Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: A brother of Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday became finance minister, tightening the family's grip on power in the South Asian nation as it confronts growing economic troubles. Basil Rajapaksa, 70, took over the finance portfolio from another brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The 72-year-old president has put Mahinda in charge of a newly created but lower level economic policies and planning ministry. Mahinda Rajapaksa, 75, was the country's president for a decade up to 2015, and Basil, who is known as the family's political strategist, managed the economy then.

Basil takes charge now after the economy recorded a coronavirus-inflicted 3.6 percent contraction for 2020, the worst since independence from Britain in 1948. With his entry, the cabinet headed by Gotabaya now has five members of the Rajapaksa family. Eldest brother Chamal, 78, is minister of irrigation while the prime minister's eldest son Namal, 35, is the youth and sports minister. Several Rajapaksa family members hold junior minister positions and other key positions in the administration.

Basil Rajapaksa was described as "Mr Ten Percent" in a 2007 US embassy cable published by the WikiLeaks organisation because of commissions he allegedly took from government contracts. He has denied any wrongdoing and inquiries failed to find



COLOMBO: Newly appointed Sri Lanka's Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa (center) receives blessing from a Buddhist monk after signing documents during his swearing-in ceremony at the Ministry of Finance office in Colombo yesterday. —AFP

any evidence to back charges he syphoned off millions of dollars from state coffers. As a dual US-Sri Lankan citizen, Basil was prohibited from standing in the 2020 election, but Gotabaya removed constitutional provisions which prevented his entry to the legislature. —AFP

International

Kabul sends in commandos as Taliban surround Afghan city

‘What we are witnessing is one of the most complicated stages of the transition’

HERAT, Afghanistan: Plumes of smoke billowed over an Afghan provincial capital yesterday as fighting raged between the Taliban and government forces for a second straight day. The government flew hundreds of commandos into Qala-i-Naw, in northwestern Badghis province, the first regional capital to face an all-out assault by the Taliban since the United States stepped up its troop withdrawal.

With the US pullout “90 percent complete”, according to the Pentagon, the insurgents have launched a blistering campaign to capture new territory, and fears are mounting that Afghan forces will collapse without vital American air support. President Ashraf Ghani said the government had the capacity to handle the situation, but admitted the difficulties ahead. “What we are witnessing is one of the most complicated stages of the transition,” he said in a speech in Kabul. “Legitimacy is ours; God is with us.” In London, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said most British troops had now left Afghanistan as part of a NATO withdrawal in parallel to the US pullout.

“I will not disclose the timetable of our departure, but I can tell the House that most of our personnel have already left,” he said in a statement to MPs yesterday. US President Joe Biden was due to speak on the US pullout later in the day after meeting his national security team. The withdrawals have drastically emboldened the Taliban, and video obtained by AFP showed thick smoke billowing over Qala-i-Naw yesterday, soundtracked by gunfire, as fighting raged. Badghis health official Abdul Latif Rostaee said at least 10 civilians had been taken to hospital since the fighting erupted.

“The Taliban have resumed their attacks from several directions with light and heavy weapons,” Badghis Governor Heshamuddin Shams told AFP yesterday. “Our security forces are bravely fighting them and the enemy is being pushed back. They are fleeing. We will give a hard blow to the enemy.” On Wednesday, the Taliban briefly seized the police headquarters and the local office of the country’s spy agency, but were later pushed back. Qala-i-Naw resident Aziz Tawakoli said Taliban fighters were still roaming the city, however. “You can see them going up and down the streets on their motorcycles,” he said.

Tawakoli said many of the city’s 75,000 people had fled their homes—either to nearby districts or to neighboring Herat province. “The shops are closed and there is hardly anyone on the streets,” he said, adding that helicopters and planes had bombed Taliban targets through the night. Badghis provincial council member Zia Gul Habibi said the Taliban suffered casualties, but also surrounded the city. “All districts are under their control... People are really in fear,” she said. “All shops and government institutions are closed. There are still reports of sporadic fighting.”

‘Women will not be able to work’

Parisila Herawai, a rights activist in the city, expressed concern for the safety of women in particular. “It is an emergency situation for all women, especially activists,” she told AFP. “If the Taliban plan to remain in the city, we will not be able to work.” Local officials said some



QALA -I -NAW, Afghanistan: Afghan security personnel stand guard along a road amid ongoing fight between Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters in the western city of Qala-i- Naw. —AFP

security officers had surrendered to the Taliban, and the insurgents opened the gates of the city jail, freeing hundreds of prisoners. Most had since been recaptured, officials said. Overnight, the defence ministry rushed hundreds of commandos to the city to launch a “large scale operation”, spokesman Fawad Aman said on Twitter. —AFP

Laila Haidari, the mother to Kabul’s drug addicts

KABUL: Her friends and family tell her to pack up and flee Afghanistan without waiting for the possible return of the Taliban, but sitting on a terrace, smoking a cigarette, Laila Haidari is determined to stay. The founder of a rehabilitation center for drug addicts, she says many of her social activist friends have already quit the country. “How can I easily leave all this behind? ‘Laila Haidari, the mother of the addicts’—this is my identity,” she told AFP.

The US has pulled out more than 90 percent of its troops from the country, at a time when peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have stalled and the insurgents are waging a blistering offensive. There are growing fears that Afghan security forces will be unable to hold back the militants without the help of international troops.

“For the Taliban, drug addicts are criminals who are tried and sent to prison, they do not see them as sick,” she said. Poppy cultivation was banned under Taliban rule, but since being kicked out of power by a US-led invasion in 2001, the export of heroin has provided militants with billions of dollars, fuelling their insurgency. With poppies cheap and easy to grow, Afghanistan now provides 90 percent of the world’s production of heroin. Crystal methamphetamine production has also surged, created from the ephedra plant which grows wild in the country. According to anti-narcotics experts, 11 percent of Afghanistan’s 34 million population are drug users, with four to six percent addicted to hard stimulants.

Raised in Iran where her family had taken refuge, Haidari was married at 12 to a mullah, who as a man had instant custody rights over their three children when she divorced him a decade later. On her return to Afghanistan, she discovered her brother, Hakim,



KABUL: This picture shows Laila Haidari, the founder of a rehabilitation center for drug addicts, poses for a picture during an interview with AFP at her cafe where she employs recovered addicts, in Kabul. —AFP

had become addicted to heroin and was living with other homeless users under a squalid Kabul bridge, next to a filthy stream. Like “something out of a Hollywood movie”, she began rescuing the “living dead” and attempting to wean them off drugs using the Narcotics Anonymous program, at a live-in centre that she launched. “When I started, it was estimated that there were around 5,000 (addicts) in the country. The youngest were 15 to 18 years old,” she said.

“Today the number is only increasing. And above all, 10 to 12 year-old children are falling victim,” she said. Affectionately named “the Mother Centre” by her first guests, she has helped hundreds kick their habits and connected them with support groups for ongoing help. Sayed Hossein was one of those pulled from under the bridge and given a fresh start by Haidari. “I started using drugs when I was in Iran, I arrived here at 20 without a family,” said Hossein, who called Haidari “my mother”. The 33-year-old now works at a restaurant-temporarily shut because of the pandemic—Haidari established to offer employment to recovered addicts. —AFP

Vaccines rushed to Sydney as outbreak spirals

SYDNEY: Australia’s prime minister announced 300,000 coronavirus vaccine doses will be rushed to Sydney yesterday, as the country’s largest city struggled to bring a Delta outbreak under control. As a citywide lockdown entered its third week, there were signs of the outbreak spiralling, with a record increase of 38 new cases in the last 24 hours. Scott Morrison said the situation in the city was “very serious” and urged five million Sydneysiders not to give in to fatigue and obey stay-at-home orders. The outbreak has nearly reached 400 cases, and is spreading quickly across the largely unvaccinated city, putting Australia’s COVID-zero status at serious risk.

“We have come so far over these last 18 months, and now’s the time to keep pressing forward. Now is not the time to give in to that frustration,” Morrison told reporters in Sydney. Police announced they would be bolstering patrols in the city’s southwest to enforce lockdown rules as case numbers rise. Despite several outbreaks, Australia has managed to avoid the worst of the pandemic through snap lockdowns, intensive contact tracing, and effectively shutting its borders to the rest of the world. After a top New South Wales health official suggested it might be impossible to bring the outbreak under control, regional leaders threatened to cut Sydney off from the rest of the country. The premier of Western Australia vowed to indefinitely extend a ban on travellers from the city and surrounding New South Wales “if they don’t get it under control”. —AFP

International

Mary Akrami, fighting to keep Afghan women's shelters open

International community encouraged us, now they ignore us

KABUL: Gathered around a tandoori oven in the kitchen of a small Kabul restaurant, a group of Afghan women prepare naan for their lunchtime customers. They are all survivors of domestic violence, and many will never be able to return to their families.

Mary Akrami, the founder of the shelter where they sleep and the restaurant where they work, fears these lifelines will be lost with the departure of foreign forces, who had pledged to restore women's rights in war-weary Afghanistan.

"The international community encouraged us, supported us, funded us... now they ignore us," said the 45-year-old, who is also director of the Afghan Women's Network, an alliance of NGOs. US and international troops have all but gone from Afghanistan, as the Taliban seizes control of large swathes of the country, leaving Afghan forces in crisis.

Akrami fears for her safety and that of the women at her shelters. One site has already closed because of clashes in the provinces. "A woman who is running away from home has no place to go," she said, adding that many girls and women end up on the streets. "We received cases of women tortured, sexually abused, physically abused," she added.

Having spent the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule in Pakistan, Akrami returned after the Islamist group was toppled by the US-led invasion. With the help of some European NGOs in 2002, she opened Afghanistan's first shelter for women fleeing family violence.

More than 20,000 women have passed

through Akrami's network of more than two dozen shelters since then. In Afghanistan, a country of 35 million, the vast majority of women are estimated by the United Nations to have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence, and the culture remains unforgiving to those who part with their husbands. In some parts of the country, women are still given as brides to settle debts or feuds, and subjected to so-called "honour killings".

'I can be independent'

Since the ousting of the Taliban, which denied girls and women education and employment, there have been some hard-won gains — women are now judges, police officials and legislators, and schools have reopened.

The government passed a law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, although the provisions are unreliably enforced. At the shelter in Kabul, some women study for exams or go to work, returning at night to sleep. Others raise their children within its walls. For those who have no opportunity to leave, Akrami has opened the restaurant. Hassanat, who was married off as a peace offering, fled her husband when he strangled her, leaving her permanently hoarse.

The 26-year-old found her way to the capital's shelter and has since mastered cooking. "I learned to read and I can make kebabs for 100 people. I can be independent," said Hassanat, who used a pseudonym to protect her identity. At the restaurant, male customers are only welcome if escorted by women, flipping the conservative tradition where women have to be



KABUL: In this picture taken in Kabul shows Akrami, founder of a shelter and a restaurant where women who survived domestic violence live and work, stands at the kitchen while women cook in Kabul. — AFP

chaperoned to leave the house.

'Betrayed'

After pouring her life into the shelters, Akrami said she felt "betrayed" to discover Washington had failed to make any demands over women's rights in the landmark withdrawal deal with the Taliban last year. At peace talks between the warring Afghan government and Taliban, the militants have made only vague commitments to protecting women's rights in line with Islamic

values. Meanwhile, high-profile women including media workers, judges and activists are among more than 180 people who have been assassinated since September — killings the US and Afghan government blame on the militants.

While some activists have been able to flee the country, most ordinary women face no option but to watch the chaos unfold. "Being a woman in Afghanistan is not easy," Akrami said. "I'm tired of fighting continuously and I'm on the verge of losing everything," she said. — AFP

Indonesians ignore warnings in rush to buy drug for COVID

JAKARTA: Indonesians have ignored health warnings to stock up on a "miracle cure" for COVID-19 backed by leading politicians and social media influencers, as an out-of-control virus surge sweeps the country. Authorities are reporting hundreds of deaths every day as the world's fourth-most populous nation struggles with its worst outbreak since the pandemic began.

Pharmacies across the country are running out of ivermectin, an oral treatment normally used to treat lice and other parasitic infections, thanks in part to viral social media posts touting its potential as a coronavirus treatment. "Those who come bring a screenshot showing that ivermectin... could cure Covid," said Yoyon, head of a pharmaceutical sales group at a market in the capital Jakarta, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

He said the shortage had pushed the price of the drug up from around 175,000 to 300,000 rupiah (\$12-\$21) a bottle. "We are out of supplies at the moment after many people came to buy it," he added. Enthusiastic praise from popular online personalities are helping drive demand. "Ivermectin is one of the safe and effective keys to ending the pandemic from various doctors, with lots of sci-

entific evidence," Reza Gunawan, a self-described "holistic health practitioner", wrote to his 350,000 Twitter followers.

Iman Sjafai, the cofounder of popular Indonesian media outlet Asumsi, used the same platform to say five of his acquaintances had recovered from COVID after taking the drug. "Maybe placebo. Maybe. But it might be true too," he added.

Sylvie Bernadi, who lives on Jakarta's outskirts, said she purchased ivermectin for infected relatives after seeing WhatsApp messages and social media posts promoting the drug. "Many people are saying that it can cure COVID-19 so I bought it," the 66-year-old said, while conceding some had raised concerns about unspecified side effects. Fuelled by anti-vaccine and pandemic conspiracy theories online, there has been a surge in demand for the drug from Brazil to South Africa to Lebanon. But manufacturer Merck has said there was "no scientific basis for a potential therapeutic effect against COVID-19" and warned of possible safety issues if the drug is administered inappropriately.

Scientists, the World Health Organization, and several drug regulators — including Indonesia's own — have also stressed there is a lack of credible evidence to show it works against COVID-19. - 'I'm not a doctor, but...' -

That has not stopped Indonesian tycoon and government minister Erick Thohir from praising ivermectin and urging domestic production to fight the current outbreak. A former owner of Italian football champions Inter Milan and a shareholder of the Philadelphia 76ers basketball franchise, Thohir recently suggested that state-owned drug giant Indofarma could produce up to four mil-



SURABAYA, EAST JAVA: Health workers transfer a COVID-19 patient at Husada Utama hospital in Surabaya, East Java, yesterday. — AFP

lion ivermectin tablets a month. While he said more testing is required to ascertain its effectiveness against COVID-19 and urged users to get a prescription before taking the tablets, others have shown less caution. "I'm not a doctor, but in the midst of desperation and difficulty, I think anything is worth a try," said Susi Pudjiastuti, a popular former fisheries minister, who has 2.5 million followers on Twitter. —AFP

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LIFESTYLE

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Buckle up: Palestinian twins turn Boeing 707 into restaurant

See Pages 20-21



Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi, 60, pose from the cockpit of a Boeing 707 aircraft being converted into a restaurant they are calling 'The Palestinian-Jordanian Airline Restaurant and Coffee Shop Al-Sairafi Nablus'. — AFP

Buckle up: Palestinian twins turn Boeing 707 into restaurant



This picture shows a view of the fuselage of a Boeing 707 aircraft being converted by Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi into a restaurant they are calling “The Palestinian-Jordanian Airline Restaurant and Coffee Shop Al-Sairafi Nablus”, in the city of Nablus in the occupied West Bank. — AFP photos

Palestinian workers in the Zionist occupied West Bank are putting the final touches on a decommissioned Boeing 707 aircraft to ready it for a new kind of takeoff: as a restaurant. Its enterprising owners, 60-year-old twin brothers Ata and Khamis Al-Sairafi, expect to welcome their first customers within weeks at the site in an isolated mountain area near Nablus.

Inside the old jet’s cabin, the seats have been stripped out and the window panes removed. Tables will soon be fitted in the fuselage, which has been painted white with laminate wooden floors. The brothers plan to call their aviation-themed eatery—which is decorated with Palestinian and Jordanian flags—“the Palestinian-Jordanian Airline Restaurant and Coffee

Shop Al-Sairafi Nablus”. “We will start by providing hookahs,” said Khamis, for people who enjoy smoking tobacco through water pipes, before later expanding the business into an event space. “The cockpit will be a suitable place for any newly-

weds who come to us for their wedding ceremony.”

The Sairafi brothers—identical twins who were sporting matching yellow shirts, khaki shorts and red sneakers during AFP’s visit—are known for their interest in unusual initiatives. Ata said he and his brother were working as scrap metal traders two decades ago when he learned about a 1980s-era passenger plane sitting near Kiryat Shmona in northern Zionist entity. They purchased it in 1999, even though there was—and still is—no airport in the Palestinian Territories, usually forcing residents who want to fly abroad to travel via Jordan.



A man paints the (incomplete) flag of Jordan on the tail end of a Boeing 707 aircraft.

Lifestyle | Feature



Photo shows Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi.



Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi, 60, "high-five" each other inside a Boeing 707 aircraft.

'Strange idea'

The brothers negotiated with the Zionist owner, who sold it to them for \$100,000, the engines removed. "After we bought it, we had to move it from Zionist entity ... which is a complicated process," Ata said. The twins paid a Zionist company \$20,000 to move the jet to the West Bank, which Zionist entity has occupied since it conquered the territory along with east Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967. The brothers said the 13-hour transport was coordinated between the Zionist entity and Palestinian sides. Key roads were closed so the plane could be rolled on a giant tow truck, its wings temporarily separated, to its current location.

"Loads of media outlets covered it, and the Zionist police intervened to organize the transfer," recalled Khamis. "We received the plane, which dates back to the 1980s, without any equipment that would enable it to fly," Ata said. The twins said they hoped to run a restaurant out of the plane since around 2000, but the launch faltered with the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

"The events in the Palestinian territories at that time hindered the completion of our project, and we thought of reviving it two years ago, but the spread of the coronavirus also prevented us from doing so," Khamis said. As they returned to their long-delayed passion project, the twins purchased a rickety retired

gangway from Ben Gurion Airport, its name still visible in Hebrew and English characters.

The project faces one more, environmental, challenge. The plane sits on property abutting a waste sorting station which the twins are trying to convince local authorities to move else-



Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi, 60, climb into openings in the fuselage of a Boeing 707 aircraft.

where. Ultimately, they said they are hopeful their project will finally take wing after being grounded for nearly a quarter-century. "Having an aircraft in the Palestinian territories," said Khamis, "is such a strange idea that I'm sure the project will be a success." — AFP



A technician drills holes in the cockpit of Boeing 707 aircraft being converted by Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi into a restaurant.



A youth stands holding out his arms through the empty canopy of a Boeing 707 aircraft.

A view of the fuselage of a Boeing 707 aircraft being converted by Palestinian twin brothers Atallah and Khamis Al-Sairafi into a restaurant they are calling "The Palestinian-Jordanian Airline Restaurant and Coffee Shop Al-Sairafi Nablus".

The world's tallest sand sculpture is under construction in Blokhuis, Denmark. — AFP photos

WORLD'S TALLEST SANDCASTLE BUILT IN DENMARK

In the small seaside town of Blokhuis in Denmark, the world's tallest sandcastle has been completed, weighing nearly 5,000 tons and towering over 20 meters high, its designers said Wednesday. Standing 21.16 meters high (69.4 feet), more than three meters taller than a castle built in Germany in 2019, which previously held the title with its 17.66 meters, according to Guinness World

Records. A total of 4,860 tons of sand make up the intricately decorated structure which is reminiscent of a pyramid.

Its creator, Dutchman Wilfred Stijger, who was assisted by 30 of the world's best sand sculptors, wanted the castle to represent the power of the novel coronavirus over the world since the beginning of the pandemic. Atop the sandcastle is a model of the virus wear-

ing a crown. "It's ruling our lives everywhere," Stijger said. "It tells you what to do.... It tells you to stay away from your family and not go to nice places. Don't do activities, stay home," he added.

To make it more cohesive, the sand contains approximately 10 percent clay and a layer of glue was applied after it was completed so that it could stand up to the chilly

and windy conditions of the autumn and winter. Inhabitants of Blokhuis have also been delighted to see local features incorporated into the sandcastle, such as windsurfing and kite-surfing, beach houses, fish and light-houses. The castle is expected to stand until the heavy frost sets in, meaning it should last until February or March. — AFP



People visit the world's tallest sand sculpture.



The world's tallest sand sculpture is seen in the background under construction in Blokhuis, Denmark.



A detail of the world's tallest sand sculpture is seen.



A member of the Botswana cabinet holds a 1,174-carat diamond in Gaborone, Botswana, that the Lucara Botswana found during an eleven day production run in June 2021.

BOTSWANA UNEARTHS SECOND HUGE DIAMOND IN WEEKS

An exceptionally large and white 1,174-carat diamond stone has been unearthed in Botswana, a mining company announced Wednesday, trumping another huge precious stone found in the country last month. The latest find, which fills the palm of a man's hand, was discovered on June 12 by Canadian Diamond firm, Lucara and presented to the country's cabinet in the capital Gaborone on Wednesday. "This is history in the making, for us and Botswana as well," said the company's managing director Naseem Lahri, adding that the diamond sits in third position among the world's largest gemstones.

In terms of size of large stones, "it actually sits as number three in the hierarchy," Lahri told AFP. Last month Botswanan dia-

mond firm Debswana said it had recovered the "third largest" stone in the world at 1,098-carats on June 1. The latest find solidifies Botswana as a leader on the world stage of the largest stones, accounting for six in the top ten list. The biggest diamond ever discovered in the world was the 3,106-carat Cullinan, found in South Africa in 1905. Parts of that diamond adorn the British crown jewels. President Mokgweetsi Masisi on Wednesday welcomed the "riveting moment" and the growing frequency of diamond discoveries in the country-promising that the southern African country will have a long-lasting legacy. Botswana is Africa's leading diamond producer. — AFP



Lucara Botswana managing director Naseem Lahri (left) shows Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi (second right) and First Lady Neo J Masisi (right) a 1,1174-carat diamond in Gaborone, Botswana. — AFP photos

Kenya concern over UK elephant 'rewilding' project

Kenya voiced concern Wednesday over plans by an animal charity to fly a herd of elephants from a British zoo to Kenya for "rewilding". The Aspinall Foundation said it plans to take the elephants on a Boeing 747, dubbed the Dumbo jet, from southern England to their new home 7,000 kilometers (4,500 miles) away. The charity said it would work with anti-poaching teams to help ensure the long-term survival of the 13 animals-including three babies-once they reach one of two sites under consideration in southern Kenya.

But Kenya's Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife said it "noted with concern" the reports in the British media about what the charity has

described as the first rewilding project of its kind. "The ministry wants to state that neither them nor the Kenya Wildlife Service have been contacted or consulted on this matter," the ministry said. "Relocation and rehabilitation of an animal from a zoo is not easy and is an expensive affair." A ministry official told AFP that the Kenyan authorities would be guided by specific regulations drawn up by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on the movement of animals.

The IUCN warned in March that poaching and habitat destruction, particularly due to land conversion for agriculture, was devastating elephant numbers across Africa. The population of African savanna elephants shrank by at least 60 percent in the last half century, prompting their reclassification as "endangered" in the latest update to the IUCN's "Red List" of threatened species. The Aspinall Foundation said the operation was planned for next year and that it would be the first time a breeding herd of elephants will have been rewilded. — AFP



In this file photo a general view of elephants grazing at Kimana Sanctuary in Kimana, Kenya. — AFP

Chinese rogue elephant herd's breakaway male sent home

A lone elephant who broke away from a herd marching through southern China has been captured and returned to a nature reserve, officials said, in the latest twist for a journey that has caused chaos but captivated Chinese social media. He was part of a herd of Asian elephants that has spent months rambling across the province, travelling over 500 kilometers (310 miles) from the nature reserve in one of the longest ever animal migrations of its kind in China.

Since setting off in spring last year they have pilfered shops and trampled crops worth over \$1 million, and thousands of residents have been evacuated from their path. The

solo 10-year old strayed from the group a month ago. On Wednesday the animal, weighing over 1.8 tons, was tranquilized and taken to the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, the wildlife department in Yunnan province said. It did not specify how he was transported some 530 kilometers back to the reserve.

After being released in the reserve, state broadcaster CCTV showed him foraging for food among lush green foliage before taking a dip in a river. Male elephants usually leave their mother's herd to live alone or in small groups with other males as they reach sexual maturity. Scientists are still baffled by what prompted the elephants to leave their home at the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, on the border with Laos.

But their mammoth trek has helped highlight habitat loss and conservation challenges in one of the few places in the world where wild elephant numbers are on the rise. China's wild elephant numbers have doubled to over 300 in the past three decades-but their habitats have shrunk by nearly two-thirds over the same period. — AFP

FRIDA KAHLO EXHIBITION BRINGS HER WORK ALIVE

With larger-than-life projections of her work, music and journal extracts, a new exhibition aims to bring Mexican surrealist Frida Kahlo's paintings to life to mark the 114th anniversary of her birth. "Frida. The Immersive Experience" presents 26 of the most emblematic works of the late painter, known for her striking self-portraits often brimming with pain and isolation. The idea is "to get to know Frida's paintings, which have been around the world, but with a little bit of familiarity and intimacy," the artist's great-grandniece Mara de Anda said.



"I believe that Frida was very avant-garde and modern so this fits perfectly. She was a woman ahead of her time," she told AFP at the launch on Tuesday. Visitors immerse themselves for about 35 minutes in the heart and mind of one of the 20th century's most celebrated artists, who died in 1954 aged 47. Works such as "The Two Fridas" and "The Broken Column" converge in a digital art experience fusing video, music and interactive elements inside the Fronton Mexico, an art deco building in the Mexican capital. "This experience makes it easier for everyone to achieve that connection, and also to understand it because Frida's paintings are special. They are not easy to understand," said 39-year-old Diana Olguin from Colombia.

People attend the inauguration of the exhibition "Frida, the immersive experience" in Mexico City . — AFP photos



'A different way'

The exhibition touches on the difficult times in the life of the painter, who contracted polio when she was a young child, a disease that stunted the growth of her right leg. When she was 18, a metal tube pierced Kahlo's abdomen during a bus crash, subjecting her to painful operations and long periods of bed rest throughout her life. The artist, who twice mar-

ried muralist Diego Rivera and was a close friend of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, turned to painting while convalescing, using a mirror for self-portraits.

Her works are accompanied at the exhibition by a digital app and an interactive room, as well as poems and pieces of original Mexican music. "For many people who don't like going to an exhibition where everything is more static, this allows you to know it in a different way," said Frida Hentschel Romeo, another of the painter's great-grandnieces. "So I think the new generations are going to love it," she said. All visitors must wear masks, use antibacterial gel and have their temperature taken at the entrance due to the coronavirus, which has taken a devastating toll on Mexico.

"For a year and a half, we couldn't enjoy this due to the pandemic, and now it's an incredible opportunity to come and distract yourself for a while and see something new," said 21-year-old university student Emiliano Diaz. "The new generations are going to enjoy it because they will see art in a different way," he added. —AFP



This is women’s moment in film, Jodie Foster tells Cannes

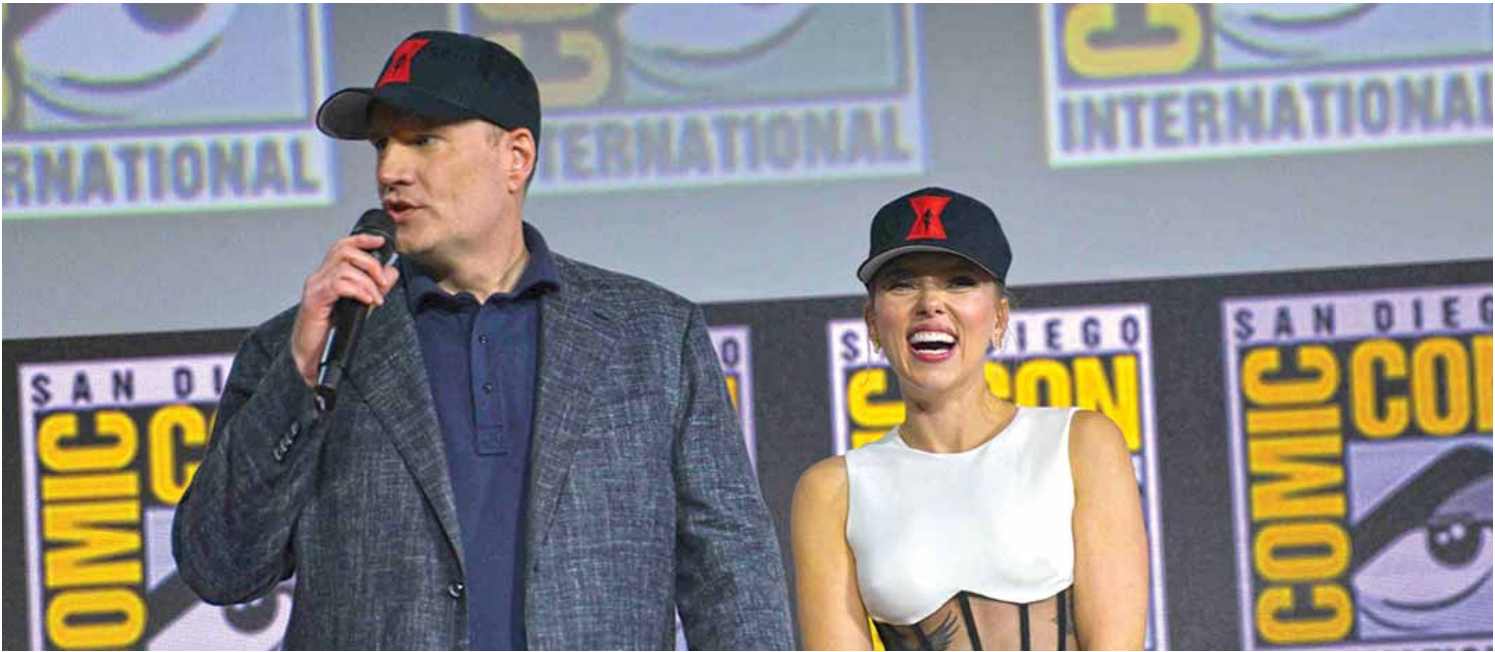
There has never been a better time for women to enter the film industry, American superstar Jodie Foster told the Cannes festival on Wednesday, saying movies had too long been starved of female perspectives. Addressing a large crowd of mostly young festival-goers in near-fluent French, she encouraged budding women filmmakers to seek their own truth and not try to please others. “This is the moment for women to enter the industry,” Foster said. Although male domination of the industry had “not changed completely,” she said, “there is now an awareness that it’s been too long that we haven’t heard stories told by women... This is the moment.”



US actress and director Jodie Foster poses on stage 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, southern France. — AFP

Foster received a lifetime achievement on Tuesday for her work that has included star turns in “Taxi Driver” and “Bugsy Malone” when she was a child, through to her Oscar-winning role in “Silence of the Lambs”. She has also directed several films, including “Money Monster” with George Clooney and Julia Roberts. “I know it’s a bit cliché to say ‘tell your own stories,’” Foster said. “But what I mean is: ask yourself questions about the truthfulness of things and whether they resonate within you, instead of pleasing others, be it the public or producers.”

Foster said many young actors entered the movie business saying “I want to be looked at in my pretty clothes” which she said was the “worst reason” for taking up the profession. “For some people it can take years, unfortunately, to cast off that armor that separates you from authenticity on the screen,” she said. Talking about her own experience, Foster said Pedro Almodovar—who presented her with her honorary Palme the day before—was “the first feminist director for me”. —AFP



In this file photo President of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige (left) and US actress Scarlett Johansson present the movie “Black Widow” on stage during the Marvel panel in Hall H of the Convention Center during Comic Con in San Diego, California. — AFP

Marvel at crossroads with ‘Black Widow’ big-screen return

Two years ago, after a blistering and unprecedented streak of billion-dollar-grossing movies, the Marvel superhero films took what was meant to be a short hiatus. When that big-screen break-involuntarily extended by the COVID-19 pandemic—finally ends today with the release of “Black Widow,” Hollywood will be watching closely to see if Marvel still has its mojo. “I would say it is in flux, at a pretty crucial turning point,” said Kendall Phillips, a Syracuse University professor who specializes in pop culture. “The key question is—can Marvel do it again?”

“Black Widow”—which finally gives Scarlett Johansson’s Russian assassin-turned-superhero Natasha Romanoff her own spin-off—has been sitting “in the can” since May 2020, as parent company Disney waited for theaters to reopen. It is now set to be the first of a jam-packed raft of new Marvel films, with 12 splashy good-versus-evil extravaganzas due in theaters by the end of 2023 — not to mention various TV series that have premiered during the pandemic or are coming soon.

Even for a franchise that previously churned out three blockbusters per year—including “Avengers: Endgame,” which briefly passed “Avatar” as the top-grossing film in history—that is a frantic pace. And the films’ comeback is being launched at a time when the appetite of moviegoers for piling into theaters remains uncertain. Despite the recent successes of “A Quiet Place 2” and “F9,” only 80 percent of North American theaters are open, box office takes are far short of pre-pandemic times, and fears of COVID-19 variants are

growing. “‘Black Widow,’ I’m certain, would make 10 to 15 percent more this weekend if all theaters were open and there was no such thing as COVID,” said David A. Gross, who runs movie consultancy Franchise Entertainment Research. “But that’s the world we live in.”

The overall Marvel relaunch is also complicated by the loss of several stars. Robert Downey Jr. and Chris Evans have stepped back from key roles as Iron Man and Captain America, while “Black Panther” actor Chadwick Boseman died of cancer last year. His role will not be recast for next year’s sequel, which will tread a difficult line between honoring Boseman’s legacy and cashing in on the first film’s nearly \$1.4 billion worldwide gross. In their absence, upcoming films will feature lesser-known comic book characters such as Shang-Chi, and the “Eternals.” Minor

characters have been promoted to lead roles in recent Marvel TV series on the Disney+ streaming platform such as “WandaVision” and “Loki.” “In the very, very long term, I think there’s an issue of diluting the value of theatrical titles,” said Gross. But Gross added: “I would never bet against Marvel. They’ve basically shattered every expectation and every ceiling.”

‘Marvel is back’

According to Phillips, part of Marvel’s success stems from creating culturally important “event” movies that draw in “the everyday average moviegoer, who never read Marvel Comics, didn’t watch the cartoons, doesn’t play the video games.” “The tricky bit is, they’re having to try to keep those people on board, draw in a new generation, all while not having those [famous] characters,” he said. Picking up the baton from 2019’s groundbreaking female-led “Captain Marvel,” “Black Widow” will be the series’ first film directed entirely by a woman, with two female leads in Johansson and Florence Pugh.

Analysts are eagerly waiting to see if it will be the first film since the pandemic hit to pass \$100 million on its opening weekend. Those numbers are far short of the \$350 million opening of “Avengers: Endgame,” and may be dampened by the film’s simultaneous release on Disney+ streaming. But if it can even beat the recent \$70 million box office of “F9,” it will send a message that “Marvel is back, they’re in the movie theater, and that’s where fans want to see Marvel first,” said Comscore box office analyst Paul Dergarabedian. “Every decision we make along the way, is for ‘what will it be like on that opening night in a big theater?’” said Marvel film chief Kevin Feige, at a launch event in Los Angeles last week. “And now we finally get to see it... Marvel movies are made for the theaters.” — AFP





A national flag and portraits of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad are pictured in the village of Maalula north of the Syrian capital Damascus. — AFP photos



A statue of the Virgin Mary overlooks the village of Maalula, north of the Syrian capital Damascus.

Syria village with language of Jesus prepares for returning pilgrims

In the ancient Syrian village of Maalula, whose residents still speak the language of Jesus, volunteers rake stones and scrub graffiti in preparation for the return of Christian pilgrims after years of war. Nestled among towering cliffs in the mountains north of Damascus, Maalula is one of the world's oldest Christian settlements. Before Syria's war, it drew in thousands of visitors a year—including former US president Jimmy Carter and late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez—to visit its churches and monasteries and to hear its inhabitants speak Aramaic.

But from 2011 onwards, the devastating conflict largely kept pilgrims away from the village, whose name in Aramaic means "entrance", after the narrow passage between its limestone cliffs. Legend has it that in the

first century Saint Taqla, a young woman, escaped an arranged marriage to a pagan and ran away from her home to lead a Christian life. With Roman soldiers in hot pursuit, she reached a dead end in the mountains, but when she prayed, a passage opened in the rock face, leading into a cave.

She lived there for the rest of her life, curing the sick with water from a sacred spring, near the site of today's Saint Taqla Greek Orthodox convent. In the narrow pass at the foot of the canyon, men have been working in the summer heat to prepare the site for visitors in time for Assumption on August 15. Volunteers heaved a fallen boulder from the pathway then shoveled limestone debris into a wheelbarrow to clear the way for a new stone path. Yahya, 29, dabbed a wet cloth on the rock to rid it of

graffiti left during the conflict. "We'll make it even more beautiful than it used to be," he said, sweat pouring from his forehead. Nearby, on the side of the winding 500-metre canyon leading to the Saint Taqla convent, the Arabic word "message" and a heart were still visible, both in red paint.

Residents slow to return

Rebels and jihadists linked to Al-Qaeda seized Maalula in the autumn of 2013, forcing most of its Christian inhabitants to flee. Syria's then-Al-Qaeda affiliate kidnapped 13 nuns from the Saint Taqla convent. They were released in a prisoner swap with the Damascus authorities in March 2014. Regime forces recaptured Maalula the following month. But years on, many of the town's 6,000

mainly Greek Catholic inhabitants have yet to return, and so have out-of-town visitors.

Village mayor Ibrahim Al-Shaer said the canyon was once a key attraction. But during the conflict, "it was left to the mercy of the elements, littered with remnants of war, and its walls defaced by graffiti," he said. Yussef Ibrahim, the deputy governor of Damascus governorate, grew up in Maalula. He remembered the days when diplomats and foreign dignitaries were driven in to admire the ancient village. "People used to come to the Maalula grotto to pray and seek a cure" to their ailments, he said. "I'll be much happier when I see them all return." — AFP



A nun lights candles inside the monastery of Mar Taqla in the village of Maalula.




This picture shows cliffs above the village of Maalula north of the Syrian capital Damascus.



A nun is pictured inside the monastery of Mar Taqla in the village of Maalula.

Word Search




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| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Z | G | N | S | T | U | D | E | N | T | L | V | Q |
| P | D | O | S | A | Y | U | A | J | E | I | G | U |
| Y | E | T | E | L | X | A | O | Y | G | L | U | E |
| Q | J | E | C | L | U | B | O | O | K | S | E | F |
| W | U | B | E | E | J | N | S | T | G | H | R | R |
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| R | H | I | L | G | R | G | N | I | D | A | E | R |
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BOOKS
DESK
ERASER
GLUE
LUNCHBOX
MATH

NOTEBOOK
PAPER
PENCIL
PLAYGROUND
READING
RECESS

RULER
STUDENT
TEACHER
WRITING

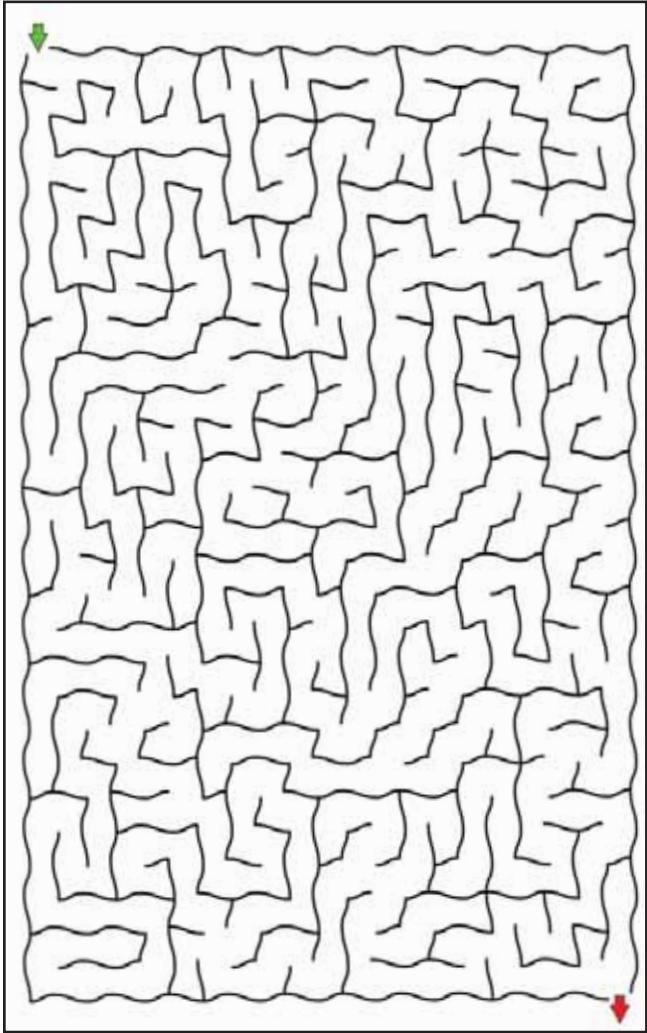


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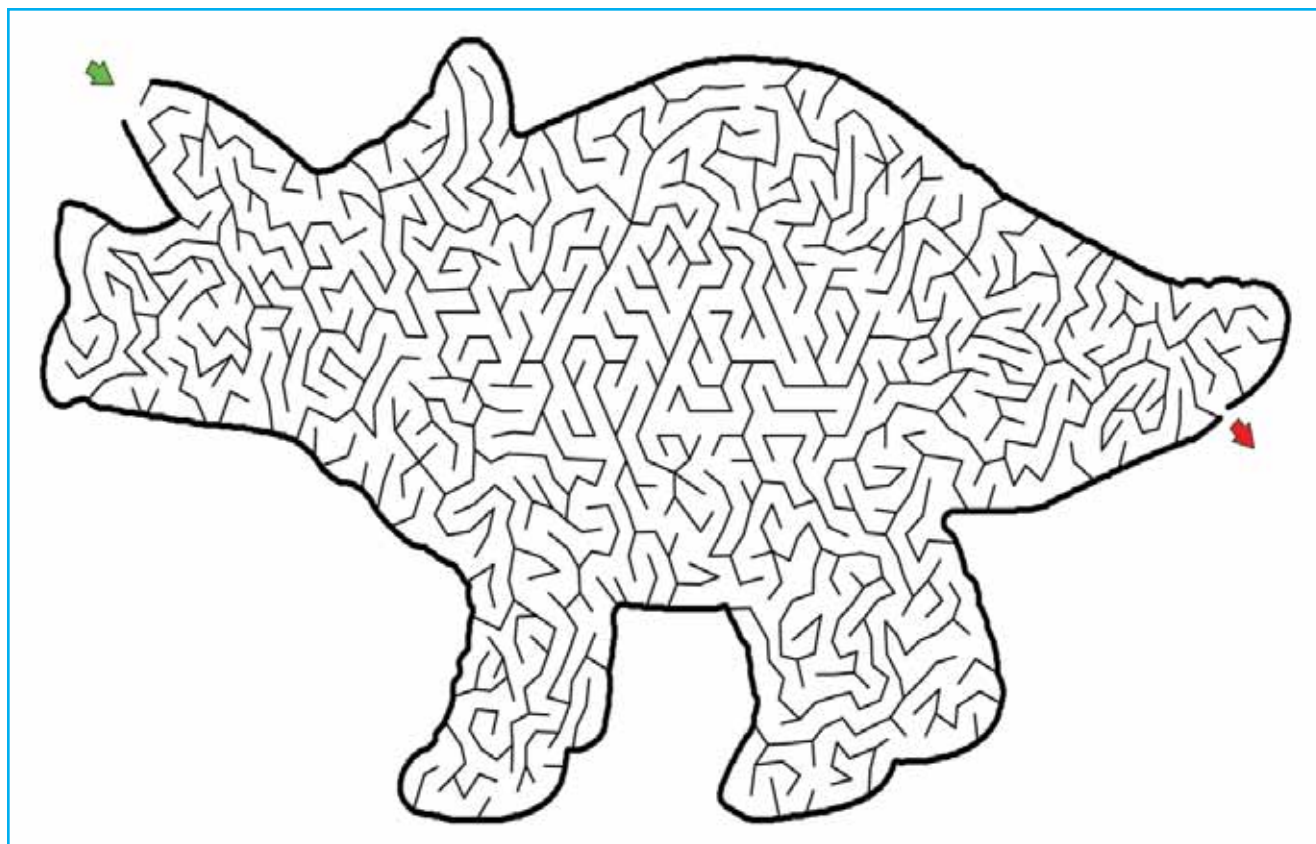
Color It




Kids Mazes



Find the way



Word Scramble



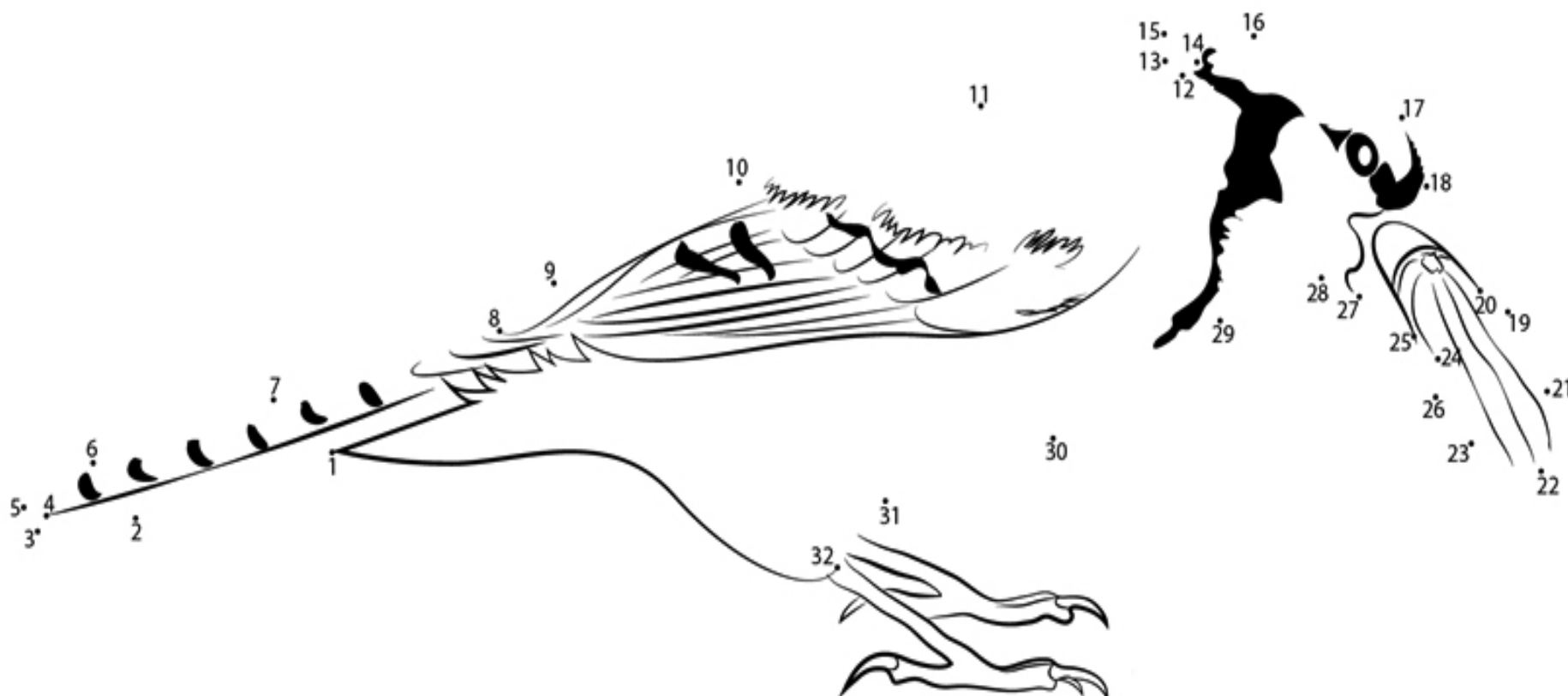
Beauty And The Beast

Word Scramble

Belle is trying to help the servants to clean up the Beast's castle which is in a state of disarray. Can you sort out the words and help her out? Watch out! Some of the words are actually two.

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| UTERVENDA _____ | AICMG _____ |
| EUIMLRE _____ | OREWT _____ |
| ORSE _____ | MRIGRAEA _____ |
| RRYAIBL _____ | ELLEB _____ |
| RSGOOTHCW _____ | IMRROR _____ |
| RECAIUM _____ | OSIRENPR _____ |
| TGASNO _____ | SOLVEW _____ |
| OULEF _____ | VOEL _____ |
| BATES _____ | CETSLA _____ |
| DNIERN _____ | ILAGLVE _____ |
| SOWDO _____ | NWWSTEIG _____ |
| BERLTAL _____ | CPHI _____ |

Join the dots

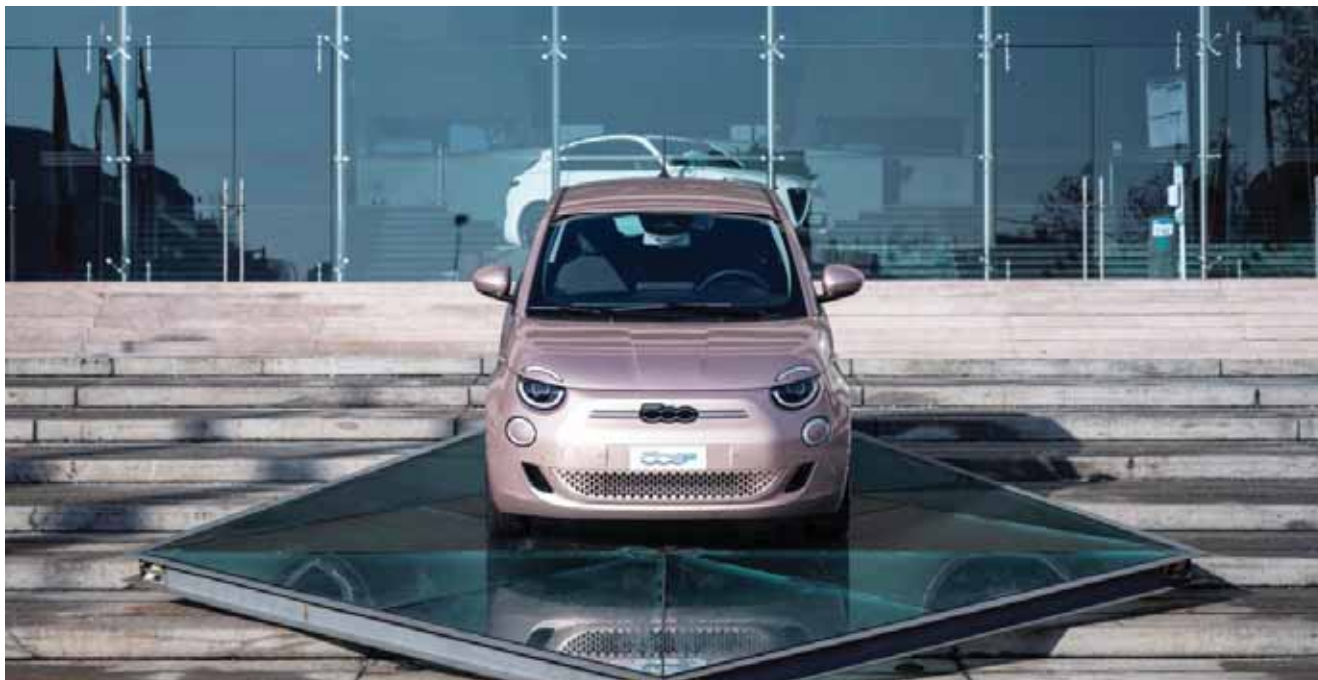


Business

FRIDAY, JULY 9, 2021

31 US states accuse Google of app store monopoly**32** Norway's telecoms group Telenor quits Myanmar over military coup**33** Indian food delivery Zomato eyes \$1.3bn IPO

EU to send petrol cars to scrap heap



TURIN: File photo shows the Prima 500 electric car displayed at the entrance of the Italian car giant Fiat Mirafiori car plant in Turin. Diesel or petrol cars have lived but the future is electric. — AFP

BRUSSELS: Europe's prestigious carmakers lead the world in perfecting the internal combustion engine—but the days of the petrol motor are numbered, and the continent is changing gear. On Wednesday next week, the European Commission will unveil its plan to reduce carbon emissions from new vehicles to zero within the next decade, to fight climate change.

The EU plans to be carbon neutral by 2050, but petrol and diesel cars remains the continent's main mode of transport and the pride of its globally admired marques. Sources in Brussels expect the commission's plan, part of a climate change strategy, to foresee an end to new registrations of gas guzzlers from 2035.

Europe's existing emissions limit of less than 95 grams of CO₂ per kilometre was to have been reduced by 37.5 percent in 2030. Exact figures are still under discussion, but Brussels is now expected to seek a 60 percent reduction by 2030 and a 100 percent reduction just five years later in 2035.

The economic damage the coronavirus pandemic has damaged the road vehicle market as a whole, but electric cars have been an exception, with growth accelerating. Battery-powered cars represented eight percent of new registrations in western Europe in

the first five months of this year, with 356,000 new vehicles.

'Go to the wall'

This, noted analyst Matthias Schmidt, represents more than in the whole of 2019. The impending new regulations will increase this trend, as they will not only spell doom for classic petrol and diesel motors but effectively force out hybrid and hybrid-rechargeable models.

These had once been seen as a transitional technology, a key product for an industry that boasts of employing 14.6 million workers in Europe. The car lobby is resigned to going along with the changeover, but wants help from Europe, in particular in terms of developing a network of recharging points for battery cars.

"Under the right conditions, we are open to even higher CO₂ reduction targets in 2030," said Oliver Zipse, president of the carmakers' association ACEA and chief executive of BMW. The industry is divided about the best way forward, with some executives warning too quick a transition will drive up prices and favour Chinese competitors, which have an advance in battery technology. —AFP

EU slaps VW, BMW with 875m euro fine

BRUSSELS: The EU's antitrust authority yesterday fined German auto giants Volkswagen and BMW 875 million euros for colluding on the development of anti-pollution technology for diesel cars.

Launched after anti-cartel raids in 2017, the case marked yet another blow against the German auto-making sector, which was rocked by the devastating "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal that broke in 2015.

The case found that while the car giants had not formed a formal cartel, they had made illegal agreements to limit the introduction of "AdBlue" or urea to diesel engine exhaust gases, reducing its effectiveness as a way to produce cleaner emissions.

Daimler, which alerted the European Commission to the issue, was spared a fine. "Today's case is about how legitimate cooperation has gone wrong. Carmakers had developed a very good technology, but decided not to compete to exploit it to its full potential," EU competition chief Margrethe Vestager told reporters.

"Instead, they decided to collude by indicating to each other that none of them would aim at cleaning above the minimum standards required by law," Vestager added.

Volkswagen's admission to manipulating 11 million vehicles worldwide to appear less polluting unleashed a wave of anger at the auto industry, and Brussels launched an in-depth cartel investigation into the three companies.

In a statement, BMW stressed that the EU had dropped earlier allegations that the auto giants colluded on putting off cleaner particulate filters for petrol cars.

It also accused the European Commission of entering "uncharted territory for antitrust law" with its decision as it had failed to prove the existence of a price-fixing cartel, but inflicted fines in any case.

The commission's biggest-ever fine of 2.93 billion euros was handed to Europe's top truck makers — including Daimler — in 2016 for colluding over 14 years to fix prices and dodge the costs of stricter pollution rules. — AFP

Business

Oil on troubled waters: Row shows Gulf powers on diverging paths

Gulf states trying to cash in on their vast oil reserves

DUBAI: A startling public row between Saudi Arabia and brash neighbour the UAE has exposed the steadily diverging paths of once inseparable allies who are competing to profit from what may be the world's last oil boom.

Wrinkles in relationships between the Gulf monarchies are usually resolved behind palace walls, but a fiery debate over the future of global oil production burst into the open this week.

The United Arab Emirates has bitterly opposed a proposed deal by the OPEC+ alliance of oil-producing countries, slamming it as “unjust” and triggering a stalemate that could derail efforts to curb rising crude prices amid a fragile post-pandemic recovery.

That is a rare challenge to Saudi Arabia, the world's number-one oil exporter — as well as the Arab world's largest economy and custodian of Islam's holiest sites. But the fault lines were drawn before this week's virtual talks. And while observers say a full rupture is unlikely, the new competitive spirit will only intensify.

Saudi Arabia's ambitious de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the UAE's strongman Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed have long been seen as the region's power couple, known by their matching initials — MBS and MBZ. While MBZ was once seen as a mentor to the younger leader, their lack of joint appearances of late has triggered speculation that the relationship has cooled considerably.

Economic race

Economic rivalry is at the heart of the feud. The

Gulf states are trying to cash in on their vast oil reserves as they face the beginning of the end of the oil era. Riyadh is desperate to fund an overdue programme to diversify its economy before the switch to renewables is complete. The kingdom has “suffered from 50 years of lethargy in terms of economic policy and dynamism and now has to play catch-up,” said Saudi government advisor Ali Shihabi. The Emiratis “will understand that you have to make some space for that”, he said.

Kirsten Fontenrose, a former White House official responsible for Saudi policy and now with the Atlantic Council, said strongarm tactics set the stage for the OPEC+ row. The neighbours have now decided “we have to prioritise our financial future against our friendship”, she said. “It's tit-for-tat and no hard feelings, just economic realities.”

Shot across the bows

Long the region's sleeping giant, Saudi Arabia is increasingly rivalling Dubai — long the region's business and services hub — by creating new post-oil industries such as tourism and technology from scratch.

Nevertheless, quality of life and ease of doing business mean that Emirati hubs Dubai and Abu Dhabi remain a powerful draw compared with the broken pavements and bewildering bureaucracy of Riyadh. With few carrots in its arsenal, Saudi Arabia has wielded the stick. In February, it issued an ultimatum to foreign firms that those seeking state contracts must have their Middle East headquarters in the kingdom by 2024.

“There were some hits below the belt by our



neighbour, but the issues will stay under control, inshallah (God willing),” an adviser to the UAE government told AFP, asking not to be named.

War wounds

The first obvious fracture in the relationship came in mid-2019 when the UAE made a hasty exit from the disastrous conflict in Yemen, after marching in with Saudi Arabia five years before as part of a coalition to support the internationally recognised government.

That left Riyadh deep in a quagmire from which it is still struggling to escape. “Was there some Saudi sensitivity when the Emiratis exited rapidly out of Yemen? Yes there was,” said Shihabi. “Saudi would have hoped that the Emiratis would have been slower... and coordinated more, but the Emiratis had their own calculations, (creating) a bit of ill-feeling.”

Seismic moves in regional diplomacy have illustrated the differing world views of the Gulf

powers. The UAE has spearheaded engagement with Israel, signing the US-brokered “Abraham Accords” in September 2020, expanding to include Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, and sparking outrage among Palestinians.

Riyadh pointedly did not follow, despite cheer-leading from Washington. Saudi Arabia meanwhile led a rapprochement with Qatar, which had endured a more than three-year boycott by its neighbours over claims the gas-rich nation backed Islamists and was too close to their regional rival Iran. The UAE, which has zero tolerance for political Islam, complied with the fence-mending moves — but with little enthusiasm.

Out in the open

“There are new alliances being created in the region,” the Abu Dhabi government advisor told AFP. “Two camps are emerging.” These diverging interests, once handled with discretion, are now being raked over in public, but observers say the neighbours are far from a Qatar-style rupture. “Talk of a rift is overblown,” said Fontenrose.

“Both countries are just trying to secure the economic future that they've put forward in their vision plans and which their leaders have a lot riding on.” Yet unlike irritants such as Yemen policy and competition for foreign investment, the oil production row could not be settled quietly, as it is a high-stakes issue for global energy markets.

“You can't avoid it with OPEC,” Shihabi said. “When you have more than 20 people in the room and you quarrel with your wife, you can hardly hide it.” — AFP

US states accuse Google of app store monopoly

SAN FRANCISCO: Dozens of US states joined forces in a lawsuit filed Wednesday accusing Google of abusing its power when it comes to getting apps for Android-powered mobile devices. The litigation aimed at the Play Store online shop for apps and other digital content for Android smartphones comes as the power of Big Tech firms is facing increasing pressure from regulators and lawsuits. “We are filing this lawsuit to end Google's illegal monopoly power and finally give voice to millions of consumers and business owners,” said New York attorney general Letitia James, a leader of the litigation.

“The company has ensured that hundreds of millions of Android users turn to Google, and only Google, for the millions of applications they may choose to download to their phones and tablets.” The lawsuit backed by 37 attorneys general accuses Google of using anti-competitive tactics to discourage Android apps from being distributed at shops other than its Play store, where its payment system collects commissions on transactions.

Google rejected accusations in the suit as meritless, detailing ways that the Play Store has helped app makers thrive while providing security for Android device users. “Android and Google Play provide openness and choice that other platforms simply don't,” Google senior director of public policy Wilson White said in a post.



PARIS: File photo shows the Google logo displayed on a screen and reflected on a tablet. Dozens of US states joined forces in a lawsuit filed yesterday accusing Google of abusing its power when it comes to getting apps for Android-powered mobile devices. — AFP

“The complaint is peppered with inflammatory language designed to distract from the fact that our rules on Android and Google Play benefit consumers.” The lawsuit contends that Google has inserted itself as “the middleman” between app developers and consumers.

Meanwhile, a verdict is being awaited in a federal suit in which Fortnite maker Epic Games accused Apple of abusing monopoly power at its App Store. Apple tightly controls the App Store, which is the sole gateway for apps or other content to get onto iPhones and other devices powered by iOS software. — AFP

UK flags new Northern Ireland row with EU before July 22

LONDON: The UK, vowing to defend its territorial “sanctity”, said yesterday it plans to submit proposals on a Brexit impasse with the European Union over Northern Ireland in the next two weeks. Brexit minister David Frost said London still wanted a “consensual approach” with Brussels regarding the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol. “But obviously, all options remain on the table for us,” he told an event at the Policy Exchange think-tank alongside Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis.

“And I can say today that we will set out our approach to parliament in a considered way on these questions before the summer recess,” Frost said, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson refused to rule out suspending the protocol. The UK parliament breaks up for the summer on July 22, after annual commemorations by Northern Ireland's Protestant community celebrating late 17th century victories over a Catholic king.

The main event of the so-called “marching season”—a perennial flashpoint between pro-UK Protestants and pro-Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland—comes on Monday. Protestant unionists feel betrayed by the Brexit agreement with the EU to regulate trade in Northern Ireland, which now has the UK's only land border with the 27-nation bloc. — AFP

Business

Norway's telecoms group Telenor quits Myanmar over military coup

'Sale of the company is best possible solution in this situation'

OSLO: Norwegian telecoms group Telenor said yesterday it is selling its subsidiary in Myanmar, where it is one of the major operators, as a result of the military coup there. While the agreement to sell Telenor Myanmar to M1 Group for \$105 million will ensure continued operations of its fixed and wireless networks, analysts expressed concern it might not bode well for freedom to use social networks. "The situation in Myanmar has over the past months become increasingly challenging for Telenor for people security, regulatory and compliance reasons," Telenor chief executive Sigve Brekke was quoted as saying in a statement announcing the divestment.

"We have evaluated all options and believe a sale of the company is the best possible solution in this situation," he said. Telenor has had a commercial presence in Myanmar since 2014 and employs a workforce of around 750 in the country.

Telenor was pushed deep into the red in the first quarter after it was forced to write down all of its assets in Myanmar, taking their value from 6.5 billion kroner (\$769 million) to zero. But the operator was highly profitable, however, with Telenor saying the subsidiary had paid 3.2 billion in dividends since 2017.

Myanmar has been rocked by massive protests and a brutal military response since the February coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her government. More than 880 civilians have been killed in a crackdown by the State Administration Council—as the junta calls itself—and almost 6,500 ar-

rested, according to a local monitoring group.

"Further deterioration of the situation and recent developments in Myanmar form the basis for the decision to divest the company," said Telenor. The sale is subject to regulator approval by the authorities in Myanmar.

The junta has vested interests in swathes of the country's economy, from mining to banking, oil and tourism. NGOs have urged foreign companies to review their presence in Myanmar. M1 Group is a holding company founded by former Lebanese prime minister Najib Azmi Mikati and his brother. It holds a major stake in the MTN mobile operator that is a leader in Africa but which is also active in Asia.

'End of story'

M1 is also on the blacklist established by Burma Campaign UK, which monitors the business ties of international firms with the Myanmar military. According to a 2019 report conducted by an international independent fact-finding mission presented to the UN Human Rights Council on the economic interests of Myanmar's military, the M1 Group has a stake in a company that rents mobile phone towers to the MEC, an army-owned firm that owns the Mytel mobile network.

Htwe Htwe Thein, a professor of international business at Curtin University in Australia, expressed concern about the impact of the sale on data security and privacy for Burmese using social



networks if the new owner is more compliant with authorities.

"End of story for the people of Myanmar who are hugely reliant on social media to send the messages out, to promote their cause," she said in comments emailed to AFP. The junta has at times completely blocked internet access or certain social networks being used to organise opposition. "At a broader level, the exit of Telenor has proven it is not possible to continue doing business in Myanmar under the military without breaking their commitment to human rights policies," Htwe Htwe Thein added. —AFP

UK pandemic hammered self-employed

LONDON: Ethnic minorities, the self-employed and low-income families in Britain suffered greater deprivation levels during the coronavirus pandemic despite "surprisingly positive" living standards figures, a report published yesterday found. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) think-tank's annual report on living standards, poverty and inequality identified these groups as the hardest-hit, even as unprecedented state support mitigated the worst effects of the crisis.

The research follows other studies showing that Britain's ethnic minorities were more likely to suffer worse health and economic outcomes during the pandemic and less likely to accept vaccines. "How fast and to what extent these groups recover as the economy reopens will be a key determinant of the pandemic's legacy," said report co-author Tom Wernham.

Some 15 percent of Britons from minority ethnic backgrounds were behind their household bills at the start of 2021, compared with 12 percent before the pandemic. The proportion of adults of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin living in households where all adults were unemployed or furloughed remained 10 percentage points higher at the beginning of 2021 than pre-pandemic levels, as many of these households relied on one income earner. —AFP

US raises concerns about Mexico energy reforms

MEXICO CITY: The United States voiced concerns Wednesday about Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's planned reforms boosting the state's role in the energy sector, during talks on a revamped North American trade deal.

"With respect to the energy policies that we see being discussed and envisioned by the Lopez Obrador administration, we are watching very closely," US Trade Representative Katherine Tai told reporters in Mexico City.

"We are raising our concerns. We are here to engage and we will be exploring avenues for addressing our concerns," she said after talks with Mexican Economy Secretary Tatiana Clouthier and Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng.

Tai sidestepped a question about whether Mexico was in breach of the year-old United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) following its recent decision to select state-run Pemex to operate a major offshore oil field. Lopez Obrador's planned reforms have prompted warnings that Mexico is in danger of violating its trade commitments by favoring Pemex and the state-run Federal Electricity Commission.

In March, a Mexican judge suspended electricity sector reforms that critics said unfairly favored fossil fuels over renewable energy produced by private firms. Nearly two months later, the same judge suspended a hydrocarbons law reform seeking to strengthen state participation in the energy industry, ruling that it was a threat to competition.

Lopez Obrador says the reforms are needed to prevent power prices from increasing. The USMCA entered into force on July 1, 2020, replacing the 1994 North America Free Trade Agreement



(NAFTA). Since then there have been squabbles between the United States and Canada on the dairy and lumber industries.

Washington has also twice invoked the USMCA dispute mechanisms to ask Mexico City to investigate violations of union rights in the automotive sector, notably at a General Motors plant. —AFP

Business

Asian markets down over Fed signal, China tech crackdown

US markets appeared ready to set aside inflation fears

HONG KONG: Asian markets were broadly down yesterday after the Fed signalled a possible inflation-induced policy change, while concerns lingered over China's crackdown on tech giants. The Federal Reserve said Wednesday that while rising prices were expected as the US economy recovered from the pandemic, the inflation jump was higher than expected.

Officials said the US central bank needs to be ready to pull back on its massive support programme if this persists, according to minutes from a June policy meeting. But it gave no indication that a reversal was imminent — a stance consistent with commentary from Fed chair Jay Powell that did not jolt the market.

US markets appeared ready to set aside inflation fears — at least for the time being — with Wall Street finishing modestly higher as both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq edged to records. "It took some time, but the Fed has finally acknowledged rising inflationary forces," Louis Navellier, chairman of Navellier & Associates, said in a note to investors on Wednesday.

The strong overnight lead from Wall Street provided some boost in Asia, but Tokyo closed down Thursday as the Japanese government was set to impose a new virus state of emergency to fight a surge in infections. Seoul was higher, as was Sydney where investors did not seem affected by news that the lockdown in Australia's biggest city could be extended.

Wellington and Singapore were down. Bourses in London, Paris and Frankfurt also fell

on open as the European Central Bank was set to announce the results of an 18-month policy review — a review widely expected to see it redefine its inflation target.

Crackdown fears

Hong Kong stocks were down throughout the day, extending losses into a seventh day, on continued concerns about China's crackdown on the country's tech giants. Beijing's shock decision to remove ride-hailing app Didi from online platforms on national security grounds sparked fears of a wider regulatory move against firms once seen as untouchable. Authorities this week suggested they could revise rules for Chinese companies listed overseas — a move that would clip the wings of major firms such as Alibaba, Tencent and Bytedance and potentially limit their ability to attract foreign capital.

Thursday saw a key measure of mainland shares traded in the financial hub fall by up to three percent, as investors moved to jettison shares of big-name Chinese firms. Investors were more upbeat despite closing down in mainland China, with bonds rallying on indications from Beijing that it would increase support to businesses, in part by expanding the liquidity available to banks.

The triumphant recovery from the pandemic in the world's second-largest economy had shown signs of slowing in recent weeks, with manufacturing activity edging down in June and factory gate inflation soaring.



HONG KONG: A man walking past a panel displaying the Hang Seng Index performance.

China's State Council said Wednesday following a meeting that it was prepared to "use monetary policy tools... to enhance financial support to the real economy, particularly to smaller businesses." The news prompted a rally on bonds, pushing China's benchmark 10-year bond yields to three percent — their lowest level

since August — as traders predicted a flood of much-needed liquidity. "This is an important dovish shift and is likely to drive unwind of residual policy normalisation fear and expectations, and render some support to broad risk assets," Citigroup Inc. strategists led by Gaurav Garg wrote in a note cited by Bloomberg TV. — AFP

Indian food delivery Zomato eyes \$1.3bn IPO

MUMBAI: Indian food delivery giant Zomato announced planned yesterday to raise 93.75 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) via an initial public offering, the latest firm to take advantage of a strong rally in local equities. Zomato and rival Swiggy — both of whose delivery riders are ubiquitous in Indian cities — are the two biggest players in a food delivery market forecast to explode in the coming years.

But Zomato co-founder Gaurav Gupta said the Indian market was still "highly under-penetrated" with only 8-9 percent of food consumption from restaurants, compared with 40-50 percent in markets such as China and the United States. "We are disrupting the Indian habit of home-cooked food and we are very excited about the opportunity ahead of us to drive this kind of behaviour," Gupta told reporters.

Both Zomato and Swiggy are, however, yet to be profitable because of high start-up and marketing costs. In the last financial year, Zomato lost 8.16 billion rupees on revenues of nearly 20 billion rupees. Delivery firms also face a backlash from Indian restaurants, which complain that the platforms' deep discounts erode their profit margins.

Zomato has a presence in 525 Indian cities, with more than 32 million Indians visiting its platform every month. It is also active in 23 other countries. The company will issue new shares — priced at between 72 to 76 rupees — in the



MUMBAI: A deliveryman working for Zomato, an online food delivery application, checks his phone outside a fastfood restaurant in Mumbai yesterday. Indian food delivery giant Zomato announced plans to raise 93.75 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) via an initial public offering. —AFP

issue that opens on July 14 and closes on July 16.

Ant Financial, controlled by Chinese investor Jack Ma, owns a minority stake in the firm. Around 30 Indian companies have announced IPO plans this year, including digital payments firm PayTM, backed by Japan's SoftBank as well as by Ma. — AFP

German exports rise, approaching pre-pandemic levels

BERLIN: German exports rose in May for the 13th month in a row, approaching their pre-coronavirus pandemic levels as demand recovers internationally, official data showed yesterday. Europe's biggest economy exported 112.2 billion euros (\$132.4 billion) worth of goods, up 0.3 percent from April, seasonally adjusted figures published by federal statistics office Destatis showed.

Their level is now just 0.3 percent under the level recorded in February 2020, before the pandemic dramatically curtailed trade and travel. Compared to May 2020, Germany exported 43.3 percent more to the European Union, and 28.7 percent more to countries outside the bloc.

The United States imported 40.7 percent more from a year ago, while China, another key market, recorded an imports growth of 17.1 percent. Meanwhile, German demand for foreign goods also rose, with growth of 3.4 percent in imports to 99.6 billion euros, according to seasonally adjusted figures. The positive data came as the German industry was hit by supply chain disruptions including on electronic components, wood, plastic and steel. Nevertheless, the government has predicted a solid recovery for 2021. — AFP

Classifieds

Kuwait Times
Established 1961

Friday, July 9, 2021



CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Yohann Samuel**, holder of Indian Passport No. R8108597 having permanent address 42, 1914 Padinjarethalackal, Puthiya Road, Palarivattom, Ernakulam 682 025, Kerala, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: **Yohann Samuel Eapen**. Given Name: **Yohann Samuel** and Surname: **Eapen**.
(C 0613) 7-7-2021

EMERGENCY 112

**Automated enquiry about
the Civil ID card is
1889988**

Hospitals

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |
| Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 |
| Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 |

Clinics

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirqab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

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Civil Aviation
دولة الكويت - State of Kuwait



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Fax: (+965) 24331579
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Very hot with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h .

| WEATHER WARNING | | | No Current Warnings | |
|-----------------|---------|---------|--|--|
| STATION | MAX EXP | MIN REC | SFC. CHART 08/07/2021 0000 UTC | |
| KUWAIT CITY | 47 °C | 36 °C | | |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 50 °C | 31 °C | | |
| ABDALY | 48 °C | 31 °C | | |
| JAHRA | 51 °C | 34 °C | | |
| SALMIYAH | 44 °C | 37 °C | | |
| AHMADI | 43 °C | 37 °C | | |
| WAFRA | 48 °C | 31 °C | | |
| SALMY | 47 °C | 30 °C | | |
| JAL ALIYAH | 49 °C | 32 °C | | |
| | | | MSL Analysis (hPa) Valid 0000 UTC 08 JUL 2021 | |

4 DAYS FORECAST

| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | Temperatures | | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
|----------|-------|---|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| | | | MAX. | MIN. | | |
| Friday | 07/09 | Very hot with a chance for rising dust | 50 °C | 32 °C | NW | 20 - 55 km/h |
| Saturday | 07/10 | Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas | 51 °C | 32 °C | NW | 20 - 50 km/h |
| Sunday | 07/11 | Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas and some high clouds will appear | 50 °C | 33 °C | NE-NW | 12 - 35 km/h |
| Monday | 07/12 | Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas | 51 °C | 33 °C | NW | 15 - 45 km/h |

PRAYER TIMES

| | |
|---------|-------|
| Fajr | 03:21 |
| Sunrise | 04:55 |
| Zuhr | 11:53 |
| Asr | 15:27 |
| Sunset | 18:51 |
| Isha | 20:22 |

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| MAX. Temp. | 49 °C |
| MIN. Temp. | 29 °C |
| MAX. RH | 22 % |
| MIN. RH | 06 % |
| MAX. Wind | S 36 km/h |
| TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR. | 0 mm |

2021/07/08

Sports

Fans banned from Tokyo Olympic venues as emergency imposed

TOKYO: Fans will be banned from Olympic venues in Tokyo and the capital will be under a virus state of emergency throughout the pandemic-postponed Games, Japan's government announced yesterday, just two weeks before the opening ceremony. The decision means Tokyo 2020 will be the first Games ever held largely behind closed doors, the latest unprecedented decision about a Games that will be like no other.

When the Games were postponed last year as the scale of the pandemic became clear, there was talk that the event would be staged as proof the world had overcome the virus. But that triumphant talk has given way to the harsh reality of new infection surges and more contagious variants, including the Delta strain which has spooked officials in Japan.

The country has seen a comparatively small virus outbreak, and avoided tough lockdowns, but it also moved slowly to start vaccinations and only about 15 percent of its population is fully vaccinated so far. With infections rising in the capital, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga yesterday announced Tokyo would be under a virus emergency from July 12 until August 22.

The measure is significantly looser than lockdowns seen elsewhere, largely limiting alcohol sales, shortening opening hours for restaurants and capping event attendances at 5,000 people. But it signals a growing concern about the current rate of infections, and appears to have piled pressure on Olympic organizers who had hoped to have up to 10,000 local fans in venues after barring overseas spectators.

Organizers met yesterday evening with local and national government officials and Olympic and Paralympic chiefs to take what

Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto termed a "very difficult decision". "We reached an agreement on no spectators at venues in Tokyo," Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa said after the talks. Most Olympic events are being staged in Tokyo, but some - including surfing, football, baseball and the marathon - will take place outside the capital.

Marukawa said a decision on spectators at events outside Tokyo would be taken in consultation with the governors of each region. The ban comes after Suga announced the new emergency measures, which he said would not interfere with holding the Games. "We will host the Games under the state of emergency," he told reporters. "I think we can realise a safe and secure Games by taking these measures."

Delta variant fears

International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach, who arrived in Japan earlier yesterday, said he would "support any measure which is necessary to have a safe and secure Olympic and Paralympic Games for the Japanese people and all participants".

Organizers are at pains to insist the Games can go ahead and will be safe for local residents and Olympic participants. But they face the reality of rising infections, with Japan's minister in charge of the virus response Yasutoshi Nishimura warning earlier Thursday that the Delta variant now accounts for around 30 percent of cases in the capital. "This is expected to expand further," he warned.

Japan has so far recorded around 14,900 deaths, despite avoiding harsh lockdowns, but the government has been criticized over the slow start to its vaccination program. And there are concerns that the



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga speaks during a press conference on a new COVID-19 coronavirus state of emergency stretching throughout the Tokyo Olympics, at the prime minister's official residence yesterday. —AFP

Delta variant could produce a new wave that might quickly overwhelm local medical resources.

Olympic organizers have drawn up extensive measures including daily testing for athletes and limits on their movement that they say will keep the public and Games participants safe. While vaccination is not required to participate in the Games, Bach said yesterday that 85 percent of arriving Olympic delegations would be inoculated, and almost 100 percent of IOC staff and members. —AFP

Momota 'only positive' about Olympic debut

TOKYO: Japanese badminton star Kento Momota said yesterday he feared he might never play at an Olympics after a catalogue of career mishaps, but is feeling "positive" about the Tokyo Games. World number one Momota was banned from Japan's Rio Games team in 2016 for illegal gambling, and was almost forced to retire last year after a serious car crash. But the unprecedented postponement of the Tokyo Games because of the coronavirus pandemic gave him time to recover, and he is aiming for gold when he finally makes his Olympic debut later this month. "When the Games were postponed by a year and then it was on the news that they might be cancelled, I thought a lot about how I might not be able to play at the Olympics," Momota told reporters Thursday.

"But a lot of people have worked hard to put the competition on, and I've just tried to block out the noise and put everything into the things I can control." Momota added that his physical fitness has improved "little by little", and that he "feels really good" going into the tournament. "I'm not thinking negative thoughts - I'm only thinking positive thoughts," he said. Momota was unstoppable in 2019, winning a record-breaking 11 titles including the World Championships, Asia Championships and All England Open. But he said his "spirit was almost broken" after a Jan 2020 car crash - hours after he won the Malaysia



Kento Momota
Masters - which killed the driver of the vehicle taking him to the airport.

'Really lonely'

Momota underwent surgery on a fractured eye socket after suffering double vision in training, and admitted he feared his career was over. "I think the area where I've really grown is mentally," he said. "I've had to deal with a lot of difficulties, and the fact that I've worked hard to get here gives me confidence going into the competition."

Momota made his comeback at the Japanese national championships in December after almost a year out. But his hopes of returning to international competition at the Thailand Open in January were dashed when he tested positive for the virus at the airport before leaving. His only appearance has been at the All England Open in March, where he lost in the quarter-finals to Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia. —AFP

SEA Games in Vietnam postponed over coronavirus

BANGKOK: The Southeast Asian Games, which were due to take place in Vietnam this year, have been postponed because of the pandemic and will most likely be held in 2022, a member of the organizing council said yesterday. The regional Olympics were scheduled to be held in Hanoi and 11 other locations from Nov 21 to Dec 2.

But Vietnam is struggling to contain a new coronavirus outbreak, and many Southeast Asian Games events were planned in provinces hard-hit by the fresh wave of infections. "Definitely, the 31st SEA games will not (be hosted) this year as scheduled in November," said Varin Tansuphasiri, Games Council member and deputy secretary of the Thai Olympic Committee. "Vietnam wants to postpone the Games until next year, 2022."

The postponement was due to the pandemic, he said, with Vietnam proposing to host the Games in April or May next year. The decision comes after Vietnam announced nine million people in Ho Chi Minh City would go into lockdown for two weeks in the early hours of today. Hanoi, which was to be at the center of the SEA Games, has had fewer cases but yesterday suspended transport links with at least 14 cities and provinces to fight the virus' spread.

Virus clusters have appeared up and down the country, including in the northern industrial provinces of Bac Ninh and Bac Giang, where Games events were due to take place. One badminton venue in Bac Giang has been turned into a field hospital. Vietnam's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang told reporters yesterday that authorities had recommended to "postpone the hosting of 31st SEA Games to a more appropriate time".

'Too many games next year'

But Tansuphasiri said it was not straightforward to find a suitable time in next year's sporting calendar. "There's already too many games next year," he said, citing the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022 and the Commonwealth Games in July next year. "There will be a bit (of) trouble for Vietnam to host in 2022."

Vietnam was once a model for virus containment due to its extensive contact-tracing and strict quarantines, but it has struggled to procure and roll out vaccines. It is currently facing its worst virus outbreak so far, with nearly 23,500 cases now recorded and 105 deaths. Prior to this outbreak, which began in late April, fewer than 3,000 cases had been recorded across the country. —AFP

Sports

Suns ready for Bucks' best effort in game 2 of NBA Finals

PHOENIX: Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks worked on defensive adjustments Wednesday to try and contain Phoenix Suns sharpshooter Chris Paul and pull themselves level in the NBA Finals. Paul scorched the Bucks for 32 points and passed off nine assists to power host Phoenix's 118-105 victory in Tuesday's opener of the best-of-seven championship series.

The Bucks must find a way to frustrate the 36-year-old backcourt maestro, playing in the first NBA Finals of his 16-year career, to have any chance of capturing their first NBA title in 50 years. "We have a lot we can learn from and we can get better," said Milwaukee's Brook Lopez, who struggled the most when matched up defensively on Paul. "We're going to look at different coverages and our rotation so we have a lot of different options to throw out there in game two."

Paul used the pick and roll to set up mismatches and mid-range shots as well as passes to Deandre Ayton and Devin Booker in thwarting Milwaukee's defense. "We looked at film. You feel like there's things you can get better," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "He's a player probably you've got to change up the looks. "If he gets a rhythm, it's not good for us. So you got to have multiple looks and adjustments and be able to execute at a high level whatever you're doing."

One problem for the Bucks is that Paul has seen almost everything a foe can throw at him defensively over 16 NBA seasons. "There's only so many things that you can do out here on this court," Paul said Wednesday. "So we adjust. If they trap, they trap. They switch, they switch. All season long we've adjusted and prepared for whatever a team has thrown us."

Suns coach Monty Williams says his team is ready for Milwaukee's best effort. "To win the first game at home was great

for us, but we also have the mentality that we're not satisfied," Williams said. "We've been in this situation before. We talked about it. We've already started to prepare ourselves for the best Milwaukee effort we're going to see in the series. We're ready for that."

The Suns have had poor showings after some big playoff wins, notably a game five loss to the Los Angeles Clippers in the Western Conference finals. "We felt like we didn't play with the juice and desperation we typically play with," Williams said. "Our guys understand that's who we are and we have to be, no matter what the situation is. That has been our DNA."

Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo had 20 points and 17 rebounds in game one, making his comeback from a hyperextended left knee after missing two games. "I was nervous. I was thinking about my knee," the Greek star forward said. "Going into game two, hopefully I can feel more confident, more comfortable to go downhill and make more plays."

He could play a role in denying Paul his desired shots as well. "They can take the mismatch really well, which guy they want to attack, so it makes a little bit harder," Antetokounmpo said. "So we just got to make it as tough as possible." Milwaukee's P J Tucker and Jrue Holiday had the most success on Paul, but the Suns playmaker still had the shots he wanted. "They're picking and choosing pick-and-rolls," Tucker said. "As a team, we have to figure out how we want to handle a lot of those switches, especially guard on guard."

Saric out for Suns

Phoenix's Jae Crowder just marvels at Paul's mastery. "Chris is a difficult assignment for anybody with him playing at the level



PHOENIX: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks makes a leaping pass over Chris Paul #3 of the Phoenix Suns during the second half of game one of the NBA Finals at Phoenix Suns Arena on July 6, 2021. —AFP

he's playing at right now," Crowder said. "Whatever you throw at him, he's prepared for it. "Game two, we're just looking to come out and impose our will for 48 minutes as much possible, especially with the home crowd behind us." —AFP

Tough talk led Suns to sacrifice, build contender

PHOENIX: When Phoenix coach Monty Williams yelled after an early season loss that the Suns had the NBA's worst starting five, the group sat down and had a long, hard talk. That conversation set the stage for sacrifices, acceptance of roles in a team setting and was a major step in the Suns reaching their first NBA Finals since 1993. "We were just really honest with each other," Suns guard Devin Booker said. "Those conversations, all those bits and pieces, all those moments are why we're in the position we're in right now. But we still have to get the job done."

The Suns defeated Milwaukee 118-105 in the opening game of the best-of-seven championship series. It could be the first title for the Suns since the team began play in 1968 and the first for star guard Chris Paul, into his first finals at age 36 after 16 NBA campaigns. "Everybody is comfortable and accepts their roles," Paul said. "That stuff sort of just happens. You start accepting things. It just kind of evolves. Your team even changes during the playoffs."

Bahamas 22-year-old big man Deandre Ayton, for starters, has been told what he needs to do by Paul and Booker all season. "They got to tell me something every day," Ayton said. "They keep a consistent thing where they are always giving constructive criticism, and I take the best of it. "It's just the respect level. We all got on each other, had candid conversations where we had to adjust. But candid conversations lead to wins." —AFP

Booker looking at quick turn from NBA Finals to Olympics

PHOENIX: Phoenix Suns star Devin Booker won't be done with basketball after the NBA Finals, with plans to join the US Olympic team after the championship showdown against Milwaukee. The 24-year-old guard, a two-time NBA All-Star, will be joined by Bucks' rivals Jrue Holiday and Khris Middleton on the 12-man US roster that is set to play its first game in Tokyo on July 25.

If the NBA Finals reach the maximum seven games, they would finish on July 22, barely time to celebrate, catch a plane and reach Japan to meet coach Gregg Popovich and his American teammates before the opening Olympic tip off. "I'll be there," Booker said. "But obviously not my main focus right now. "I saw all the guys reported to Vegas and only other place I would rather be is the Finals, but I would love to be there with the guys and I'll be there soon."

Booker treasures the opportunity to help deliver the United States a fourth consecutive gold medal. "Very important. Life goal of mine," he said. "It's the most prestigious event that basketball can find. So to be a part of representing your country brings you to a whole 'nother stratosphere. Just thinking of the guys that have come before us and represented our country and I don't think there's anything better than winning a gold medal."

But Booker wouldn't complain about the chance for an NBA-Olympic double title despite the short turnaround. Middleton made his own global basketball investment three months ago, joining the ownership group of the Brisbane Bullets of Australia's National Basketball League. "It's something that I was excited about," Middleton said.

"Being a part of an ownership group is something I wanted to do, for sure. As a player it could be tough but I realize the responsibilities I had wasn't going to really affect my basketball career right now, but it's something I think a lot of players are starting to trend towards, finding ways to invest their money and it's something I'm interested in."

Middleton has visited Australia to check out his investment and see the support Aussies have for basketball. "The sport for sure is definitely growing over there in Australia," he said. "I've been there a couple times and just seeing their fan base, how much it's growing and how much they're passionate about the sport, I thought it was just an all-in-all win for myself."

The tightest global ties to the NBA Finals are seven international players on the rosters. The Bucks boast Greek forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, his brother Thanasis, Guinea's Mamadi Diakite and Frenchman Axel Toupane. The Suns' lineup includes Bahamas center Deandre Ayton, Egypt's Abdel Nader and Croatia's Dario Saric, who suffered a torn right knee ligament in game one that will sideline him for the rest of the series.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 20 points and 17 rebounds in game one, making his comeback from a hyperextended left knee after missing two games. He's also among seven players in the finals of Nigerian heritage, his parents having moved from Lagos to Athens three years before he was born. —AFP



Devin Booker

Sports

Lightning strike twice for second straight Stanley Cup

MIAMI: The Tampa Bay Lightning won their second straight Stanley Cup Wednesday, edging the Montreal Canadiens 1-0 to win the NHL championship series four games to one. Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy bounced back from a game-four defeat in Montreal with a 22-save shutout. With his fifth clean sheet of the post-season, Vasilevskiy scooped the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoffs Most Valuable Player.

"When the team is playing like this in front of you, you get lots of confidence from them and just try to help them however you can, just try to be at your best every night for the guys," Vasilevskiy said. Rookie Ross Colton scored the lone goal as the Lightning became the first back-to-back champions since the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2016 and 2017.

"It's unbelievable," Tampa Bay captain Steven Stamkos said. "I mean, so cliché to say, but there's no words. This group to go back-to-back after everything we went through last year in the bubble, to go through this year, ups and downs. I mean, it's amazing."

After failing to close out the series on Monday the Lightning dominated game five early, but they couldn't get a shot past Montreal goaltender Carey Price. Colton changed that at 13:27 of the second period when he slotted a pass from defenseman David Savard past Price to give the Lightning a 1-0 lead. Tampa Bay had won the puck against the near boards, Colton making his way towards the net where he jostled for position with Montreal defenseman Joel Edmundson and was able to redirect Savard's pass through traffic into the net.

Colton and Savard were the only two players in the Lightning lineup who didn't feature in last season's championship team. The Lightning's title comes just nine months after they beat the Dallas Stars in six games in a quarantine bubble in Edmonton.

This time, they were able to celebrate in front of 18,110 fans at Amalie Arena in Tampa, Florida.

"It doesn't take anything away from last year, but to do it again is just validation into history," Stamkos said. "And this group accomplished something that not many people thought could happen, and like I said, to do it in front of our family, our friends and our fans was just amazing."

The Lightning are the first NHL team to clinch a Stanley Cup title at home since the Chicago Blackhawks did it in 2015 - against Tampa Bay. Vasilevskiy, who ended each series of these playoffs with a shut-out, including 1-0 against the New York Islanders in game seven of the Stanley Cup semi-finals, became the first goalie to win the Conn Smythe since Jonathan Quick won it with the Los Angeles Kings in 2012. "I think we might be taking for granted how good he really is, and he's been proving it here now for a number of years," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said, "and I think he's just getting started."

Canadian drought

For Tampa Bay's Pat Maroon it was a third straight Stanley Cup. He won with his hometown St Louis Blues in 2019 before going back-to-back with the Lightning to become the first player since 1983 to win three straight - and the first since 1964 to do it with two different teams. "This one was special," Maroon said. "It's hard to win and I was blessed to be a part of good teams and get on a roll. It's hard to go back-to-back and to be a part of the group, that's so special."

For the Canadiens, it was the end of an unlikely playoff run. Unable to build on their game-four victory, they remain in search of a first Stanley Cup title since 1993 - the last time a Canadian Club has lifted the trophy. The Canadiens had been



TAMPA: The Tampa Bay Lightning celebrate after defeating the Montreal Canadiens 1-0 in Game Five to win the 2021 NHL Stanley Cup Final at Amalie Arena on Wednesday. —AFP

the first team from north of the border in a decade even to reach the final.

They rallied from 1-3 down to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs in the first round, then ousted the Winnipeg Jets before downing the Vegas Golden Knights in the semi-finals. "Every single guy gave everything they had every single night," Canadiens forward Brendan Gallagher said. "You look at our group and, obviously, there's a lot more talented teams and there's a lot of teams that do a lot of things, but there's no team that's stronger as a group and the resiliency that we showed." —AFP

Windies, Aussies look for momentum ahead of World T20

GROS ISLET, Saint Lucia: West Indies and Australia commence a five-match Twenty20 series today under lights at the Daren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia with both teams in pursuit of a winning momentum as the countdown to the World T20 continues. Title-holders for the global tournament set for October-November in the United Arab Emirates, the Caribbean side started a home run of 15 T20Is with a 3-2 loss to South Africa in Grenada. That highlighted their continuing challenges of coping with high-quality spin bowling while conceding a high proportion of scoreless deliveries in their five innings. This series will be followed by three One-Day Internationals against the Aussies in Barbados, after which Pakistan come to the region for another five-match T20I series, also to be played in Bridgetown.

For Australia, whose best effort in the World T20 was as beaten finalists to England in the 2010 event in the West Indies, this assignment follows consecutive narrow series losses in England, at home to India and in New Zealand. That last campaign was almost five months ago and with the visitors missing a number of key performers like David Warner, Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell and Pat Cummins, this series represents an ideal opportunity for some of the fringe players to make a strong claim for inclusion in the World T20 squad.

Those seeking to make an impression include all-rounder Dan Christian, who was among the runs with a score of 47 in an intra-squad warm-up fixture at the match venue on Monday. "Everyone had a good hit, bowlers had a good bowl and we got to see what

conditions will be like, so all-in-all a pretty successful night," was Christian's assessment of the workout ahead of what is expected to be his first appearance in national colours for four years.

Should the pitches for the five matches behave similarly as for that warm-up hit-out then the West Indies can expect to face another searching examination of the adaptability of their batsmen who failed on three occasions against South Africa to reach targets just below 170. That series reinforced shortcomings in the home side which head coach Phil Simmons hopes can be corrected in the coming days. "We've got to think a little bit more. We've got to be smarter in our cricket - smarter especially in that seven to 14-over period," said Simmons. West Indies are expected to stick with the nucleus of the squad which faced the South Africans while the Australians' biggest challenge appears to be establishing a settled middle-order given the absence of so many regular names. With the series being played in the one of the rainiest months of the year in the Caribbean, there is no guarantee that the matches will not be significantly impacted by the elements. However, both teams remain hopeful of getting enough action in which would assist in formulating their World T20 squads three months away from the main event. —AFP



GROS ISLET: Fidel Edwards of West Indies takes part in a training session ahead of the 1st T20I between Australia and West Indies at Daren Sammy Cricket Ground on Wednesday. —AFP

Lions to face Sharks after Bulls pull out

PRETORIA: The British and Irish Lions will play a hastily-arranged second match against the Sharks at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria tomorrow, South African Rugby announced yesterday. The fixture will replace the originally-scheduled match against the Pretoria-based Bulls after several Bulls players tested positive for COVID-19.

Ben Calveley, managing director for the Lions, said he was grateful for the replacement fixture, but warned that it was dependent on COVID testing in the Lions camp. One player and one member of the touring staff tested positive on Wednesday, forcing coach Warren Gatland to make eight changes in his 23-man squad ahead of their first match against the Sharks at Ellis Park in Johannesburg because of close contacts with the infected personnel.

Despite the late changes and the disrupted preparation, the Lions won 54-7. They have yet to face meaningful opposition in South Africa after beating the Johannesburg-based Lions 56-14 in their opening fixture last Saturday. "We have further COVID-19 testing scheduled for today and tomorrow," said Calveley.

"The results of those tests will determine whether we will be able fulfil this fixture, but, as it stands, we are optimistic. "We remain committed to the tour in South Africa and determined to rise to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic." —AFP

Sports

Federer crashes as Djokovic reaches 10th Wimbledon semi

LONDON: Roger Federer faced serious questions over his future on Wednesday after crashing out of Wimbledon in the quarter-finals, just five weeks shy of his 40th birthday. Eight-time Wimbledon champion and 20-time Grand Slam title winner Federer lost 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 to a Poland's Hubert Hurkacz, a player 15 years his junior.

There were no such problems for world number one and five-time champion Novak Djokovic who reached his 10th Wimbledon semi-final and 41st at the Grand Slams. Djokovic, looking to equal Federer and Rafael Nadal on 20 majors, defeated Hungary's Marton Fucsovics 6-3, 6-4, 6-4. He will face Canada's 10th seed Denis Shapovalov, who beat Russia's Karen Khachanov 6-4, 3-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-4, for a place in Sunday's final. Hurkacz will tackle Italy's Matteo Berrettini in the other semi-final.

Defeat was only Federer's 14th at Wimbledon in 119 matches and his first straight-sets loss since an opening round exit against Mario Ancic in 2002. It was also the first time he had lost a set 6-0 at Wimbledon. "I really don't know. I've got to regroup," said Federer when asked if his Wimbledon career was over. "With everything that comes after Wimbledon, we were always going to sit down and talk about it. I got to take a few days. Just see, Okay, what do I need to do to get in better shape so I can be more competitive."

Those discussions will also center on his participation in the Olympic Games in Tokyo which start in just over two weeks' time. "Clearly there's still a lot of things missing in my game that maybe 10, 15, 20 years ago were very simple and very normal for me," Federer added ruefully.

10th semi for Djokovic

World number 18 Hurkacz had never got beyond the third round of a Grand Slam before this Wimbledon. However, boosted by having defeated world number two Daniil Medvedev in five sets in the last 16, he was a break up on a sluggish-looking Federer in the sixth game of the opening set. The Swiss star, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020 and was bidding to be the oldest man in the Wimbledon last-four in over a half a century, carved out a break for 2-0 in the second set.

He couldn't hang on and Hurkacz levelled in the seventh game from 1-4 down before dominating the tiebreak. Federer looked punch-drunk and he was quickly down 0-2 in the third set before Hurkacz wrapped up the decider in just 29 minutes in front of a stunned Centre Court. He is only the second Polish man to reach the semi-finals at Wimbledon - Jerzy Janowicz being the other in 2013. "It's super special to have played Roger here, it's a dream come true," said Hurkacz.

Victory for Djokovic was his 100th on a grass court. Djokovic became only the third man to capture all four majors more than once with his second French Open victory last month. Now he is halfway to becoming the first man in the Open Era and only the third in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam of all four majors. "Sometimes things do look surreal for me but I try to live in the moment and take every opportunity I have on the court," said Djokovic.

'Huge inspiration'

"Going for history is a huge inspiration for me, let's keep it going."



LONDON: Switzerland's Roger Federer returns against Poland's Hubert Hurkacz during their men's quarter-finals match on the ninth day of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club on Wednesday. —AFP

Djokovic raced into a 5-0 lead in the first set before 29-year-old Fucsovics got on the board. The world number 48, bidding to become the first Hungarian man since 1948 to make the semi-finals at Wimbledon, saved five set points. However, the rearguard action was too late to prevent the champion edging ahead. —AFP

Djokovic set to rule over Wimbledon's young pretenders

LONDON: Novak Djokovic can reach a seventh Wimbledon final today, driven on by the desire to capture a sixth title at the All England Club and record-equaling 20th Grand Slam title. The world number one will be overwhelming favorite to defeat semi-final opponent Denis Shapovalov, the Canadian player he has already beaten six times out of six.

Victory for the Serb would send him into a Sunday championship match against either Italy's Matteo Berrettini or Poland's Hubert Hurkacz, the man who sent eight-time winner Roger Federer crashing in the quarter-finals. Djokovic is playing in his 10th semi-final at Wimbledon and 41st at the majors. None of the other three pretenders have ever got this far at the tournament. Only Berrettini has tasted the experience of a semi-final at the Grand Slams, at the 2019 US Open. Apart from dropping the first set of his opener against British wildcard Jack Draper, Djokovic has been untroubled. "I feel like I've been playing, hitting the ball well throughout the entire tournament, putting myself exactly where I want to be: semi-finals," said 34-year-old Djokovic.

"Not spending too much energy. Now I really have to be consistent from the first to last point in the next match, and hopefully another one on Sunday." Djokovic has only dropped



LONDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics during their men's quarter-finals match on Wednesday. —AFP

serve four times at this year's Wimbledon and faced just 15 break points.

Victory today will take him a step closer not only to a sixth Wimbledon title but also to becoming just the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam. It's a feat so rare that it hasn't been achieved since Rod Laver swept all four majors in the same year for a second time in 1969. "Sometimes things do look surreal for me but I try to live in the moment and take every opportunity I have on the court," said Djokovic. Shapovalov, the stylish left-hander, has reached his first Slam semi-final by seeing off two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray and eighth-seeded Roberto Bautista Agut, a 2019 semi-finalist. In the quarter-final, the 22-year-old had to mix style and steel to see off Russia's Karen Khachanov in five sets. —AFP

On Friday, he will need to have his service

Federer defeat echoes Wimbledon exits of the greats

LONDON: Roger Federer admitted he has yet to decide if he will return to Wimbledon next year after his shock straight-sets loss to Hubert Hurkacz in the quarter-finals on Wednesday. AFP Sport looks at how three previous greats bid farewell to the All England Club.

Pete Sampras

Sampras was a seven-time Wimbledon champion but he arrived in London in 2002 having been defeated by a young Roger Federer in the fourth round 12 months earlier. It had also been two years since his last tour title. Having opened his campaign with victory over Britain's Martin Lee, Sampras was sent out to Court Two, the All England Club's infamous 'Graveyard of the Champions' for his second round clash with Switzerland's George Bastl.

The Swiss, ranked 145 in the world, only made the main draw as a lucky loser from qualifying but he pulled off one of the tournament's greatest ever shocks when he defeated Sampras 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 3-6, 6-4. It was 30-year-old Sampras's earliest loss at Wimbledon in 11 years. "I wasn't at my best," admitted Sampras. "I'm not going to end my time here with that loss. I want to end it on a high note and so I plan on being back. As long as I feel like I can continue to win majors and contend, I'll continue to play."

Despite his defiance, it was to be Sampras's last visit to Wimbledon. He retired later in 2002 but he

went out on a high by winning a fifth US Open in September in his final tournament. The old Court Two was demolished in 2009.

Boris Becker

Becker, a three-time Wimbledon champion, played his last career match at the 1999 tournament. Ranked at 77 in the world, the 31-year-old reached the last 16 where he lost in straight sets to second seed Pat Rafter. It had been 10 years since the last of his three titles at the All England Club and 14 since his first as an unknown teenager diving to the left and right on Centre Court.

As the German star walked off for the last time, he was given a standing ovation - even the Royal Box stood to applaud. "My whole Wimbledon career has been an attempt to live up to 1985 and it has been a big feat. What really bugs me is that I got to seven finals and won only three of them," said Becker. "My only real regret is that I didn't play when John McEnroe was around. But when I was coming up he was going down. The best player I beat here was Andre Agassi. But I would love to have beaten Pete Sampras."

Bjorn Borg

Borg won five successive Wimbledon titles from 1976-1980, revolutionizing the appeal of the sport in the process. His last visit to the All England Club was in 1981 where he lost the final to John McEnroe, 12 months after having defeated the brash American in an epic final. The Swede finished his Wimbledon career at the age of just 25 with only four defeats in 55 matches. McEnroe admitted he was stunned when Borg called it quits even though the Swede was to eventually make an ill-conceived return to the tour. "Bjorn and I played just 14 matches on Tour. It was unbelievably disappointing," said McEnroe. —AFP

Sports

England survive Denmark scare to reach first major final in 55 years

LONDON: England will play in their first major tournament final for 55 years after coming from behind to beat Denmark 2-1 after extra time in front of a delirious 65,000 crowd at Wembley in Wednesday's Euro 2020 semi-final. Mikkel Damsgaard's stunning free-kick after 30 minutes threatened another semi-final disappointment for Gareth Southgate's side, three years on from losing in the last four of the World Cup.

But Simon Kjaer's own goal levelled before half-time and a controversial penalty proved decisive when Harry Kane scored on the rebound after his initial effort was saved by Kasper Schmeichel. England will attempt to win the European Championship for the first time when they face Italy back at Wembley in Sunday's final. "For once it fell our way," said Kane. "We responded really well after falling 1-0 down but we controlled the game. First time in our history to get through to the European final and at Wembley, it is one of the proudest moments of my life for sure."

Defeat ends Denmark's fairytale run to the semi-finals, the furthest they have been at a tournament since winning Euro 92. The Danes' tournament began in nearly-tragic circumstances when star midfielder Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest in their opening game against Finland. Kasper Hjulmand's men have since ridden an emotional wave and played plenty of slick football in sticking four goals past Russia and Wales on their way to the semi-finals.

However, England's huge advantage in having six of their seven matches on home soil has paid off as they were the physically fresher side in the latter stages. And Hjulmand said his side's exit was even more "bitter" because of the manner of the winning goal. "One thing is to lose a game, but losing this way is a disappoint-

ment because these guys have fought a lot," said Hjulmand. "We have to digest this before we can describe these feelings. It's a bitter way to leave the tournament."

Roared on by the deafening noise created by the biggest crowd for an England game in nearly two years, the hosts came flying out of the traps. Kane's teasing cross just evaded Raheem Sterling as he burst in towards the far post. Denmark settled after a shaky start and started to pose a threat themselves as Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg shot straight at Jordan Pickford before Martin Braithwaite and Damsgaard saw efforts fly off target.

Damsgaard stunner

England were on a national record run of seven consecutive clean sheets, but were finally breached in spectacular fashion by Damsgaard's free-kick that flew into the top corner. Any questions over how Southgate's men would react to falling behind for the first time in the tournament were emphatically answered as England rapidly hit back. Sterling should have equalized when he fired straight into Schmeichel's midriff with just the 'keeper to beat.

Moments later, the hosts were level when Kane freed Bukayo Saka down the right and Kjaer turned into his own net under pressure from Sterling. Denmark's exertions in being forced into a 9,000-km round trip for their quarter-final win over the Czech Republic in Baku showed in the second half as they desperately tried to keep England at bay.

Penalty controversy

Schmeichel kept his side in the game, flying low to his right



LONDON: Denmark's defender Simon Kjaer (left) fights for the ball with England's forward Harry Kane during the UEFA Euro 2020 semifinal match at Wembley Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

to parry Harry Maguire's header in the second half and from Kane early in extra time. England's pressure finally paid off in controversial circumstances when Sterling was awarded a soft penalty as he fell under a challenge by Joakim Maehle in the 104th minute. Schmeichel even denied Kane from the spot but the ball fell kindly for the England captain to sweep home his fourth goal of the tournament. —AFP

England dare to dream after reaching final

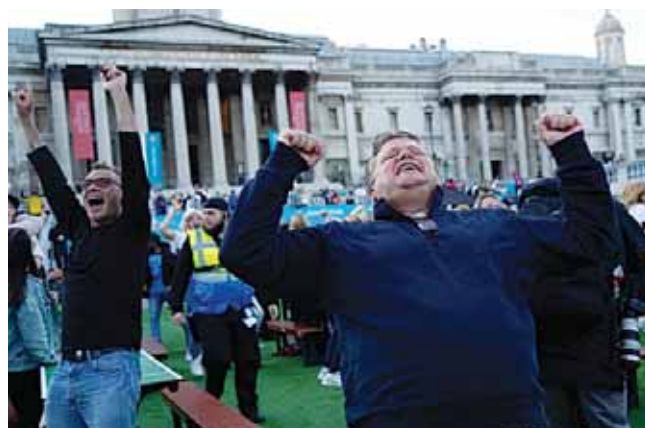
LONDON: England fans woke up bleary-eyed yesterday to the reality of a first major tournament final in 55 years after a momentous win against Denmark set up a Euro 2020 showdown with Italy. Three years on from their defeat to Croatia in the World Cup semi-final, Gareth Southgate's men overcame the Danes 2-1 in extra-time at a rocking Wembley to reach their first European Championship final.

They now stand just one game away from ending their long and painful trophy drought, which dates all the way back to the 1966 World Cup. Standing in their way are an Italy side who are on a 33-match unbeaten run, reviving their reputation on the global stage after an embarrassing failure to even reach the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

A Wembley crowd of almost 65,000 whipped themselves into a frenzy before kick-off on Wednesday with rousing renditions of "Sweet Caroline" and "Football's Coming Home". Simon Kjaer's own goal cancelled out a superb Mikkel Damsgaard free-kick and Kasper Schmeichel kept England at bay with some stunning saves to take the tie to extra-time.

The key decisive moment came late in the first period of extra-time when Dutch referee Danny Makkelie awarded a spot-kick for Joakim Maehle's challenge on Raheem Sterling which survived a VAR check, and England held out to seal the win. The final whistle sparked scenes of pandemonium inside Wembley - hosting the biggest crowd in the UK since the start of the coronavirus pandemic - as the players partied on the pitch.

Flag-waving fans at London's Trafalgar Square abandoned their seating to merge into a huge, swaying crowd after the final whistle. One group of supporters climbed on top of a double-decker bus. For Denmark, defeat spelt the end of a fairytale run



LONDON: Football fans react as they watch the UEFA Euro 2020 semifinal match at a fanzone in Trafalgar Square on Wednesday. —AFP

to the last four after the trauma of witnessing star Christian Eriksen collapse in their opening group game against Finland following a cardiac arrest.

England have suffered semi-final heartbreak at major tournaments four times since 1966 and those agonising defeats have been etched in the psyche of English football. But Southgate has overseen the emergence of a vibrant young team unconcerned by the failings of their predecessors. "They've responded to what was always going to be a really challenging night," Southgate said of his players, who had not conceded a goal until the Denmark game.

"We were so smooth through the quarter-final and relatively unscathed through the second round. We knew that at some point we were going to concede and we would have to respond." He added: "For our country, I've not heard this new Wembley like that ever and to be able to share that with everybody and share it with everybody at home is very special." —AFP

Denmark Euro dream ends after emotional ride

LONDON: Denmark's run to the Euro 2020 semi-finals was even more of a fairytale for the nation of five million people after their near-tragic start to the tournament. On the opening weekend of the Euro, Christian Eriksen, his country's star player for the best part of a decade, collapsed on the field against Finland after suffering a cardiac arrest.

As his teammates formed a protective circle around the Inter Milan midfielder to shield him from the cameras, captain Simon Kjaer and goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel consoled his sobbing partner on the side of the pitch. Thanks to the rapid medical response, Eriksen was resuscitated after one defibrillation and able to leave hospital less just six days later.

Three-and-a-half weeks on from the incident, Denmark were still in contention to repeat their shock success at Euro 92, which they won having initially failed to qualify thanks to Yugoslavia's expulsion. In the end, lightning did not strike twice. England, roared on by a 65,000 crowd at Wembley, booked their place in the final of a European Championship for the first time with a controversial 2-1 win after extra time. —AFP



COPENHAGEN: A Danish football fan reacts on the City Hall Square after Denmark was defeated by England late Wednesday. —AFP



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