

2 Cafe 312, run by special needs staff, first of its kind in Kuwait



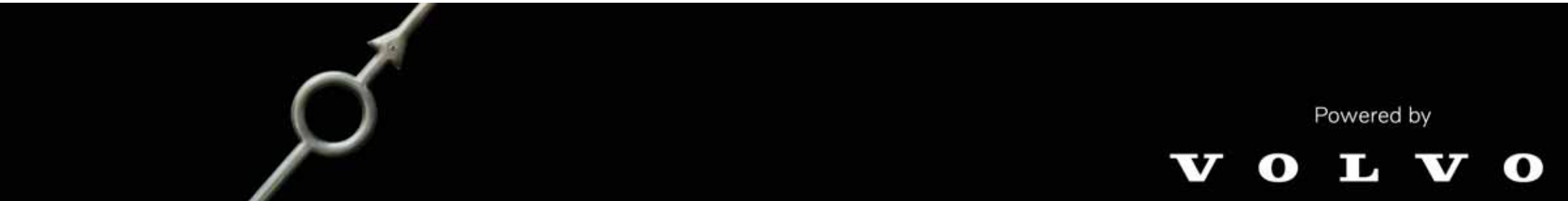
6 Cuba approves emergency use of home-grown COVID vaccine



13 Imaginary deaths, real grief: Fallen anime heroes honored



14 Barty wins first Wimbledon title on Cawley anniversary



Delta puts brakes on return to post-COVID normality

Vaccine link to heart inflammation • Mask not needed for vaccinated US students

Zain wins prestigious ‘Best Corporate Governance Award 2021’ for Kuwait

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa announced that it has won the World Finance ‘Best Corporate Governance Award 2021’ for Kuwait. The company drew praise from the judging panel for its principles and integrity captured by its Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework, which drive its ongoing ability to provide shareholder returns and to pursue long-term objectives while ensuring ongoing transparency and accountability.

Zain has adopted a sound Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework that enhances the overall governance environment within the company in line with applicable laws, regulations and leading practices. Wherever possible, the company looks to exceed the requirements of the Corporate Governance Regulations issued by the Capital Markets Authority in Kuwait, Boursa Kuwait, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and other regulatory bodies.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi said, “We are proud of the standards we set with respect to corporate governance and integrity. From the publication of our annual and sustainability reports to our regulatory disclosure



as well as operational and financial results reporting, we are guided by a desire to offer all our stakeholders the most transparent access to our information as possible.” (See Page 8)

PARIS: Nations across the globe hit new pandemic highs and reimposed COVID-19 restrictions yesterday as the highly contagious Delta variant forced governments to put the brakes on plans to return to normality. The highly transmissible Delta variant, first detected in India, is sweeping the globe as countries race to inoculate their populations to ward off fresh outbreaks and allow for economies and daily life to recover.

The European Union - lambasted early on in the pandemic response for a botched vaccine acquisition program - said yesterday it has delivered enough shots to cover 70 percent of the bloc’s population. “By tomorrow, some 500 million doses will have been distributed to all regions of Europe,” EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

Supply shortages in South Korea have meant only about 11 percent of the country’s 52 million population is fully vaccinated, according to health authorities. The nation, held up as a model of how to combat the pandemic, reported 1,378 new coronavirus cases yesterday, a third straight record high. From tomorrow, gatherings of more than two people will be banned after 6:00 pm, schools, bars and clubs will be closed.

In Pakistan, where less than eight percent of the population has been vaccinated, the government said only those who had received jabs would be allowed to fly. The country of around 215 million people has largely escaped the worst of the pandemic, with under a million recorded infections and around 23,000 deaths - although cases are on the rise again.

After an “exponential” rise in cases in recent days, officials in the autonomous northeastern Spanish

region of Catalan said they had no choice but to reimpose restrictions. Nightclubs will close and a negative COVID-19 test or proof of vaccination will be needed to take part in outdoor activities involving more than 500 people.

Russia also announced yesterday that cases continued to surge and it had a new record number of daily deaths, the fifth since the beginning of the month. The 752 new deaths bring Russia’s total toll to 142,253. The country also recorded 25,082 new infections, meaning there have been more than 5.7 million cases. State statistics agency Rosstat, which defines coronavirus-related deaths more broadly, put the figure at 270,000 by the end of April.

Less than 20 percent of Russians have received a single dose, despite shots of locally developed vaccines being readily available. Despite the rising infections and deaths, 54 percent of a deeply skeptical Russian public don’t plan to get vaccinated, according to a survey by the independent Levada-Center published this week.

While vaccines have been successful in mitigating the worst effects of infections, concerns have been raised about how well some of them will cope with more virulent strains. In Indonesia, which is fighting a ferocious wave of infections, more than a dozen fully inoculated frontline health workers have died, according to the country’s medical association. Authorities said on Friday that medics would be given a third booster jab using the vaccine made by US company Moderna, to provide them extra protection.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

‘Cyber disruption’ in Iran

TEHRAN: Iran’s transportation ministry said yesterday a “cyber disruption” had affected its computer systems and website, while the country’s national railway company denied reports of being hit by a cyberattack. The disruption started before noon, taking down the body’s website and links associated with it. — AFP

27 killed in Algeria accidents

ALGIERS: At least 27 people died in two road accidents in Algeria overnight, including when a bus smashed into a truck, local media reported yesterday. In one crash on Friday night, a bus and truck collided on a road connecting Constantine to the Mediterranean port of Jijel, leaving 18 dead and 11 injured. — AFP

Zika cases detected in Kerala

NEW DELHI: Authorities in India’s southern Kerala region have issued a statewide alert after 14 cases of the Zika virus were detected, officials said Friday. Among the patients was a 24-year-old pregnant woman who was undergoing treatment at a hospital in the state capital Thiruvananthapuram. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable and can transmit the mosquito-borne illness to their newborns, which can result in life-altering conditions. — AFP

Lebanon power station to restart

BEIRUT: A major power station in Lebanon is to resume operations today, two days after it ground to a halt due to a lack of fuel at a time of constant power cuts and economic collapse. Zahrani in south Lebanon went offline on Friday because the state electricity company was unable to access fuel shipments stuck offshore due to pending payments. — AFP

G20 ministers endorse global tax reform

VENICE: G20 finance ministers yesterday gave their backing to a “historic” global deal to tax multinational companies more fairly and urged hold-out countries to sign up. A framework for international tax reform, including a minimum corporate rate of 15 percent, was agreed this month by 131 countries. But the endorsement by the 19 biggest economies plus the European Union will help ensure it becomes a reality following years of negotiations.

“After many years of discussions and building on the progress made last year, we have achieved a historic agreement on a more stable and fairer international tax architecture,” the final statement said. “We endorse the key components of the two pillars on the reallocation of profits of multinational enterprises and an effective global minimum tax.”

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Mercenaries: Sinister export from Colombia

BOGOTA: Some fight in Yemen or Afghanistan, others guard oil pipelines in the United Arab Emirates; and yet more turned up in Haiti this week, where they are accused of assassinating the president. Hardened by more than half a century of conflict back home, retired Colombian soldiers and illegal combatants feed the sinister market of mercenaries around the world. Some 26 Colombians have been accused of taking part in the pre-dawn murder of president Jovenel Moise on Wednesday that also left his wife Martine wounded.

Colombia said on Friday that at least 17 ex-soldiers are believed to have been involved in the attack at Moise’s home. Some were killed by Haitian police and the majority were captured. But the participation of Colombian mercenaries highlights the



VENICE: Italian policemen clash with protestors yesterday during a gathering called by the group “We are the tide” to protest against the G20 meeting between finance ministers and central bankers. — AFP



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Suspects in the assassination of Haitian president Jovenel Moise are presented to the media by Haitian authorities on July 8, 2021. — AFP

lucrative transnational mercenary market. “There is great experience in terms of irregular war... the Colombian soldier is trained, has combat experience and on top of that is cheap labor,” Jorge Mantilla, a criminal phenomenon researcher at the University of Illinois in Chicago, told AFP.

It’s not just retired soldiers that leave Colombia’s borders - already so porous to the export of

Continued on Page 2

Muslim women offered for sale in fake ‘auction’

NEW DELHI: Police in India are investigating how dozens of Muslim women were offered for sale in fake “auctions” online without their knowledge, in a case the victims say illustrates growing Islamophobia across the country. Photos of more than 80 women were reportedly uploaded in recent weeks to GitHub, an open software development platform, under the title “Sulli deal of the day”. “Sulli” is derogatory slang for Muslim women.

Hana Mohsin Khan, an airline pilot, was alerted last week by a friend who directed her to a link that led to a gallery of images of women. “The fourth picture was mine. They were literally auctioning me as their slave for the day,” Khan told AFP. “It sends chills down my spine.”

Continued on Page 2

Local

Cafe 312, first of its kind in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Cafe 312 is the first of its kind in Kuwait, run by ten employees with special needs and offers hot and cold drinks, various types of juices, sandwiches and light snacks. The cafe's staff are happy with the idea of this project, where they can express themselves and get the needed experiences. — KUNA

G20 ministers endorse global...

Continued from Page 1

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire was quick to hail the agreement, saying it was a once-in-a-century opportunity for reform. "There is no turning back. We are putting an end to the fiscal race to the bottom and the digital giants will now pay their fair share of taxes," he said.

The reforms aim to prevent countries competing to offer the lowest tax rates to attract investment, which has often resulted in multinationals paying derisory levels of tax. Final agreement is not expected until the run-up to the G20 leaders' summit in Rome in October.

The 15 percent minimum tax rate was agreed on July 1 under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Countries including the United States, France and Germany, along with aid agencies such as Oxfam, have been pressing for a higher rate. But some

nations are opposed even to this, including EU member Ireland, which lured Apple and Google to Dublin with low tax rates.

In their final statement, the G20 ministers said they "invite all members" of the negotiations... that have not yet joined the international agreement to do so". The minimum rate is expected to affect fewer than 10,000 major companies, but the OECD estimates an effective 15 percent rate would generate an extra \$150 billion in revenue per year.

The measure is one of two so-called pillars of global tax reform that have been under negotiation for years, but which have been given new impetus under US President Joe Biden. The other would give countries a share of the taxes on profits earned in their territory. Multinationals operate in many countries - oil giant BP is present in 85, for example - but usually pay taxes on profits only in tax domiciles cherry-picked for their low rates.

It would initially apply to the top 100 or so companies, and is targeted at the most aggressive users of tax-reducing domiciles, such as technology giants Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple. The G20 ministers were meeting for the first time in person since Feb 2020, at the start of the global coronavirus pandemic, although China and India are attending virtually. — AFP

Mercenaries: Sinister export...

Continued from Page 1

cocaine - as guns for hire. In 2004, Venezuelan authorities detained "153 Colombian paramilitaries" they accused of taking part in a plan to assassinate then-president Hugo Chavez. Colombia has a seemingly inexhaustible pool of soldiers. The armed forces are made up of 220,000 personnel and thousands retire over a lack of promotion opportunities, misconduct or after reaching 20 years of service.

Every year "between 15,000 and 10,000 soldiers leave the army rank and file... it's a human universe that is very difficult to control," Colonel John Marulanda, president of a Colombian association for former military personnel, told W Radio. They retire relatively young with low pensions and that makes them "prey to better economic opportunities," said the retired officer. He says that what happened in Haiti was a "typical case of recruitment" of Colombian ex-soldiers by private companies to carry out

operations in other countries.

Colombian authorities say four companies were involved in the assassination. A woman who claimed to be the wife of Francisco Eladio Uribe, one of the captured Colombians, said a company offered her husband \$2,700 to join the unit. Uribe retired from the army in 2019 and was embroiled in the "false positives" scandal investigated by authorities, in which soldiers executed 6,000 civilians between 2002 and 2008 to pass them off as enemy combatants in order to gain bonuses.

In May 2011, the New York Times newspaper revealed that an airplane carrying dozens of Colombian ex-soldiers arrived in Abu Dhabi to join an army of mercenaries hired by the US firm Blackwater to guard important Emirati assets. The Times then claimed in 2015 that hundreds of Colombians were fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen, now hired directly by the UAE. For the last decade "there's been a boom in this industry," said Mantilla.

At that time, the United States began substituting its troops in the Middle East for "private security firms because it implies a lower political cost in terms of casualties and a grey area in international law". When it comes to potential human rights violations "the legal responsibility falls on the material perpetrators" rather than the State or company that contracted them, said Mantilla. — AFP

Delta puts brakes on return to...

Continued from Page 1

The Southeast Asian nation has been depending heavily on China's Sinovax shots amid the global shortage of alternatives that have been mostly supplied to rich nations. The rapid spread of the Delta variant across Asia, Africa and Latin America is exposing crucial vaccine supply shortages for some of the world's most poorest and most vulnerable populations.

Senegal, the EU, the United States, several European governments and other partners, signed an accord in Dakar on Friday to finance vaccine production in the West African state. And Cuba approved its home-grown Abdala vaccine for emergency use, the first Latin American coronavirus jab to get the green light and a possible lifeline for a region trying to battle a killer pandemic with modest means.

Pfizer and BioNTech announced they would seek regulatory authorization for a third dose of their COVID-19 vaccine. It comes after initial data from an ongoing trial showed a third shot pushed antibody levels five to 10 times higher against the

original coronavirus strain and the Beta variant, first found in South Africa, compared to the first two doses alone, according to a statement.

In addition, the companies expect that a third dose will perform similarly well against the highly transmissible Delta strain, which is quickly becoming globally dominant. Out of caution, the companies are also developing a Delta-specific vaccine, the first batch of which has been manufactured at BioNTech's facility in Mainz, Germany.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization said Friday that there was a "likely causal association" between coronavirus vaccines using mRNA technology and "very rare" heart inflammations, but the benefits still outweigh the risks. The UN health body's Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) said that cases of myocarditis - inflammation of the heart muscle - and pericarditis - inflammation of the lining around the heart - had been reported in multiple countries, especially the US.

"The reported cases have typically occurred within days of vaccination, more commonly among younger males and more often following the second dose of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines," the committee said in a statement. After reviewing available data, the GACVS judged that "current evidence suggests a likely causal association between myocarditis and the mRNA vaccines". — AFP

Muslim women offered for sale...

Continued from Page 1

From that day till today, I am just in a constant state of anger," she said.

GitHub said it has now suspended the users' accounts, saying they violated its policies on harassment, discrimination and inciting violence. Delhi police have filed charges - but against unknown persons because they do not know the identity of the perpetrators. Sania Ahmad, 34, who also found herself "up for sale" last week, points the finger at what she calls an online troll army of Hindu zealots in India that has proliferated in recent years.

They have become adept at hounding people including journalists and activists with thousands of abusive messages to the extent that some shut down their social media accounts. Many among India's 170 million Muslims say they feel like second-class citizens since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP party came to power in 2014.

A string of lynchings of Muslims by Hindu mobs over so-called cow protection - a sacred animal for many Hindus - and other hate crimes has sown fear and despair in the community. Indian journalist Fatima Khan, who was also among the women targeted on

GitHub, said the fake "auction" fit into this pattern. "How is this acceptable? What will be the punishment, if any, meted out to the people who made this list?" she tweeted. "Muslim men are lynched, Muslim women are harassed and sold online. When will this end?"

Online harassment of women and girls - including threats of violence, rape and manipulated pornographic images - is a huge problem, not just in India. A 2020 survey by UK-based Plan International of 14,000 girls in 31 countries found more than half had been victims of such treatment. "Rather than free and empowered to express themselves online, girls are all too often harassed, abused and driven from online spaces," it said.

In India, Muslim women are a particular target, said Ahmad, 34, who works for an Indian media company. "It starts with petty abuse and grows into death and rape threats," she told AFP. "I have 782 screenshots of abuse - mostly on Twitter - targeted at me. And these are just from the past year." The perpetrators, she believes, have "political backing" as part of a growing trend of ugly Islamophobia under India's Hindu nationalist government.

The government has not commented on the latest scandal. It denies being anti-Muslim. Ahmad sent a legal notice to Twitter reporting multiple derogatory posts but no action had been taken, she said. Twitter has not commented on the case. The victims in the latest case included researchers, analysts, artists and journalists, according to the National Commission for Women. — AFP

Local

Kuwait lists 41 COVID deaths in three days

Kuwait calls for continuing int'l efforts against HIV

KUWAIT: Kuwait has reported 41 deaths in three days while hospital occupancy continued to increase as the country fights to curb a surge in COVID-19 infections. The health ministry announced yesterday recording 11 deaths in the previous 24 hours, compared to 18 on Friday and 12 on Saturday, raising total fatalities to 2,100. Meanwhile, total cases rose to 374,104 as 1,555 new ones were announced yesterday, compared to 1,617 on Friday and 1,705 a day before. The number of active cases stood at 18,068 as of yesterday, down from 18,252 on Friday and 18,390 on Thursday. The number of hospitalized patients announced yesterday was 1,169 including 326 in intensive care units, up from 321 patients on Friday and 316 a day before. Total recoveries reached 353,936 as of yesterday when 1,728 fresh recoveries were announced, while 1,737 were announced on Friday and 1,621 on Thursday.

Fighting HIV

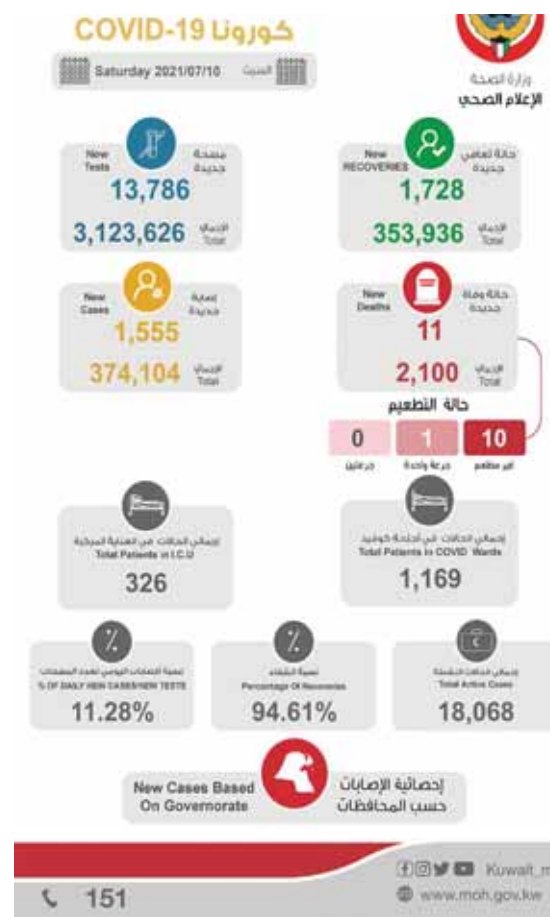
In other news, Kuwait called on Friday to continue working on fighting HIV/AIDS, and exchange information and experiences in this field to combat this virus. This came in the speech of State of Kuwait delivered by Chancellor Tahani Al-Nasser during the UN General Assembly's special session discussing ways of fighting HIV/AIDS. In the speech, Nasser welcomed the UN secretary general's report on fighting AIDS issued on March 31. She expressed thanks to the important information mentioned in the report explaining the progress made in fulfilling the com-

mitments made in the 2016 Political Declaration.

Many countries have fulfilled their commitments in terms of access to health services, advanced diagnostic and treatment technologies, and enhancing the performance of health systems in general, she added. This contributed to a 39 percent decrease in deaths from AIDS-related causes from 2010 to 2019, while HIV infections decreased by 23 percent since 2010, she added. On the other hand, Chancellor Nasser expressed disappointment that progress is still far below the level of global commitments for many reasons, most notably the lack of investment in comprehensive HIV prevention and other social and humanitarian constraints. This led to an increase in the number of new infections recently, compared to the previous years.

820,000 deaths

Since 2016, an additional 3.5 million people were infected, and 820,000 people have died, she explained, stressing the importance of strengthen cooperation between relevant agencies and bodies. In her speech, the Chancellor stressed that Kuwait realizes the importance of prevention and care for HIV cases. Kuwait has formed a multi-sectoral high-level national committee to combat AIDS, this developed strategic plan that focused on prevention, education and treatment, she noted. Nasser praised Kuwait as being one of the pioneering countries that has a number of preventive laws against the HIV/AIDS, in addition of participating in International activities, conferences, and meetings in this field. — KUNA



US underscores Kuwait's 'pivotal role, partnership'

KUWAIT: Kuwait plays a pivotal role towards preserving regional peace and security, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored to Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah in a phone call on Friday.



Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah

Against the backdrop of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, the Kuwaiti top diplomat and his US counterpart agreed that bilateral relations are on an upward trajectory, which in turn, helps bring common goals to fruition, said a foreign ministry statement. —KUNA

Zionist entity must be held accountable: Kuwait

GENEVA: Kuwait on Friday said it was imperative to hold the Zionist entity accountable for the "atrocities" it commits against the Palestinian people, urging the international community to find the root cause of such practices. Despite a ceasefire that halted the latest outbreak of violence across the Gaza Strip, the Zionist entity's "provocative actions" remain unabated, which include its "illegal" settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territories, Kuwait's permanent delegate to the UN-Geneva Jamal Al-Ghunaim told the Human Rights Council. He excoriated the Zionist entity for "altering the historic landscape" of Jerusalem, in addition to "desecrating" the holy city's fabled Al-Aqsa mosque, actions the Kuwaiti envoy said undermine global efforts to find a definitive solution to the Middle East conflict. The diplomat voiced his country's "categorical rejection" of actions that violate established humanitarian laws and conventions, slamming the international community's "silence" over the Zionist entity's "varied infractions" of such laws. "Kuwait's unflinching support for the Palestinians is a cornerstone of its foreign policy," he said, adding that the "Palestinian cause" will continue to take precedence over other matters until the ultimate goal of Palestinian statehood is achieved. — KUNA



Jamal Al-Ghunaim



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Director Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad launched yesterday new coast rescue and rapid intervention equipment to be used by firefighters in sea rescue operations.



Kuwait Airways launch flights to Geneva

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) has launched its first commercial flight to Geneva, Switzerland, on Friday, the airline announced, noting that it will schedule flights to this destination two times a week; on Mondays and Fridays. Kuwait Airways had announced on Thursday increasing weekly flights to London to three starting yesterday. The corporation said on its Twitter account that the flights would be organized on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. KAC resumed operations to the British capital in the middle of

June at a rate of a single flight a week. It has re-arranged flights to Geneva, Munich and Frankfurt effective Friday at a rate of two flights per week. It has also announced renewing operations to Paris, Malaga and Sarajevo.

On June 15, it announced starting three flights per week to Bodrum on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. And on June 18, it began organizing three flights a week to Trabzon on Sundays, Mondays and Fridays, in addition to the regular flights to Istanbul. Moreover, the national carrier announced two flights per week to Tbilisi on Mondays and Fridays, in addition to several summer tourism destinations. The corporation has affirmed its readiness to restore full operations of commercial flights in line with approval of the health authorities and resumption of air navigation in other countries. Last week, KAC relaunched its first commercial flight to Paris. Flights to this destination will operate thrice weekly on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.



Local

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News in brief

Civil Aviation denies
'fire on plane' claims

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation commented on rumors claiming a fire had started on board of a Gulf Air plane that made an emergency landing at Kuwait International Airport recently. It said the rumors were inaccurate as no fire had taken place, noting that the incident was dealt with accordingly and is currently being investigated.



Amiri Diwan mourns Sheikha

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan on Saturday mourned Sheikha Bushra Jarrah Sabah Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, who passed away at the age of 68. The deceased will be laid to rest today at 09:00 am. For condolences, texts can be sent to the following numbers: 99762222 (for men) and 99030617 (for women).

Kuwait condemns assassination

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait on Thursday strongly condemned the assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moise. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined the State of Kuwait's solidarity with the Republic of Haiti, as well as condolences to the President's family and the friendly Haitian people.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Photo taken on June 25, 2021 shows an Arabian red fox in a desert in Ahmadi Governorate, Kuwait. — Xinhua

Kuwait oil price
up to \$74.30
per barrel

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$2.40 to \$74.30 per barrel Friday after being at \$71.90 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of the Brent crude saw an increase by \$1.43 to \$75.55 per barrel, while the West Texas Intermediate went up by \$1.62 to \$74.56 pb.

On Friday, OPEC said that its basket of crudes went down \$1.61 in trading sessions to close at \$71.97 per barrel (pb) on Thursday, compared to \$73.58 the day before. Annual price of the OPEC basket in 2020 was at \$41.47 pb. Last Monday, OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting was called off to a later undetermined time reportedly due to disparities amongst members. — KUNA

Whale sharks
congregate in Qatar
in mesmerizing scene

DOHA: Whale sharks congregate at Shahin off-shore oil field off Qatar's northeastern coast, in a mesmerizing scene rarely seen around the globe where these huge creatures gather in an environment of over 40 C degrees. More than 100 whale sharks congregate near colonies of coral reefs, 90 kilometers from land, between April and end of September every year, as opposed to 4-5 weeks in other locations around the world. The Qatari Ministry of Municipality and Environment has been exerting efforts to maintain the marine environment specially following the congregation of whale sharks, Salem Al-Safran, Deputy Director of Natural Reserves Management Department at the ministry, said. The 15-meter-long whale sharks, with a weight over 30 tons, are one of the world's largest fish, he said in a statement. The ministry monitored congregation of around 400 whale sharks at Shahin oil fields, he noted, and they mostly come to feed on eggs of Tuna fish, which lay millions of eggs between April and October in this area. Sarfan said the ministry launched a project in 2011 about the whale sharks and indeed succeeded in knowing their behavior. "The result of this project contributes to the protection of this huge yet nice creature not only at Shahin field but around the world," he added. The ministry also began in 2019 a study



the journey of whale sharks by installing tracking devices on 12 of them. A documentary about the whale sharks was also produced, said Safran. Whale Sharks inhabit in tropical and warm waters, and can live up to 70 years. Despite their mammoth size, filter-feeder whale sharks feed on plankton including copepods, krill, fish eggs, and small fish. — KUNA



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Cuba approves emergency use of home-grown COVID vaccine

Afghanistan to rush troops to border

Taleban claim to control 85 % of Afghan territory

KABUL: Afghan authorities prepared yesterday to try to retake a key border crossing seized by the Taleban in a sweeping offensive that the insurgents claim has helped capture a vast swath of the violence-racked nation. As US troops continued their withdrawal, the Taleban said its fighters had seized two crossings in western Afghanistan - completing an arc of territory from the Iranian border to the frontier with China.

It now held 85 percent of the country, a Taleban official said Friday, controlling about 250 of Afghanistan's nearly 400 districts - a claim impossible to independently verify, and disputed by the government. Beijing, meanwhile, which has criticized Washington for its hasty withdrawal, urged its citizens to leave the country "as soon as possible" after evacuating 210 nationals. The "complex and severe domestic security situation" prompted the evacuation warning, the foreign ministry said, adding that 22 of those flown out tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in China.

Taleban gains

On Friday Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP their fighters had captured the border town of Islam Qala on the Iranian frontier and the Torghundi crossing with Turkmenistan. Herat governor spokesman Jilani Farhad

said Saturday the authorities were deploying fresh troops to retake Islam Qala post, the biggest trade crossing between Iran and Afghanistan. "They will be sent there soon," he told AFP.

The Afghan government has repeatedly dismissed the Taleban's gains as having little strategic value, but the seizure of multiple border crossings and the taxes they generate will likely fill the group's coffers with new revenue. In a clear sign fighting was getting closer to major urban centers, an official at one hospital in Kandahar - the country's second-largest city and the birthplace of the Taleban - said Saturday dozens of wounded had been admitted in the past 24 hours, including at least 15 service members. With the Taleban having routed much of northern Afghanistan in recent weeks, the government holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be reinforced and resupplied by air. The air force was under severe strain even before the Taleban's lightning offensive overwhelmed the government's northern and western positions, putting further pressure on the country's limited aircraft and pilots.

On Thursday President Joe Biden said the US military mission would end on August 31 - nearly 20 years after it began - but he admitted it was "highly unlikely" Kabul would be able to control the entire country. "The status quo is not an

option," Biden said of staying in the country. "I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan." Biden said the Afghan people alone should determine their future, but he acknowledged the uncertainty about what that would look like. Asked if a Taleban takeover was inevitable, the president said: "No, it is not."

Militias deploy

Afghan commandos clashed with the insurgents this week in a provincial capital for the first time, with thousands of people fleeing Qala-i-Naw in northwest Badghis province. On Friday the Afghan defence ministry said government forces had "full control" of the city, but a local official said on Saturday the insurgents had attacked again during the night.

Yesterday, the Taleban also claimed to have captured a district in the province of Laghman, neighboring Kabul. Around 100 km from the Iranian border, Ismail Khan - a veteran warlord whose fighters helped US forces topple the Taleban in 2001 - vowed to back government forces fighting against the insurgents. "We will soon go to the frontlines and with the help of God change the situation," Khan told reporters in the western city of Herat. Yesterday, hundreds of Khan's fighters deployed across the city and manned its gates, an AFP correspondent reported.

US pushes for deal

The Taleban have been emboldened by the US troop withdrawal and - with peace talks in Doha deadlocked - appear to be pressing for a full military victory. Still, on Thursday, Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taleban negotiating team, insisted the insurgents were seeking a "negotiated settlement". But President Ashraf Ghani said the insurgents were not interested in talks. "When one side wants negotiations but the other side doesn't want to talk, is that right?" he said in a speech yesterday. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called for international pressure to force a deal. "The entire world can help by continuing this push," he said in a tweet.

The Pentagon chief did not specify which countries he was urging to help, but Pakistan is widely believed to have significant influence over the insurgents. In recent weeks China, another neighbor, has harshly criticized what it sees as a hasty and chaotic withdrawal by Washington. "The US disregards its responsibilities and duties and withdraws troops from Afghanistan hastily, dumping the mess and war on the Afghan people and countries in the region," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a routine briefing Friday. "The US, as the original culprit of the Afghan issue, bears unavoidable responsibility." —AFP

B'desh factory owner held after fire kills 52

DHAKA: The owner of a factory where 52 people died in a fire was arrested for murder yesterday along with seven others, as it emerged that children as young as 11 had been working there. Police said Abul Hashem and four of his sons were among eight people detained over the inferno, which broke out Thursday and raged for more than a day. A separate inquiry has been launched into the use of child labor at the food factory.

Jayedul Alam, police chief for Narayanganj district where the factory is located, said the entrance had been padlocked at the time of the blaze and the factory breached multiple safety regulations. "It was a deliberate murder," the

police chief told AFP. All eight people detained face murder charges. Before his arrest, Hashem told the Daily Star newspaper the fire "may have been a result of workers' carelessness", suggesting a discarded cigarette could have sparked the carnage.

Emergency services found 48 of the bodies on the third floor of the Hashem Food and Beverage factory in Rupganj, an industrial town outside Dhaka. The fire department said the exit door to the main staircase had been padlocked and highly flammable chemicals and plastics had been stored in the building. Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labor, said inquiries had begun into the use of child workers at the factory.

Laizu Begum, who spent hours waiting outside the factory, said her 11-year-old nephew had been working on the third floor and was now missing. "We heard the door of the floor where my nephew worked was padlocked. Then we realized, after seeing how big the fire was, that he is probably dead," said the woman, who broke into tears.

Outside the burned shell of the factory and at

the hospital morgue, AFP spoke to 30 survivors and relatives of the dead, who said child workers at the factory were paid just 20 taka (24 US cents) per hour. Bilal Hossain, father of 14-year-old Mitu Akter, who was among the missing, went to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue with a photo of his daughter, begging police and doctors to hand over her remains. "I sent my baby girl to die," said Hossain, who added that the company even owed the girl back wages. "How will I tell her mother?"

At the hospital, Chandu Mia held a photo of his 15-year-old daughter. "I am not sure if she is alive," he said, holding back tears. State minister Sufian told AFP she had spoken to two survivors aged 14. "I went to the hospital and I asked them how old they are. The youngest were 14," she said. Sufian said some children aged as young as 14 were allowed to work in non-hazardous jobs, but that the Hashem factory was considered hazardous. "If child labor is proved, we will take action against the owner and the inspectors," she said. —AFP



RUPGANJ, Bangladesh: A garment worker walks past the burnt factory after a fire was put out on Saturday. —AFP

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International

Cuba approves emergency use of home-grown COVID vaccine

First Latin American coronavirus jab to reach this stage

HAVANA: Cuba on Friday approved its home-grown Abdala vaccine for emergency use, the first Latin American coronavirus jab to reach this stage and a possible lifeline for a region trying to battle a killer pandemic with modest means. The country's CECMED health regulator gave the go-ahead after Abdala's makers last month announced the vaccine candidate was more than 92 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 disease after three doses.

Cuba is working on five coronavirus vaccines, and in May started immunizing its population using two of them - Abdala and Soberana 2 - even before they received approval. By this week, 6.8 million of Cuba's 11.2 million people have received at least one dose of either vaccine, while 1.6 million have the required three doses. The country has not bought or sought vaccines from elsewhere, and aims to immunize its population before the end of the year.

In June, the state-run BioCubaFarma laboratory said Abdala "shows efficacy of 92.28 percent in its three-dose scheme". The World Health Organization has set a 50-percent efficacy threshold for coronavirus vaccines to qualify for approved global roll-out, though individual countries can green-light jabs without the UN stamp for domestic use.

The CECMED said approval of Abdala was based on its analysis that it met requirements for "quality, safety and effectiveness". And Aica

Laboratories, where the vaccine is produced, said there had been "a rigorous process of evaluation of the dossier and... inspections of the plants involved". Under American sanctions, communist Cuba has a long tradition of making its own vaccines, dating back to the 1980s. Nearly 80 percent of its inoculations are produced locally.

Soberana 2 next?

On Thursday, the Finlay Institute which makes Soberana 2 said it, too, showed efficacy exceeding 91 percent after three doses. Eduardo Martinez, president of BioCubaFarma, said Soberana 2 will be submitted to the regulatory authority in the coming days for its own emergency approval. Cuba has recorded more than 224,000 COVID-19 cases among its population of 11.2 million, and some 1,450 deaths. It has seen a recent spike in infections, with a new daily infection record reported Friday.

On Wednesday, authorities sent an urgent deployment of doctors and medical equipment to the province of Matanzas - where foreign tourists have continued to visit - after hospitals there reached capacity. A local company has been commissioned to make more hospital beds for Matanzas and there is a social media campaign to raise donations.

Elsewhere in Latin America, the situation remains worrying. Brazil has the world's second-highest death toll - more than 530,000. Colombia

recently crossed the grim threshold of 100,000 coronavirus deaths and Peru is now the country with the world's highest death toll per capita. Mexico, whose recorded death toll of 234,000 is the fourth-highest in the world, said Tuesday it is battling a fresh pandemic wave.

A locally produced vaccine offers a glimpse of hope for Latin America and the Caribbean, a region which the UN says has fully vaccinated just over 13.6 percent of its population compared to 34.9 percent in the European Union and 46.3 percent in North America. The region comprises a third of the world's coronavirus death toll despite representing just 8.4 percent of the global population.

Venezuela has signed a contract to purchase 12 million doses of Abdala and has already started using the Cuban jab in its vaccination campaign. Argentina's health minister visited the island in May to discuss a possible vaccine deal and Mexico has expressed interest. There is no requirement for the WHO to approve such bilateral vaccine deals.

Abdala and Soberana 2 are recombinant protein vaccines that work by recreating the "spikes" on the surface of the coronavirus and introducing it to the body, training the immune system to recognize intruders and fight back in case of a real infection. Recombinant vaccines, unlike some coronavirus shots already in use, do not need extreme refrigeration. —AFP



HAVANA: A nurse holds a vial of the Cuban vaccine candidate Abdala against COVID-19 on Friday. —AFP

News in brief

US Capitol fencing removed

WASHINGTON: More than six months after the deadly US Capitol insurrection, authorities on Friday began the process of dismantling fencing and barricades surrounding the iconic Washington building, although some access restrictions will remain in place. Personnel were seen removing bars connecting sections of the eight-foot (2.4-m) black metal fencing that had been erected in the days following the violent unrest at the citadel of American democracy. —AFP

Condo tower toll rises to 79

MIAMI: The death toll from the collapse of an apartment building in Florida has risen to 79, after 14 bodies were recovered from the rubble, authorities said Friday. "It is a staggering and heartbreaking number that affects all of us very, very deeply," said Miami-Dade county mayor Danielle Levine Cava. Champlain Towers South, a 12-story building in Surfside, a town north of Miami Beach, came tumbling down on June 24, as dozens of residents slept inside. —AFP

Russia sets COVID death record

MOSCOW: Russia reported 752 coronavirus deaths yesterday, a national record of pandemic-related fatalities over a 24-hour period, as the country battles a third wave. Russia has now set seven new pandemic highs for COVID-19 deaths in the last 12 days as it fights a surging outbreak driven by the highly infectious Delta variant and a sluggish vaccination campaign. The country's official virus case-load passed 5.75 million yesterday, making it the fifth-worst hit nation worldwide, according to an AFP tally. —AFP

Moroccan journo jailed for 5 years

CASABLANCA: Detained Moroccan journalist Soulaïmane Raïssouni was sentenced on Friday to five years in jail for indecent assault against another man. Raïssouni, editor-in-chief of now-defunct newspaper Akhbar Al Yaoum, denies the charge and has been on a hunger strike for 93 days. He was not present in court for the sentencing. The 49-year-old has been in detention since May 2020 after an LGBT activist accused him of sexual assault. —AFP

Five dead in Mogadishu bombing

MOGADISHU: A large car bomb targeting a top police chief exploded in Somalia's capital Mogadishu yesterday, killing five people, police and witnesses said. The attack was claimed by Al-Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab Islamist group, which has been fighting to topple Somalia's federal government for years and has carried out waves of attacks. The bomber, using an explosives-laden vehicle, struck the motorcade of Benadir region police commissioner Farhan Mohamad at a busy intersection in the capital. —AFP

Spanish govt in rib rumble as minister attacks meat industry

MADRID: Meat-loving Spaniards were outraged when a member of the government took aim at the industry over environmental and health concerns, prompting the prime minister to declare himself unable to resist a perfectly cooked steak. In a nation where the average person tucks into around 50 kg of meat

Bolsonaro disapproval rating surpasses 50% for first time

SAO PAULO: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's disapproval rating passed 50 percent for the first time, according to a poll published by the Datafolha Institute, marking a new low in the far-right leader's declining popularity. Bolsonaro's gap to former leftist president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ahead of next year's elections also increased from 18 to 21 percentage points.

The percentage of people that consider Bolsonaro to be doing a "bad" or "terrible" job increased from 45 percent in May to 51 percent in the poll conducted among more than 2,000 people from July 7-8 and published overnight Thursday to Friday. Bolsonaro's approval rating also remained at its lowest mark of 24 percent, set in May. His highest approval rating of 37 percent came in December 2020.

But his popularity started to plummet from January 2021, when the government stopped hand-

ing out subsidies to mitigate the economic crunch caused by the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the country of 212 million people. And the fall continued as Brazil entered a second, and more lethal, pandemic wave at the beginning of 2021, followed by corruption allegations surrounding Bolsonaro's handling of the health crisis, which has claimed the lives of 530,000 Brazilians.

In the election opinion polls, Bolsonaro's share increased from 23 percent in May to 25 Percent, but the uptick fell short of Lula's jump from 41 to 46 percent. Former trade unionist Lula, 75, was denied the possibility of running against Bolsonaro in 2018, as he was serving a 12-year graft sentence linked to the Petrobras corruption scandal. But he was released 18 months later and in March had his convictions quashed on procedural grounds.

The Datafolha poll found the popular Lula would defeat 66-year-old Bolsonaro by 58 percent to 31 percent in a second round election run-off - another four percent increase on the difference in May. Both men have their detractors, however, with Bolsonaro's personal rejection rating rising from 54 to 59 percent and Lula's creeping up from 36 to 37 percent.

Bolsonaro is the subject of a senate investigation

will deepen the exceptional ties that they have forged," Parly said in a tweet after the two met. Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Anton Semelroth called the roadmap "a statement of intent to broaden cooperation in all areas of special operations."

He said there was no specific regional focus of the agreement. But both countries are said to be looking for ways for allies to continue working together to battle Islamic jihadist groups even as they reduce the presence of their troops in Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan. President Joe Biden announced Thursday that the near two-decade US military involvement in Afghanistan would end by Aug 31.

Earlier Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron announced his country would start closing military bases in northern Mali by year-end, as the jihadist threat in the Sahel begins to shift south and exposes more countries in the region to Islamist attacks. Both countries remain deeply concerned about non-state extremist insurgents in Africa, with Biden saying the

US, France expand special forces cooperation

WASHINGTON: The US and French defense chiefs signed a new "roadmap" for cooperation between their special operations forces Friday as both seek to build international efforts to counter non-state threats like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group. French Defense Minister Florence Parly signed the pact at the Pentagon with her counterpart Lloyd Austin, on a visit that came as the US pulls out of Afghanistan and France cuts its counter-terror operations in Africa's Sahel region.

"In the face of terrorism, our special forces have developed a true brotherhood of arms. This convention

Venezuelan police move in on gang-run neighborhoods

CARACAS: Venezuelan security forces entered four poor neighborhoods of the capital Caracas on Friday seeking to end two days of fighting with armed gangs that have claimed several lives, AFP has witnessed. "We control the area but there may still be a few snipers," an officer told AFP. No official toll has been given but local media say a dozen people have lost their lives since fighting broke out between gangsters and police in the neighborhoods, or "barrios" on Wednesday - including several bystanders.

On Thursday, the authorities issued search warrants and offered rewards of up to \$500,000 for gang bosses behind the deadly clashes but now on the run. In sectors controlled by the Cota 905 gang, the ground was littered Friday with bullet casings, evidence of thousands of shots fired in

two days, according to images on social media. "It was like a war. We hid and waited for it to pass," Jesus Rey, a 40-year-old mechanic who lives in the neighborhood told AFP.

Interior Minister Carmen Melendez tweeted that police have "advanced in the dismantling of the criminal structures that have settled in these territories with the intention of sowing terror". The government blames the violence on an alleged plot by the opposition to "destabilize" President Nicolas Maduro. "The enemies of the homeland intend to sow anxiety through the financing of criminal gangs, we will not sit idly by," Maduro wrote on Twitter. "We are acting forcefully, adhering to the laws."

Around 800 members of the security forces were deployed in the operation, searching pedestrians and homes, and seizing cars, motorcycles and barrels of diesel thought to belong to the gangs. In June, similar clashes killed at least three people including a nurse who fell victim to a stray bullet. Friday was the first time in years the authorities have launched a major offensive against the heavily-armed gangs who have de-facto control over parts of the capital.

ters in the left-wing government headed by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. "If you put me in front of a medium-rare rib steak, I can't resist," Sanchez declared on an official visit to Lithuania, at the other end of the 27-nation European Union.

Beyond the cultural role of meat in the Spanish diet, where many restaurants serve tapas dishes of cured meat beneath ordered rows of the very same legs dangling from the ceiling, its production is also vital to the economy. The national meat industry association says it accounts for almost €28 billion (\$33 billion) of revenue or 2.3 percent of Spanish GDP, making it the country's fourth-largest industry.

Garzon's comments were "irresponsible and



RIO DE JANEIRO: In this photo taken on July 3, 2021, a woman holds a sign depicting Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro in a dollar bill during a protest against his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

over his handling of the pandemic, the seriousness of which he repeatedly downplayed. He's also being investigated by the public prosecutor for allegedly failing to act on an embezzlement tip off regarding coronavirus vaccine purchases. The opposition is pushing for the chamber of deputies president to open impeachment proceedings against Bolsonaro. —AFP

US counter-terrorism effort needs to shift from Afghanistan to the continent and other hotspots.

In a discussion at the Atlantic Council after her Pentagon visit, Parly said the Takuba task force, nine European and African countries' special forces working together in the Sahel, was a model for future cooperation. Takuba "is a remarkable and concrete example of Europeans taking their responsibilities by accompanying the Malian armed forces in combat," she said. "This task force has already achieved major successes against terrorism," she said, adding: "The US support to our operations in the Sahel is crucial."

Citing other joint missions in recent years, she said: "Our operational cooperation delivers concrete results. And it will continue to deliver." Ahead of their discussions, Austin called France an "ideal partner" in the Indo-Pacific, where Washington is trying to build stronger partnerships to counter China. In Washington, Parly also visited US Cyber Command, which is the Pentagon's cyber warfare body. —AFP



CARACAS: A member of the Bolivarian National Police aims at a possible target after clashes with alleged members of a criminal gang in the Cota 905 neighborhood on Friday. —AFP

Venezuela is one of the most violent nations on Earth. In 2020, the country registered 12,000 violent deaths, according to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory. This is a rate of 45.6 per 100,000 inhabitants - seven times higher than the global average. —AFP

unworthy of a Spanish minister," a group of six meat industry associations said in an open letter, accusing him of "stigmatizing" the sector. Agriculture Minister Luis Planas also took Garzon to task, accusing him of talking up a "fake problem" and calling his criticism of producers "unfair". Meat production accounted for "just eight percent" of Spain's greenhouse gas emissions, Planas said.

And Health Minister Carolina Darias sought to downplay her colleague's health claims, saying in a press conference Friday that people should aim for "a diet that allows them to alternate between eating large amounts of protein and of vitamins... a balanced and rounded diet, everything in the right amount". —AFP

International

Communist Party emerges from shadows during HK crackdown

CCP has moved increasingly center stage in recent years

HONG KONG: China's Communist Party has abandoned its tradition of working from the shadows in Hong Kong as authorities pursue a sweeping crackdown on critics and remold the financial hub in the mainland's authoritarian image. While Hong Kong was returned by colonial Britain in 1997, Beijing has historically been wary about making the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) too visible in a city where many hail from families who fled the worst excesses of its rule.

"There were a few reasons for the CCP to be kept out of sight," political analyst Willy Lam told AFP. "The CCP was associated with a series of horrendous mistakes including the Cultural Revolution, the three years of famine and so forth." Beijing's quiet support for leftist riots which killed about 50 Hong Kongers in 1967 - and Beijing's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown - also left a deeply ingrained suspicion of the party for many residents.

Ahead of the handover, former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping - creator of the "one country, two systems" model where Hong Kong could keep key freedoms and autonomy - moved to calm nerves by assuring residents that they did not need to love the party to be deemed patriots. "We don't demand that they be in favor of China's socialist system; we only ask them to love the motherland and Hong Kong," he said.

With 90 million members, the party is ubiquitous on the mainland but in Hong Kong it has been all but invisible. The party itself has never registered as an official entity and the city's proxy leaders have always denied being members - at least while in office.

Centenary celebrations

But the CCP has moved increasingly center stage in recent years, culminating most prominently in this month's festivities marking the centenary of the party's founding. Hammer and sickle flags have sprung up across the city in recent weeks along with huge

billboards proclaiming the anniversary. The local government hosted an exhibition titled "A Hundred Years of Prosperity and Greatness" while Beijing's four government agencies also held a prominent symposium with a series of bellwether speeches.

It was the first time high-profile events had been put on for a party anniversary in Hong Kong and it offered a vivid illustration of how far Deng's definition of patriotism has changed under President Xi Jinping. "Safeguarding the leadership of the CCP is safeguarding 'one country, two systems,'" Luo Huining, director of Beijing's Liaison Office, said in his symposium speech. "Those who raise a hue and cry for ending the one-party rule... are the real enemies of Hong Kong's prosperity and stability," he added.

The party's increased visibility comes as authorities enforce a political orthodoxy on the once outspoken city in response to huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago. Beijing has imposed a sweeping national security law that criminalized much dissent and rolled out a campaign dubbed "Patriots rule Hong Kong" to vet people's political views. Protests have been all but banned using anti-coronavirus measures and most of the city's pro-democracy opposition leaders are now in jail, facing prosecution or have fled overseas.

'Love the party'

"Beijing has turned to direct governance over Hong Kong," veteran journalist and political analyst Johnny Lau told AFP. "The representatives of the central government do not mind coming forward to the front stage and showing their presence and leadership. "With 'Patriots rule Hong Kong' and the new security law... authorities have implied that people now have to love the country and love the party," he added.

Hong Kongers with connections to Beijing's officialdom have suggested the same. In an interview published Wednesday by ultranationalist mainland



HONG KONG: In this picture taken on July 8, 2021, visitors watch a digital presentation film at an exhibition at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. —AFP

media outlet Guancha.cn, Lau Siu-kai, a former chief adviser at Hong Kong's central policy unit, said the Chinese Communist Party had once been considered a "sensitive phrase" in the city.

As a result the party had chosen not to carry out its activities publicly. But that approach, Lau said, was now "outmoded" because democracy protests had tried to turn Hong Kong into "an infiltration base that could be used by opposition forces to challenge the CCP's rule", he said. Now that Hong Kong's democracy opposition had been "utterly

defeated and scattered", he added, it was time for the party to "seize the power of discourse".

Hong Kong officials have embraced that idea. After new laws were passed ordering all public office holders to make oaths of loyalty, Erick Tsang - the secretary for constitutional and mainland affairs - said there was now no room for political ambiguity. "You cannot say that you are patriotic but you do not love the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party or you do not respect it," he said. "This does not make sense." —AFP

India's poor can't afford to beat the heat

SRI GANGANAGAR, India: Beating the merciless heat is hard in the Indian desert city of Sri Ganganagar, a reality facing millions across the vast country as the climate changes in the coming decades. While people in richer nations can find some respite from a warming planet with air conditioners and other modern luxuries, many here - and elsewhere in India - don't even have running water.

Sri Ganganagar, in the desert state of Rajasthan near the Pakistan border, is regularly India's hottest place and temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius are nothing out of the ordinary. So the district's two million people - equivalent to the population of Slovenia - get up early during the long summer months. By late morning the sun is already ferocious and the temperature a brutal 42 Celsius, and everyone soon retreats to their homes until early evening.

"By noon only those who can't avoid it are outside. We just sit under this," said fruit vendor Dinesh Kumar Shah, gesturing to his large black umbrella. Only a lucky few have air conditioning,

with most people using fans and cheaper air coolers - in between power cuts - and thick green curtains called tarpals to block out the sun. "Us poor are hit the hardest," said local resident Kuldeep Kaur. "The ceiling fans at our homes just circulate the hot air. It is particularly difficult for young children at home in summers. But I guess there isn't much ordinary citizens can do about it. We just have to bear it."

Along the city's irrigation canals, boys and men young and old - but not women in socially conservative Rajasthan - cool off in the muddy water. Locals know the water-release schedules. It helps them with irrigating their crops, and tells them where they need to be for a dip. "This is better than any fan or air-cooler," said Arjun Sarsar, 16, who has already spent four hours chilling, literally, with his friends.

Getting hotter

India's average temperature rose about 0.7 Celsius between the beginning of the 20th century and 2018. It is set to rise another 4.4 degrees by 2100, according to a recent government report. The study also forecasts the frequency of heatwaves by then to be three to four times higher than in 1976-2005, and they will last twice as long.

According to a draft report by the UN's climate science advisory panel seen by AFP last month, hundreds of millions of people will likely be afflict-



SRI GANGANAGAR, India: Men cool off with a swim in a canal on a hot summer day in this city in the northern Indian state of Rajasthan. —AFP

ed by at least 30 deadly heat days every year by 2080, even if the world meets the Paris climate deal goal of capping warming well below two degrees Celsius. Sustained heatwaves can be mortally dangerous, especially when combined with high levels of humidity.

Together, high humidity and heat can create so-called "wet-bulb temperatures" so vicious that sweating no longer cools people down, potentially killing a healthy adult within hours. "Both temperatures and humidity are increasing in India and all over the world," —AFP



MELBOURNE: Bou Rachna, widow of the slain Cambodian analyst Kem Ley, kneels in front of a photo of him at the Wat Buddhharangsi Buddhist Temple on Friday. —AFP

about the corruption that blights the country. Shortly before his murder he gave an interview about an investigative report that detailed some of the millions of dollars allegedly amassed by the family of long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen. The Cambodian government strongly denied any role in the killing. —AFP



TOKYO: French resident Vincent Fichot, whose two children have been abducted by their Japanese mother, poses for a photo outside a train station yesterday. —AFP

Family of slain Cambodia activist mark anniversary

PHNOM PENH: As the family of slain Cambodian activist Kem Ley rebuild their lives in Australia, his youngest son, born just months after the assassination, acts as a human timepiece measuring the years since the five brothers lost their father. Kem Ley, a popular analyst and critic who dabbled in grassroots politics, was shot at point-blank range at a gas station cafe in Phnom Penh in 2016.

An unemployed former soldier confessed to the killing and claimed the motive was an unpaid debt, in a trial critics say was a political cover-up. On the eve of the fifth anniversary of his death yesterday, his widow Bou Rachna visited a Melbourne temple to pray. "I always tell my sons about the story of their Dad, I hope they will remember forever the good actions of their father," she told AFP.

His work bag and laptop are on display in the

family's Melbourne home, along with his portrait and a pot of incense sticks. Bou Rachna was five months pregnant at the time of the killing and named her fifth son, Kem Ley Vireakboth, after her late husband. "It's like he is still with us," she said. Kem Ley Jr is now five years old, and has shown signs of autism. "So even though we keep talking to him (about his dad) he still does not understand yet," his mother said.

The family moved to Australia in 2018 after being granted refugee status. The widow has struggled to support her children financially - the eldest is at university and was ineligible for a government-funded degree and must pay full tuition because the family are yet to gain citizenship. "It's really difficult for me as a woman who has to look after five children in this situation," she said, adding that many Khmer-Australians had shown tremendous kindness to her family. "We have changed countries and have found a good place to live. We don't feel pressure and intimidation."

'Scapegoat'

Kem Ley was a vocal critic of Cambodian politicians of all stripes, but he was particularly scathing

will not give up his hunger strike until his children, a boy and a girl aged six and four, are returned to him. Failing that, he said, "I want the French authorities to show me they are serious and that they really want to defend my kids, and that they will impose sanctions against Japan until Japan agrees to protect my children's rights."

His wife has accused him in court of domestic violence, Fichot said, but later "retracted" the claim, and the Japanese justice system now has "nothing to reproach me for", he said. "I've tried everything, I've tried to convince my wife by saying to her that it was not good for the kids," he added. "Right now I don't even know if they are alive." Joint custody of children in cases of divorce or separation does not exist legally in Japan, where parental abductions are common and often tolerated by local authorities. No official numbers exist, but rights groups have estimated that about 150,000 minors are forcibly separated from a parent every year in the East Asian archipelago. —AFP

News in brief

Garcetti tapped as India envoy

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Friday nominated Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, an ambitious star in his Democratic Party, to be ambassador to India, with which the United States has an increasingly close relationship. A Rhodes scholar who spent 12 years as an intelligence officer in the US Navy Reserves and plays jazz piano on the side, Garcetti said in a statement that he had "committed my life to service". If confirmed by the Democratic-run Senate, which appears likely, the 50-year-old Garcetti would take up an ambassadorship with a storied history. —AFP

Bangladesh secures vaccine boost

DHAKA: Bangladesh has sealed deals for 17.5 million more coronavirus vaccine doses, the health minister said yesterday, as the country battles record deaths and its caseload passed one million. The country of 169 million people has imposed its harshest ever lockdown as it seeks to curb a major surge in cases and record numbers of deaths. The lockdown has been in place for two weeks and is backed by troops on the streets to keep people in their homes. Health minister Zahid Maleque said the government was also concentrating on increasing the number of vaccine doses available. —AFP

Record high S Korea COVID cases

SEOUL: South Korea reported 1,378 new coronavirus cases yesterday, a record high for the third day in a row as the country prepared to impose its highest-level curbs in the greater capital area next week. More than 1,000 of the new cases were in the capital Seoul and its surrounding areas, home to around half the South Korean population. Clusters have recently surfaced in areas including schools, offices and shopping malls, with people in their 20s and 30s - most of whom are not yet eligible for vaccinations - driving up the numbers. Only about 11 percent of the country's 52 million population is fully vaccinated, according to health authorities. —AFP

CONDOLENCES

United Indian School Management, Staff & Students

Mourn the sad demise of our dear teacher

Mrs. Manju Prem

"Your personality illumined the lives

Of those around you with a warmth, that will be forever cherished"

You will be deeply missed.

"We pray that God Almighty will strengthen and comfort the family

to bear this untimely loss.

French father on hunger strike for 'abducted' kids

TOKYO: A Frenchman in Japan who says his children were abducted by their Japanese mother began a hunger strike in Tokyo yesterday, in a protest he hopes will bring international attention to his fight to be reunited with his family. "I've given everything, I've lost my job, my house and my savings in the last three years. I weigh 80 kilograms now, and I'll give it all until the very last gram," Vincent Fichot told AFP, sitting at the entrance to a train station in Tokyo, not far from the new Olympic stadium.

Fichot, 39, who has lived in Japan for 15 years, said he

Business

SUNDAY, JULY 11, 2021

Zain wins prestigious ‘Best Corporate Governance Award 2021’ for Kuwait

World Finance recognizes Zain for its integrity, principles and transparency

• Bader Al-Kharafi: The proactiveness and innovative policies of all the regulatory bodies in Kuwait drive us to be a more agile and responsible organization

• Zain recognized for its integrity, principles, and transparency portrayed by the implementation of its Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa announced that it has won the World Finance ‘Best Corporate Governance Award 2021’ for Kuwait. The company drew praise from the judging panel for its principles and integrity captured by its Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework, which drive its ongoing ability to provide shareholder returns and to pursue long-term objectives while ensuring ongoing transparency and accountability.

World Finance is a print and online magazine providing comprehensive coverage and analysis of the financial industry, international business and the global economy. Since being founded nearly 20 years ago, the publication is read in over 100 countries, with a readership of 120,000 per issue on average. The annual World Finance Awards select and analyze some of the most diverse and succinct governance platforms and recognize leading organizations in this important area.

Zain has adopted a sound Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework that enhances the overall governance environment within the company in line with applicable laws, regulations and leading practices. Wherever possible, the company looks to exceed the requirements of the Corporate Governance Regulations issued by the Capital Markets Authority in Kuwait, Boursa Kuwait, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and other regulatory bodies.

Corporate governance

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi said, “We are proud of



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

the standards we set with respect to corporate governance and integrity. From the publication of our annual and sustainability reports to our regulatory disclosures as well as operational and financial results reporting, we are guided by a desire to offer all our stakeholders the most transparent access to our information as possible.”

Al-Kharafi added, “The proactiveness and innovative policies of the Capital Markets Authority, Boursa Kuwait, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and other regulatory bodies in Kuwait drive us to be a more agile and responsible organization and we remain motivated to raise the bar even higher with respect to good governance and accountability.”

Zain’s corporate governance framework helps the company to mitigate risks

and facilitates an effective board oversight over the company’s executive management by monitoring the implementation of policies when running daily operations. Corporate Governance promotes strong internal controls to improve integrity of financials and establishes a culture of compliance. This governance structure has also helped Zain to win the confidence of the market and attract global investors.

Zain’s CG framework includes a set of policies that have been approved by the board to safeguard the integrity of the day-to-day business operations and to protect the rights of different stakeholders. These policies discuss and outline responsibilities and commitments relating to critical topics such as whistleblowing, conflict of interest, related party transactions, disclosure, remunerations of the Board and the Executive management, and board affairs including board assessment, to name a few.

Transparency

Zain Group’s selection for this year’s honors is a result of the company’s tireless pursuit of transparency and best practice in its Investor Relations and general operating and reporting functions. The company’s Code of Conduct, for example, requires that any business dealings be undertaken with the utmost honesty, integrity and fairness. To uphold this, Zain, its suppliers, business partners, intermediaries and agents are expected to carry on business with the highest levels of integrity, honesty, fairness and responsibility. Zain’s Code of Conduct also requires that stakeholders ensure they have adopted a similar approach to conducting their own businesses.

The ethical guidelines of Zain’s Code of Conduct are extensive and exist to guide and empower the Board of Directors and executive management to make the right choices, as individuals and as a company. Adhering to the Code of Conduct allows Zain to exercise a positive impact on the industry, communities in which it operates, and beyond; and build a company all can be proud of, where corporate responsibility is a key competitive advantage.

With respect to compliance, Zain’s Corporate Governance and Compliance Department is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Corporate Governance Framework. The department also facilitates the review assessment of

the company’s corporate governance framework to verify full compliance with the set framework and related laws and regulations in Kuwait and the countries that Zain operates in. This ‘Best Corporate Governance Award 2021’ award follows Zain recently been named winner in three categories at the annual Global Good Governance Awards 2021: Best of the Best in Diversity Award 2021; Leadership in Sustainability Award 2021; and Championship Award in Women Empowerment 2021. The annual Global Good Governance Awards are organized by UK-based think tank Cambridge IFA and celebrate individuals, governments, public and private sector institutions and NGOs that exhibit governance and sustainability as their strategic priority.



Small-scale Chilean miners left out of copper price bonanza

ANTOFAGASTA, Chile: Hugo Moroso individually selects rocks he extracts from the small Kiara copper mine in the Vicuna Mackenna mountain range of northern Chile, home to the largest copper deposits in the world. Chile is the world’s top producer of copper, making up 28 percent of global output. The mineral accounts for 10-15 percent of the South American country’s GDP, with much of it exported to China, the world’s biggest consumer.

But while copper prices are booming at record levels of over \$10,000 a ton, the same cannot be said for 70-year-old Moroso’s earnings. “My son doesn’t want me to keep working in mining,” said Moroso, whose back-breaking labor earns him just 500,000 pesos (\$660) a month. The Kiara mine is located 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of Antofagasta—a paradise for copper mining giants like Australia’s BHP, which owns the Escondida site, and Chile’s state Codelco company that runs the Chuquibambilla site. Miners at those sites earn around two million pesos a month (\$2,700), well above the national

average. Antofagasta — 1,300 kilometers north of the capital Santiago—is known as “the capital of world mining” and the source of 25-30 percent of Chile’s exports.

Yet poverty in the city—one of the country’s most expensive—increased from 5.1 percent in 2017 to 9.3 percent in 2020. “In this city there are people that can live like in Europe and others that live in (makeshift) camps where there’s no running water, there are outhouses, dirt roads, that’s what makes you angry,” said Felipe Berrios, a priest who has lived in the Chimba area of town for six years.

Chimba lies next to a rubbish dump among the city’s arid hills and is home to 1,000 families living in wooden huts. Many are immigrants from Colombia, Bolivia and Peru working menial jobs.

In this region “which provides 10 percent of the country’s GDP but receives only two percent of investment, you don’t see large roads, you don’t see the best schools, you also don’t see an improvement in hospital infrastructure,” Ricardo

Diaz, the governor elect, told AFP.

Small-time miners like Moroso pick through rocks to find the ones with the most copper to sell to the Enami national mining company. Big mining companies use machines for this tiring work.

A year ago, a ton of rocks with 2.5 percent copper content fetched 43,000 pesos (\$59); now that’s soared to 109,000 pesos (\$150) but Moroso’s salary has barely budged in three decades.

“It’s the only thing I know how to do,” he said. Working conditions are tough. During the day the sun beats down in the windy desert, while at night temperatures drop dramatically. One solace is that work is safer now than it was for the miners’ fathers. The workers have masks and a machine to cart out the rocks they break up with pickaxes.

Before, they had to lug wheelbarrows full of rocks up a slope while covering their noses with moistened socks to keep out the dust. The copper price boom has at least created more work. Enami has registered more than 1,400 small-scale miners and says that over 80 operations have been reactivated since 2020.

The Kiara mine reopened in August 2020 after three years of closure. “It’s a good business but you have to have the



ANTOFAGASTA, Chile: Miners take a break at the Kiara copper mine, 136 km south of Antofagasta, Chile. The increase in the price of copper, that overpassed 10,000 dollars the ton, boosted by the demand from China and the “green” post-pandemic reactivation plan, gave rise to Chilean small mining, while large companies operate at full speed. — AFP

right people and look after those that work with you,” said Leonel Alvarado, one of the owners of the Kiara mine, which sits at 2,400 meters (7,875 feet) above sea level.

Changes could be afoot in Chile’s mining industry. The lower house Chamber of Deputies has approved a bill pushed by left-wing parties—due to be discussed in the Senate next—that will increase taxes on the extraction of non-renewable natural

resources, with the aim of investing that extra money in mining communities.

The commission that will rewrite Chile’s dictatorship-era constitution is also planning changes to the exploitation of primary resources. The government expects the current 40 percent sales tax—a figure similar to other major mining countries such as Australia and Peru—to increase to 70 percent. — AFP

Britain’s economic recovery slows as more curbs lifted

LONDON: Britain’s economy grew for a fourth month running in May on further easing of lockdown measures but the rate of expansion slowed more than expected, official data showed.

Gross domestic product grew by 0.8 percent in May as restaurants and pubs welcomed customers back indoors for the first time since the end of last year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. But that was down on April’s 2.0-percent growth rate. The analysts’ consensus had been for a slowdown to 1.5-percent growth in May.

“The economy grew for the fourth consecutive month, albeit at a slower pace than seen recently... (and) remains around three percent below its pre-pandemic peak,” said Jonathan Athow, deputy national statistician for economic statistics at the ONS. “Pubs and restaurants, who were again able to welcome indoor guests, were responsible for the vast majority of the growth seen in May.”

“Hotels also saw a marked recovery as restrictions lifted,” Athow added.

Offsetting a 37-percent surge in accommodation and food services activity was a 16.5-percent drop in production of transport equipment. This was owing to the global shortage in semiconductors hitting car manufacturing, the ONS said. In the three months to May, total UK output grew by 3.6 percent thanks also to strong retail sales, the ONS said.

Separate data showed UK exports rising in May, while imports dipped. “May’s weaker-than-expected increase in GDP underlines that the recovery to

its pre-COVID levels will be drawn out,” forecast Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. He pointed to a “fading of some initial enthusiasm when businesses reopened. “Rising COVID-19 infections also appear to be prompting some people to work from home again and to visit shops and services venues less frequently.”

Overall, the global economy has surpassed its pre-pandemic peak, data survey firm IHS Markit said at the end of June. Following Friday’s data, British finance minister Rishi Sunak said it was “great to see people back out and about thanks to the success of the vaccine rollout, and to see that reflected in” the GDP update.

The government on Thursday said that UK residents returning to England from the United States and most European countries will soon no longer have to self-quarantine if fully vaccinated against Covid-19. The quarantine change will start from July

19, when the government hopes to remove virtually all coronavirus restrictions in England. Additionally, the government is expected to announce a plan in the next fortnight allowing entry to fully-vaccinated foreigners and British expatriates.

Broader plans to ease social distancing, mask-wearing and other virus curbs come despite a surge in infections of the highly contagious Delta variant. Prime Minister Boris Johnson argues that a successful UK vaccination campaign—which has seen nearly two-thirds of adults fully jabbed—has weakened the link between infections and hospitalizations and deaths. However a group of more than 120 scientists and medical professionals have slammed the unlocking plans, calling them a “dangerous and unethical experiment”. In a letter to The Lancet medical journal, they cautioned that the move could leave thousands with long-term illness owing to so-called long COVID. Britain has one of the highest death tolls in Europe, with more than 128,000 fatalities. — AFP

Business

Biden unveils sweeping effort to counter corporate consolidation

Plan to reset US economy for the benefit of workers and consumers

WASHINGTON: Vowing to reset the economy for the benefit of everyday workers and consumers, President Joe Biden unveiled on Friday a wide-ranging plan to tilt the balance of power away from corporations and towards “the little guy.” Biden described the initiative as a shift from what he called Washington’s 40-year “experiment of letting giant corporations accumulate more and more power” as he signed an executive order directing changes on everything from the sale of hearing aids to the disclosure of airline baggage fees.

“We have to get back to an economy that grows from the bottom up,” he said. The order, which drew strong praise from consumer advocates but a scathing response from some industry lobbying groups, outlines 72 initiatives across the federal government and announces the creation of the White House Competition Council to monitor progress. A White House fact sheet cited earlier moments in US history when presidents confronted corporate power, such as the trust busting push by President Theodore Roosevelt in the early 20th century that gave “the little guy a fighting chance.”

The move comes as Biden’s legislative agenda faces challenges in a closely-divided Congress. The Democratic president has scored some Republican support for a scaled-down infrastructure package, but his other initiatives have failed to garner their support.

Big Tech targeted

Executive orders provide another policy mechanism for presidents, although, unlike legislation, they can be reversed by a successor’s pen and have less weight than laws. Achieving the policy’s goal of lowering drug prices, or improving small farmers’ hands in negotiating with meat processors, will take extensive action from other government bodies and

may require years to materialize, experts said.

“It is a blueprint for what this administration hopes to accomplish on competition. It remains to be seen how much of this can actually be done,” said Daniel Crane, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School specializing in antitrust law. Among the measures, the order calls for greater scrutiny of mergers involving large tech companies, including so-called “killer acquisitions” that are meant to remove a competitive threat.

The plan also orders the Federal Trade Commission to establish rules on the surveillance and accumulation of data at tech firms and to ensure small businesses are given a better chance to compete with large companies that own and operate online retail marketplaces. The White House also reversed former president Donald Trump’s actions on net neutrality, requiring internet providers to allow access to all services in an effort to boost competition among broadband providers.

The measures follow Biden’s appointment of prominent Big Tech critics, including Tim Wu at the White House’s National Economic Council and Lina Khan as head of the Federal Trade Commission. Other provisions call for the Health and Human Services department to establish rules to allow hearing aids to be sold over the counter and the Department of Transportation to ensure more transparent disclosure of airline baggage fees and other ancillary charges.

The White House also directed US health authorities to work to import prescription drugs from Canada and to increase supply of generic and biosimilar drugs. The policy includes provisions to protect workers from being forced to sign non-compete agreements when starting a new job, which Biden said are used in industries like con-



ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, US: US President Joe Biden speaks to the press as he makes his way to board Air Force One before departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland Friday. —AFP

struction and fast food for “one reason: to keep wages low.” “If you’re employer wants to keep you, he or she should have to make it worth your while to stay,” Biden said.

‘False premise’

Zephyr Teachout, a professor at Fordham Law School and an advocate for tough antitrust enforcement, applauded the measure. Biden’s announcement “wholly embraces the understanding that con-

centration of power and market dominance is a central reason for massive inequality,” she tweeted. But the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a think tank funded in part by large tech companies, said the order is based on a “false premise” and most of it infringed on Congress’ duty to legislate. US Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President Neil Bradley dismissed the policy as “out of touch with reality” and vowed to fight “a government-planned economy.” —AFP

Brussels warns UK its Brexit bill is final

BRUSSELS: The European Commission warned on Friday that its calculation of the cost of the Brexit divorce bill is final, after London and Brussels gave different estimates of what is owed.

Accounts published last month by the European Union give a figure of 47.5 billion euros (40.8 billion pounds, \$56.5 billion) that Brussels says it is owed by the UK government, to be paid over several years. A UK government spokesperson, however, said its estimate of the bill still stands at between 35 and 39 billion pounds—or between 41 and 45 billion euros.

The discrepancy could become the latest bone of contention between the two sides already at loggerheads over several parts of the UK-EU withdrawal agreement.

But European Commission spokesman Balazs Ujvari said the first instalment of Britain’s 6.8 billion euro bill for 2021 had been paid on time and in full. “The report is final,” Ujvari said, referring to the 200-page EU annual accounts published on June 30. “And the calculations were made in line with the withdrawal agreement. He said the bill amounts to “47.5 billion euros, which the United Kingdom is going to have to pay into the European Union budget over the course of the next years.”

Separately, a British spokesperson said: “The UK Government’s estimate of the value of the net financial settlement remains in the central range of 35 to 39 billion pounds.

The British official said the government does not recognize the higher Brussels figure and dubbed it “an estimate produced by the EU for its own internal accounting purposes.

“It doesn’t, for instance, reflect money owed back to the UK, which reduces the amount we pay,” the spokesperson told reporters. Britain left the European Union at the start of



the year after long and tortuous negotiations for a follow on trade and cooperation agreement with the 27-nation bloc. But it agreed to ongoing payments, largely to reflect its obligation to support pension funds and sickness insurance for EU officials. The EU spokesman said Britain would receive two bills this year totalling 6.8 billion euros and that a first instalment

covering part of this sum had been paid in June.

“Everything that had to be done was done. Therefore, we have no indication whatsoever that the overall figure would be contested,” Ujvari said.

British leader Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government is to report full details of its estimate to the UK parliament “shortly.” —AFP

Winners and losers from minimum tax on multinationals

VENICE: G20 finance ministers meeting in Italy will discuss a reform of taxation on multinational firms that is meant to stop nations from using ultra-low tax rates to attract businesses.

The world’s top economies would be the biggest gainers of the OECD-brokered preliminary deal, while tax havens would be the biggest losers.

Big countries to win

The United States, Germany, France, etc... the world’s biggest countries are where multinationals do most of their business but are less and less likely to have their tax homes. These countries stand to benefit from a measure that would redistribute part of the corporate taxes raised to nations where multinationals actually make their profits.

The imposition of a minimum rate of 15 percent (with fewer possibilities to lower it) would also increase the amount of tax money to be distributed. According to the OECD, which led

negotiations that produced a draft tax reform agreement among 131 nations, setting a minimum effective tax rate of 15 percent would generate an extra \$150 billion in revenue per year.

Many nations have rates higher than 15 percent on paper, but with so many exemptions that companies end paying much less. Most of these exemptions would be closed, so companies would end up having to pay at least 15 percent. The CAE, a body charged with providing economic analysis for the French government, has calculated that Paris would likely get an extra six billion euros in tax revenue per year.

Germany would likely receive 8.3 billion euros and the United States nearly 15 billion.

China would also likely benefit as it is expected to be able to continue to provide certain tax incentives to support business development. The details on what tax incentives might remain have yet to be finalized, however.



VENICE: Italian Financial Guard (Guardia di Finanza) police boat patrols in front of San Giorgio Maggiore church during the G20 finance ministers and central bankers meeting in Venice, yesterday. —AFP

Tax havens to lose

Countries that set their tax rates low in order to lure businesses, including tax havens that charge little to no tax, stand to lose the most. While Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have balked at the deal, other tax havens like Panama, Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands have nonetheless

signed up.

“They’ve realized that they don’t have the capacity to block an international deal and calculated that it’s in their interest to be cooperative,” said Nicolas Veron, an economist at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington and the Bruegel Institute in Brussels. — AFP

economic growth, elevated inflation, increased global vaccination rates and a more hawkish Fed.”

President Joe Biden unveiled a sweeping plan to crack down on corporate mergers through an executive order that directs of dozens of changes on everything from drug prices to the disclosure of airline baggage fees. The order drew strong praise from consumer advocates but a scathing response from some industry lobbying groups. Markets largely shrugged off the plan, which requires extensive follow-up steps from numerous government agencies to ensure the promised changes are implemented.

European stock markets also leapt higher, while Asian indices were mixed amid renewed fears over the threat from coronavirus variants to the global economic recovery. Hong Kong was a rare bright spot in Asian trading Friday, closing 0.7 percent higher on bargain hunting. — AFP

Global minimum tax deal: What you need to know

VENICE: Some 131 nations have agreed to what would be the biggest international tax reform in a generation to clamp down on big companies that are gaming the rules. The G20 nations are now expected to endorse a provisional deal reached under the auspices of the OECD, adding momentum to reach a final deal by October and convince hold-outs to join.

The pillars

The proposed reform is comprised of two pillars to prevent companies from establishing bases in countries with low taxes to maximize profits earned elsewhere. Pillar one would give countries a share of the taxes on profits earned there, though the tax would still be collected where the company has its fiscal base. Multinationals operate in many countries—oil giant BP is present in 85, for example—but usually pay taxes on profits only in their tax home.

This provision would initially apply only to the top 100 or so companies, before expanding after seven years. Pillar two is a global minimum corporate tax rate to stop competition between countries over who can offer companies the lowest rate—what critics call a “race to the bottom”.

The OECD deal set a minimum rate of 15 percent. While this is supposed to be an “effective tax rate”—that is the companies actually pay that amount of tax—the OECD deal envisages the possibility of countries retaining some investment incentives that would reduce payments.

Next steps

The next step towards a final deal is the meeting of G20 finance ministers in Venice on Friday and Saturday. While the OECD-brokered deal removes much of the drama, as all of the G20 nations were part of the 131 nations that backed it, the meeting can help maintain political momentum towards achieving a final deal. There are many technical details to work out before the self-imposed October deadline (with a hoped-for 2023 start date), including the method used to calculate the amount of taxes to be redistributed. Details of exemptions from the minimum tax rate also will be hammered out.

Who are the hold-outs?

Of the 139 nations that participated in the talks, eight didn’t sign up to the deal: Barbados, Estonia, Ireland, Hungary, Kenya, Nigeria, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Sri Lanka. Peru, which did not initially sign because of a domestic political crisis, later joined the agreement.

The eight hold-outs use low tax rates to attract multinationals. Kenya and Nigeria believed the guarantees offered to developing countries are insufficient, according to a source involved in the negotiations. Ireland said it supports the measure to redistribute taxes paid by multinationals among nations where they do business, but opposes the minimum 15 percent effective tax rate. — AFP

US stocks end volatile week at records

WASHINGTON: Wall Street stocks bounced back Friday, concluding a rocky week at records as investors shrugged off worries over global growth and the Delta strain of COVID-19 that had pummeled equities in the prior session. All three major US indices finished at all-time highs, following a strong session in Europe. “Yesterday’s ‘sea of red’ has been washed away, replaced by an avalanche of green across global markets as investors step right back on to the equity rally train,” commented Chris Beauchamp, an analyst at the online trading group IG.

Market watchers attributed the rally to bargain hunting after Thursday’s losing session, along with relief at a jump in the yield of the 10-year US Treasury bond after it sagged below 1.3 percent on Thursday. “We’re in a bull market, and the path of least resistance is up,” said Maris Ogg of Tower Bridge Advisors.

“You get some concerns like we did yesterday, and then people reconsider, and they come back and buy stocks again,” she said. “We’re in the second year of what will probably be at least a five-year expansion.”

This week’s sharp pullback in yields had been seen as suggesting weakening confidence in the medium-term global growth outlook, but the yield on the 10-year bond climbed sharply on Friday. A note Friday from Oxford Economics predicted yields on the 10-year note would move back towards 1.9 percent this year, citing “still-strong

Business

Jazeera Airways completes a capital increase of KD 10 million successfully

The first rights offering including tradable preemptive rights in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways “Jazeera” and Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” announced, in a joint statement, the successful completion of the capital increase subscription process with a total value of KD 10 million through the issuance of 20 million shares at a subscription price of 500 fils per share, representing 10 percent of the issued and paid-up capital of the company.

The subscription coverage rate of the capital increase stood at 210 percent, as announced by both companies, marking the completion of the first tradable preemptive rights in Kuwait, which ran for 21 days - from 15 June to 5 July. Preemptive rights were traded on Boursa Kuwait from 15 to 28 June, at a reference price of 143 fils per right for the first day of trading and average price of 165 fils per right, which resulted in the trading of approximately KD 460 thousand worth of preemptive rights. The subscription coverage rate reflects the high demand for the company's shares by shareholders and investors who benefited from the trading of preemptive rights.

On this occasion, Rohit Ramachandran, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Jazeera Airways, stated that the subscription process fulfilled all legal requirements, and witnessed the issuance of tradable rights securities for the first time on Boursa Kuwait. This was done in an effort to compensate shareholders who did not subscribe to the capital increase, and fulfill regulatory requirements, while supporting Jazeera Airways' future operations.



Rohit Ramachandran



Ali H Khalil

future operations.

Ramachandran added that Jazeera Airways seeks to increase the number of its destinations, from the current 35 to 65 destinations within the next three years, after adding 13 new aircrafts, bringing its fleet to a total of 30, noting that during the pandemic, the company launched 10 new routes including Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and then Colombo, Tbilisi, Bodrum, Trabzon, London Heathrow, Bishkek, Tashkent, Antalya, and Kiev in Ukraine.

Ramachandran also stated that allowing vaccinated expatriates to travel and return to Kuwait starting from August and gradually reopening the airport, is an important step towards restoring the balance from a health and economic perspective. Ramachandran also

said that Jazeera Airways is looking forward to reactivating a series of flights that were stopped during the pandemic. He indicated that the company has requested the reactivation of 8 destinations in August, and that it is currently integrating systems in preparation for the beginning of August, as travelers must show proof of vaccination when booking flights on the company's website.

A great success

Jazeera Airways appointed Markaz to act as the Lead Manager and the Subscription Agent, due to Markaz's extensive experience and track record in this field. Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at Markaz, expressed his contentment with the success of the subscription process. He stated: “We take pride in being the Lead Manager of this issuance, considering it is the first tradable preemptive rights to date, in Kuwait, and in collaboration with a prominent company such as Jazeera Airways, which seeks to benefit from the recovery of the global economic situation post the pandemic”.

Khalil added: “We recognize the importance of capital markets in supporting the stability of an economy, and hence, at Markaz, we are keen to contribute to the development of Kuwaiti capital markets and provide shareholders with various investment opportunities through the management of capital increase subscriptions, in addition to bonds, sukuk and others.”

Khalil expressed his sincere gratitude to the Capital Markets Authority and Boursa Kuwait for introducing new investment tools such as preemptive rights, marginal trading and others, to enrich capital markets and benefit shareholders. He also thanked the Kuwait Clearing Company for their continuous support.

A solid financial foundation

At a time when challenges increased due to the pandemic, Jazeera Airways maintained its balance and stability due to its solid financial foundation. The company's cash balance at the end of March amounted to KD 17.5 million, in addition to the proceeds of KD 10 million raised through the recent capital increase. The company is also currently in the process of collecting a total of KD 6 million in receivables, further strengthening the liquidity of the company and enabling it to deal with any developments, on the back of the company's solid financial position.

Thanks and appreciation

Ramachandran acknowledged the Capital Market Authority's role in managing the rights offering request, and speed of its response and support during the process of increasing Jazeera Airways' capital, expressing his appreciation to both the Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Company for their role in implementing the rules concerning the trading of preemptive rights, which took place seamlessly.

Eid Al-Adha is special this year with Huawei offers

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the blessed Eid Al-Adha, and for its family atmosphere filled with friendliness, love, and gifts exchange, Huawei Consumer Business Group provides special offers on a range of selected products in all its showrooms in addition to all the authorized retail outlets. The offer will be valid from today till 31st July 2021 to make the Eid celebration more special this year.

Consumers will get a special deal as Huawei will offer a variety of Bundles at amazing prices, including Huawei MateBook D14 + Huawei Watch Fit Bundle, Huawei MatePad (Wifi) + Huawei Scale 3 Bundle, Huawei Nova7i + Huawei FreeBuds 4i Bundle and Huawei Y7a + Huawei Watch GT2 Pro (Black) Bundle offers.

Huawei will also offer special promotions on Sports and Fitness lovers, including the Huawei Band 6 + Huawei FreeLace Pro Bundle, Huawei FreeBuds 4i + Huawei Watch Fit Bundle, Huawei GT2 Pro (Black) + Huawei FreeBuds Pro Bundle, and Huawei FreeBuds 4i + Case with 4 colors Bundle Offers. Also, Huawei will have a Flash Sale offers on the selection of accessories including Huawei BodyFat Scale, Huawei AM6 Bluetooth Headphone, Huawei PowerBank 1000MAH, and Huawei Bluetooth Mini Speaker (CM510).

And for more surprises in the Eid Al-Adha Holidays, Huawei Consumer Business Group will have exclusive offers only by visiting its website, where consumers will get discounts on some products including Laptops like Huawei MateBook X Pro, Huawei MateBook X and wearable products like Huawei Watch GT2e, Huawei FreeBuds 3i, Huawei FreeBuds 3 and Huawei Band 4 Pro.

AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 07 July 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The bank had announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Moamen Mahmoud Ahmad, Laila Ahmad Al-Wazan, Eid Ahmad Al-Sharrah, Adel Rshoud Al-Rshoud, Fatemah Fakher Al-Zalzalah, Suad Abdulmohsen Al-Saleh, Bader Saleh Al-Enezi, Rosine Garabad Ohanesian, Abdulrahman Hissain Srour, Jasem Mohamad Al-Naser, Eman Abdulmohsen Al-Jassar, Falah Salem Thwaib, Ahmad Mohammad Al-Rasheed, Abdullateef Abdulaziz Al-Saleem, Alyaa Naser Al-Bawi, Hasnaa Faisal Al-Gharib, Seham William Botros, Lames Ahmad Shabab, Husna Farooq Mohamad And Deema Yousef Shaat.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the “privilege draw”, which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account unique and attractive to all society segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

Gulf Bank launches MX.3 treasury management system with Murex

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has successfully launched the MX.3 integrating platform in collaboration with Murex, the global leader in trading, risk management and processing solutions for capital markets.

The platform implementation is a transformative step for Gulf Bank as it develops and automates its treasury and capital markets systems. The MX.3 platform provides a robust technological infrastructure that meets evolving capital markets and regulatory requirements. The platform enables a seamless workflow across front-to-back-to-risk management and processing. “At Gulf Bank, we seek to make the most of our digital transformation journey, transforming the institution into a fully integrated digital bank that will not only live up to, but exceed, the aspirations of customers, now and in the future,” said Gulf Bank General Manager of Treasury Sami Mahfouz. “To achieve this, Gulf Bank is creating a sophisticated, modern treasury platform that caters to customers' needs for a full treasury trade cycle, in addition to seizing the extraordinary opportunities available to diversify and expand the Bank's operations. Throughout the process of working on the launch of the new platform, we were so proud to have witnessed such a great embodiment of the culture of teamwork that characterizes Gulf Bank.

“At Gulf Bank, having the utmost confidence in our technological partners is key,” Mahfouz added. “As a leading treasury and capital markets management systems provider, Murex is in a league of its own. We have no doubt that our launch of Murex's platform will improve our business model, which is based first and foremost on customer satisfaction, and will boost operational excellence to new levels across the Bank's sectors. Despite the pandemic and the challenges of working remotely, Gulf Bank's Treasury Department worked around-the-clock with its partners to make this transition a resounding success. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Murex for its professional partnership and for the continuous efforts expended to ensure Gulf Bank's success.”

The integrating platform will enable Gulf Bank's Treasury Department to benefit from synergies in connected functions, organization modeling, trade repository, workflow dashboards, in-depth reporting, automated triggers, and real-time monitoring of positions and risks. This Gulf Bank initiative is the latest stage of its journey to meet the challenges of the future and provide only the best banking solutions. The new platform will disrupt and break the silos associated with complex legacy systems, enabling Gulf Bank stakeholders to innovate. Gulf Bank's new treasury management system will help the bank to keep pace with change and regulations, navigating capital markets and better serving customers, while improving efficiency, reducing costs, and instilling greater control over trade aspects from initiation to final matching.

“We are proud to be part of this exciting transformation project with Gulf Bank,” said Philippe Helou, managing partner and co-founder at Murex. “Murex has a long history of partnering with financial institutions to accompany the transformation from legacy systems to modern technology that puts these institutions in the best position to navigate the changing capital markets.”



Sami Mahfouz



Huawei MatePad 11: The latest and greatest tablets for 2021

By Islam Al-Sharaya

KUWAIT: Huawei has unveiled its MatePad 11 tablet computer in the Chinese market with the new operating system HarmonyOS 2 pre-installed. Huawei supplied the MatePad 11 tablet with a 10.95-inch LCD screen with a display resolution of 2560 x 1600 pixels which supports a high refresh rate of 120 hertz per second, according to the Chinese website Gizmochina.

The Huawei MatePad 11 tablet features slim bezels on all sides and it comes with an 8-megapixel front camera placed on one of the edges. The Huawei MatePad 11 tablet is powered by a Qualcomm Snapdragon 865 processor, which comes with 6 GB RAM, and internal storage in three options with a capacity of 64, 128 or 256 GB, expandable via MicroSD internal storage cards. Up to 1 TB.

The Huawei MatePad 11 computer features a 13-megapixel main rear camera, f / 1.8 lens slot, with LED flash, and the device includes 4 microphones, along with 4 speakers with Harman Kardon standards, so the device will provide a distinct experience in watching video content, with Support for isolating background noise during calls. Have you ever tried working on a laptop in bed or on the bus? Or carrying it on your back while hiking because you know you will have to work at the end of the hike? How about writing a lengthy email on your phone? While both of these devices are great at what they do, they leave a hole, which cannot be filled only by a device that can bridge the gap between both - enter the tablet.

Tablets are awesome because they combine many of the great aspects of smartphones and laptops ranging from designing, to drawing, to sketching, to playing games, watching movies, reading, browsing, keeping kids entertained, and a whole lot more. If you are on the lookout for grabbing a new 2021 tablet in (Name of Country) then you must surely have the new Huawei MatePad 11 in your radar.

120Hz FullView display

The new Huawei MatePad 11 is the first-ever Huawei tablet to support a 120 Hz FullView Display. Running at a higher refresh rate than many tablets on the market, the newest Huawei MatePad delivers incredibly fluid visuals when displaying a wide range of content. Additionally, with support for DCI-P3 color gamut, images and videos alike look exquisitely vibrant on the display. The Huawei MatePad 11 is also designed to minimize exposure to blue light and flickers. The tablet has earned the TÜV Rheinland Low Blue Light and TÜV Rheinland Flicker Free certifications, giving you peace of mind that your eyesight is protected, even after working on the tablet for hours.

Super device capabilities

The new Huawei MatePad 11 Leverages the revolutionary distributed technologies to pool resources from a number of different devices such as laptop and monitor and then combine the desired capabilities to create one Super Device that provides a futuristic Smart Office experience.

For instance, you can connect the Huawei MatePad 11 wirelessly through Huawei Share with the Huawei MateBook D15 to project the screen of the tablet onto your laptop and enable seamless cross-device file sharing with simple a drag and drop. The laptop can be connected with a USB-C cable to the Huawei MateView and use the mouse and keyboard to easily navigate and work right on the Huawei MateView's larger screen.

The Huawei MatePad 11 also supports the new Tablet-PC Multi-screen Collaboration capabilities which contains three modes: Mirror Mode, Extend

Mode and Collaborate Mode. In Mirror Mode, your laptop's screen is mirrored to your tablet display, allowing you to directly work on files and documents, or draw/sketch on your laptop with the stylus of the Huawei MatePad 11 just as professional designers would. Then there is Extend Mode, which transforms your Huawei MatePad 11 into a second screen, providing extra screen space to display more content, great for online shopping, or when you are browsing the Internet and there are so many items to explore!

Additionally, the innovative Collaborate Mode enables cross-platform interactions, allowing you to transfer content such as text, images and documents between connected devices with a simple drag and drop! Tearing down the boundaries that separate tablets, smartphones and laptops, Multi-screen Collaboration enriches and elevates what you could possibly do with the new Huawei MatePad 11 and other connected devices, empowering you and definitely letting you to be more productive and creative than before. In a nutshell, the new Smart Office allows you to control three devices (your tablet, laptop and monitor) and Switch between wired & wireless projection and between work & personal modes seamlessly.

Huawei M-Pencil (2nd gen) for more fun

Imagine you could draw or sketch what you are thinking of! The new Huawei MatePad 11 is compatible with the Huawei M-Pencil (2nd generation), the Huawei stylus that has been upgraded to better help you capture your inspiration. The Huawei M-Pencil (2nd generation) features a new platinum-coated pen nib, an ultra-low latency and support for 4,096 levels of pressure sensitivity. In addition, it supports a breadth of innovative interaction features including Huawei FreeScript, which transforms handwritten content into machine-encoded text in real time for any text field. It also supports Double-tap to switch between the current tool and the eraser, Instant Shape, Instant Table and more.

Smooth and stable performance

Simply put, the Huawei MatePad 11 delivers smooth and stable network connection for working, learning or video playback. High-speed Wi-Fi 6 connection lets you stay ahead of others and thankfully the Huawei MatePad 11 supports Wi-Fi 6 to offer 80 MHz of bandwidth and a maximum theoretical throughput speed of 1.2Gbps.

Four channel audio for full sensory immersion

Designed as a well-rounded tablet, the new Huawei MatePad 11 delivers immersive audio experiences with the quad-channel large-amplitude quad-speaker system. The powerful built-in speaker system delivers room-filling, immersive sounds for any audio content. The sound system is designed with and tuned by the expert audio engineers at Harman/Kardon, ensuring that the sounds produced by the speakers are faithful to their source material.

A gorgeous design

In designing the tablet, Huawei sought for a clean, simple and unobstructed display that lets you focus better on the task at hand. The latest tablet features a 10.95-inch, 16:10 ultra-wide display, 86 percent screen-to-body ratio and 7mm slim bezels. This not only provides a more balanced look, but also naturally directs your attention to the content on display.

In short, if you are looking for a new tablet that crosses all the boundaries set by other tablets in the market, then the new Huawei MatePad 11 is the way to go easily making it our top pick for 2021 tablets in (Name of Country) right now!

Business

KFH keeps investing strongly in digitization

Alterkait: KFH's business model is flexible and adapts to future aspirations

KUWAIT: Characterizing it as a top priority in a competitive landscape of institutions, Haytham Alterkait, Group Chief Information Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), stressed the importance of moving forward in enhancing customer experience through innovation and transformation into integrated digital banking services, with a focus on data security and enhanced cybersecurity strategy, advanced analytics, cloud computing and process automation by employing AI & Machine Learning, and continuously investing in technologies and fintech. This enables KFH to stay ahead of competitors and fulfill the aspirations of all customer segments in an accelerating transformation and development environment.

He pointed out that digitization of banking operations contributes to raising performance efficiency, enhancing financial inclusion, increasing productivity, cutting costs and eventually improving profitability. Alterkait explained that the outstanding achievements and qualitative shifts in KFH digital transformation strategy reflected an insightful institutional vision, translated the aspirations of customers and added value to the customer experience and the banking business as a whole. This is in line with KFH's vision of leading the development of global financial services that are compliant with the provisions of Islamic Sharia, and its mission to achieve the highest levels of innovation and excellence in customer service.

He added that despite the pandemic and subse-

quent full and partial lockdowns, KFH proved its dynamism and success by continuously providing services to customers without interruption through mobile, e-channels, digital platforms and smart branches, noting that the pandemic has prompted the bank to accelerate digital transformation, which is fully consistent with KFH's strong business model that is flexible and adaptable to the bank's digital aspirations.

"While reaching their desired objectives, banks must promote a culture of innovation, adapt to change and maintain information security as much as possible to meet the rapid changes in customer behavior, especially the technology-savvy millennial generation who conduct transactions digitally without having to visit the branch," Alterkait said.

He added that the efficiency of KFH's digital services was reflected in around 140 million transactions completed in 2020 by KFH customers through KFHonline or the mobile app. This emphasizes the successful efforts KFH exerted to provide innovative banking solutions to enable customers to complete their transactions around the clock, from anywhere, easily and safely.



Haytham Alterkait

NBK: 50% Cashback for purchases from Cinescape and Talabat during Eid

KUWAIT: Underscoring its keenness to join its customers in celebrating all public occasions, and in line with its strategy to reward them all year round, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is giving eligible NBK credit and prepaid cardholders 50 percent cashback on their purchases from "Cinescape" and "talabat" App & Website during Eid Al-Adha. NBK customers can get the cashback on their payments for cinema tickets and snacks at "Cinescape", as well as all purchases from restaurants or groceries through "Talabat", when using their eligible NBK credit or prepaid cards.

Additionally, NBK customers get a chance to enter the draw on Tesla Model 3 cars for every KD 1 spent using the eligible NBK credit and prepaid cards.

The eligible cards for this cashback campaign are as follows:

- NBK Visa Platinum Credit Card
- NBK Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK Visa Infinite Privilege Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Signature Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Infinite Credit Card
- NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Platinum Prepaid Card
- NBK-Platinum Mastercard Credit Card
- NBK World Mastercard Credit Card
- NBK World Mastercard Miles Credit Card

- NBK World Elite Mastercard Credit Card
- NBK UEFA Champions League World Mastercard Credit Card
- NBK UEFA Champions League Platinum Mastercard Prepaid Card

On this occasion, Anwar Al-Ballam, cards products manager, at Consumer Banking Group, at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We congratulate our customers on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha, and affirm our keenness to celebrate with them our way during special occasions by providing exquisite offers and campaigns."



Anwar Al-Ballam

NBK's rewards are designed to suit the needs of its customers and according to their lifestyles, especially on those occasions in which the bank seeks to provide exceptional offers, based on its customers' celebration traditions, he noted.

Al-Ballam added that NBK is committed to create a richer banking experience for NBK credit and prepaid cardholders through special offers and campaigns all year round, to cater to their unique lifestyle.

With returning to normal life, National Bank of Kuwait launched a variety of exceptional rewards for its customers, including cashback campaigns, salary acquisition rewards, and other exclusive offers and draws that were well-received and appreciated by customers. NBK credit cards provide the best payment method given the various benefits they offer customers when using their cards for shopping, including NBK Rewards Program, NBK Miles Program, purchase protection and extended warranty, as well as many other benefits.



KFH raises awareness on risks of investment in virtual assets

KUWAIT: Executive Manager - Money Markets at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Khalid Al-Rukhayes said that banks provide multiple investment channels for their customers including deposit accounts and investment funds in addition to various investment opportunities which are safer than investment in virtual assets e.g., "Bitcoin" and other Cryptocurrencies which are not under CBK control. Accordingly, these currencies are construed as a high risk and ambiguous investment channel.

This statement was made in a press release highlighting KFH continued efforts to support and enhance the banking awareness campaign "be aware" which was released recently by CBK in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association to enhance financial knowledge for different tiers of society and achieve the best benefit from all types of banking services.

Al-Rukhayes added that KFH is keen on raising customers' awareness on the need to be fully aware of the risks resulting from investment in virtual assets which are not subject to regulatory laws e.g. customers incurring losses and the inability to protect them from any fraud which they may be exposed to at any time.

Al-Rukhayes emphasized that virtual currencies value may fluctuate significantly in a short time due to the difficulty to monitor or supervise them by any authority. Local banks are continuing their endeavor to raise the awareness of all their customers and ensure

that all precautionary procedures are taken to avoid these significantly high risks.

The "be aware" campaign targets various elements including customer's awareness of his rights regarding personal finance operations whether consumer or residential, the mechanism to file a complaint about banking services, different banking cards, and the means to avoid fraudulence operations and awareness regarding the risks of loan encashment, high risk investments and other related issues. KFH works always on organizing training courses for its employees to increase their experience level in fraudulence



Khalid Al-Rukhayes

operations and combating financial crimes, especially, electronic ones, and encourages them to transfer this information in a simplified manner to customers through direct contract in the service centers, social media channels and various electronic channels of the bank.

The campaign "be aware" aims to enhance and support the goals of the Central Bank of Kuwait and its social program which aims to spread banking knowledge among society members, increase public awareness on the most important financial issues, the method to protect asset from fraudulence. Also, it aims to highlight the banking sector role in general and the banking products provided by the private sector by introducing a set of instructions and information on regular basis through social media in cooperation with Kuwait banking association and local banks. The campaign shall continue till the end of this year.

Digital services

Alterkait pointed out that e-banking services offered by KFH include: opening a bank account online for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch, local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque-book request, requesting financing, requesting Al-Kheir Card, and checking the PINs for credit and debit cards, activating new bank cards, reporting a lost credit/debit card, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, perusal of investment plans, receiving account balances and deposits summary, along with a wide range of digital services.

He added that KFH has recently launched digital signature service in personal financing products through KFH mobile app or desktop from anywhere without having to visit the branch, Live FX Pricing, instant cross-border payments service at KFH-Turkey using Ripple's technology and digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches which provides advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

KFHGo branches

Alterkait said that customers can obtain a variety of interactive banking services through KFH Go's 10 branches located in various places in Kuwait, includ-

ing Kuwait International Airport, such as: establishing "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold, savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, or by using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services.

Technology partnerships

Alterkait highlighted KFH efforts in establishing technology partnerships with FinTech companies such as the agreement with Aion Digital, a digital-first banking platform, to transform all functions of Retail and Corporate Banking services at the bank, and the collaboration with ProgressSoft, a leading payment solution provider, to launch an electronic forms solution which fully transforms traditional banking forms into electronic, secured and automatically validated forms.

He added that innovation mentality becomes an integral part of the strategy and methodology of KFH that aims at enhancing customer experience according the highest standards of quality, speed and safety, along with consolidating KFH's leadership position as a first and preferred bank for all segments of retail and corporate customers through offering digital solutions.

AUB's Jeragh named 'Best Banking CIO of Year Kuwait 2021'

KUWAIT: In a new addition to AUB's growing record of awards, the General Manager of Information Technology at Ahli United Bank, Abdullah Yousef Jeragh, was awarded the Best Banking Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the year Kuwait 2021 by the reputable international magazine Global Banking and Finance Review. Jeragh was granted this Award in recognition of his vision, strategy and strong leadership in the field of banking information technology, and his achievements that enabled AUB to deal with the unfavorable conditions resulting from the repercussions of Covid-19 pandemic, and the support he has provided to IT Department. Jeragh managed over years of service at AUB to make several achievements in IT infrastructure. He also managed to provide the necessary information infrastructure to support the bank in its journey towards providing digital services and products in addition to its usual services.

This Award is granted on an annual basis by "Global Banking and Finance Review" magazine. This year, Jeragh received the highest votes as the Best Banking CIO of the year Kuwait 2021. The magazine's global banking and financial research team evaluated the nominees for the award and

ensured that they fulfill the criteria required to win in the chosen category. Then, the panel composed of the research team, the editor and the publisher, made the final evaluation.

Commenting on this Award, Jehad Al-Humaidhi, the Acting Chief Executive Officer at AUB said this success is a recognition of the record of success and achievements of Mr. Jeragh over many years in which he has worked at AUB and has been able, with the support of the Bank's IT team to make tangible achievements in utilizing IT to develop and enhance banking business. "Honoring and appreciating the distinguished human resources that work at AUB is a recognition of the Bank's excellence and its ability to achieve continuous success, and I extend my sincere congratulations to Jeragh and his team at IT Department for their excellence," Al-Humaidhi added.

From his side, Jeragh, said, "On the personal level, I feel proud of this honor as the Best Banking CIO of the year Kuwait 2021. I see this Award as a real honor for IT team at AUB level. I seize this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to AUB's management for the incomparable work environment they provide which has a great impact on the work I have been honored for".

Jeragh added: This prestigious Award is a recognition of our persistent work and incessant endeavor to meet the changing needs of our valued clients by providing a solid advanced IT infrastructure, and providing innovative and effective solutions to keep abreast with the latest developments in Banking IT.



Abdullah Yousef Jeragh

Solutions by stc to provide GM with in-vehicle connectivity

KUWAIT: Solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced that it has partnered with General Motors (GM) to provide an in-vehicle connectivity solution to support GM's OnStar service. solutions by stc is the first business solutions provider to provide the IOT application over vehicle management, and infotainment subscription services in Kuwait. The partnership with GM now extends solutions by stc's experience and offerings capabilities within the automotive industry through various advanced applications that enable digitization across smart transport and in-vehicle solutions.

The new collaboration between solutions by stc and GM was announced during a virtual conference held on July 4th. Representatives from GM, the Ministry of Interior, Alghanim Automotive, Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Company, as well as solutions by stc were present. The conference highlighted the key features behind OnStar, GM's groundbreaking in-vehicle technology. The only service that supports drivers before, during, and after a car collision.

OnStar is the regional leader when it comes to in-vehicle safety and security, forging the way for Connected Cars across various innovative features and services. Supported by stc's high internet speeds and advanced network, OnStar will provide drivers with automatic crash response, stolen vehicle assist, emergency services, on-demand diagnostics, roadside support, and internet subscriptions. The new in-vehicle service will be available on GM brands including Chevrolet, GMC, and Cadillac, across most 2021 models which will be equipped with a stc eSIM to power OnStar.

Commenting on the partnership, Mohammad N Al-Nusif, Chief Executive Officer of solutions by stc, said, "We are proud to partner with a leading automotive company such as GM. The connectivity solution provided by solutions by stc is the first-

of-its-kind in Kuwait and falls in line with our commitment to deliver modern technological platforms to our customers. The new service builds on our extensive offering line that aims to assist corporate customers in their path towards digital transformation."

Gary West, Managing Director OnStar and Future Mobility at General Motors Africa and Middle East said "We're excited to launch OnStar in Kuwait, the first market in the Middle East to go live with our pioneering in-vehicle safety and security technology, setting new benchmarks for in-vehicle services. Thanks to our partnership with solutions by stc, we're now able to provide customers with unparalleled levels of safety and security whatever the circumstances. With OnStar, drivers now have added peace of mind knowing that the service,



Mohammad N Al-Nusif

which is backed by the human touch, can be there for them for the unplanned ensuring they get the right help."

Al-Nusif added, "When introducing new innovations to market, we apply a design thinking model to identify the core needs of our customers and how to deliver on their needs using our capabilities. Our objective is to add value to our customers, especially when collaborating with market leaders such as GM. As we move forward, we will continue searching for innovative methods in which we can apply both digital and cloud-based concepts to existing applications. As the digital era continues to expand through transformative milestones, solutions by stc aims to keep pace with the rapidly evolving tech-world and become the gateway to its customers' appetite for digital innovation."

It is worth mentioning that under its product line, solutions by stc delivers a range of connectivity options including fixed or wireless services, advanced technology, ICT, IoT and the IT products and services. The company also launched the 5G LiveBus, a safe and smart bus solution supported by advanced connectivity to provide a safe and convenient method of transportation for passengers.

Lifestyle | Features

Cannes falls for 'The Worst Person in the World'

The Cannes film festival has fallen head over heels for a Norwegian film about a young woman trying to find herself and the unknown actress who plays her. "A star is born," declared The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw. Renate Reinsve "takes off like a rocket and deserves star status to rival Lily James or Alicia Vikander," he added, giving "The Worst Person in the World" a five-star review—one of several it has already garnered. In her first big screen lead, Reinsve plays a twenty-something trying and failing to define herself through her pinballing relationships with men until she finally strikes out on her own path.

Variety predicted it would become a "touchstone" movie for millennials, Britain's Daily Telegraph called it "wondrous", while Xan Brooks of The Observer said it was "simply gorgeous". Bradshaw—one of several critics to admit wiping away a tear or two during the premiere—credited the director Joachim Trier with inventing a whole new genre. "Trier has taken on one of the most difficult genres imaginable, the romantic drama, and combined it with



(From left) Norwegian actor Anders Danielsen Lie, Norwegian actress Renate Reinsve, Danish director Joachim Trier, Norwegian actor Herbert Nordrum and Norwegian screenwriter Eskil Vogt pose as they arrive for the screening of the film "Verdens Beste Menneske" (The Worst Person in the World) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. — AFP

another very tricky style—the coming-of-age—to craft something gloriously sweet and beguiling," he said. The French media were equally bewitched.

And everyone wondered why the world

has never heard of 33-year-old Reinsve before. Trier told AFP that "there is an awful lot of her in the character. She has had a big, big impact on this film. I wrote it specifically for her," he said knowing her

gift for improvisation. "I could cut four of five different versions of any scene with her in this film. I always wondered why the hell is Norwegian film so messed up that she hasn't had a lead role yet?" Trier added.

Love in the time of #MeToo

Reinsve told AFP that she had "been through the same" labyrinth of self-doubt and indecision as her character. And she too would often think of herself as the worst person in the world as she saw others around fly. In the film her character Julie drifts from medical school to a psychology degree to photography to five minutes of Facebook fame for writing a piece called "Oral sex in the era of #MeToo". "Growing up before #MeToo you kind of shape yourself with the strong opinions and presence of men," Reinsve added.

"She finds her identity in others' eyes. When you free yourself from that, you become yourself and stronger," she said. The film—which includes one of the most gobsmackingly feminist sex scenes ever

seen at Cannes—has also been praised for the way it deals with the shifting gender power balance. In one particularly telling scene, Reinsve's older graphic novelist boyfriend crashes and burns when a radio interview turns to the lumpy sexism of his past creations.

Trier said the film was navigating "the beautiful chaos" and complications of love in a time of massive change. "With #MeToo it is very polarized. But I believe that change also comes about through humanity and understanding," he said. "Is there such a thing as pure love? I'm not sure, they are millions of agendas, conscious and unconscious. I want to give a big hug to people with this the film and say hey, 'It's OK. we are all going through this.'" "The Worst Person in the World" is one of 24 films competing for Cannes top prize, the Palme d'Or, which will be awarded next Saturday. — AFP

Val Kilmer documentary charts Hollywood rise and fall

Val Kilmer has made an intriguing and bittersweet return to the big screen at the Cannes film festival in a new documentary charting his stratospheric rise and later fall in Hollywood through his own home recordings. The Amazon-produced documentary "Val" is a tender portrait of the actor, now 61, whose career has seen more ups and downs than the fighter jets in his breakout film "Top Gun". Most striking is Kilmer's voice, turned into a near-incomprehensible rasp by treatment for throat cancer.

It has not quite ended his career—he is due to reprise his iconic role as Iceman this autumn in the long-awaited sequel "Top Gun: Maverick". But the documentary shows him as a shadow of his former self, reduced to a life of signing autographs at conventions—as he puts it, "selling his old self". The film draws heavily from Kilmer's huge library of home videos—he carried a camera with him throughout his life—providing intimate behind-the-scenes footage from his hits, including "Tombstone", "The Doors" and "Batman Forever".



(From left) US producer Mercedes Kilmer, US producer Jack Kilmer, US director Leo Scott and US director Ting Poo pose during a photocall for the film 'Val' at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

One of the last survivors of Auschwitz women's orchestra dies

Esther Bejarano, one of the last survivors of the women's orchestra at Auschwitz, has died at the age of 96, the head of the Anne Frank Education Centre said on Twitter yesterday. Bejarano, who played the accordion in the Auschwitz orchestra, died in the night from Friday to yesterday, Meron Mendel, head of the Frankfurt-based organization, said.



In this file photo taken on December 08, 2019 Esther Bejarano, survivor of the Holocaust and of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, is pictured during an interview at her flat in Hamburg, northern Germany. — AFP

"Esther Bejarano survived Auschwitz because she played accordion in the camp's orchestra. She dedicated her life to music and to the fight against racism and anti-Semitism," he wrote. "An important voice in the fight against racism and anti-Semitism has left us," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas tweeted.

Paying tribute to her "vitality and incredible story, we'll miss her voice," Maas wrote. Born in Sarrelouis in 1924, Bejarano was deported to the Nazi extermination camp in April 1943, before being transferred to another camp in Ravensbrück in November of that same year. Her parents and her sister were murdered by the Nazis. After World War II, Bejarano went to Palestine and lived in Israel for nearly 15 years before returning to Germany, where in recent years she was warned about the rise of the far-right. "For those who lived through that, it is impossible to describe how serious is" the rise of Germany's far-right AfD party and the anti-Islam movement Pegida, she said.

Bejarano also wrote a number of autobiographical novels and worked for the International Auschwitz Committee. She was recruited for the Auschwitz women's orchestra knowing only how to play the piano, but not the accordion. The orchestra played for camp prisoners and for deportees as they arrived there on trains. Speaking to Deutsche Welle radio in 2014, she said: "You knew they were going to be gassed and all you could do was stay there and play." — AFP

Anti-hero Matt Damon brings roughneck America to Cannes

Matt Damon brought a slice of redneck middle America to Cannes Friday with "Stillwater", a film about a washed-up oil worker who seeks to save his daughter and their damaged relationship. It has been a very French affair from the start: set in Marseille on France's southern coast, made with a mostly French crew and French co-writers, and featuring local star Camille Cottin of "Call My Agent" fame. Damon says he fell in love with Marseille during the filming: "I



US actor Matt Damon poses as he arrives for the screening of the film "Stillwater" at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

just think it's a spectacular place," he told reporters in Cannes. "If I was a young guy in France, this is the city I would live in. There's so much culture and diversity."

The process even turned the film's American director and cast into fans of the local football team. "Sometimes American film-makers come to Europe or into France to make a movie and they pitch their tent and keep the French film-makers on the outside," Oscar-winning director Tom McCarthy told AFP. "But we said: 'We can't do that here'," he said. "It really is a collaboration, a meeting of cinema cultures." Damon plays Bill Baker, an oil rig worker from Oklahoma who travels to Marseille to help his daughter who is in prison for a murder she says she didn't commit. He doesn't speak French, and his bulky frame, baseball cap, chequered shirts and unfashionable jeans make him stick out in the Mediterranean coastal city like a caricature of an American midwestern tourist. "He's from the heart of Trump country, he is very much part of that culture," Matt Damon told AFP in an interview.

'Invaluable roughnecks'

"It looks like it's going to be that standard Hollywood setup, a father going to exonerate his daughter, help his daughter and he ends up using his skills to do it," Damon said. "But it's really an inversion of that because the guy has no skills. He doesn't understand the language, he doesn't understand the culture. He doesn't really understand where he is." Damon said he went to great lengths to get his



(From left) Screenwriters Thomas Bidegain and Noe Debre, French actor Idir Azougli, US actor Matt Damon, US actress Abigail Breslin, US director Tom McCarthy, French actress Camille Cottin, actor moussa Maaskri, actor Gregory Di Meglio, producer Lisa Chasin and French actress Lilou Siauvaud pose as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Stillwater' at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

character's look right, spending time with oil workers to get their advice on clothes, eating the same food they do, and working out to bulk up.

"We hung out with these roughnecks, who were just invaluable," Damon said. "They'd go: No it's this type of blue jean, because they have fire retardant on them. And it's this shirt, not that. It's almost like a uniform," Damon said. He put on weight for the role "because they're very big guys. The stuff they're picking up is heavy. I'm in

the Stade Velodrome, the home stadium of Olympique de Marseille (OM), during an actual match, which he said was unforgettable. "They're a team with incredible heart and incredible fans. The energy in that stadium and filming there, that was a special couple of nights," McCarthy said.

The director said his film's main character was seeking redemption without achieving it, and acknowledged that the same could be said of Olympique de Marseille who, disappointingly, ended the



(From left) French actor Idir Azougli, French actor Gregory Di Meglio, Algerian-born French actor Moussa Maaskri, US actress Abigail Breslin, French actress Lilou Siauvaud, US actor Matt Damon, US director Tom McCarthy, French actress Camille Cottin, French screenwriter Noe Debre and French screenwriter Thomas Bidegain pose during a photocall for the film 'Stillwater' at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos

shape, but lifting the things they lift, I'd go, Oh my god," he said.

'Incredible heart'

McCarthy and his team invested similar efforts to make the Marseille shoot as authentic as possible. "In many ways it's my most complicated film structurally" said McCarthy, whose film "Spotlight" won the best picture Oscar. Shot almost entirely on location, it includes a key scene shot at

cannabis grass in the vehicle, the Parisien newspaper reported. The rapper was detained along with a friend who was in the car. They were given notice of committing a criminal offence and told they face a fine for using drugs, Paris prosecutors said in a statement to AFP.

This fine must be approved by a judge before it is formally imposed. NBA star James Harden, in the French capital with the rapper for Fashion Week, was in the vicinity and intervened but was not detained. In a video posted on Twitter, Harden, who has played for the Brooklyn Nets since January, can be seen surrounded by several police officers, with one patting him down. Jones, an active supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement, was twice nominated for a Grammy music award in 2020 for "The Bigger Picture." — AFP



Rapper, Lil Baby and Sports Agent, Rich Paul attend a game between the Phoenix Suns and Los Angeles Lakers during Round 1, Game 4 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

US rapper Lil Baby released, faces fine after Paris drug arrest

American rapper Lil Baby was released from police custody in Paris on Friday after his arrest on suspicion of possessing drugs, and faces a fine, prosecutors said. Lil Baby, 26, whose real name is Dominique Jones, was in a parked car late Thursday that was checked by officers who said they smelled cannabis, according to a police source. Police found 20 grams of



People attend the Baalbek Festival, held virtually under the theme “defying darkness with music”, in crisis-hit Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley. — AFP photos



Artists perform during the Baalbek Festival, held virtually under the theme “defying darkness with music”, in crisis-hit Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley.

Baalbek Festival goes virtual in crisis-hit Lebanon



People attend the Baalbek Festival.



People attend the Baalbek Festival, held virtually under the theme “defying darkness with music”.

Zelda game cartridge sells for ‘world record’ \$870,000 at auction

A sealed cartridge of “The Legend of Zelda” for the old Nintendo NES console has sold for a world record sum of \$870,000, auction house Heritage Auctions said in a statement Friday. The cartridge, dated to 1987, is still in its original packaging and trumps the previous world record sale of a video game — \$660,000 for a 1986 “Super Mario Bros” cartridge sold in April-according to the auction house.

The game was the “masterpiece” in a sale of 443 lots that runs until Sunday, Eric Bradley, spokesperson for the Dallas-based company, told AFP. The auction house has not revealed the identity of the buyer. Blending adventure, action and exploration in a magical universe, Zelda is one of the most significant titles in the history of video games and one of Nintendo's

best-known series. Retro video games have become increasingly popular with nostalgic collectors in recent years, driving up prices for old-school consoles and cartridges at auctions.-AFP



This undated handout photo released by Heritage Auctions shows a sealed copy of the Nintendo NES game ‘The Legend of Zelda’.— AFP

France acquires de Sade’s ‘Sodom’ manuscript for over \$5 million

The French state has acquired the original manuscript of the Marquis de Sade’s “120 Days of Sodom” for over \$5 million, safeguarding for the country a work declared a national treasure, the culture ministry said Friday. The 18th-century erotic masterpiece has endured a turbulent destiny over the centuries but the future of the original text now appears secure after a private benefactor stepped in with the money.



These file photos shows the manuscript of “The 120 Days of Sodom” written by the Marquis de Sade while he was imprisoned at the Bastille in 1785. — AFP

The culture ministry had in December 2017 stepped in to pull the sale of the manuscript from an auction, declaring it a national treasure and banning its export. The ministry said in a statement that it had paid 4.55 million euros (\$5.34 million) to acquire the work for France. It hailed the text as a “monument” that has influenced numerous authors.

‘Tears of blood’

Before the culture ministry's intervention, the manuscript had been due to be sold in an auction of historic documents owned by the French investment firm Aristophil, which was shut down in scandal two years previously, taking investors' money with it. Sade wrote the controversial work about four rich libertines in search of sexual gratification on a roll made from bits of parchment he had smuggled into his cell in the Bastille prison. When the Paris prison was stormed at the beginning of the French revolution on July 14, 1789, the famously philandering aristocrat was freed, but he was swept out by the mob without his manuscript.

Sade believed it had been lost to looters and wept “tears of blood” over it, but the unfinished manuscript was preserved after being hidden by a revolutionary and then secretly bought by an aristocrat, the Marquis de Villeneuve-Trans. It became known to the public only after a German psychologist, Iwan Bloch, bought it and allowed its first publication in 1904. Even so, the book languished unpublished for more than a century and was banned in Britain until the 1950s. Measuring 12 meters long, the manuscript is itself something out of the ordinary, consisting of 33 sheets stuck together in a scroll.

The sum for its purchase by France was provided entirely by Emmanuel Boussard, a former investment banker and co-founder of the Boussard & Gavaudan investment fund, the ministry said. It will become part of the collection of the Arsenal library in Paris, a branch of France's BNF national library. French courts seized 130,000 historic documents that Aristophil had bought for its investors in 2015 after police denounced the company as huge “pyramid scheme.” Aristophil claimed to have amassed the greatest private collection of French literary and historical documents in the world. — AFP

Imaginary deaths, real grief: Thai artist honors fallen anime heroes

Portraits of dozens of anime characters, each with a small altar for fans to leave flowers, adorn the wall of a Bangkok gallery—a tribute to fictional heroes who met an untimely death. The 2D Afterlife exhibit is made up of 50 of these creations from artist Jinnipha Nivasabut, who wanted to mourn the deaths of her favorite characters in popular shows and manga series. The core concept “is to explore the idea of why the deaths of these fictional characters could have such an impact on real people,” the 22-year-old anime lover said.

Eschewing anime's cartoon style, she instead painted the fallen heroes with the realism of stately oil portraits. “In my memories, I see these characters as real persons. They're like members of my family so I decided to draw these characters to resemble real persons as much as possible,” she said. Japanese anime and manga enjoy mainstream popularity in the kingdom, with frequent conventions held in pre-pandemic Bangkok that would draw massive crowds of cosplayers. Jinnipha said she wanted her work to not just serve as fan art, but as a participation experience for both her and the massive fan base supporting each series. Below each portrait, a small shelf acting as an altar allows the public to place flowers and Fanta soda drinks-typical Thai offerings to the dead.



Thai artist Jinnipha Nivasabut sitting with oil portraits of deceased anime characters, at her exhibition The 2D Afterlife, at Palette Artspace in Bangkok. — AFP photos

Sasha Baus, a beloved character from the ultra-popular Attack on Titan series, had a potato left on her shelf—a reference to her love for food on the show that earned her the nickname “Potato Girl”. “They know that she loved potatoes so one of them came here and put it on the shelf for her,” said gallery visitor Kullanit Assawawongkasem, 19, who added that

she was “devastated” when the character was killed. But “seeing these portraits, especially of Sasha, I'm not exactly sad,” she said. “It's the opposite-I'm kind of glad that people still think of her.” The exhibit, hosted at Palette Artspace in Bangkok, ends on August 3. — AFP



Oil portraits of deceased anime characters.



Anime fan Kullanit Assawawongkasem (left) and her boyfriend looking at oil portraits of deceased anime characters.



Palette Artspace art curator Watjanasin Charuwattanakit arranging portraits of deceased anime characters and funeral wreaths at artist Jinnipha Nivasabut's exhibition The 2D Afterlife.



Thai artist Jinnipha Nivasabut sketching in front of oil portraits of deceased anime characters.

Barty wins first Wimbledon title on Cawley anniversary

LONDON: Ashleigh Barty won her first Wimbledon title on the 50th anniversary of fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley's maiden crown, beating Karolina Pliskova 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 in the final yesterday.

The 25-year-old Australian - who wore a specially-designed dress in tribute to Cawley's iconic scallop one she sported in 1971 - adds the Wimbledon crown to her 2019 French Open title. "It took me a long time to verbalize, to dare to dream it and say it," said Barty, who was also fulfilling a childhood dream. "I didn't sleep a lot last night, I was thinking of all the what-ifs. I hope I made Evonne proud."

It was the first women's Wimbledon final to go to three sets since 2012 when Serena Williams beat Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska. Barty is also the first top seed to win the women's title since Williams in 2016.

Barty had looked like cruising to victory after soaring into a 4-0 lead over her opponent - the Australian's start so blistering that she won the first 14 points. However, 29-year-old Pliskova

steadied herself while Barty faltered when she served for the match at 6-5 in the second set.

The Czech broke and then swept the tiebreaker to take the final into a decider. Barty got the break for 2-0 in the final set and despite one or two wobbles she got herself over the line sinking to her knees, her hands over her face in disbelief.

She wiped a couple of tears away before climbing up to the player's box, just like her compatriot Pat Cash did when he won the Wimbledon men's title in 1987. Victory would taste sweeter too as only last month she retired from the French Open in the second round due to a left hip injury.

"This is incredible," said Barty, the third Australian woman to be crowned Wimbledon singles champion in the Open era (Cawley and Margaret Court (1970) the others). "I have to start with Kaja (Karolina Pliskova). "Congratulations on an incredible tournament to you and your team. I love testing myself against you and I'm sure we'll have many many matches."

'I never cry...now'

Barty is masterful at remaining poker-faced on court and she managed to restrain her emotions largely at the presentation ceremony. However, once off court she sobbed as she hugged her boyfriend Gary Kissick. For Pliskova, it was more heartbreak as the former world number one fell at the final hurdle in three sets in the 2016 US Open final.

At one point with Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise looking on it looked feasible, though, that she could pull off mission impossible in winning the title. However, her previously superb weapon - her serve that had only been broken four times prior to the final - deserted her when she most needed it.

So did her emotions as Pliskova - the fourth Czech woman to appear in a Wimbledon singles final in the Open era - spoke after receiving the runner-up trophy. Her tears, though, did not compare to those shed by her late compatriot Jana Novotna when she lost in the 1993 final and had to be consoled by the Duchess of Kent.

Perhaps of some consolation to Pliskova is Novotna picked herself up



LONDON: Australia's Ashleigh Barty kisses the winner's Venus Rosewater Dish trophy after winning her women's singles match of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships against Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova at The All England Tennis Club yesterday. —AFP

after that defeat and won the title in 1998. "I never cry, never, and now," said Pliskova stepping back a bit. "I want to say Ash [Barty] played an incredible tournament, I fought to make it difficult for her but she played very well so con-

grats to her. "I want to thank all my team. All the success goes to them, without them I would not be here, and my family of course. No matter which trophy I have we have had an incredible two weeks here." — AFP



LONDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic stretches at the Aorangi Practice Courts at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. — AFP

Djokovic eyes 20th Slam against Berrettini

LONDON: Novak Djokovic admits "it will mean everything" to capture a sixth Wimbledon title and record-equaling 20th Grand Slam today but he will have to overcome Matteo Berrettini, the Italian slugger with the build of a heavyweight boxer.

Djokovic will move level with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal on career majors with victory and also go three-quarters of the way to the first calendar Slam in more than half a century. The 34-year-old is in his seventh Wimbledon final and 30th at the Slams.

Only Federer, with 31, has appeared in more championship matches at the majors but the fading Swiss star is more than five years older. "It would mean everything. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm playing," said Djokovic who has already captured a ninth Australian Open and second French Open in 2021.

The victory in Paris made him just the third man to win all four majors more than once. "I imagined myself being in a position to fight for another Grand Slam trophy prior to coming to London. "I put myself in a very good position. Anything is possible in the finals. Obviously experience is on my side."

Djokovic needed all that experience and famed iron will to see off Denis Shapovalov in the semi-finals where he saved 10 of 11 break points. Shapovalov was so distraught at the failure of his all-out assault that had pushed Djokovic to the brink that he left Centre Court in tears. "There is no holding back once you step out on the court, particularly in the later stages of an event that I always dreamt of winning," said Djokovic after a 20th successive grass court win. "The dream keeps going. I am trying to take out the maximum of my own abilities every single match and see what happens. Giving up is never an option."

'It's crazy'

Berrettini, the 25-year-old world number nine, is the first Italian ever to make a singles final at Wimbledon. Victory will make him Italy's first male Slam champion since Adriano Panatta at the 1976 French Open. He has lost both his previous encounters with Djokovic, including the quarter-finals at Roland Garros last month.

But he is on a run of 11-0 this season on grass having won the Queen's Club event on the eve of Wimbledon. At the All England Club, he has blasted his way to the final on the back of a tournament-leading 101 aces.

Berrettini also boasts the second fastest serve so far, 223.7kmh in his first round win over Guido Pella of Argentina. Weighing in at 95kg — the same as a heavyweight boxer — Berrettini has also unleashed 254 winners so far to Djokovic's 190. — AFP

Williams overcomes hardships to mold Suns into winners

MILWAUKEE: Overcoming personal tragedy and career setbacks, Phoenix Suns coach Monty Williams is on the verge of realizing a life's dream by becoming an NBA champion. The 49-year-old American has guided the Suns to a 2-0 lead over Milwaukee in the best-of-seven NBA Finals by building a team culture that's part "goofy sayings" and part tough conversations about daily work building a foundation for success. "We're just grateful that we're in this position and the guys have adopted some of the stuff we've tried to implement," Williams said. "The buy in and commitment was there from day one."

Williams relies on a year of hard work and lessons learned to avoid too much talking these days. "The last thing I want to do is crowd anybody's mind," Williams said. "I tell our guys to go hoop. I don't want them thinking about their shots or whatever may be deemed as a struggle. When you put the work in the way these guys have... I don't want to get in his head. We have a saying, 'reps remove doubt'. If you get your work in, you can trust your work."

It's how Williams, who spent nine seasons as an NBA forward, has developed since he was a coaching intern for the 2005 NBA champion San Antonio Spurs. He spent five years as an assistant coach at Portland before taking the head coaching

job at New Orleans, where he first met star guard Chris Paul, now in his first NBA Finals with the Suns at age 36.

"We both were unbelievably headstrong and competitive and I was probably more 'my way or the highway,'" said Williams. "Mine was probably a lot of insecurity, trying to show what I knew and prove it as opposed to just coaching. That probably ruffled feathers, not just his but a number of the players remarked to me that was the case. After you've had some life experiences and listened to people about their evaluations of you, especially people you respect, you have no choice but to change. I've learned I would rather be effective over right."

Williams was fired in 2010 and became an assistant coach in Oklahoma City, where his wife, Ingrid, was killed in a 2016 car accident, leaving him alone to guide their five children. Williams worked as an assistant coach for the 2016 US Rio Olympic gold medal team. After two years away from the game, he returned in 2018 as an assistant for Philadelphia before signing with the Suns in May 2019.

"I've always felt if you try to have an atmosphere, an environment, where everything was at a high level, you didn't have to change once you got where you wanted to be," he said. "We wanted the environment to be a place where guys felt like they were getting better every day. If we were ever in a position to win big, it wasn't going to feel different."

'I want it badly'

Williams delivered sayings such as "Well done beats well said" and "preparation meets opportunity" to focus player thoughts on achievement and improvement day after day. "We talk a lot as coach-



PHOENIX: Head coach Monty Williams and Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns high-five during the first half in Game Two of the NBA Finals against the Milwaukee Bucks at Phoenix Suns Arena on Thursday in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

es," Williams said. "At the same time we want our guys to hoop and play and be doers. Most of our guys have adopted it and it served us well."

Emotions bubbled over for Williams in a Los Angeles locker room moment earlier this month after the Suns clinched an NBA Finals berth. "The emotions come from the work that goes into it, the decisions you make in your life to get to this point and things people do to help you get to this point," Williams said. "I think just my desire. I want it badly. I know I've been blessed a lot to be in this position. And I never want to lose sight of that. Sometimes it's overwhelming when I think about how blessed I've been." — AFP

Diaz stunner downs Peru to give Colombia Copa 3rd place

BRASILIA: Luis Diaz scored a sensational winner with virtually the last kick of the match as Colombia beat Peru 3-2 in Brasilia on Friday to finish third in the Copa America. The goal was the 24-year-old Porto forward's second of the match and came just 10 minutes after Gianluca Lapadula looked to have sent the game into a penalty shoot-out.

It was a thrilling encounter that ebbed and flowed, with Yoshimar Yotun giving Peru a first half lead before Colombia captain Juan Cuadrado equalized early in the second period. "We're happy, it was important to finish by winning," said Cuadrado, whose side lost their semi-final on penalties to Lionel Messi's Argentina, who play Neymar's Brazil in Saturday's final. "I'm happy with how we reacted (to going behind) and how we went after the result."

Colombia had the better start and piled on early pressure but Peru held firm despite the ball often ping-pong around in their box. And Peru even had the first clear chance on 28 minutes when Christian Cueva's clever pass found Lapadula, but under pressure from a defender he fired narrowly wide from just inside the box.

Diaz had a chance for Colombia but fired straight at goalkeeper Pedro Gallese. On 40 minutes Sergio Pena left Colombia's center back Oscar Murillo on the floor with a clever turn, rounded goalkeeper Camilo Vargas but blazed well over the goal from a tight angle.

Peru got the lead they deserved just before the break as Cueva's precise pass and Lapadula's clever



BRASILIA: Colombia's team poses on the podium with their medals and trophy after defeating Peru 3-2 in their Conmebol 2021 Copa America football tournament third-place match at the Mane Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia, Brazil, on Friday. — AFP

run took out four defenders to set up Yotun for an emphatic finish. Colombia were back level just four minutes after the break as Cuadrado fired a free-kick through a disintegrating wall and past Gallese at his near post.

Alexander Callens had given away the free-kick on the edge of the box with a clumsy challenge and compounded his error by jumping away from his fellow members of the wall to create the gap that Cuadrado exploited.

Colombia's tails were up and Cuadrado's cross picked out man-of-the-match Diaz whose acrobatic overhead kick was parried over by Gallese. The game opened up and the dangerous Lapadula cut inside a defender on the right before firing in a left-

foot shot that clipped the bar as it went over.

It was end to end stuff with the goalkeepers playing a role in launching long range attacks. Gallese picked out Cueva to run at goal only for a Wilmar Barrios bodycheck to stop him in his tracks. But then Vargas launched a long ball up field for Diaz to scamper away and beat Gallese with a rasping finish on 66 minutes.

Lapadula looked to have sent the match to penalties eight minutes from time when he rose almost unopposed to head home a Raziel Garcia corner from six yards out. But Diaz had the last word with a stunning strike from 25 yards that Gallese could only get his fingertips to as it rifled into the top corner. — AFP

Sri Lanka-India postponed five days by COVID

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's cricket board said Saturday that a one-day series against India would be postponed for five days because of a COVID-19 outbreak in the Sri Lankan camp. Several Sri Lankan players and officials have been put into isolation after batting coach Grant Flower and a team data analyst tested positive for coronavirus on

Friday. The first of three one-day internationals, which was due to start on Tuesday, has been pushed back to July 18, Sri Lanka Cricket said in a statement. The other games will now be July 20 and 23, and the start of the Twenty20 series has been delayed until July 25, with the other two games on July 27 and 29.

"The move is aimed at providing more time for the Sri Lanka national players and the support staff to complete required health protocols before getting onto the field," the board said. Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah expressed support for the move, saying that "circumstances are extraordinary". "Our medical team is in constant touch with the team of doctors at SLC

and together following all safety protocols that will help the series to get underway."

Flower, 50, had returned from England — where Sri Lanka had played a one-day and Twenty20 international series — when he showed coronavirus symptoms. Data analyst GT Niroshan also tested positive, the board said. Cricket sources said at least one player had also contracted the virus, but was being tested again. Soon after the Sri Lanka team's return, three players and four support staff members of the England team also tested positive for COVID-19. Three Sri Lankan players who violated their bio-secure bubble in England were sent back to their home country and now are facing disciplinary action. — AFP

‘Immortality’ beckons if Kane ends his wait to win a trophy

LONDON: Harry Kane's winner against Denmark to send England into their first major tournament final for 55 years was his 275th goal for club and country. Yet, at 27, the England captain is still yet to win a trophy. That could all change spectacularly tonight should Kane become the first Englishman since Bobby Moore in 1966 to lift a major piece of international silverware.

Personal accolades also await the Tottenham striker if he can maintain his return to scoring form in the knockout stage of Euro 2020. Kane's fourth goal in the last three games on Wednesday took him level with Gary Lineker as England's all-time top goalscorer at major tournaments with 10.

One more goal would also be enough to take him alongside Cristiano Ronaldo and Patrik Schick as joint-top scorer in the tournament. Two more and he would win the Golden Boot outright for the second consecutive tournament after scoring six times at the 2018 World Cup.

"Golden Boots are a bonus and if I end up getting that it means I've scored one or two goals in the final, which gives our team a great chance of winning the whole thing," said Kane. "That is the ultimate aim."

Any chance of more goalscoring landmarks seemed a long way off as Kane trudged through the group stage without scoring and barely even threatening to do so against Croatia, Scotland and the Czech Republic.

Kane looked so out of sorts Gareth Southgate even

substituted his skipper with 15 minutes to go of the 0-0 draw against Scotland. A grueling 49-game club season in which he tried in vain to drag Spurs back into the Champions League seemed to have taken its toll.

Kane made it clear before the tournament began he may have to leave his boyhood club to fulfill his ambitions of winning major trophies, with Manchester City interested in making him Sergio Aguero's successor at the Etihad. He may look enviously upon the trophy hauls collected by international teammates Raheem Sterling, Kyle Walker, John Stones and Phil Foden under Pep Guardiola at City.

Obsessive goalscorer

But today gives Kane a shot at a legendary status that would rank higher than anything he may go onto achieve in the club game. "One more game and a couple more goals and he'll have scored his way to immortality," former England captain Alan Shearer wrote in The Athletic.

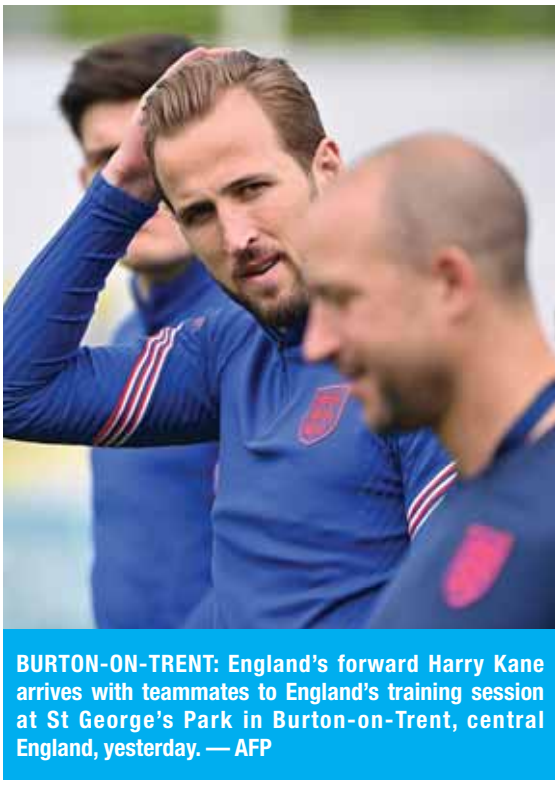
One moment in the dying embers of the Three Lions' last-16 victory over Germany changed the course of Kane's tournament and possibly his career. Already leading 1-0 thanks to Sterling's opener, Kane stooped to head home Jack Grealish's cross to spark wild scenes of celebration at Wembley as England ended the first of a series of 55-year hexes by beating Germany in the knockout tie of a major tournament.

Even British Prime Minister Boris Johnson exclaimed "Harry Kane finally scored" as he watched on in the Downing Street gardens. Kane then took just four minutes to open the scoring against Ukraine in the quarter-final, adding a second in the second half of a 4-0 thrashing. Fortune was on his side in the last four as Kasper Schmeichel saved his penalty only for the ball to rebound kindly back into his path to smash home.

"He scored. That is the transformation in Harry Kane. One goal against Germany turned his tournament and leaves both he and England on the brink of creating history," added Shearer. "If you think that sounds too simplistic to be true, then you do not grasp the obsessional nature of the goalscorer and how his existence is ruled by a very basic metric. Kane has not played his way into form, he has scored his way there."

Just 94 behind, Kane is primed to one day take Shearer's Premier League goals record of 260. Shearer could also have won many more trophies than his one Premier League winner's medal at Blackburn had he joined the all-conquering Manchester United side managed by Alex Ferguson rather than heading home to Newcastle to become a club legend in 1996.

That world-record move came weeks after he won the Golden Boot at Euro 96. Kane may also have a big decision to make in the coming weeks, but by that time he could be a hero for all of England rather than just treasured at Tottenham. — AFP



Chiellini and Bonucci defy English ‘youngsters’

LONDON: Italy's old guard Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci will have the task of stopping English ‘youngsters’ Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling in the Euro 2020 final in London tonight. The Juventus center-backs are the only survivors of Italy's 4-0 final loss to Spain in Euro 2012, and central to the side Roberto Mancini's reconstructed after the Azzurri failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup campaign behind them. Both Chiellini and Bonucci were on the pitch during the low of their play-off defeat by Sweden in November 2017 when they failed to qualify for the World Cup in 60 years. "The will to rebuild was immense. We managed to transform the disappointment into enthusiasm and the desire to do well," said captain Chiellini.

"It is a dream that we have cultivated in the last three years, we carry it with us. The coach instilled it in our heads until it became reality. "At the beginning when he said we had to think about winning the European Championship we too thought he was crazy. Instead we managed to get there and now the last centimeter is missing." In Italy's new-look young side, 36-year-old Chiellini and 34-year-old Bonucci, who between them boast 219 caps, are the center-back pairing of choice. The duo have cultivated their art during a decade together at Juventus, apart from a brief ill-fated season-long spell Bonucci spent at AC Milan three years ago. "Chiellini and Bonucci are two monsters, monumental," said Italy's former World Cup winner Andrea Barzagli, the third pillar in Juve's famed 'BBC' (Bonucci, Barzagli, Chiellini) defensive partnership until he retired in 2019. "They are the cornerstone of the national team. They still play at a very high level and then, when you need someone to do the barking..."

Jose Mourinho lauded a pair who could give "a masterclass in defending at Harvard University" after his Manchester United side fell to a Champions League defeat in Turin. "Mourinho's compliments pleased us, they make us think of how much good we had done in our career," said Bonucci on Friday. "(But) every game you have to prove you are strong, a team".

Bonucci has so far had an almost perfect European campaign, one of two Italian outfield players, along with Jorginho, to have started in all six matches. When not injured Chiellini, is Italy's top defender. Chiellini returned after missing two Euro matches with a thigh injury. He was replaced by Lazio's Francesco Acerbi. Both are looking for their first trophy with Italy who won the European title in 1968. After seeing off two 28-year-old central strikers in Belgium's Romelu Lukaku and Spain substitute Alvaro Morata, Italy now face 27-year-old Harry Kane. "Youngsters against old men..." smiled Bonucci. "Kane? We're not discovering him now, it's been years that he's being doing good things with Tottenham, England. —AFP

‘Coming home to Rome’: England’s Italians eye victory

BEDFORD: Were it not for the grey skies and threat of rain as they sip espressos and talk football outside La Piazza Caffè, Luciano Lambiase and his friends could be in Naples or Rome. But the retired factory engineer, 66, and his boyhood friends Pasquale Spadaccino and Franco Bulzis, both 73, are discussing the upcoming Euro 2020 final in the southern English town of Bedford, home to one of the country's largest Italian communities.

"It's coming home to Rome," Lambiase told AFP, predicting that his national team would beat England in the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship final at Wembley tonight. "It's always been a mystery to us what 'It's Coming Home' means," he added, referring to the popular anthem written by comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner that England fans sing at games. "This is the first time they've played in a (Euro) final, and we've

won four world cups," he added. Liberato "Libby" Lionetti, 55, who runs La Piazza in Bedford's market square and whose customers include fans in England shirts, was more diplomatic in his predictions. Hoping for a modest 1-0 win for Italy, he said that whatever happens, football was "definitely coming home to Bedford". Ahead of the game, the atmosphere in the town was "very tense, everybody's excited", Lionetti said.

Whatever the rivalries during the game, afterwards "everything will be all right", he added. "It's only that 90 minutes, or however long it takes for your team to win. And then that's it and the next day is another day. You just get on with it." The older men drinking coffee outside the cafe said they hoped the match would pass without incident. But they acknowledged that a final between Italy and England brings back memories of the abuse they suffered as young men at international games in the 1960s and 70s.

Lambiase, Spadaccino and Bulzis arrived in Bedford as children in 1956 after their fathers left Italy's southern Campania region to work in the town's then-flourishing brick-making industry. Now the 14,000-strong Italian community still runs grocery stores, cafes and restaurants in the town.

Tensions

The three men say that in the poverty of the early post-World War II years, football bound the Italian community together when they had little else. Tensions between communities endure and Bedfordshire Police have urged residents to be "sensible" and provide a "safe environment for all to enjoy the football".

Following England's defeat to Italy in Euro 2012, four people were arrested after England fans attacked a cavalcade of cars celebrating the Italian victory. Police launched an investigation in 2014 when an Italian flag was set on fire by England fans in Bedford after the "Azzurri" beat England in the first round of the World Cup. Bedfordshire Police said they will be deploying more resources for the match and encouraged families to stay at home, pointing to a recent surge in coronavirus cases.

"We are lucky to live in one of the most diverse areas of the country and we will always celebrate this diversity and the great Anglo-Italian relationship we have in Bedford," Bedfordshire Police Assistant Chief Constable Sharn Basra said. "Please enjoy the match responsibly, get home safe and let's all hope for a fitting finale to what has been a great tournament for both teams." —AFP



‘Sweet Caroline’ sweeps nation

LONDON: England's run to the Euro 2020 final is sweeping the nation into a frenzy ahead of tonight's clash with Italy, but over 60,000 fans at Wembley will be rocking to unfamiliar football anthem. Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" has become the crowd and squad's favorite of England's first ever run to a European Championship final. "You can't beat a bit of Sweet Caroline," England manager Gareth Southgate said after a 40,000 strong Karaoke session celebrated victory over Germany in the last 16. "It's just a really joyous song. I think, that brings people together." The song "Three Lions", commonly

known by its lyrics "football's coming home" has been the soundtrack to England success, and more commonly failure, for 25 years. Recorded by comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner along with rock band The Lightning Seeds for Euro 96, it chronicles England's series of heartbreaks in "30 years of hurt" since winning the 1966 World Cup.

That barren run has now extended to 55 years, but the "football's coming home" mantra any time England win a match at a major tournament has become a target for opposition players and fans to take aim at a perceived English arrogance by claiming football as their own.

It is almost as long ago that "Sweet Caroline" first hit the charts in 1969. Yet, despite constant reminders that this England squad is too young to be traumatized by tournament failures of the past, they are well aware of the lyrics they have belted out along with their adoring

public. "I thought Sweet Caroline went slightly better than Three Lions in the post-match sing-song," Skinner said after the Germany clash. "I felt like we'd beat Germany and lost to Neil Diamond in extra time." Diamond himself has even noticed the buzz. "What a thrill it was to hear everybody singing Sweet Caroline at Wembley," he told The Telegraph. He has plenty of reason to smile with his song propelled up to second in the UK download charts on the back of Euro 2020 fever. The band of the Coldstream Guards were even invited into the grounds of Clarence House by Prince Charles to play the tune ahead of Wednesday's semi-final win over Denmark. The communal outpouring of joy in the stands is not just reflected by the decades of waiting for England to reach a major final, but on the back of a series of strict lockdowns over the past 18 months due to the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

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Adan Hospital	23940620
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Rawda	22517733
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Sport | Times

SUNDAY, JULY 11, 2021

England and Italy count down to Euro 2020 final



LONDON: A combination of file pictures shows Italy's players (left) in Rome on June 11, 2021 and England's players in Rome on July 3, 2021. — AFP

LONDON: England and Italy are counting down to tonight's Euro 2020 final, with Gareth Southgate's men seeking to end a 55-year trophy drought but the Italians aiming to spoil the Wembley party. Sporting immortality beckons for England captain Harry Kane and his team-mates, who are desperate to etch their names in the record books by winning just the second major trophy in the nation's history.

Wembley, which was also the venue for England's 1966 World Cup triumph, will host around 65,000 fans for the game despite coronavirus restrictions still in place. England began the tournament as one of several contenders to lift the trophy and have taken advantage of playing all but one of their matches at home.

Southgate's men will be willed on by the vast majority of a crowd that created a crackling atmosphere for England's

second-round match against Germany and the semi-final against Denmark. "We've all waited so long as players, as public, as people to see us in a final," said Kane. "So these are the opportunities you have to grab with both hands."

"We have an amazing chance to win our second major trophy as a country. The players we've had over the years and produced, we feel proud to be representing them as well. We've got to be excited for it, we've got to enjoy it, but of course, any football match, we're all winners here, we all want to win, and we're going to need every bit of that to get the job done on Sunday."

Italy redemption

Standing in England's way are a battle-hardened Italy side who have restored the nation's pride after failing even to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. England have never beaten Italy at a

major tournament, although meetings between the nations have been few and far between.

Italy triumphed in a penalty shoot-out in the quarter-finals of Euro 2012 in Ukraine and won 2-1 when they met in the group stage of the 2014 World Cup, although both sides ended up being eliminated in the first round.

Both teams have been transformed since then. The Azzurri have lit up Euro 2020 ever since beating Turkey 3-0 in the opening game a month ago. They are on a national record 33-match unbeaten run under coach Roberto Mancini, who has spent time in England both as a player and as a manager.

This will be their third game of the tournament at Wembley, where they beat Austria 2-1 in extra time in the last 16 and Spain on penalties in a gripping semi-final on Tuesday. "Playing at their home does not scare us," Italy's veteran

defender Leonardo Bonucci said. "We are looking forward to taking to the field even though most of the fans present will be English. We want to do something historic, have a great performance and then we'll see how it ends."

Italy had the backing of around 11,000 British-based fans at the semi-final and their supporters will once again be there for the final. Reports in Italy said that 6,500 tickets had been sold to fans already in Britain and that number would be bolstered by 1,000 more who will fly into the country for the game, including President Sergio Mattarella.

Azzurri wait

The Azzurri are looking to end a long wait to win the European Championship. The four-time World Cup winners have been continental champions only once, when it was just a four-team event in 1968. Since then they have reached two

finals, losing to France in 2000 and to Spain in 2012. Sunday's game will be their 10th major tournament final.

Mancini has been praised for the job he has done since taking over in 2018 in the aftermath of Italy's failure to qualify for the World Cup in Russia. "Beyond the players, I'd say that everything comes from Mancini who knows how to make the right choices," Italy legend Dino Zoff told AFP. "For me, it's not a surprise to see Italy in the final. I was convinced they'd do well."

Away from the build-up to the final, European football's governing body UEFA has fined the English Football Association 30,000 euros (\$35,500) after a laser pointer was shone at Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel on Wednesday. The punishment also takes into account disturbances during the national anthems at Wembley and the lighting of fireworks. — AFP






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