



3 Remains of 10 Kuwaiti martyrs laid to rest



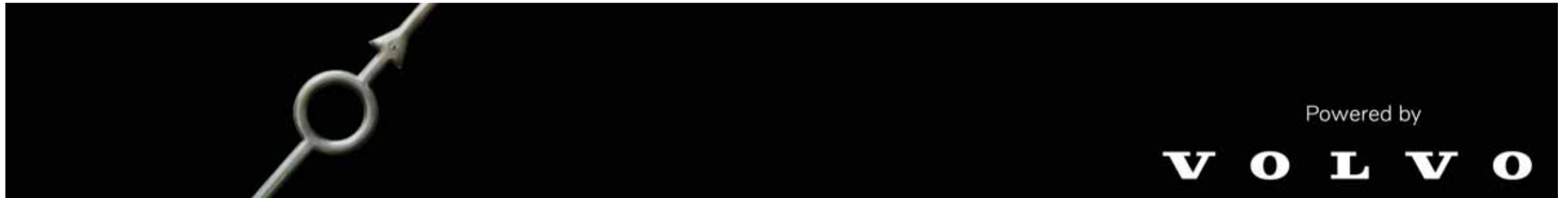
7 Taliban claim control of key border crossing with Pakistan



10 Boubyan Bank launches NOMO, world's first Islamic digital bank



15 A greener Olympics? Tokyo 2020's environmental impact



KD 2,000 fee for residents aged 60+ to renew iqama

Visa transfer ban re-imposed • 62,000 work permits canceled • Health insurance amended

Zain Group Q2 2021 net profit grows 17% to reach \$138m

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecommunications innovator operating in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced its consolidated financial results for the six months to June 30, 2021. Zain served 48.3 million customers at the end of the period, a 1 percent increase year-on-year (Y-o-Y).

For the first six months of 2021 (H1) Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of KD 750 million (\$2.5 billion), a decrease of 3 percent Y-o-Y. EBITDA for the period reached KD 310 million (\$1.03 billion), down 6 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41 percent. Net income amounted to KD 86 million (\$285 million), up 5 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting earnings per share of 20 fils (\$0.07).

Commenting on H1 2021 results, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group, Ahmed Al-Tahous said: "The board's key focus during these challenging times has been to support management in its endeavors to be future-ready to fully exploit the next phase of growth in driving shareholder value. We remain focused on providing meaningful connectivity and minimizing the impact



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

of the pandemic on society by implementing digitalization initiatives to better serve communities, businesses, and governments." (See Page 9)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower yesterday re-imposed a ban on the transfer of residences to other activities for residents working in certain sectors, a statement said. Meanwhile, local newspapers and news sites reported that the authority has allowed expats over 60 without a university degree to renew their residency, provided they pay an annual fee of KD 2,000.

The authority said in a statement that workers who were recruited by sectors like industry, agriculture, fishing, free trade zones and cooperative societies were earlier allowed to transfer to any other job, provided their sponsors agreed.

It added that this permission was given on a temporary basis due to the circumstances amid the coronavirus pandemic to provide these sectors some flexibility and allow employers to hire workers from the domestic market. The authority said it has decided to cancel this permission and revert to imposing the ban on the transfer of workers in these sectors. The decision comes into effect today.

The authority also reportedly decided to allow expats over 60 years of age without a degree to renew their work permits and residencies against a payment of KD 2,000 annually, local newspapers said. The authority had banned elderly expats from renewing their residencies and asked them to leave the country, which stirred a campaign on social media against the decision. The newspapers said the manpower authority will issue an official decision in the next few days. Expats above 60 who hold university degrees were

exempt from the ban.

Also yesterday, the interior ministry, in cooperation with the health ministry, amended procedures for granting health insurance to residents. Assistant Undersecretary for Residency Affairs Maj Gen Anwar Al-Barjas said residents under article 18 (private sector) will be granted health insurance for a period of two years inside the country and one year outside it; residents under article 20 (domestic helpers) will be granted health insurance for a period of three years inside the country and one year outside it; and residents according to article 22 (dependents) will be granted health insurance for a period of two years inside the country and one year outside.

In related news, PR Director and spokesperson of Public Authority for Manpower Aseel Al-Mezyed said 61,975 work permits were canceled during the first half of the current year. She said the authority processed over 940,059 transactions online, including 38,873 cancellations of work permits of residents who are abroad, in addition to canceling 20,011 work permits due to death or permanent cancellation or transfer to family visa, domestic help or the government sector. Mezyed added 402,000 work permits were renewed, while 99,000 were transferred within the private sector. Sixty-four work permits were also issued to bedoons.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen yesterday denied that people over 75 years of age are banned from leaving the country. MP Bader Al-Humaidi however called on authorities to abolish the Kuwait Mosafer app registration for people returning to Kuwait, saying having a PCR test certificate is sufficient.

News in brief

Alcohol linked to cancer

PARIS: Alcohol consumption was linked to 4 percent of all new global cancer cases last year, according to a study published yesterday. The study estimated that there were more than 6.3 million cases in 2020 of mouth, pharynx, voice box larynx, esophageal, colon, rectum, liver, and breast cancer - all of which have established links to alcohol. — AFP

Virus strikes twice

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: India's first coronavirus patient, a student who was in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has tested positive for a second time, a medical official told AFP yesterday. The 21-year-old woman from the southern state of Kerala has no symptoms but is in isolation at her home, Thrissur district medical officer Reena KJ told AFP. The woman tested positive again during a routine check ahead of a trip to New Delhi. — AFP

Fossil fuel power has peaked

PARIS: Electricity generation from fossil fuel has peaked worldwide as emerging markets opt for cheaper renewable technology as part of a global shift to cleaner energy, analysis showed yesterday. Renewable options such as solar and wind are already the cheapest source of new power generation in 90 percent of the world's markets, meaning developing nations can avoid oil and gas as they seek to meet growing electricity demand. — AFP

Struggle to afford period supplies

BEIRUT: Three quarters of women in Lebanon are struggling to afford period supplies amid a deep economic crisis, forcing many to resort to impractical or unsafe alternatives, non-governmental organizations said yesterday. "76.5 percent of women and girls living in Lebanon experienced more difficulty in accessing products because of the sharp rise in prices during the past year," the groups Fe-Male and Plan International found in a survey. — AFP

Joy and relief as India opens NEET center in Kuwait

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Indian students, teachers and parents in Kuwait greeted with joy and relief an India govern-

ment decision to open a new exam center for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) in Kuwait to help the Indian student community in the Middle East.

"It is a big relief for students like me," said Sidharth Fernandez, an Indian student who completed his 12th grade this year. Heaving a sigh of relief, he said the decision has lifted his anxiety about travelling to India during this pandemic to write the entrance exam. Many other students shared the sentiments of Fernandez, saying the decision has put an end to their concerns over safe-

Scores mourn Palestinian rights activist

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Palestinians marched through Ramallah Tuesday to bury rights activist Suha Jarrar, 31, as the Zionist entity refused to release her mother, lawmaker Khalida Jarrar, from prison for the funeral. "We are all your daughters, oh Jarrar," the crowd chanted. Khalida Jarrar, 58, has been arrested and jailed many times and often held without charge in what the Zionists call administrative detention. Palestinians and human rights

organizations had pressed in vain for her release for her daughter's burial. Suha Jarrar was found dead in her Ramallah home on Sunday, according to the advocacy group Al-Haq where she worked. Al-Haq director Shawan Jabarin told AFP the cause of death was not known and the family was waiting for autopsy results.

A statement from the group said Suha Jarrar would remain "a role model in her strength, patience, generosity and defiance in the face of extreme injustice and adversity of (the Zionist entity's) prolonged military occupation and apartheid". Khalida Jarrar was sentenced to two years in prison in March 2021 for belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which the Zionist entity and

Continued on Page 2

Pakistan bus blast kills 12

PESHAWAR: Beijing said nine Chinese workers were among 12 people killed yesterday by a bomb attack on a bus in northwestern Pakistan and called for severe punishment, but Islamabad blamed the explosion on a "gas leak". The bus was carrying around 40 Chinese engineers, surveyors and mechanical staff to a hydropower dam construction site in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Islamabad is Beijing's closest regional ally, but the security of Chinese workers has long been of concern in Pakistan. Large numbers of them are based in the country to supervise and build infrastructure projects. Pakistan's foreign ministry in a statement said the bus "plunged into a ravine after a mechanical failure, resulting in leakage of gas that caused a blast".

Meanwhile, China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian expressed his "shock and condemnation over the bombing". He urged Pakistan to "severely punish" those responsible and

Continued on Page 2



BEITUNIA: Palestinians demonstrate in front of the Zionist Ofer prison near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank on July 12, 2021, demanding the release of the detainee Khalida Jarrar after the death of her daughter. — AFP



Rescue workers and onlookers gather around a wreck after a bus plunged into a ravine following a bomb explosion in Kohistan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province yesterday. — AFP

Crown Prince receives Prime Minister, Deputy Speaker



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness also received the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmad Khalifah Al-Shohoumi. — KUNA photos



Egyptian President receives Kuwait's parliament speaker



CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi meets Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. — KUNA

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi received in Cairo yesterday Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, who conveyed a verbal message from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Egyptian leader regarding bilateral relations and cooperation. Ghanem also conveyed

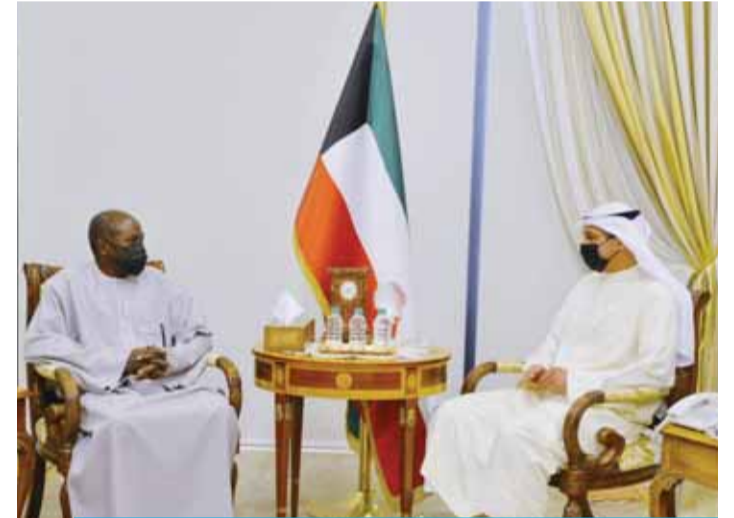
greetings of His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Sisi and wished Egypt and its people further progress and prosperity. Sisi conveyed his regards to the Kuwaiti political leadership, and reaffirmed historic relations between the two countries. — KUNA

Kuwait's Prime Minister receives outgoing Senegalese ambassador



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait Abdou Lahad Mbacke. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace the Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait Abdou Lahad Mbacke, on the occasion of ending his tenure. Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister



Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri meets the Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait Abdou Lahad Mbacke.

Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafeeri also received the outgoing Ambassador of Senegal in a separate meeting yesterday. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar attended the meeting. — KUNA

Pakistan bus blast...

Continued from Page 1

"earnestly protect" Chinese nationals and projects. The Chinese embassy in Islamabad also earlier said its nationals had come under "attack". Both countries said nine Chinese workers and three Pakistanis had died in the disaster which happened at around 7 am.

Arif Khan Yousafzai, a senior government official in Kohistan district where the blast happened, said around 28 people were also injured. They were airlifted to hospital by the military, officials said. Pakistan

authorities said an investigation was under way.

Construction of the Dasu dam on the Indus River began in 2017 and was scheduled to be built within five years, according to the Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority. In April, the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for a deadly suicide blast at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador, who was unhurt, in southwest Balochistan.

The group has recently claimed a string of attacks - not only in Pakistan's restive tribal areas along the Afghanistan border, but also in the country's cities, including the capital, Islamabad. Beijing has poured billions of dollars into Pakistan in recent years to boost the country's infrastructure. But Chinese-funded projects have sparked resentment, particularly among separatist groups, who say locals see little benefit, with most jobs going to outsiders. — AFP

Scores mourn Palestinian...

Continued from Page 1

the United States label a "terrorist" organization. She had been detained without charge since 2019, and her sentence included time served.

Jarrar was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council, or parliament, as part of the PFLP, but the Zionist military did not find evidence she had taken part in violent acts. On Monday, Palestinian demonstrators threw rocks and shook the yellow gates of Ofer military prison north of Jerusalem, where many Palestinians are

held. Zionist forces responded with tear gas.

Activist Abdullah Abu Rahma told AFP he attended the protest "to express our solidarity with Khalida Jarrar", put pressure on the Zionist entity and "for our voices to reach the human rights and international institutions to stop this arbitrary arrest". At Al-Haq, Suha Jarrar specialized in environmental and gender issues, including briefing the United Nations on Palestinian access to water under Zionist occupation. She studied in Canada and earned her master's in climate change science and policy in Britain.

Omar Shakir, (Zionist entity) and Palestine Director for Human Rights Watch, blasted the Zionist entity's decision not to release Khalida Jarrar for her daughter's burial. "Having repeatedly detained Khalida in violation of her rights, (Zionist) authorities should at minimum allow her to say goodbye to her daughter." — AFP

Joy and relief as India opens NEET...

Continued from Page 1

opened in Kuwait," India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan tweeted on Tuesday.

Hundreds of thousands of Indian students were on the horns of a dilemma as they faced the arduous prospect of travelling to India to write various entrance exams during the COVID pandemic. "It is a milestone decision for the Indian community in Kuwait and comes at a critical time. Thanks to the ambassador for his efforts," said Grace Thomas, an Indian teacher.

Since 2019, India's ministry of health and family welfare has made it mandatory for students to clear the NEET exam, which is the entry examination for undergraduate medical education in India, as a prerequisite to pursue

medical education abroad. "We are relieved, we are thankful," said Riyaz Ahmad, father of a student who completed her 12th grade this year. For many parents like Ahmad, taking their children to India to take entrance examinations posed insurmountable challenges during this crisis.

"The NEET (UG) 2021 will be for the first time conducted in 13 languages, with the addition of Punjabi and Malayalam," the Indian minister said. The languages which are now being offered are Hindi, Punjabi, Assamese, Bengali, Odia, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Urdu and English, he said.

Pradhan had on Monday announced that the NEET exam, which was earlier scheduled on Aug 1, will now be conducted on Sept 12. The number of cities where the examination is conducted will be increased from 155 to 198. The number of examination centers will also be increased from the 3,862 used in the 2020. Last year, the exam was conducted on Sept 13 amid strict precautions in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 13,66,000 candidates had appeared for the exam, of whom 7,71,500 qualified.

Singapore unveils one of world's biggest floating solar farms



This undated handout photograph released yesterday shows an aerial view of Sembcorp energy company's new floating solar power farm at Tengeh reservoir in Singapore. — AFP

SINGAPORE: Singapore yesterday unveiled one of the world's biggest floating solar power farms, covering an area the size of 45 football pitches, as part of the city-state's push to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The project is the country's most ambitious yet, comprising 122,000 panels on Tengeh Reservoir that will produce enough electricity to run its five water treatment plants.

Singapore is among the biggest per capita carbon dioxide emitters in Asia and its land scarcity makes boosting renewable energy sources a challenge. The prosperous financial hub has turned to setting up plants off its coasts and in reservoirs, and aims to quadruple solar energy production by 2025. The new farm can produce up to 60 megawatts of electricity, and will lead to carbon emissions reductions equivalent to removing 7,000 cars from roads, according to Sembcorp Industries and national water agency PUB.

Sembcorp built the project, which covers about 45 hectares (110 acres), with backing from the agency. "Solar energy is plentiful, clean and green, and is key to reducing PUB's and also Singapore's carbon footprint," said the water agency's chief executive Ng Joo Hee. Singapore has also built a solar farm in the Johor Strait, which separates the island state from Malaysia, as well as plants on land.

The government in February unveiled a "green plan" that included steps such as planting trees, reducing waste sent to landfills and building more charging points to encourage electric car use. Singapore has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions "as soon as viable" in the second half of the century. Critics say the city-state's goals are behind that of other developed economies, and that it has not gone far enough to achieve its environmental ambitions. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's martyrs laid to rest



KUWAIT: The remains of 10 Kuwaiti prisoners of war identified following DNA tests earlier this week were laid to their final resting place during a funeral procession in the Sulaibikhat Cemetery yesterday. The prisoners were taken during the 1990 Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, and their remains were found in a mass grave in Iraq. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait's oil price up to \$75.67 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 86 cents to \$75.67 per barrel Tuesday after being at \$74.81 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday.

The price of the Brent crude rose by \$1.33 to \$76.49 per barrel, and the West Texas Intermediate went UP by \$1.15 to \$75.25 pb. The OPEC basket went up by 80 cents to \$75.13 per barrel on Tuesday as oppose to \$74.33 last Monday, said the bulletin for the international organization yesterday.

The annual price of the OPEC basket in 2020 was at \$41.47 pb. The OPEC basket consists of Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Merey (Venezuela). —KUNA



Firemen put out steel plant blaze



KUWAIT: Firemen put out a blaze reported in a steel plant in Industrial Shuaiba on Tuesday, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said. Teams from Abdullah Port and Um Al-Haiman fire stations

were dispatched to the area, and they managed to contain the flames and put out the blaze. No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened, KFF noted.

KuwaitBC eyes closer UAE trade ties

ABU DHABI: A Kuwaiti business group signed a deal with a UAE-based fund for small and medium enterprises yesterday as part of efforts to improve bilateral trade ties. "We are glad to work with Kuwaiti businessmen to explore an array of investment opportunities," said Mohammed Bin Rashid Fund for SMEs Deputy CEO Saeed Al-

Marri, pointing out that such endeavors help contribute towards the UAE's regional investment hub aspirations.

The deal will help "open new doors" for the Kuwait Business Council (KuwaitBC) in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, its deputy chief Feras Al-Salem said, hailing the deal as a lucrative opportunity for Kuwaiti entrepreneurs.

KuwaitBC was established in May 2016 under the umbrella of the Dubai Chamber as an independent non-profit organization; an initiative of a group of prominent Kuwaiti companies, personalities, and businesspeople in Dubai and the Northern Emirates. —KUNA

News in brief

Farwaniya Hospital patient allegedly commits suicide

KUWAIT: A patient at Farwaniya Hospital committed suicide by jumping out of the window yesterday, according to preliminary findings. The 28-year-old Indian man reportedly fell to his death from the window of a room located in the second floor of the hospital. Further investigations are ongoing.

Kuwaitis over 75 'unable to travel'

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis over the age of 75 have complained of difficulties in registering in the Kuwait Mosafer platform that is necessary to travel. Because insurance companies refuse to issue them travel insurance, which is a mandatory condition for travel, according to a local report.

Most deaths for not fully vaccinated

KUWAIT: A roundup of COVID-19 deaths reported in nearly two weeks in Kuwait shows that 97 percent of the cases were for people who were not fully vaccinated. The health ministry had said on Tuesday that Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases jumped by 1,712 to 379,076 as deaths rose by 11 to 2,147. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 1,182 as of Tuesday, with 333 of them in intensive care units.

Welsh woman to be freed from Kuwait prison 'within days'

KUWAIT: A woman from Wales who is in prison in Kuwait despite being cleared of drugs offences will be flown to the UK 'within days,' her lawyer has said. Sara Assayed, 35, works as a primary school teacher in Kuwait City, where she has been living since she was 17. She was sentenced to jail for 10 years in March when drugs were allegedly found in her car, but was cleared on appeal last month.

Local

Kuwait Times

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An ice cream vendor is seen next to his cart near a street in Kuwait. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Mexican Ambassador sends Eid greetings

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Mexico to the State of Kuwait released the following Press Release on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Adha:

Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Angel Isidro has the honor to extend his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister, the Government and the people of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the advent of Eid-Al-Adha, wishing the friendly people of Kuwait further prosperity and stability.

Ambassador Isidro added, "I look forward to working with the government of the State of Kuwait to further strengthen bilateral relations, to deepen our cooperation, and to ensure a prosperous future in the relations between Mexico and Kuwait."

It is our hope and wish to develop strong and unique cooperation between both nations at all levels, seeking to consolidate stability and development regionally for the good of the peoples of both countries."



Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Angel Isidro

GCC Commercial Arbitration Center elects new secretary

KUWAIT: The Administration of the Commercial Arbitration Center for the Gulf Cooperation Council announced on Monday, the election to the prestigious post Kuwait's representative Tareq Al-Shumaimry, as Secretary-General of the Center, as of this July after the approval of the Center's Board of Directors.

The center's board of directors chairman, Sami Zainal, said that the scientific level and practical experience of Shumaimry in the field of arbitration

and management will have a positive impact on the center's work. He explained that Shumaimry has a number of memberships, the most important of which is a member of the International Federation of Journalists (Brussels) since 2003. He was also a member of the Arbitration Committee (Canada), and a member of the Arbitration Center of the Kuwait Society of Engineers.

The new secretary has participated and attended a number of judicial, economic and financial courses inside and outside Kuwait, as well as conferences in local and international arbitration. He also participated as a lecturer in various institutions, including the Kuwait Institute for Judicial Studies 2003-2004 and a lecturer at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training 2009-2010.

Shumaimry expressed his thanks to the repre-

sentatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council members, members of the Board of Directors of the Center for the confidence granted to him in this position. He said that the GCC Commercial Arbitration Center enjoys a legal and legislative ground in the GCC countries that helps in providing an advanced international arbitration experience that helps in settling disputes in the best way.

The new Secretary-General of the Center holds a BA in Economics, Accounting and Political Studies from Kuwait University. He has served as Chairman of the Public Budgets Committee at the Permanent International Court of Arbitration in the Hague, in addition to the position of Deputy Director of the Judicial Arbitration Department in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Justice from 2003 to 2012.

Yemeni FM: Kuwait one of top Yemen supporting countries

ADEN: Kuwait has always been one of the top countries supporting Yemen's peace and security and Yemenis are grateful for the Kuwaiti role in their development as well as for the humanitarian efforts, said Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmad bin Mubarak yesterday. In an interview yesterday, bin Mubarak recalled the peace talks which Kuwait hosted in 2016, a gathering lasting for over 100 days and was brokered by the UN. He also underlined Kuwait's efforts to resolve Yemen's issues and defend its sovereignty during its non-permanent membership at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2018-2019.

Kuwait has also played a role in ending the war in Yemen and unite the country in 1979, as it brokered an agreement between the two clashing sides, the minister said. Meanwhile, he noted that

he had held talks with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah during his last visit to Kuwait, regarding the political situation in his country, especially after Saudi's initiative to end the war and the efforts of the US and UN envoys.

The talks also involved activating the joint ministerial committee and forming a political talks committee between the two countries foreign ministries, bin Mubarak added. Moreover, the minister hailed the efforts of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) to fund development projects in Yemen over the decades, as well as the efforts of Kuwaiti rescue organizations.

Among Kuwait's top projects is Sanaa University, where tens of thousands of students had graduated, and the Kuwait hospital in Sanaa, he said. —KUNA



KUWAIT: A group photo of the honored physicians. —KUNA

Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology center honors staff

KUWAIT: Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti, Director of Sabah Al-Ahmad Medical District, honored the staff of Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center yesterday in recognition of their efforts during the coronavirus crisis. In a brief speech, Dr Shatti praised the Urology Center staff for their hard work in helping curb spread of the pandemic, and conveyed appreciation of Minister of Health to doctors and administrative staff.

Dr Saad Al-Dosari, Head of the surgery department at Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center, said that in October 2020 the center was set for surgeries

for non-corona patients to lessen the load on other hospitals. The center prepared five fully equipped operation theaters after the first wave of the pandemic, he added.

Dr Dosari stated that between November 2020 and April 2021 the center, along with Farwaniya, Jahra, Adan and Mubarak Al-Kabeer hospitals preformed 2,078 surgeries, compared with up to only 839 operations conducted each year between 2017-19. He also said 11,031 persons visited the outpatient clinics between the November-April period. Dosari also praised the hard work and success of the Center, and appreciated the support of Al-Sabah Medical district as well as the Ministry.

Meanwhile, Dr Shatti announced that the new Jahra Hospital will be opening in the next few days and will only treat non-corona patients while coronavirus patients will be treated at the old Jahra Hospital to lessen the outspread of the virus. —KUNA

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Pregnant women, mothers threatened by Afghan violence

US charges 4 Iranians with plotting to abduct reporter in NY

Page 6

Page 7



SOWETO: Residents of Soweto shout slogans in front of Maponya Mall in Soweto, yesterday as they protest against the wave of violence and looting that afflicted several South African provinces during the past four days. — AFP

Death toll in S Africa unrest climbs to 72

Armed forces were sending 2,500 soldiers to help overwhelmed police

JOHANNESBURG: Stores and warehouses in South Africa were hit by looters yesterday for a fifth day running despite the troops President Cyril Ramaphosa deployed to try to quell unrest that has claimed 72 lives. As pillaging erupted in the economic capital of Johannesburg and the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa's main opposition accused radicals of stoking the unrest.

The armed forces were sending 2,500 soldiers to help the overwhelmed police. But these numbers are dwarfed by the more than 70,000 troops deployed to enforce last year's coronavirus lockdown, and only a handful of soldiers were seen at some shopping centres.

The raging unrest first erupted last Friday after former president Jacob Zuma started serving a 15-month term for contempt, having snubbed a probe into the corruption that stained his nine years in power.

By the weekend, it started spreading to Gauteng province. "The total number of people who have lost their lives since the beginning of these protests ... has risen to 72," the police said in a statement late Tuesday. Most of the deaths "relate to stampedes that occurred during incidents of looting of shops", it said. Others were linked to shootings and explo-

sions of bank ATMs. The number of arrests has risen to 1,234, although many thousands have been involved in the ransacking sprees.

Looting 'for my mum'

Earlier TV footage showed dozens of women, some wearing their dressing gowns, men and even children strolling into a butcher in Soweto, coming out balancing heavy boxes of frozen meat on their heads or shoulders. Police showed up three hours later and fired rubber bullets. Soldiers eventually followed.

In Alexandra township north of Johannesburg, hundreds of people streamed in and out of a shopping mall, freely grabbing groceries. Looters who spoke to AFP said they had got caught up in the rush, or saw the chance to ease a life blighted by poverty.

"I'm really not concerned about Zuma. He is a corrupt old man that deserves to be in jail," said a 30-year-old man who works at a car wash. He admitted to "taking things from the shop for my mum"—stainless-steel pots, meat and groceries.

In Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal's capital, people hauled boxed refrigerators through bushes to a long line of cars that were parked along a high-

way. In Durban, aerial footage showed hundreds of people looting a large shopping centre and carting off huge boxes of goods.

A woman was seen throwing her baby from the first floor of a building to save her from fire after shops below her apartment were set on fire. The child safely landed with a group of people on the street.

'Anarchy'

In his nationwide address Monday night, Ramaphosa lashed "opportunistic acts of criminality, with groups of people instigating chaos merely as a cover for looting and theft". "The path of violence, of looting and anarchy, leads only to more violence and devastation," Ramaphosa said.

The chair of the African Union Commission condemned "the surge of violence that has resulted in the deaths of civilians and appalling scenes of the looting", calling "for an urgent restoration of order". The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, announced Tuesday it would file criminal charges against Zuma's children and the leader of the leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Julius Malema.

In a statement, the party accused them of using

"social media to express comments which appear to encourage and incite the violence and looting." Once dubbed the "Teflon president", Zuma was handed the jail term on June 29 by the Constitutional Court for bucking an order to appear before a commission probing the graft that proliferated under his administration. He started serving the term on Thursday after handing himself in to authorities. He is seeking to have the ruling set aside.

Zuma popularity

Zuma, 79, is a former anti-apartheid fighter who spent 10 years in jail in the notorious Robben Island jail off Cape Town. He rose in democratic South Africa to vice president and then president, before being ousted by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in 2018 as scandals proliferated.

But he remains popular among many poor South Africans, especially grassroots members of the ANC, who portray him as a defender of the disadvantaged. South Africa is deep in an economic malaise, with crippling high levels of unemployment. Economic activity had already been badly affected by restrictions to stop the spread of coronavirus. — AFP

France honors Europe's anti-jihad troops on Bastille Day

PARIS: European special forces involved in anti-jihadist operations in Africa's Sahel region were given prime position in France's Bastille Day celebrations yesterday, in a sign of President Emmanuel Macron's military priorities.

The traditional parade on France's national day returned to the Champs-Élysées after a one-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Roughly 80 French and European special forces drawn from the multinational Takuba force in the Sahel led the procession on foot, a choice intended to send a diplomatic message from Paris.

Macron, who presided over the ceremony, announced a major drawdown of French troops in the Sahel region last month and is banking on his often reluctant European partners to send more troops to replace them.

Paris wants Takuba—which numbers only 600 troops currently, half of them

French—to take over more responsibilities from the 5,100 soldiers in France's Barkhane operation, who have been battling Islamist groups in the Sahel for eight years.

The parade under grey skies and light rain was a scaled-down version of the usual event, with only 10,000 people in the stands instead of 25,000.

The holiday commemorates the storming of the Bastille prison in Paris in 1789, which kicked off years of revolution in France. This year's event could be the last for 43-year-old Macron, who will finish a five-year term in April next year.

He is expected to seek re-election, however. It will be the last for outgoing defence chief-of-staff Francois Lecointre, who looked emotional as he greeted Macron before reviewing the troops. "There's a continual decline of order in the world," he told Le Monde newspaper on Saturday, referring to



PARIS: France's President Emmanuel Macron (L) and French Army Chief of Staff General Francois Lecointre stand in the command car as they review the troops during the annual Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris yesterday. — AFP

actions by Russia, Turkey and Iran, as well as terror groups such as Islamic State in the Middle East and in Africa.

Alongside the traditional pageantry, fireworks displays and celebrations of Bastille Day, the southern Riviera town of Nice will mark the fifth anniversary of a terror attack that cost the lives of 86 people.

Prime Minister Jean Castex will

visit the city for a ceremony at the site of a memorial for the dead, who were killed by a Tunisian man who drove a truck into crowds watching fireworks. City authorities have organised a concert and 86 beams of light will illuminate the Mediterranean waterfront to honour the dead at 10:34 pm, the time of the start of the truck rampage. — AFP

Biden taps Jeff Flake as envoy to Turkey

WASHINGTON: Jeff Flake, a former senator and one of the most outspoken Republican foes of Donald Trump, was nominated Tuesday by President Joe Biden as ambassador to Turkey, tasked with managing one of the most complicated US alliances. Flake, who unlike many Republicans has never retracted his criticism of Trump and went so far as to campaign for Biden in last year's election, said he was "humbled and honored" to be chosen as ambassador.

"This is a pivotal post at an important time for both of our countries,"

Flake wrote in a blog post as his nomination was announced in a routine White House statement.

"With this nomination, the Biden administration reaffirms the best tradition of American foreign policy and diplomacy: the credo that partisan politics should stop at the water's edge."

Turkey, which has experienced major tensions with Washington in recent years but is also a vital partner in key areas such as Afghanistan, was one of the few prominent posts where Biden had left in place a Trump appointee — David Satterfield, a career diplomat with vast experience in the Middle East.

Flake's confirmation in the Senate appears virtually assured as Democrats are in control and he remains friendly with many Republican colleagues. Republican Senator Mike Lee of Utah

said that Biden showed "wisdom" in choosing him.

Vociferous Trump critic

Flake, 58, has long been expected to be tapped for a diplomatic post but speculation had focused on an ambassadorship in Africa. Flake served as a Mormon missionary in South Africa and Zimbabwe and was active on African issues as a senator.

Biden earlier nominated another Republican critic of Trump from Arizona — Cindy McCain, widow of veteran senator John McCain — to be the US ambassador to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome. With a boyish smile and an upright moral code commonly associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Flake clashed with Trump from the beginning of the brash



NEW YORK: File photo shows Senator Jeff Flake speaks onstage during the 2018 Global Citizen Festival: Be The Generation in Central Park in New York City. — AFP

tycoon's political ascent — even though Flake largely supported Trump's legislative agenda. — AFP

One dead in Cuba protests, at least 100 arrested

HAVANA: One person has died in the anti-government protests across Cuba, according to officials, with activists saying at least 100 people have been arrested and scores remain in detention as demonstrations overseas in solidarity continued. The rallies are the largest since the Cuban revolution of the 1950s and come as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity, food and medicine, just as it records a spike in coronavirus infections.

Cuba's San Isidro free speech protest movement published late Monday a list of 144 people held or reported as disappeared following the demonstrations in dozens of cities and towns. A 36-year-old man died during a protest on the outskirts of Havana on Monday, the interior ministry said Tuesday, according to the state news agency, which named him as Diubis Laurencio Tejeda and said he had taken part in "disturbances."

Demonstrators had chanted "down with the dictatorship" before being dispersed by police in about 40 different locations across Cuba on Sunday, but about 100 protesters again gathered in the capital Havana Monday evening, shouting "down with communism."

Relatives and friends of those detained during and after the historic demonstrations engaged in a desperate search on Tuesday for news on their whereabouts. "They took him from the house handcuffed and beaten, without a shirt, without a mask," said a 50-year-old woman who did not wish to give her name, asking after her 21-year-old son at a police station in the capital.

"They took many from the neighborhood, young and old." On Tuesday Cuba's foreign minister Bruno Rodriguez denied there had been a "social outbreak", insisting that the people still support "the revolution and their government." — AFP

International

Ethiopia's premier vows to repel 'enemies' after Tigray rebel assault

War, characterised by grisly massacres and rampant sexual violence

ADDIS ABABA: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed yesterday vowed to repel attacks by Ethiopia's "enemies" after rebels in Tigray launched a fresh offensive to regain territory in the war-torn region. Tigrayan forces this week claimed a series of battlefield gains in a renewed assault that comes two weeks after the federal government declared a unilateral ceasefire in the face of rebel advances.

The latest rebel push followed the stunning recapture of the regional capital Mekele last month from federal forces, a turning point in a brutal eight-month conflict that has killed thousands of people and left many hundreds of thousands facing famine.

Abiy said he remained committed to peace—even if it came at a "cost"—but these latest attacks would not go unanswered. "We will defend and repel these attacks by our internal and external enemies, while working to speed up humanitarian efforts," he said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Abiy, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, sent troops into Tigray last

November after accusing the region's once-dominant ruling party of orchestrating attacks on Ethiopian military bases. He said Ethiopia had demonstrated its willingness to end hostilities in the mountainous northern region.

"We've undertaken a unilateral ceasefire to avoid further conflict, to provide the people with a reprieve during the farming season, and to allow aid operations to proceed without excuse," he said. "Even though we knew peace would exact some cost on us, we have taken the peaceful option."

'Resist provocation'

But he said Ethiopia's enemies were "unable to rest without conflict" and accused them of using child soldiers. He urged Ethiopians to remain united and stand behind the Ethiopian army and resist "outside pressure and internal provocation".

A spokesman for the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) told AFP on Tuesday they had seized Alamata, the main town in southern Tigray, and pushed into the western part of the region where fertile

farmlands have long been contested.

The rebel claims could not be independently confirmed as communications were largely down in the area, but UN and humanitarian sources reported fighting around towns in western Tigray and in a refugee camp.

Abiy and Ethiopian officials characterised their troop withdrawal from Mekele as a strategic move while the TDF described it as a major rebel victory, and the declaration of a ceasefire a "joke". However, they later accepted it "in principle" while demanding the withdrawal from the region of Eritrean and Amhara forces.

The war, characterised by grisly massacres and rampant sexual violence, has damaged Abiy's standing as a reformer and peacemaker, and badly strained Ethiopia's ties with traditional allies. Western powers have demanded the ceasefire be accompanied by unfettered aid access and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, warning of possible sanctions should these conditions not be met.

The World Food Programme said



DANSHEHA, TIGRAY: Asfaw Abera (R), an ethnic Amhara who recently relocated to Western Tigray after living 30 years in Khartoum, Sudan, plays with his children at the temporary home given by the authorities in the city of Humera, Ethiopia. —AFP

this week that it had reached Mekele with food supplies but far more was needed to address the massive need in

a region where the United Nations says famine conditions are already present. —AFP

US charges 4 Iranians with plotting to abduct reporter in NY

WASHINGTON: Four Iranian nationals were indicted Tuesday on charges of plotting to abduct a journalist in New York and smuggle her out of the country to Iran, the Justice Department said.

US-based journalist and activist Masih Alinejad, who is of Iranian descent and is an outspoken critic of the Tehran government, confirmed on Twitter that she was the target of the alleged plot.

"I am grateful to the FBI for foiling the Islamic Republic of Iran's Intelligence Ministry's plot to kidnap me," she said, with a video clip of her standing by her window with a police car in the street outside, lights flashing.

"This plot was orchestrated under Rouhani," she added, referring to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, widely seen as a political moderate.

Alinejad founded the My Stealthy Freedom movement, which encourages women to remove their hijabs.

The four men named in the indictment are an Iranian intelligence official and three officers who work under him, according to a statement from the Justice Department. It said they all live in Iran.

A fifth co-conspirator in California is accused of financing the alleged operation.

According to the Justice Department indictment, the intelligence officers had first tried in 2018 to force relatives of their kidnap target, referred to only as Victim-1, to lure her to a third country to be arrested and brought to Iran to be imprisoned.

They then moved to surveiling the victim and other members of her household in Brooklyn, New York "on multiple occasions in 2020 and 2021," the Justice Department's statement said.

Evacuation by Speedboat

The agents hired private investigators to "surveil, photograph and video record" their target, according to the charge sheet.

It alleged that the men researched how to bring Alinejad from the United States to Iran. One of the accused allegedly looked into travel routes from her home to a waterfront neighborhood in Brooklyn, while another was researching a "service offering military-style speedboats for self-operated maritime evacuation out of Manhattan."

They also examined ways of getting their kidnap victim from New York by sea to Venezuela, which has close ties to Tehran. The indictment said that in July of 2019, the chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Courts said that anyone sending out video attacking the regime, in particular contradicting the law that women must cover their heads, "was committing the crime of cooperating with a hostile foreign government and would be sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment."

Other targets

The Iranian network uncovered by the FBI was also scoping out other targets in Canada, Britain and the United Arab Emirates, and had tried to deploy similar methods of surveillance there, the indictment said.

The four agents were identified as Alireza Shavaroghi Farahani, Mahmoud Khazein, Kiya Sadeghi and Omid Noori.

A fifth Iranian residing in California, Niloufar Bahadorifar, was suspected of having helped in financing the plot. "Every person in the United States must be free from harassment, threats and physical harm by foreign powers," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Mark Lesko in the Justice Department's statement. —AFP

Rouhani says hopes Iran's next govt can conclude nuke talks

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday he hopes his successor can clinch a deal to lift US sanctions, implying that nuclear talks will not conclude before his term ends in August. The Islamic republic has held talks since April in Vienna with major powers on reviving its troubled 2015 nuclear agreement.

The accord offered Tehran international sanctions relief in exchange for limiting its nuclear programme, but was torpedoed in 2018 when former US president Donald Trump withdrew from it and reimposed sanctions. "The work was ready" to be done, the moderate Rouhani said of the talks, speaking in a televised cabinet meeting.

But "they took away the 12th administration's opportunity," he added about his government, without elaborating. "We hope the 13th administration can finish this work," Rouhani is set to hand power in early August to the ultraconservative former judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who last month won a presidential poll.

Trump's successor Joe Biden has signalled his readiness to return to the deal and has engaged in indirect negotiations with Iran as the accord's remaining other state parties—Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia—hold talks in Vienna. They have held six rounds of talks, concluding the latest on June 20 without setting a date for a new one.

Decision time

The United States and France warned Iran in late June that time was running out to revive the deal, to which Tehran responded by saying that it expects others to "take the decisions". Iran's ultraconservative camp, which deeply distrusts the United States, has repeatedly attacked Rouhani over the failing nuclear deal, which was reached six years ago yesterday.

Despite this, Iran's senior political figures, including Raisi, have voiced broad agreement that the country must seek an end to the punishing US sanctions. "Any negotiations that guar-



TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency yesterday shows Iran's President Hassan Rouhani attending a cabinet meeting in the capital Tehran. —AFP

antee national interests will certainly be supported, but... we will not allow negotiations to be for negotiations' sake," Raisi said on June 21.

He added that "any meeting must produce a result ... for the Iranian nation". Rouhani's government has insisted that Iran's basic position on the nuclear talks will remain the same. Ultimate political power in Iran rests with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who gave the green light to both the original nuclear agreement

and the efforts to revive it.

In his speech, Rouhani also insisted that his government has "done what was required" to lift US sanctions and that Iranians could "clearly see" their efforts in a foreign ministry report released Monday. The report mentioned in broad terms what has been agreed to in Vienna and included a note from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who called on all political forces to work together to succeed in the talks. —AFP

Iraq cleric demands action over deadly COVID unit fire

BAGHDAD: Populist Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr has warned he will hold the Iraqi government responsible if it fails to take action over a devastating fire that killed at least 60 people in a COVID isolation unit. The warning comes just months before Iraq is scheduled to go to the polls in October for an early parliamentary election that was demanded by a protest movement backed by Sadr's supporters.

"It is incumbent on the government to work immediately to firmly and seriously punish those to blame for hospital fires, whether in Nasiriyah or other provinces, no matter their (political) affiliation," Sadr tweeted late Tuesday. "Otherwise, this government will be held responsible from its lowest to its highest (official)."

The devastating blaze, which swept through the COVID isolation unit of Al-Hussein Hospital in the southern city of Nasiriyah on Monday evening, was the second such fire in Iraq in three months. An April fire at a Baghdad COVID hospital killed 82 people and was also blamed on the explosion of badly stored oxygen bottles.

That blaze triggered widespread anger and resulted in the suspension and subsequent resignation of then health minister Hassan al-Tamimi, a nominee of Sadr's powerful political bloc. Prime



NASIRIYAH: People light up candles for a vigil in mourning for the victims of a fire that swept through a COVID-19 coronavirus isolation unit killing over 60 people and wounding dozens more, at al-Hussein Hospital in Iraq's southern city of Nasiriyah. —AFP

Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi has ordered an investigation into Monday's blaze "that will lead to those directly responsible", his office said. He already dismissed the hospital's manager, the provincial health director and the local civil defence chief.

Arrest warrants have been issued for 13 officials, including the provincial health director. Sadr demanded that the findings of the official inquiry be released quickly. "It must not end up like others

conducted into previous hospital fires. Or else we have other means of protecting people's safety and dignity."

The health ministry said yesterday that 60 people had been confirmed to have died in the fire. Forensics experts had identified 39 bodies while 21 were still unidentified. Demonstrations in honour of the victims were planned in Nasiriyah later after residents held a candle-lit vigil late on Tuesday. —AFP

Russia, US have 'common interests' on climate change

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin told US climate envoy John Kerry that Moscow and Washington have a shared interest in battling climate change, the Kremlin said yesterday, in a rare area of common ground between the rivals. "The climate problem is one of the areas where Russia and the United States have common interests and similar approaches," Putin said in a phone call with Kerry who is visiting Moscow, the Kremlin said in a statement.

The former secretary of state is in Russia this week to discuss climate change with officials and

has called on the country to cooperate with the US on the issue. Putin said Moscow "attaches great importance" to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and "advocates de-politicising" dialogue on climate change.

The comments on a rare point of cooperation between the two countries come after Putin met US President Joe Biden for talks in Geneva last month. Moscow has welcomed Kerry's visit and called it a positive step to improve relations.

For years Putin was notorious for his scepticism about man-made global warming and saying Russia stands to benefit from it. But in recent months he has also made statements to the effect that climate change is not just a boon to Moscow.

Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov said yesterday that climate change and decarbonisation are "top of the agenda" for the Russian leader. He said the climate issue is "where dialogue between Russia and America is possible and necessary".

Putin also discussed the "prospects for environmental cooperation in the Arctic" with Kerry, according to the Kremlin statement. He has made the development of Russia's Arctic region a strategic priority as its ice cover melts, opening up new shipping routes for Moscow.

Earlier this week, Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov-whom he met many times when he served as secretary of state—with the pair agreeing to cooperate on climate issues. At his annual state of the nation address in April, Putin said Russia must adapt to climate change and called on the country to create an industry for utilising carbon emissions.

Climate change is one of the few areas in which the United States and the European Union have said they are ready to engage with Russia amid high tensions over a range of issues, including Ukraine, cyber-attacks and Moscow's human rights record. —AFP

International

Taleban claim control of key border crossing with Pakistan

Afghanistan troop pullout a 'mistake': George Bush

KANDAHAR: The Taleban said yesterday they had captured the strategic border crossing of Spin Boldak on the frontier with Pakistan, continuing sweeping gains made since foreign forces stepped up their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The situation on the ground could not immediately be verified, with Afghanistan's interior ministry denying the report even as social media was abuzz with pictures of Taleban fighters looking relaxed in the frontier town.

Spin Boldak is the latest in a string of border crossings and dry ports seized by the Taleban in recent weeks, with the insurgents looking to choke off much-needed revenue from the government in Kabul while also filling their own coffers.

As Kabul's grip over the country appeared to further loosen, former US president George W. Bush slammed current White House incumbent Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all troops. Civilians were being left to be "slaughtered" by the Taleban, Bush told German broadcaster Deutsche Welle yesterday.

"This is a mistake... They're just going to be left behind to be slaughtered by these very brutal people, and it breaks my heart," he said. The Bush administration launched the US invasion into Afghanistan in 2001 that toppled the Taleban government following the September 11 attacks on US soil by Al Qaeda militants.

Along with his key security advisors, Bush was later blamed for a series of miscalculations in Afghanistan that led to the revival of the Taleban movement.

Key crossing

The seizure of the vital border crossing with Pakistan follows days of heavy fighting across Kandahar province, where the government was forced to deploy commando fighters to prevent the fall of the provincial capital even as the insurgents inched closer

to taking the frontier.

In a statement, insurgent spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid assured traders and residents that their "security is guaranteed". But Afghan officials insisted they were still in control. "The terrorist Taleban had some movements near the border area... The security forces have repelled the attack," interior ministry spokesman Tareq Arian told AFP.

Residents disputed the government's claims. "I went to my shop this morning and saw that the Taleban are everywhere. They are in the bazaar, in police HQ and custom areas. I can also hear the sound of fighting nearby," said Raz Mohammad, a shopkeeper who works near the border. The border crossing is one of the most strategically valuable for the Taleban.

It provides direct access to Pakistan's Balochistan province — where the insurgents' top leadership has been based for decades — along with an unknown number of reserve fighters who regularly enter Afghanistan to help bolster their ranks. Hours after the crossing fell, an AFP reporter on the Pakistani side saw around 150 Taleban fighters riding on motorcycles, waving insurgent flags, as they demanded to be allowed to cross into Afghanistan.

Balochistan is a favoured destination for fighters regularly heading for medical treatment and hosts many of their families. A major highway leading from the border connects to Pakistan's commercial capital Karachi and its sprawling port on the Arabian Sea, which is considered a linchpin for Afghanistan's billion-dollar heroin trade that has provided a crucial source of revenue for the Taleban's war chest over the years.

'What it is'

With the United States just weeks away from wrapping up its final withdrawal from Afghanistan, the



CHAMAN: People wave Taleban flags as they drive through the Pakistani border town of Chaman yesterday, after the Taleban claimed they had captured the Afghan side of the border crossing of Spin Boldak along the frontier with Pakistan. — AFP

hardline Islamist group has swept through much of the country, and the government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be resupplied by air. The sheer speed and scale of the insurgents' multi-pronged offensives have stirred fears that Afghan security forces are being overwhelmed.

In Washington earlier this week, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said success fending off the Taleban would depend on the country's leaders, and not so much what the United States does. "They know

what they need to do," Kirby told reporters.

In another sign Western governments were rapidly reassessing their Afghanistan policies, British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the United Kingdom was prepared to work with the Taleban if it enters into a power-sharing government. "Whatever the government of the day is, provided it adheres to certain international norms, the UK Government will engage with it," he told the Daily Telegraph. "All peace processes require you to come to terms with the enemy. Sometimes, that's what it is." — AFP

Pregnant women, mothers threatened by Afghan violence

KABUL: Married to a much older man in Afghanistan, Wati — who thinks she is around 30 years old — is pregnant for a fifth time in four years, including two miscarriages. She has travelled by car to a government-run maternity clinic in a poor and rural village in southern Kandahar province, the birthplace of the Taleban.

"I am afraid I will lose the baby again," she tells AFP, a small bump showing on her frail frame. Decades of conflict and poverty have long made it a struggle for women to access maternal healthcare in deeply patriarchal Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces and escalating violence, there are signs it could become even more difficult, with thousands of women displaced, roads increasingly too dangerous to travel and international aid drying up.

At the clinic in Kandahar, women in burqas arrive accompanied by male relatives, who are barred from entering and wait outside on the grass. "I only have permission to leave the house to go to the doctor," says Wati, clutching her medical notes in a plastic bag.

With five children, fellow mother Khorma has also had two miscarriages and is worried after discovering she is pregnant again. "I worked too hard at home," she said during a visit to the clinic in Dand district, before the Taleban launched its latest sweeping offensive across the country. Forty-one percent of Afghan women give birth at home and 60 percent have no postnatal care, according to a 2018 study by the KIT Royal Tropical Institute, based in



DAND: File picture shows nurse Husna (L) checks the blood pressure of Khorma, who doesn't know her exact age, for an antenatal care visit at a government-run maternity in Dand district of Kandahar province. — AFP

the Netherlands.

The statistics are worse in the south, the region most affected by decades of conflict, with clinics often too far away or requiring expensive transport through dangerous areas. "Some families don't care about pregnancies: The women give birth at home, start bleeding too much and go into shock," says Husna, a midwife.

Aid decline 'life threatening'

The international community has poured billions of dollars in aid into Afghanistan during the past two decades of US-led military involvement, with the average infant mortality rate halved between 2003 and 2018, according to the World Bank. Although healthcare has improved — mainly in

cities — insecurity and poverty still have a devastating impact.

The United Nations children's agency UNICEF recorded that 7,700 women died in childbirth in 2017 — twice the number of civilians killed in political violence that year. The drawdown of US and NATO troops has accompanied a slashing of foreign aid, which Human Rights Watch says has already delivered a "life-threatening" impact on women and girls. In the dusty village of Qasem Pul, midwife Najia goes house-to-house, monitoring women through their pregnancies. "Some families don't let women go to clinics. Sometimes men don't even let me in," she says. Najia meets with Kela in the courtyard of her home, a little boy resting in her lap, his face screwed in pain. — AFP

Indonesia new 'epicentre of Asia' as cases skyrocket

JAKARTA: Virus-racked Indonesia posted record daily infections topping 54,000 yesterday as the highly infectious Delta variant rips across the archipelago, catapulting it ahead of India as Asia's COVID-19 epicentre. The Southeast Asian nation has been battered by a virus explosion that overwhelmed hospitals, leaving scores to die at home, while desperate relatives hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick.

Yesterday, Indonesia's health ministry posted its highest-ever 54,517 new cases and 991 deaths in 24 hours-recent daily mortality rates are as high as 10 times the numbers in early June. But the official data is widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing rates and poor contact tracing.

"Indonesia could become the epicentre of the pandemic, but it's already the epicentre of Asia," said Dicky Budiman, an Indonesian epidemiologist at Australia's Griffith University. "If you look at the population difference between India and Indonesia... then the pandemic is far more serious than in India."

Indonesia's real number of daily cases could be topping 100,000 a day and threatened to double by the end of the month with as many as 2,000 daily virus deaths, Budiman warned. India, which was battered by an eye-watering Covid wave earlier this year, was now reporting an average of about 44,000 daily cases and 1,028 deaths.

But its population is almost five times that of the nearly 270 million people in Indonesia, which has about 141 cases per million people compared with around 29 cases per million in India, according to the website ourworldindata.org. On a cumulative basis, India has tallied more than 30 million infections and



BANDA ACEH: A man receives a dose of the Sinovac COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at a cafe in Banda Aceh yesterday. — AFP

over 400,000 deaths since the pandemic started, well ahead of Indonesia's official 2.6 million cases and 69,210 deaths.

Eid fears

Last week, the world's fourth most populous nation rolled out tighter curbs-including shutting down shopping malls, restaurants and offices-in its hard-hit capital Jakarta, across densely populated Java and on holiday island Bali. It later extended a web of less-severe restrictions across the 5,100-kilometre-long (3,170 mile) archipelago, from Sumatra in the west to easternmost Papua.

But now there are fears that the highly transmissible Delta variant, first identified in India, was hitting more remote areas where health facilities could not handle a major outbreak. "We have to closely monitor this because if anything happens (in those regions) their health facilities are clearly below that of Jakarta or Java," health minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said this week. And there are fears that Eid al-Adha celebrations, which start next week, could spark another explosion in cases across the world's biggest Muslim majority nation. — AFP

US pushes ASEAN to hold Myanmar accountable on coup

WASHINGTON: The US has "deep concerns" about the situation in Myanmar following February's coup, urging the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to take action, the State Department said Tuesday. Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government earlier this year, accusing it of fraud during 2020 elections.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken "called on ASEAN to take joint action to urge the end of violence, the restoration of Burma's democratic transition, and the release of all those unjustly detained," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement, using the country's former name.

As well as expressing his "deep concern" about ASEAN member Myanmar, Blinken also pushed the bloc to put into place its five-point plan for Myanmar drafted in April, calling on ASEAN "to take immediate action to hold the Burmese regime accountable to the consensus and to appoint a special envoy," said Price.

Earlier this month Washington imposed fresh sanctions on 22 people related to the military coup and subsequent attacks on the country's pro-democracy movement. Former leader Suu Kyi is currently under house arrest while on trial for a raft of charges that could see her jailed for more than a decade. Mass demonstrations against the takeover were met with violent repression around the country, which is also dealing with surging coronavirus infections. More than 900 civilians have been killed by the junta's forces, according to a local monitoring group. — AFP

Georgia TV stations suspend broadcasts over attacks on journalists

TBILISI: Four independent Georgian TV stations suspended broadcasts for 24 hours yesterday in protest over attacks against journalists and the death of a cameraman. Demonstrations erupted in the capital Tbilisi following the death on Sunday of Alexander Lashkarava, a 37-year-old cameraman working for independent TV station Pirveli, less than a week after he was assaulted by a violent mob protesting against a planned LGBTQ Pride parade.

His death, and the beating of dozens of other journalists by the mob, has prompted a wave of outrage in the Caucasus country and abroad, with Reporters Without Borders (RSF) saying it "marks a disastrous turning point for the freedom to inform in Georgia."

Prominent Georgian TV personalities and managers have accused Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili's government of setting violent hate groups against critical media.

Yesterday, four independent TV stations — Formula, Mtavari, Pirveli, and Kavkasia — said they were suspending broadcasting for 24 hours.

"Garibashvili must resign. All those who attacked journalists on July 5 must be prosecuted," they said in identical statements on their Facebook pages.

Instead of regular programs, the four national broadcasters were showing a scrolling list of more than 50 journalists who sustained injuries in last week's attacks including concussions, chemical burns and broken arms.

"We have suspended running programs for 24 hours. Our silence will shout loudly about the incredible challenges independent media face in Georgia," Pirveli TV's news editor, Nodar Meladze, told AFP.

Hundreds of journalists turned out on Tuesday for Lashkarava's funeral, which saw his coffin carried through a corridor of colleagues with their cameras lowered on tripods.

Garibashvili expressed condolences to Lashkarava's family and colleagues and promised a prompt investigation into the cause of his death, which he has called an "incredible tragedy."

The United States and European Union have condemned the attacks on journalists and called for the prosecution of those responsible.

Asked yesterday about possible sanctions against Georgian officials over the attacks, US State Department spokesman Ned Price told a press briefing: "We have a number of tools to hold accountable those responsible in some way for human rights abuses, for violence around the world. Sanctions are indeed one of those tools."

RSF has accused authorities of "culpable passivity" and said police had failed to protect journalists.

Critics have accused the ruling Georgian Dream of tacitly supporting homophobic and nationalist groups. These groups are seen as supporters of the ruling party and have staged protests against pro-Western opposition parties, attacking opposition leaders and activists. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2021

EU enters battle over its green revolution

Plan to transform bloc from fossil fuel dependency to a world of net-zero emissions

BRUSSELS: The EU went into battle yesterday to secure a path to its bold pledge of carbon neutrality by 2050, triggering an epic political clash over electric cars and fuel prices that could last for years. The mammoth plan was unveiled by the European Commission and is intended to transform the bloc's economy from fossil fuel dependency to a world of net-zero emissions.

Brussels also hopes to establish Europe as the unquestioned leader on meeting the goals of the Paris climate accord. "Europe is now the very first continent that presents a comprehensive architecture to meet our climate ambitions," EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Brussels. "We have the goal, but now we present the roadmap to how we are going to get there," she added.

The myriad proposals include an effective ban on the sale of new petrol-driven cars from 2035, one of the boldest moves against gas-guzzlers ever, and one that has already raised concerns in Paris and Berlin. The proposals were announced by the European Commission's environment supremo Vice President Frans Timmermans.

At the heart of the legislative package is the ambition to breathe new life into the EU's flawed

Emissions Trading System (ETS), the world's biggest carbon market, where industry pays for the right to pollute. The laws will now snake their way through the EU's legislative system amid high-stakes horse-trading in the European Parliament and among the bloc's 27 member states, egged on by industry lobbyists and green activists.

"Each state will have to defend its interests because their situations are very different in terms of industry, geography, energy supply and investment capacity," said a senior EU diplomat.

"Member states will see the ambition, see the effort needed to realize it and must decide if there are no insurmountable problems," the diplomat said. The jockeying has already begun, with powerful interests fighting hard to win special treatment—or extra time—before the constraints of a greener Europe come into force.

Environmentalists swiftly denounced the laws as not going far enough—with the European Environmental Bureau decrying a plan that was "unfit and unfair" to fight climate change effectively.

One major fear is resistance from the motoring public in a continent-wide replay of the "yellow vests" protests that erupted in France when the government imposed a new fuel tax in the name

of defending the environment.

'Fit for 55'

The legislative push is being promoted as the "Fit for 55" package, as its central aim is to align existing EU laws and targets with a deepened 55 percent net emissions reduction by 2030.

The previous objective was a cut of at least 40 percent from 1990 levels. Another pillar is a carbon levy that will be paid by non-European companies at the bloc's external border to ensure dirtier imports aren't allowed an unfair advantage.

The levy will be called a "carbon border adjustment mechanism" and polluting companies importing goods into the EU will have to buy ETS carbon permits, a move likely to antagonize EU trading partners like Russia, China and India.

Last-minute infighting

To ease the blow, European rivals of the importers — industries such as steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers and electric power—would see their existing free carbon permits phased out.

Sources reported of serious infighting at the European Commission as the final touches were being put on the proposals. Especially sensitive



BRUSSELS: (From left) European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni, unveil proposals to govern transition to low carbon economy dubbed "European Green Deal" during a press conference at the EU Parliament in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

were measures to impose sustainable and probably more expensive fuels in public-facing sectors such as transport, heating and cooling—as well as construction. —AFP

India food delivery giant Zomato kicks off \$1.3bn IPO

MUMBAI: Food delivery giant Zomato yesterday launched its much-anticipated IPO to raise 93.75 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion), India's biggest this year and the first of a series of public listings by tech unicorns. Zomato—which counts subsidiaries of Uber and Jack Ma's Ant Group among its existing shareholders—is one of the country's hottest tech start-ups and dominates India's booming app-based food-delivery space alongside rival Swiggy. Fresh shares priced at between

72 and 76 rupees were issued as part of the initial public offering, which closes tomorrow.

Ahead of the IPO, Zomato raised over 41.96 billion rupees (\$560 million) from 186 marquee institutional investors, including global investment funds like Blackrock, Fidelity, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley.

As of 2 pm local time (0830 GMT), 10 percent of shares reserved for retail investors were subscribed more than two times so far. But there was lackluster interest in the early hours of bidding for the remaining shares allocated to institutional and high-value investors.

In total, institutional investors have nearly 75 percent of the IPO reserved for them. There are high expectations about the growth of the food delivery market in the country of 1.3 billion people and Zomato and Swiggy's delivery riders are ubiquitous in Indian cities.

But there are also concerns that companies like Zomato and Swiggy—which are yet to be profitable due to high start-up and marketing costs—could be overvalued. Zomato, which operates in 525 Indian cities with more than 32 million Indians visiting the platform every month, lost 8.16 billion rupees in the financial year ending March 2021.

"Zomato has been incurring substantial losses and may continue to incur losses in (the) near future too, given the business is at nascent stage," Mumbai-based investment services firm Motilal Oswal said in a note to clients ahead of the IPO.

Around 30 Indian companies have announced IPO plans this year, including digital payments firm Paytm, backed by Japan's SoftBank as well as by Ma. Zomato's offering, along with Paytm's, is expected to propel India's IPO market to its best year on record. —AFP



Net Income

86

Million KD



Customers



Revenue



EBITDA



EPS

H1 2021 results

Business

Zain Group Q2 2021 net profit grows 17% to reach \$138 million

Board recommends half-year dividend of 10 fils

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecommunications innovator operating in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces its consolidated financial results for the six months to June 30, 2021. Zain served 48.3 million customers at the end of the period, a 1 percent increase year-on-year (Y-o-Y).

For the first six months of 2021 (H1) Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of KD 750 million (\$2.5 billion), a decrease of 3 percent Y-o-Y. EBITDA for the period reached KD 310 million (\$1.03 billion), down 6 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41 percent. Net income amounted to KD 86 million (\$285 million), up 5 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting earnings per share of 20 fils (\$0.07).

For H1 2021, foreign currency translation was impacted mainly due to the currency devaluation in Sudan from 55 in January 2021 to 444 (SDG / USD) end of June 2021, and a 19 percent currency devaluation in Iraq from an 1,190 to 1,470 (IQD / USD), cost the Group \$378 million in Revenue and \$233 million in EBITDA.

Group Key Performance Indicators (KD and USD) for Q2 of 2021

In the second quarter of 2021 (Q2), Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of KD 369 million (\$1.2 billion), remaining relatively stable compared to the prior period. EBITDA for the quarter reached KD 152 million (\$506 million), down 5 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 41 percent. Net income for the quarter amounted to KD 41 million (\$138 million), up 17 percent Y-o-Y, reflecting earnings per share of 10 fils (\$0.03).

For Q2 2021, foreign currency translation was impacted mainly due to the currency devaluation in Sudan from 55 in January 2021 to 444 (SDG / USD) end of June 2021, and a 19 percent currency devaluation in Iraq from 1,190 to 1,470 (IQD / USD), cost the Group \$215 million in Revenue and \$175 million in EBITDA.

Key operational notes for H1 2021

1. Extraordinary General Assembly held in June 2021 saw the approval of the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute interim dividends, quarterly or semi-annually.

2. Board meeting held on July 14 recommends an interim dividend of 10 fils per share for first six months of 2021 as part of the minimum 33 fils annual dividend policy, subject to Regulatory approvals.

3. Zain Group achieved consolidated data revenue of \$1.05 billion, representing 42 percent of the Group's revenue.

4. Throughout the first six-months, Zain Group invested over \$491 million in CAPEX reflecting 20 percent of revenue, predominantly in expansion of Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) infrastructure; spectrum fees; 4G upgrades and new network sites across its markets, as well as 5G rollouts in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain.

5. Zain KSA reports profitability for the 12th consecutive quarter and achieving Retained Earnings after extinguishing all accumulated losses.

6. Enterprise (B2B) business arm continues to witness strong growth across several key markets landing key regional clients.

7. Zain eSports growth continues, holding 11 tournaments during Q2 2021 with over 5,000 participants and attracting 6 million social media impressions.

8. Zain partners UNICEF to launch Child Online Safety Booklet promoting safe eSports and gaming to schools & universities.

9. The Zain Group Application Program Interface (API) platform enabling faster deployment of digital partnerships, continues to grow exponentially, offering 26 live services resulting in a healthy Y-o-Y increase in revenue with approximately 5 million transactions per month.

10. Zain 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.

11. Zain recognized with prestigious World Finance Best Corporate Governance Award 2021 for Kuwait.

Commenting on H1 2021 results, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group, Ahmed Al-Tahous said, "The Board's key focus during these challenging times has been to support management in its endeavors to be future-ready to fully exploit the next phase of growth in driving shareholder value. We remain focused on providing meaningful connectivity and minimizing the impact of the pandemic on society by implementing digitalization initiatives to better serve communities, businesses, and governments. I would like to thank all the government ministries and regulatory authorities across our markets for their wisdom and understanding of the emerging industry dynamics and support of the telecom sector at large."

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "The Board's recommendation to pay a half-year dividend of 10 fils per share (as part of the 33 fils) is a result of our strong balance sheet and the solid operational performance attained by the Group in the



Zain Group Chairman Ahmed Al-Tahous



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

- For H1 2021, Net Income up by 5% to reach \$285 million
- Chairman, Ahmed Al-Tahous: The Board is focused on the next phase of growth and minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on the business
- Vice-Chairman & Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi: A first in the company's history, Board's recommendation to pay a half-year dividend of 10 fils per share (as part of the 33 fils) is a result of our strong balance sheet and solid operational performance.
- Data Revenue represents 42% of Group Revenue for H1 '21
- Zain KSA achieves positive retained earnings after extinguishing all accumulated losses
- Currency devaluations in Iraq and Sudan impact revenue by \$378 million
- Healthy data and revenue growth from 5G networks in Kuwait, KSA and Bahrain
- Zain Iraq and Zain South Sudan launch high-speed 4G commercial services boosting connectivity and socio-economic activity
- Company's focus on Wholesale and Enterprise business lands lucrative regional corporate accounts
- Robust growth in FinTech, Digital Operator entities, API platform and eSports



Group Key Performance Indicators (KD and USD) for first six months (H1) of 2021

Total Managed Active Customers	48.3 million
Revenue	KD 750 million (USD 2.5 billion)
EBITDA	KD 310 million (USD 1.03 billion)
EBITDA Margin	41%
Net Income	KD 86 million (USD 285 million)
EPS	20 fils (USD 0.07)

year to date. This interim dividend recommendation is a first in Zain's history and follows the approvals received during the recent Extraordinary General Assembly, and reaffirms the three-year minimum 33 fils dividend policy commitments we made in 2019."

Al-Kharafi continued, "The robust growth witnessed during Q2 2021 reaffirms the success of the '4Sight' strategy and digital transformation set forth by the Board and executive management to invest heavily and focus on monetizing our 4G, FTTH and 5G networks, while seeking new business verticals and revenue streams. Our excellent performance is even more satisfying when one considers the unavoidable currency devaluations in Iraq and Sudan, which had considerable impact on the financials."

"To minimize the impact of the currency devaluations, management has proactively undertaken decisive cost optimization initiatives across all markets, and both Zain Iraq and Zain Sudan have revamped prices and are now offering new attractive data monetization packages."

"Operationally, most of our markets recorded growth in Q2 as compared to the same period a year earlier. The healthy growth in Kuwait was powered by its incomparable 5G network that sees the operator capturing the largest market share in the country. Similarly, quality networks were instrumental in the robust profit growth in Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, and Bahrain, while in Saudi Arabia the operator continues to receive international accolades for the reach, speed and quality of its 5G network."

"Moreover, it's rewarding that for the first time in its history, Zain KSA achieved Retained Earnings after reporting its profitability for the 12th consecutive quarter and extinguishing all accumulated losses in accordance with its capital restructuring strategy, and we look forward to the operator exploiting the enormous potential of the Saudi telecom market and entering a new era of growth. Congratulations to the Zain KSA board and management team for this decisive milestone."

Commenting on the success of Zain's focus on reaping the lucrative opportunities in the digital space, Al-Kharafi said, "Management is extremely optimistic of the potential of our fintech entities including Zain KSA's subsidiary, 'Tamam', Zain Jordan's and Zain Iraq's 'Zain Cash' platforms and 'M-Gurush' in South Sudan, that are all experiencing exponential growth."

"Zain KSA's digital operator 'Yaqoot' continues to deliver healthy growth in the Saudi digital telco space, and we recently launched another digital operator in Iraq, 'oodi', where we expect similar success. Both Yaqoot and oodi offer a simple, all-digital mobile experience that frees customers from the traditional retail buying experience. From the moment customers download the app, they have all the power they require to manage their mobile service."

With respect to the continuing growth of Zain eSports, Al-Kharafi said, "This exciting and fast-growing initiative creates shareholder value on multiple fronts as it meets several different goals for Zain, including youth development, enriching

the brand, fostering innovation, and creating vast digital opportunities across our 4G, 5G and fiber networks. Our confidence that Zain eSports will develop into a regional gaming powerhouse is taking shape."

On Zain's Wholesale business, Al-Kharafi noted: "We have recently revamped our wholesale carrier company, 'Zain Global Services', consolidating and providing it the resources to open new revenue streams and manage the capacity, voice, messaging and roaming businesses across Zain's operating companies. Zain Global Services will ultimately evolve to become a truly regional carrier and the single interface for all of Zain's operating company requirements, as well as for other international carriers having requirements within the region."

"Over recent years, Zain has been evolving to become a fully integrated service provider and has been focusing on enterprise segments for additional synergies and growth. Given that the wholesale industry has at its core the transformation of the infrastructure enabling global connectivity, Zain considers the development of its wholesale business as a key area to the telco's overall transformation. It is worth noting that our B2B revenue has grown an impressive 16 percent over the year, and we are elated to land several lucrative corporate accounts in key markets."

Al-Kharafi concluded by commenting on the recently held EGM, "The amendments and new provisions to the company's articles approved by the Assembly will help the Group in its execution of our '4Sight' growth strategy, providing the Board of Directors and executive management greater flexibility, while we focus on digital innovation and seek new lucrative opportunities in the ICT arena across the region and beyond."

Financial KPIs of key markets

Kuwait
Maintaining its market leadership, the flagship operation of Zain Group saw its customer base serve 2.4 million. The Group's most profitable operation saw its H1 2021 revenue grow by 4 percent to reach \$515 million (KD 155 million), with EBITDA increasing by 11 percent to \$194 million (KD 59 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 38 percent. The operator recorded net income of \$123 million (KD 37 million). Data revenue grew by 5 percent Y-o-Y and represented 40 percent of total revenue.

The operator continues to grow its 5G mobile and broadband customers and resulting revenue, capturing the largest 5G customer and revenue market share in the country.

Saudi Arabia
For H1 2021, the operator generated Revenue of SAR 3.8 billion (\$1 billion), with EBITDA amounting to SAR 1.5 billion (\$401 million), reflecting an EBITDA margin of 39 percent. Net income for the period reached SAR 83 million (\$22 million). Having the Kingdom's largest 5G network covering 50 cities, data revenue represented 50 percent of total revenue and customers served stood at 7.4 million, a 4 percent increase.

Iraq
Zain Iraq's H1 2021 revenue reached \$376 million, and EBITDA amounted to \$145 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 39 percent. Net profit reached \$24 million for the period. The operator's customer base increased by 7 percent to reach 16.1 million customers maintaining its market leading position. It should be noted that the Iraqi dinar devaluation also impacted Zain Iraq's revenue by \$88 million for the six-month period.

Sudan
For H1 2021, Zain Sudan generated revenue of \$160 million, with EBITDA amounting to \$77 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 48 percent. Net income for the period reached \$41 million, compared to \$15 million last year. Data revenue grew by 4 percent representing 28 percent of total revenue, while the operator's customer base grew 8 percent to reach 17 million, maintaining its market leadership. The significant currency devaluation impacted Zain Sudan's revenue by \$340 million.

Jordan
For H1 2021, Zain Jordan revenue increased by 5 percent to \$245 million, EBITDA grew by 15 percent to reach \$118 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 48 percent, with net income growing 24 percent Y-o-Y and reaching \$43 million. With the ongoing expansion of 4G services across the country, data revenue grew 13 percent representing 49 percent of total revenue. Zain Jordan served 3.5 million customers maintaining its market leading position.

Bahrain
For H1, 2021, Zain Bahrain generated revenue of \$87 million for H1 2021, up by 4 percent Y-o-Y. EBITDA for the period increased by 6 percent to \$29 million, reflecting an EBITDA margin of 33 percent. Net income increased 29 percent amounting to \$7.4 million, with data revenue growing 5 percent to represent 45 percent of total revenue.

Business

Boubyan Bank launches NOMO Bank, world's first Islamic int'l digital bank

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced the launch of the new brand name, NOMO Bank, the world's first Islamic International Digital Bank through the UK-based Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a member of Boubyan Bank Group, which is subject to the laws of UK's financial regulatory authorities.

Boubyan Bank's Group CEO and BLME Chairman, Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, stated: "The new bank is a demonstration of Boubyan's strategy in action to expand internationally after confirming our domestic position, and follows in the path of our plans to expand our digital banking services."

"We are proud that NOMO Bank is the first bank of its kind in the world, which combines both advanced technology - being a digital bank - with Sharia compliance. This reiterates the leadership of Boubyan Bank Group and its constant efforts since 2010 to bring change to the Islamic financial and banking industry, which positively reflects on our customers' experience and meets their expectations," he added.

Al-Majed went on to add: "NOMO is a brand name of the Bank of London and the Middle East (BLME), in which Boubyan is a majority shareholder. The bank is a fully licensed UK bank, which is regulated in the UK by the PRA (Prudential Regulation Authority) and regulated by the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority). This means that all the bank's transactions are under the supervision of UK regulatory authorities. Moreover, the bank is assigned an overall credit rating of A3 by Fitch Ratings."

"Nomo has been developed to accommodate the growing segment of customers in Kuwait or the region with international banking needs, allowing them to access, move, and invest their money in the UK and internationally with ease and assurance," Al-Majed elaborated.

He went on to add: "Islamic banking across the wider GCC region is a major element behind the boom of the Islamic banking industry worldwide in terms of the digital products and services being offered to customers. Our aim is to propel Islamic digital banking towards a more innovative future where the priority is customer convenience by providing all services digitally."

"The launch of the new bank came after several years of research and studies of the needs of various segments of customers in Kuwait and the region, which revealed their need for international banking services that cannot be catered for by conventional banks. This



Al-Majed and Al-Tuwaijri during the press conference



Al-Majed during the press conference



Andrew Ball

gave rise to the concept of NOMO being a digital platform that can meet their needs through a smart phone App," he explained.

He added: "Based on those studies, we chose UK in general, and

London in particular and decided it is the best option for our customers in Kuwait and the region since it is a place that our customers like in addition to the confi-

dence people have had in UK's financial and banking systems over the past decades, coupled with the convenient and secure environment for investors from around the world."

Furthermore, Al-Majed commended the efforts exerted by the Central Bank of Kuwait and its constant endeavors towards setting up the technological and operational infrastructure for establishing digital banks in Kuwait, which comes as a part of its ongoing plans targeting the development of the financial and banking sectors. Al-Majed thanked everyone who contributed to this achievement, stating that while Boubyan Bank Group is cer-

tainly credited for this achievement, all credit goes to Kuwait being a leader in the banking industry, and this further highlights the innovation and creativity adopted by Kuwaiti banks.

He went on to add: "The most prominent thing about NOMO Bank is that Boubyan Bank's Kuwaiti youth played the main role in its launch by cooperating with the team which will be managing it. This team comprises of many former experts of global banks who helped create many digital banks around the world."



Media representatives attend the press conference

- **Al-Majed:** NOMO is a demonstration of our strategy in action to expand internationally and to continue Boubyan's plans to expand its digital banking services
- **Al-Tuwaijri:** The bank is in the initial operating stages, those interested may visit its website to register
- **Andrew Ball:** UK banks are admired around the world for their stability, resilience and high levels of governance
- A digital bank where Boubyan & Non-Boubyan customers in Kuwait and the region can open accounts and manage all their banking transactions through the bank's app

Markaz report

Issuances of GCC sukuk doubled to \$30 billion

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", in its recent research report titled "GCC Bonds and Sukuk Market Survey HI-2021," highlighted the trends pertaining to Bonds and Sukuk primary issuances in the GCC region during the first six months of the year. The report showed that primary debt issuances continue to see significant activity in the region.

Primary issuances of Bonds and Sukuk amounted to \$83.7 billion during HI-2021, marking a growth of 18 percent year-on-year from \$70.8 billion raised during HI-2020. The implications of COVID-19 have resulted in added strain on regional economies in terms of budget deficits and tightening liquidity. Moreover, the total number of primary issuances during the first half of the year totaled 201, compared to 176 issuances during the same period in the previous year.

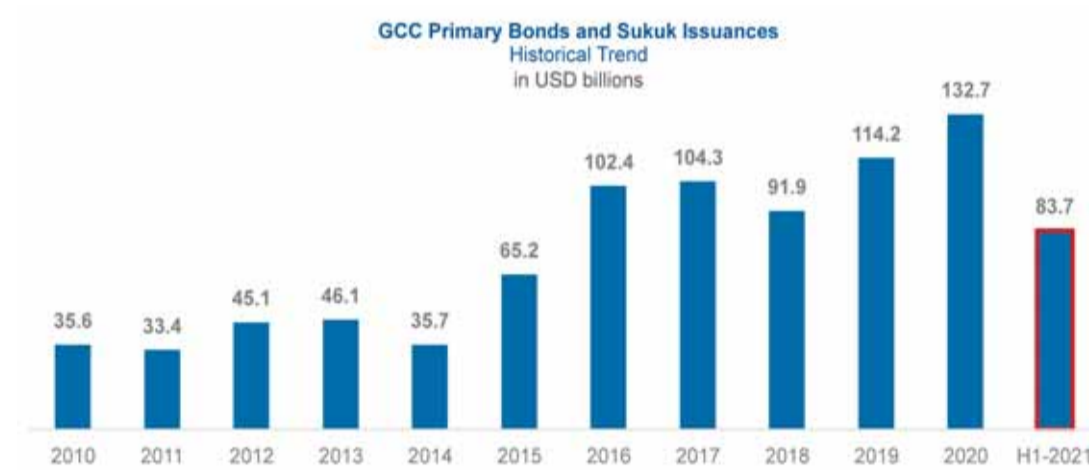
GCC bonds and sukuk market

The bonds and sukuk market within the GCC consists of bonds and sukuk issued by governments or corporations for financing purposes and are denominated in either local or foreign currencies.

Geographical allocation

Saudi-based issuers led the GCC bonds and Sukuk market during HI-2021, raising a total of \$31.9 billion, or representing 38 percent of the total value raised in the GCC, through 21 primary issuances. The UAE followed with 34 percent and Oman with 10 percent of the total value raised. Moreover, Kuwaiti entities raised a total of \$3.4 billion, representing 4 percent of the total value raised during the first half of 2021.

Sovereign vs. Corporate: Sovereign issuances by GCC entities amounted to \$32.4 billion during HI-2021, down 23 percent year-on-year from \$42.3 billion raised during HI-2020. Corporate issuances on the other hand amounted to a total value of \$51.4 billion during HI-2021, an increase of 80 percent year-on-year from \$28.6 billion raised during the same period last year.



Conventional vs sukuk

Conventional issuances decreased during HI-2021 by 3 percent year-on-year, where a total of \$53.7 billion was raised in HI-2021, representing most of the issuances with 64 percent of the total value of primary issuances in the GCC. On the other hand, Sukuk issuances doubled on a year-on-year basis to reach \$30.0 billion during HI-2021, compared with \$15.2 billion raised in HI-2020, representing 36 percent of the total value of issuances.

Sector allocation

The government sector accounted for the largest amount of primary debt issuances by value, raising a total of \$32.4 billion, or 39 percent of the total value of issuances in the GCC in HI-2021. The financial sector was second in its contribution to the total value of primary issuances in the region, raising a total value of \$28.7 billion and representing 34 percent of the total market.

Maturity Profile

Issuances with tenors of 5-10 years dominated the GCC debt capital markets by total value, raising a total of \$30.2 billion, or 36 percent of the total value of issuances, through 67 issuances. Issuances with tenors of 10-30 came in second with a total value raised of \$28.1 billion through 33 issuances.

Issue size profile

The size of GCC bonds and sukuk issuances ranged from \$5 million to \$4.4 billion. Issuances with principle amounts greater than or equal to \$1 billion raised the largest amount totaling \$44.1 billion, representing 53 percent of the total primary issuances.

Currency profile

US dollar-denominated issuances led the GCC bonds and sukuk market in HI-2021, raising a total of \$55.0 billion or 66 percent of the total value of issuances, through 108 issuances. The second largest issue currency was the Saudi riyal (SAR), where issuances in SAR raised a total of \$14.8 billion or 18 percent of the total value of issuances in the GCC, through nine issuances.

Rating

In terms of value, a total of 58 percent of GCC conventional and sukuk bonds were rated as Investment Grade in HI-2021 by either one of the following rating agencies: Standard & Poor's, Moody's, Fitch and/or Capital Intelligence.

Listing

During HI-2021, 150 issuances of a total of 201 issuances of bonds and sukuk were listed, equivalent to \$78.4 billion. London Stock Exchange is the listing exchange with the greatest traded value of GCC primary issuances issued in HI-2021 totaling \$37.8 billion through 69 issuances.

Bonds and sukuk total amount outstanding in the GCC

As at 30th June 2021, the total amount outstanding of corporate and sovereign bonds and sukuk issued by GCC entities was \$683.4 billion. Government issuances made up 57 percent of the total amount. The financial sector was the second sector to lead the corporates with 24 percent of the total amount. Of the amount outstanding as at 30 June 2021, \$278.1 billion, or 41 percent, were issued by Saudi Arabian entities. Bonds and sukuk by Kuwaiti entities accounted for only \$26.2 billion, or 4 percent of the total amount of outstanding debt in the GCC.

KIB announces 3 winners of its credit cards campaign draw

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the names of the three winners of its premium credit campaign draw, which was held on July 8th at the Bank's head office in the presence of representatives from the ministry of commerce, KIB staff members and officials. The three lucky winners were announced as follows: Mohammed Behbehani who won a 2020 Lexus, Munera Al-Jaber who won a Harley Davidson, and the final prize, a Seadoo Jetski went to Fahad Al-Ajmi.

The KIB credit card campaign, which was launched back in April of this year and concluded earlier this month, was held exclusively for premium credit card holders, including Visa Platinum, Visa Signature and Mastercard World card holders. Premium card holders were given the chance to enter a draw for every KD 1,500 they spent, in addition to continuing to benefit from the 3 percent cashback facility that the cards offer.

On announcing the campaign winners, Musab Al-Sha'lan, Deputy General Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department, said, "At KIB, we truly believe that being a premium card holder means benefitting from an overall elevated experience and an added value benefits on an ongoing basis, aside from the chance to win grand prizes, our premium card holders benefit from various services such as discounts and promotions on restaurants, cafes and entertainment attractions, airport lounge access, travel insurance, and many more benefits."

It serves to note that KIB's premium credit cards cater to a diverse set of clientele, namely: Platinum Visa designed to meet the needs of our everyday customers; Visa Signature which is customized for exceptional individuals who appreciate premium services and the best of everything; and Mastercard World crafted for the needs of the business elite, with flexible payment options and a wide selection of exclusive benefits from MasterCard. Each premium card offers a variety of offers and benefits that make it easier for customers to financially navigate locally and internationally.



Musab Al-Sha'lan

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait 'Kuwait's Fastest Network' for 2021

Awarded by Ookla Speedtest, the worldwide leader in Internet testing and analysis

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, the first telecom operator to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, named the "Kuwait's Fastest Mobile Network" for 2021: awarded by the Ookla, the company behind Speedtest, and the global leader in fixed broadband and mobile network testing applications, data and analysis.

Network superiority and investment

Ooredoo Kuwait proudly earned this accomplishment based on the results of thousands of consumer-initiated tests taken using Speedtest. The company has taken major steps in the world of telecommunications over the past two years and during the pandemic, and continued to strengthen its networks up until this day while successfully continued to achieve key milestones in its network development journey. Moreover, the company has taken proactive steps in the Kuwaiti market and outperformed its competitors in providing the best and fastest coverage. The network infrastructure witnessed a significant upgrade over the past two years, with KD 68 million invested heavily in developing the network in addition to enhancing and enriching customers' experience and providing the best 5G experience. Faster speeds and very low response rates (latency) in data transmission have been remarkably observed.

2,000 5G towers

Unremitting efforts have been made by Ooredoo Kuwait with great hard work by Technology and Networks teams that was supported directly by the senior management. This resulted in increasing the number of its 5G towers to nearly 2,000 towers to ensure a broader and more comprehensive coverage across all residential areas of Kuwait, chalets, farms and islands. Furthermore, Ooredoo Kuwait deployed 1,000 Long Term Evolution (LTE) expansions and upgrades to providing much faster data speeds, improved performance as well as lower operating costs.

Data usage & traffic

Amidst the pandemic, digital technologies and solutions are at the fore; hence, the number of Internet users has significantly increased, particularly during the pandemic lockdowns and curfews. Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed 50 percent increase and growth in data and Internet usage compared to last year, hence, it efficiently responded to this growth and increasing demand, which made it outperform its competitors, and provide superior experience on online gaming, e-learning, video streaming services and browsing Social Media channels and platforms.

FWA technology

Additionally, Ooredoo launched 5G Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) to provide Internet access to customers in areas with low fiber penetration or

expensive to install and maintain. The company has also taken major steps in improving productivity and performance for its business customers, by launching the Dedicated Internet Package (DIA), which provides a range of different speeds. It also ensures fast Internet with a more secure Internet connection than the broadband network services currently available for businesses.



Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain

KD 68 million investment

In a statement on this occasion, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait, expressed his contentment and pride after this accomplishment, and said: "We take pride of this achievement, which reflects our continuous efforts to achieve our vision of enriching people's digital lives, which goes in-line with our strategy to empower Kuwait's society by driving digital transformation. This strategy has continually ignited us to efficiently respond to the rapid

- 5G towers jumped to nearly 2,000 and enhanced coverage across all residential areas, chalets' areas, farms and islands
- 50% discount on all Shamel Pro packages in celebration of this occasion starting next week
- 50% growth in data and Internet traffic compared to the last year
- Al-Babtain: KD 68 million invested in network infrastructure upgrades over the past two years
- Settles: Ooredoo earned the award all thanks to an exceptional performance this year

changes and changing demands of our customers, and proactively provide them with effective digital solutions, products and services."

Al-Babtain concluded by saying: "We have been working towards providing the best and fastest coverage at the state level, especially in developing the infrastructure of the Ooredoo network. An amount of KD 68 million has been invested over the past two years with the aim of developing the network infrastructure and enriching our customers' digital experience. Today, we thank them all for their trust and great loyalty."

Extraordinary excellence

Ookla CEO, Doug Settles, said: "Speedtest Awards, presented by Ookla, are reserved for an elite delegation of network operators that have delivered

ture of saving in Kuwait, and to reward savers for committing to saving on a habitual basis. That is why we are always especially excited to announce the Al-Danah winners as part of our periodic draws to reward them for saving, and to encourage everyone to take an even more active savings approach when managing their financial affairs."

Exclusive loyalty program increases your chances of winning!

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward customers for their loyalty, the Al-Danah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained at the end of the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward the customer for their loyalty to the Bank. In that way, all chances garnered by existing Al-Danah customers throughout 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah account holders to increase their chances of winning by increasing the amounts deposited into their accounts. With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Will you be the next Al-Danah millionaire?
Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Shared Electronic Banking Co (KNET).
The 'Eidity' application, the first of its kind in the region, and running for the second consecutive year, enables users to electronically send and receive Eidiya (monetary gift) for Eid Al-Adha via their mobile phones securely and seamlessly. Furthermore, the sum can be sent to any mobile number registered in the State of Kuwait, even to recipients who do not have bank accounts. The application includes additional features such as the option to share a personalized note, redeem monetary benefits, as well as monitor the sending



exceptional Internet performance and coverage within a market. It is our pleasure to present Ooredoo with the award for "Fastest Mobile Network" in Kuwait. This recognition is testament to their exceptional performance in 2021 based on Ookla's rigorous analysis of consumer-initiated tests taken with Speedtest."

50% off

In celebration of this occasion, Ooredoo Kuwait offered its customers 50 percent discount on all postpaid Shamel Pro plans starting next week in addition to many other exclusive and special offers that customers will benefit from. Details regarding those offers will be posted on both the website www.ooredoo.com.kw and MyOoredoo App.

Network sturdiness during pandemic

Ooredoo was one of the first companies in Kuwait that established proactive strategies and offered constant support to the governmental bodies. In this approach, Ooredoo Kuwait has fueled the drive-in



Ministry of Health with smart devices, handsets, and wireless network devices (routers) with SIM cards and Internet.

Online education

The company also launched its "Education" Learning Platform, the provider of a new-age, learning environment. Ooredoo is the first telecommunications company in Kuwait to launch such a platform. "Education" is a provider of a new-age, learning environment. It strives to help students capitalize on teachable moments by giving them instant access to knowledge at all times. The platform resembles the full classroom experience, with online conferencing and the ability to conduct exams and complete assignments virtually. The Platform also allows educators, students, and parents to communicate easily online.

Ookla flagship platform

Ookla is the global leader in mobile and broadband network intelligence, testing applications and related technologies. Speedtest, Ookla's flagship network testing platform, collects hundreds of millions of measurements about the performance and quality of networks around the world each day. Operators, businesses and government agencies alike rely on Ookla for unparalleled and immediate information on the state of networks and online services. Ookla's portfolio of enterprise solutions also includes Downtetector, which provides real-time analysis of status conditions and outages across industries such as network services, finance and gaming.

Ookla is part of Ziff Davis, a subsidiary of J2 Global, Inc (NASDAQ: JCOM) and leading global digital-media company operating in three core verticals: Technology, Gaming and Shopping. Ookla's headquarters are located in Seattle, WA with additional offices around the world. More information is available at www.ookla.com.

Gulf Bank to announce Al-Danah winner of KD 1 million today

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is preparing to announce the lucky winner of the Al-Danah account's semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million. In compliance with national health requirements, Gulf Bank will be conducting the draw as part of a virtual draw event airing tonight at 7pm on Al-Rai TV and the bank's various social media channels. The draw will also be held live in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and from Ernst & Young.

Two millionaires in 2021

Last year, Gulf Bank announced its new draw prize scheme for the Al-Danah account in 2021. It is worth noting that the Bank has updated the draw prizes it distributes throughout the year, with a remarkable increase in the semiannual draw prize, which is now KD 1 million, the second largest prize following the annual grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million. The new draw prize scheme makes Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account one of the most rewarding savings accounts of the year, granting two people the opportunities of a lifetime: to become millionaires in 2021!

On this occasion, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Mohammed Al-Qattan, said: "The moment we have been waiting all year for is finally here, and we are closer than ever to revealing our newest Al-Danah Millionaire! We would like to invite all our clients to join in on today's celebration and enjoy the many surprises we have in store. We would also like to wish our AlDanah account holders the best of luck, as any one of them could be taking home the Al-Danah prize! As one of Gulf Bank's most long-standing and established savings accounts, the Al-Danah savings account is designed to encourage a cul-

'Eidity' app available to customers for Eid Al-Adha holiday

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) customers can now send Eidity through the 'Eidity' application service, an initiative spearheaded by the CBK in collaboration with Kuwaiti banks and the

Gulf Bank's AlDanah draws will take place according to the following schedule

Draw	Winners	Draw Prize
Monthly	10 Winners	KD One Thousand per winner (KD 1,000 per winner)
First Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)
Semi-Annual Draw	One Winner	KD One Million (KD 1,000,000)
Third Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)
Annual Grand Prize	One Winner	KD One Million, Five Hundred Thousand (KD 1,500,000)

Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To participate in this year's upcoming quarterly and annual Al-Danah draws, customers must maintain the required balance.

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

and receipt of funds.

Through the adoption of smart initiatives such as 'Eidity' and in line with ABK's "Simpler Banking" strategy, the Bank drives the integration of banking services amongst all segments of society to enhance financial inclusion and fast-track a digital-first mind-set. The Bank continues to provide diversified offerings to ensure that its customers are equipped with smart and rewarding spending solutions that simultaneously safeguard their wellness through contactless transactions.

Argentina, IMF make progress on debt restructuring

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina: Argentina made progress in talks with the International Monetary Fund on restructuring the country's crippling debt, the economy ministry said on Tuesday. Economy Minister Martin Guzman met an IMF delegation headed by Julie Kozack, the deputy director of the western hemisphere department, during last week's Group of 20 summit in Venice.

"The technical teams' meetings provided progress and understanding on key issues of the government's economic program," the ministry said.

"In particular, concrete progress was made in understanding regarding policies for the development of the domestic capital market, tax administration and the development of sectors that generate foreign exchange." The IMF said in a statement that the meetings from July 8-12 were "productive," adding that "discussions focused on policies to strengthen the recovery, economic stability, and job creation."

"In particular, progress was made in identifying policy options to develop the domestic capital market, mobilize domestic revenue, and strengthen Argentina's external resilience," said the IMF.

"Our goal is to support Argentina as it durably addresses its economic and balance of payment challenges. Since coming to power in December 2019, Argentine President Mauricio Macri has looked to renegotiate several multi-billion dollar debts he describes as "unpayable" for a country of 45 million that has been in recession since mid-2018.

Argentina received \$44 billion of a \$57 billion loan from the IMF arranged under Fernandez's predecessor, Mauricio Macri. After taking office, Fernandez refused to accept the rest of the loan. This year, Argentina has paid the IMF \$600 million in interest with two more tranches of another \$750 million due later this year.

It must also pay off \$3.8 billion of the debt in two instalments before the end of the year. Last year, Fernandez managed to renegotiate a separate \$66 billion loan that was worth 54.8 cents on the dollar. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

CAR CRASH? SEXY FRENCH HORROR FLICK RATTLES CANNES

Cannes was punch-drunk from a wild, violent and sexy French shocker yesterday with critics unsure if they had witnessed the birth of a genre or the worst flop in years. "Titane" by French director Julia Ducournau tells the story of a young woman who has sex with cars, kills without a care, and pretends to be a boy despite being pregnant by a vintage Cadillac. Not the most common of plots. Ultra-violent scenes had some cinema-goers shield their eyes at the film's early festival screenings, as sharp intakes of breath alternated with nervous giggles. The movie still won a long standing ovation at its opening night on Tuesday.

Acknowledging that some scenes were difficult to watch, Ducournau told reporters that even the goriest bits had narrative meaning. "I hate gratuitous violence, I really do," she said. The film drew some flattering comparisons with "Crash" by David Cronenberg—another controversial look at driving and eroticism—and "Blue Velvet" by David Lynch, both of which became instant classics after premiering in Cannes.

The Hollywood Reporter said the movie, which is competing for the Palme d'Or, might herald a "French-Punk-Queer Wave", while IndieWire said it was "one of the wildest films ever to screen at Cannes".

'A desire for metal'

Others clearly hated "Titane". The Guardian newspaper called it a "car crash" because of its "sheer silliness and towering pointlessness", French paper Liberation said the storyline was "pretty much inarticulate" and Switzerland's Le Temps wondered what the film-maker had meant by her "pretentious" offering.

While some felt let down by the French director—whose cannibalistic debut "Raw" delighted critics a few years ago—others gave her full marks. "Ducournau breaks all the rules, to our greatest pleasure," gushed French magazine Les Inrockuptibles. "Her furious film is like no other." The director herself said she felt "a lot of anger" while writing the film. "Trump had just been elected, and the world was not a happy place," she told AFP in an interview. "I was very pessimistic

about the future and about a society that has no room for fluidity, transformation, for change and inclusiveness," she said, adding: "There was also a desire for metal and skin that I can't really explain."

The main character is played by newcomer Agathe Rousselle. She stars alongside French veteran Vincent Lindon, her surrogate dad in the movie, who told reporters that lifting weights every day for two years for his role as buff fire brigade commander had been "the biggest risk I took for the role, because I am 62".

Lindon, who won Cannes' best actor award in 2015, said working with Ducournau had taught him "to let go", making him "a better actor and a better man". Both characters are broken, their lives "scorched earth", said Ducournau. "To show how love and humanity are born, I had to take that scorched earth and make it blossom, like light makes the darkness blossom," the director said. "The film is a film about love, about unconditional love." "Titane" is among 24 films competing for the Palme d'Or, to be awarded on Saturday. —AFP



French actor Vincent Lindon kisses French director Julia Ducournau during a photocall for the film "Titane" at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. —AFP

Show goes on for French cinema deemed world's oldest

Cinema on France's Mediterranean coast has won its bid to be recognized as the oldest still in operation by Guinness World Records, 122 years after its first public screening. The bright-yellow Eden Theatre in La Ciotat, a resort town outside Marseille, showed some of the first films made by Auguste and Louis Lumiere, the engineer brothers considered the inventors of the motion picture. "It's the reward for more than two years of research," Michel Cornille, president of the association that runs the Eden, said in a statement after the Guinness certification was confirmed earlier this month.

The cinema's former owner Raoul Gallaud was a friend of the Lumieres' father, and became a fan after being invited to their summer home in the region for a private screening in 1885. Gallaud offered to host a projection a few days later but the attempt was bedeviled by technical problems, and the Lumieres ended up doing their first public screening later that year in Paris. But four years later, on March 21, 1899, the Eden began showing Lumieres films including "Boat launch at La Ciotat" and "The Cowboys of America."

That was the date used by Guinness to deem Eden "the oldest purpose-built cinema in operation." "It's very emotional because all my life I've watched my family fight so the Eden will continue to live," said Marie-Laure Smilovich, the cinema's managing director and a great-grandchild of the Lumiere brothers. —AFP



This photograph shows the room of the "Eden-Theatre" cinema in La Ciotat, southern France. —AFP

Race to find beached baby orca's mother in New Zealand

Wildlife rescuers in New Zealand were scrambling to keep a stranded baby orca alive yesterday, as volunteers scoured waters off Wellington to find the calf's mother. The killer whale, a male aged four to six months, washed ashore on rocks just north of the capital on Sunday and was refloated by wildlife officers after distressed members of its family pod swam off, the Department of Conservation said. Named Toa-Maori for 'warrior'—the 2.5-meter (eight foot) orca is unweaned and unable to survive alone in the ocean. "He's still young, that's one of the big challenges we have," marine species manager Ian Angus told AFP.

"We have to think about how we ensure we get him back to his mother because he needs help, certainly with the feeding. How do we locate his mother? That's the second big challenge, which we're now struggling with," Angus said an air and sea search was under way off Wellington for Toa's pod and the public were encouraged to report any orca sightings. Toa is being kept in a makeshift pen set up between

two jetties at the seaside suburb of Plimmerton. It is being fed via a tube every four hours and monitored around the clock by wetsuit-clad volunteers to ensure it does not beach itself again.

Angus was cautiously optimistic about the young whale's future but said there were no facilities in New Zealand that could care for the animal long-term, making it imperative its mother be found as soon as possible. "He's been through quite a stressful experience but his health at the moment looks good," Angus said. "Orca are fairly robust animals and we're managing to hydrate him and slowly get some feed into him, so there are good signs." Despite being known as killer whales, orcas are actually the largest species of dolphin, with males growing up to nine meters.

Recognizable by their distinctive black and white markings, they are listed as critically endangered in New Zealand, where their population is estimated at 150-200. Pods of orcas are relatively common in Wellington Harbor, where they have been observed hunting stingrays. —AFP



A baby orca named Toa is cared for by Department of Conservation staff and volunteers in Plimmerton. —AFP

TO TRACK ELEPHANTS, SCIENTISTS KEEP AN EAR TO THE GROUND

The "mini earthquakes" that elephants make by both walking and vocalizing are not only a way to communicate with each other but can be used to track their movements, according to a study published yesterday. African elephants not only make their presence known with a resounding trumpet, they also create powerful "rumbles" with their vocal chords that are at such a low frequency they are almost inaudible to the human ear. These rumbles create sound waves that travel not only through the air but also—because of the elephant's weight—through the ground. And these rumbles are thought to carry a wealth of information.

"Elephants use many different vocalizations in a variety of contexts, for example mating, greeting, or warning each other of an imminent threat," said Michael Reinwald, of the University of Oxford's Department of Zoology, who led the study published in the journal Royal Society Interface. "They really seem to be saying a lot!" The researchers monitored African elephants in Kenya by listening for their vocalized rumbles using microphones and seismometers—often used for measuring earthquakes and explosions.

Reinwald said the elephants "generate mini earthquakes" with every footstep but also when they rumble, allowing the researchers to record the sound waves at distances of several hundred metres and then estimate their position based on this data. They found seismic recordings gave slightly more accurate results than microphones, which they said suggests the potential of a new method of tracking wildlife

through "seismic monitoring".

Sound of silence

Previous research has shown that elephants react to just the seismic component of these rumbles, although it is unclear how important these are compared to the acoustic sounds. There are two main theories for how the elephants are able to hear these low frequency sounds. They may detect the sound waves using sensors in the skin of their feet, or through bone conduction—meaning the wave travels up through their legs and to the middle ear. Reinwald said one of the challenges of the research, which was carried out with the charity Save the Elephants as well as the Mpala Research Center, was the raucous calls of wildlife around the watering hole where they set up their equipment.

"It was also a real challenge to protect all the equipment from everything from walking elephants to curious monkeys to nibbling rodents," he said. He said seismic monitoring could provide an alternative when microphones and camera traps are affected by bad weather or natural obstacles. And the researchers hope that seismic monitoring might help scientists decipher what messages the elephants are sending, by helping to track what types of rumbles they use in different environments and social contexts. "Seeing that seismic rumbles contain a lot of information, despite the solid material that these waves pass through, is quite surprising and suggests that elephants might use these waves to communicate over great distances," Reinwald said.—AFP

Barred Russian director rolls out Cannes red carpet at home

Dissident director Kirill Serebrennikov—who is banned from leaving Russia—said Tuesday that he laid a red carpet in Moscow to recreate the Cannes film festival's premiere he was not allowed to attend. Serebrennikov—who was under house arrest when his last movie "Leto" picked up a prize at the festival three years ago—is in the running again for Cannes' top prize, the Palme d'Or. But the 53-year-old, who ran foul of the Kremlin for his support of LGBTQ issues, said he tried to create some of the Cannes magic by unrolling a red carpet on the set of his latest project in Moscow. "We had a double celebration in the studio," he told reporters by video link.

The director was given a long standing ovation at his Cannes premiere when he appeared by FaceTime, with a seat bearing his name left empty. Serebrennikov made "Petrov's Flu"—a dream-like romp through a mid-winter Moscow in the stagnant years before the collapse of the Soviet Union—while he was being tried in a controversial fraud case the Hollywood Reporter described as "a nightmare straight out of a Franz Kafka novel".

'Obama feared assassination': Oliver Stone rehears conspiracies at Cannes

US director Oliver Stone returned to one of his favorite themes as he presented his latest movie at Cannes on Tuesday, claiming that president John F. Kennedy was assassinated by the CIA because he stood up to the American military. Stone, whose new documentary on the killing was premiering at the Cannes film festival, also told reporters that he thought it was fear of being bumped off that kept Barack Obama from challenging the military and intelligence agencies during his time in office.

"Obama, one of his biggest concerns when he was president, was being assassinated because he was the first black president," Stone told reporters. "I think he had fears. I don't know this. I'm just assuming this from his behavior: don't offend anybody, be moderate in all things." Stone's new documentary, "JFK Revisited: Through the Looking Glass", pulls together evidence gathered in the three



Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov (center) attends a press conference for the film "Petrov's Flu" via video connection after he was banned from leaving Russia to attend the Festival, with producer Ilya Stewart (left), Russian actor Yuri Kolokolnikov and Russian actor Ivan Dorn (right) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. —AFP

Court by day, filming by night
He shot the movie at night after spending

most of the day in court facing charges his supporters say were a punishment for his daring as director of the city's Gogol Centre theatre. But Serebrennikov refused to criticize the Russian authorities during a video news conference, saying "the real difficulties (in making the film) are within yourself, but when you have a great team that helps."

Critics in Cannes loved "Petrov's Flu", which is adapted from Alexei Salnikov's free-wheeling novel of a city afflicted by a strange virus. Variety called the movie, which stars Ukrainian singer Ivan Dorn "a rowdy, exhilarating return to top form for Serebrennikov." The Hollywood Reporter said it was "a hoot, and a sometimes moving exercise in nostalgia." Serebrennikov, who had been close to President Vladimir Putin's circle, ran into trouble after his ballet based on the energetic gay life of legendary dancer Rudolf Nureyev outraged Russian conservatives. Nikita Mikhalkov, an Oscar-winning film director with Kremlin links, said Serebrennikov should not be allowed to parade "Nureyev's cock" at the Bolshoi Theatre. —AFP



US director Oliver Stone

Kennedy "was the last American president who really struggled for peace in the world," he added. "We are where we are because of that. Things changed on November 22 1963." "Clinton, Obama—they seemed to start with these intentions but they never completed them," Stone insisted. He bemoaned the fact that US financiers had refused to back his new documentary, forcing him to look for funding in Europe—just as he did when making "Snowden", his 2016 movie about whistleblower Edward Snowden. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

AFTER VIRUS CLOSURES, SHAKESPEARE RETURNS... OUTSIDE



Actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company rehearse scenes from the William Shakespeare play *The Comedy of Errors* in the Lydia & Manfred Gorny Garden Theatre, a specially constructed outdoor performance space located in the Swan Theatre Gardens in Stratford-upon-Avon, central England. —AFP photos

Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company has returned to the stage after an enforced 18-month absence due to the coronavirus pandemic—at a specially built open-air theatre in the bard's home town. The first performance of "The Comedy of Errors" took place on Tuesday night, in front of a 250-strong crowd—half the capacity until pandemic restrictions are eased in England next week. "This feels like the real spirit of Shakespeare. You've just got the words, the space and the audience," actor Greg Haiste told AFP before the show. "And you've got that wonderful shared experience which we've been missing so much over the last year and a half."

The purpose-built Garden Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, central England, is next to the RSC's main indoor auditorium on the banks of the river Avon. It sits on 900 tons of rock and 30 tons of steel have been

used for the seating. It lies just a stone's throw from where the celebrated 16th-century playwright was born and his final resting place at the Holy Trinity Church.

The RSC, whose alumni include some of Britain's most famous actors, from Laurence Olivier to Judi Dench, had been set to perform "The Comedy of Errors" when coronavirus struck. That forced the company to postpone the farce, as entertainment venues had to shut their doors and stay-at-home restrictions were imposed from March 2020. "A lot of us started this project in January 2020, and we got right through to almost ready to do it, and we had to pause, and we started again," said Haiste.

No umbrellas

The Garden Theatre has forced the RSC to adapt: lighting-trickier outside—has had to be redesigned, and actors have to use

microphones to be heard without indoor acoustics. "That's going to be interesting to stay connected with the audience without them directly receiving our voices," said actress Hedydd Dylan. "Hopefully we'll get used to it and so will they."

Dylan is one of the cast members already accustomed to performing in the open as part of productions at London's Globe Theatre—a reconstruction of Shakespeare's Elizabethan-era playhouse on the banks of the Thames. She said she was "used to acting with pigeons landing on the stage sometimes". "It's a little bit distracting but the audience love it. Everything that goes wrong, that's their favorite game," she added.

Good weather is never guaranteed in Britain, even in the summer months, and the audience is being warned that they may get wet. But while raincoats are encouraged,

umbrellas are forbidden. Exposure to the elements, though, is being billed as all part of the experience, giving theatre-goers a taste of how plays used to be performed in Shakespeare's day. As well as disruptive pigeons, actors and the audience will have to contend with the surrounding noises of the busy market town or the often noisy nearby swans on the river. The pandemic has made other changes to preparations. Kissing scenes have been ruled out. Dylan said actors also rehearsed with masks, social distancing—as well as COVID tests—making the experience "pretty weird".

Pigeon poo

"We're just dying to share this story with real human beings," said Dylan, adding that it would be a thrill to put the worst behind them and return to normality. "Finally it feels real and it's going to hap-

pen," said actress Avita Jay. With some members of the public still wary about returning to enclosed spaces, open-air performances feel like the "perfect solution", she added. Being outside could also be "more adventurous", Jay said.

"We've got a sweepstake at the moment on who is going to be the first person to have a pigeon poo on them during the show, hopefully it won't be me." Director Phillip Breen said at least now an audience would be present. "People seem to be impatient to come... We've sold very well," he said. Despite his concerns for the future of the theatre after the pandemic, the revival in Stratford comes with new optimism. "It has that feeling of celebration, people want to come back and see actors work again," he said. "Hopefully it will reset a relationship between our actors and our audience." —AFP

'MANDALORIAN' AND 'CROWN' LEAD EMMY NOMS AS DISNEY EXPANDS EMPIRE

Disney+'s "Star Wars" series "The Mandalorian" on Tuesday tied for the most Emmy nominations with Netflix royal drama "The Crown" at 24, as the Mouse House stormed television's version of the Oscars. Disney's new streaming service, in only its second year, also topped the prestigious limited series category, where Marvel superhero spin-off "WandaVision" earned 23 nominations. Apple TV+, another streamer in its sophomore year, topped the comedy categories with "Ted Lasso" on 20, while NBC sketch comedy series "Saturday Night Live", a perennial Emmys favorite, extended its all-time record number of nominations to 306 with 21 new nods.

The 73rd Emmy Awards will be handed out at a live, in-person ceremony in Los Angeles broadcast by CBS on September 19. The show—set to feature a "limited audience of nominees and their guests"—will mark a welcome return to some normality. Last year's edition was broadcast from an empty theater, with winners beaming in via video call. Hosted by US actor-comedian Cedric the Entertainer, the gala will honor the best in television from a unique, pandemic-plagued year in which producers struggled to film under tight COVID restrictions. Like the rest of us, the Television Academy's 25,000 voters spent several months stuck at home, leaving them ample time to sift through a stripped-down selection of series from their sofas.

Superheroes and 'Star Wars'

Disney+ increased its share of Emmy nominations from 19 in its debut year to a whopping 71 this time. Combined with the parent company's other platforms such as ABC and Hulu, Disney topped the overall nominations with 146. HBO and its own streamer HBO Max managed 130, just pipping last year's record-breaking leader Netflix on 129. "The Mandalorian" and "The Crown" will compete for best drama against Hulu's dystopian drama "The Handmaid's Tale," which scored 21 nods, and the likes of Netflix's buzzy period rom-com "Bridgerton." Season two of "The Mandalorian," a space-set neo-Western spun off from the wildly popular sci-fi "Star



In this file photo "The Crown" cast Helena Bonham Carter (left), Josh O'Connor and Erin Doherty pose with the trophy for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series in the press room during the 26th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. —AFP photos



In this file photo The Disney+ logo is seen on the backdrop for the World Premiere of "The Mandalorian" at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood.

Wars" films, scored strongly across technical categories, in addition to multiple acting nominations for the likes of Giancarlo Esposito—though sadly Baby Yoda was not eligible. All three previous seasons of monarchy saga "The Crown"

have been nominated for best drama series, but the show—like all other Netflix dramas—has never won the top prize. The show also boasts leading contenders in the drama acting categories, including Emma Corrin as Princess Diana, Josh O'Connor as Prince Charles, and Gillian Anderson as Margaret Thatcher.

'Best Parisian Travelogue'

"Ted Lasso"—about a hapless American football coach thrust into English soccer—is the hot favorite to win best comedy series, where Michael Douglas's "The Kominsky Method" is the sole comedy nominee from last year again in the running. The Academy sprung a surprise by nominating "Emily in Paris" for best comedy, just five months after Golden Globes voters were ridiculed for recognizing the cliché-ridden Netflix comedy. "Emily in Paris" is barely a comedy and barely a TV show and 'Best Parisian Travelogue' isn't even an Emmy category," wrote The Hollywood Reporter's Daniel Feinberg, as the nomination spawned incredulous memes on social media.

Elsewhere, the limited series field has arguably the most competitive and prestigious lineup of all, making the success of Disney+'s Marvel series "WandaVision" all the more impressive. It will compete with shows including Kate Winslet's small-town murder mystery "Mare of Easttown," and the Barry Jenkins-directed slavery tale "The Underground Railroad." There however was no place for Steve McQueen's acclaimed immigrant anthology "Small Axe," or A-listers Nicole Kidman and Ethan Hawke for their roles in "The Undoing" and "The Good Lord Bird," respectively. "WandaVision"—which features popular characters from Marvel's record-breaking films, including Elizabeth Olsen's magical witch Wanda Maximoff—won legions of fans and critical praise for its quirky send-up of classic TV sitcoms. And it is not the only superhero show gatecrashing the Emmys—fellow Marvel series "The Falcon and the Winter Soldier" bagged five nominations, including for guest star Don Cheadle, as did Amazon Prime Video's "The Boys." —AFP

Britney Spears legal battle heads back to Los Angeles court

Three weeks after Britney Spears sensationally called for an end to her "abusive" guardianship, the pop singer's legal battle returned to court yesterday in Los Angeles. Spears gave explosive testimony on June 23 in which she pleaded with a California judge to allow her to end the conservatorship long controlled by her father, and to choose her own lawyer. Her 20-minute emotional and almost breathless monologue ramped up worldwide interest in a case that was already the subject of a frenzied #FreeBritney campaign by her adoring fans.



It is not known if the singer will address the court directly this time, but at least 10 separate petition hearings and five further items are on the docket, according to the Los Angeles County Superior Court website. Since her testimony last month, many of the central figures in the complex and controversial network installed to manage Spears' affairs have distanced themselves. Samuel Ingham, the lawyer appointed by court soon after her highly public 2007 breakdown—when the shaven-headed star attacked a paparazzo's car at a gas station—has asked to step down from his role.

So too has the financial management company that was set to assume joint control of Spears' estate with her father Jamie, who remains in place despite a petition filed last year for his removal. Her longtime manager Larry Rudolph has also resigned. All three men came in for searing criticism from Spears last month, when the 39-year-old said that "my dad and anyone involved in this conservatorship and my management—who played a huge role in punishing me when I said 'no'... they should be in jail."

Her impassioned testimony has drawn widespread support, from fans chanting outside the courtroom to her musical peers Christina Aguilera and Madonna. Spears told the court that she had been prevented from having a contraceptive IUD removed, despite wanting more children, and forcefully put on medication that made her feel "drunk." She said she had been made to perform shows under threat of lawsuit, and that she was not even allowed to get changed in privacy or drive her own car. "I just want my life back. It's been 13 years and it's enough," said Spears.

'Handpick my own lawyer'

The nature of yesterday's petitions is not publicly known. But earlier this month Spears' mother Lynne filed a petition asking for her daughter to be allowed to choose her own new lawyer.

Celebrity website TMZ reported Tuesday that the singer has been in talks with Hollywood lawyer Mathew Rosengart and that he has agreed to represent her. The former federal prosecutor has previously represented the likes of Steven Spielberg and Sean Penn, and was expected to attend court yesterday. Rosengart did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

If the judge approves his appointment, Rosengart would be expected to apply for Jamie Spears' removal from control of her estate, and—at some point—an end to the conservatorship itself. "I haven't really had the opportunity by my own self to actually handpick my own lawyer by myself. And I would like to be able to do that," Spears told the court last month. "I would like to also—the main reason why I'm here—is because I want to end the conservatorship without having to be evaluated," she said. —AFP

Courtney, Britney and LGBTQ history: Six Emmys takeaways

"The Crown" and "The Mandalorian" led the charge in Tuesday's Emmy nominations, as television prepares to honor a year transformed by the pandemic. Here are six takeaways:

Streamers sink or swim

In a TV era widely dubbed the "streaming wars," the various new online platforms had a hugely mixed day. Disney+ and Apple TV+ triumphed among the new kids on the block, earning 71 and 34 nods in their second years (up from 19 and 18 on debut.) And HBO Max chipped in with original streaming titles such as "Hacks" and "The Flight Attendant" to edge HBO's combined total, just past rival Netflix in the overall network race. But in an increasingly crowded marketplace, Paramount+ earned just six nods and NBC's Peacock crashed out with only two nominations on their launch years.

TV or not TV?

With each passing year, the Emmys is forced to re-assess an existential question: what actually is television? Is it Steve McQueen's critically adored "Small Axe"—an anthology of five films made for the small-screen about London's West Indian immigrants, which did not compete at the Oscars? Or is it "Hamilton"—a live taping of the Broadway smash-hit stage musical, bundled onto Disney+? The boundaries are becoming more and more blurred by streaming, but Emmy voters at least made their preferences clear on Tuesday. "Hamilton" bagged 12 nods, including a whopping seven acting nominations, while "Small Axe" earned a paltry one for cinematography.

First-time noms

With the pandemic restricting TV productions all year, many established shows were missing—creating room for a flock of first-time acting nominees to break through. Forty-four rising stars earned debut acting recognition this year, including "I May Destroy You" creator and actress Michaela Coel, "Bridgerton" heart-throb Rege-Jean Page, and "WandaVision" lead Elizabeth Olsen. "The Crown" newcomers Josh O'Connor and Emma Corrin are first-time favorites for their lead roles as Prince Charles and Princess Diana, as is Anya Taylor-Joy for "The Queen's Gambit." And Kaley Cuoco finally took her first nomination for "The Flight Attendant," after years without recognition in the massively popular sitcom "The Big Bang Theory."

Transgender history

MJ Rodriguez, another first-time nominee, made history as the first transgender woman nominated for a lead acting role at the Emmys. Rodriguez stars as mother hen Blanca Rodriguez in "Pose," the groundbreaking FX show which explores New York's underground ballroom culture in the 1980s. GLAAD, a US organization that promotes greater LGBTQ inclusion in the media, hailed her nomination as "a breakthrough for transgender women in Hollywood."

Courtney and Conan

There was a strong nostalgic air to Tuesday's nominations—in particular for Courtney Cox and Conan O'Brien. Cox was famously the one "Friends" star never nominated for an Emmy during the wildly popular sitcom's original run. Voters finally remedied that—to an extent—that by nominating the much-maligned "Friends: The Reunion," on which Cox served



In this file photo US actresses Courtney Cox (left) and Jennifer Aniston attends the 46th American Film Institute Life Achievement Award Gala at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. —AFP

as an executive producer, for four awards including best pre-recorded variety special. Meanwhile veteran late-night talk host O'Brien, who retired "Conan" last month, received his first Emmy nod in the variety series section for 10 years.

Britney doc

Pop star Britney Spears is embroiled in a high-profile legal battle to end the guardianship she has been under ever since her very public breakdown in 2008. Just a day before another major hearing at Los Angeles court, she is back in the spotlight thanks to a pair of Emmy nominations for feature-length documentary "Framing Britney Spears."

Produced by FX and The New York Times, it focuses on the role of paparazzi and the tabloid press in the downfall of the singer, and helped draw attention to her adoring fans' #FreeBritney campaign. —AFP

Sports

Federer withdraws from Tokyo Olympics after knee injury 'setback'

GENEVA: Roger Federer announced on Tuesday he has withdrawn from the upcoming Tokyo Olympics after a "setback" in his recovery from a knee injury. The 20-time Grand Slam champion was knocked out of Wimbledon in the quarter-finals by Hubert Hurkacz last week.

The 39-year-old Federer, who has never won an Olympic singles gold medal, underwent two surgeries on his right knee in 2020. "During the grass court season, I unfortunately experienced a setback with my knee, and have accepted that I must withdraw from the Tokyo Olympic Games," Federer said in a statement on social media.

The tennis competitions in Japan are set to start on July 24, the day after the opening ceremony. Federer, who turns 40 next month, pulled out of the French Open after reaching the fourth round, hoping to get fit for Wimbledon. He showed signs of his best during his run to the quarter-finals, but bowed out tamer, losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 to Poland's Hurkacz.

That defeat sparked talk among fans

and pundits speculating whether the eight-time Wimbledon winner would retire, with Federer saying he "didn't know" if his Wimbledon career was over. But on Tuesday, the former world number one said he was hoping to return to the ATP Tour later this summer. "I have already begun rehabilitation in the hopes of returning to the tour later this summer," he added. "I wish the entire Swiss team the best of luck and I will be rooting hard for the team from afar."

He is just the latest to join a long list of tennis stars to skip the Olympics. Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and Dominic Thiem have all pulled out, while newly-crowned Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic put his chances of playing in Tokyo at "50/50".

The Games have been badly affected by COVID. The 2020 edition was delayed by a year and although it will go ahead, it will largely be held behind closed doors and with strict health restrictions in place. The Olympic singles title is the only major tournament Federer is yet to win. He has completed

the career Grand Slam and won the season-ending ATP Finals six times.

He lost in the semi-finals in 2000 in Sydney and reached the final in 2012, only to be beaten by Andy Murray in London, just weeks after edging out the Briton on the same Centre Court in the Wimbledon final. Federer did, however, win doubles gold with Stan Wawrinka in Beijing 13 years ago.

'Need to get in better shape'

The loss to Hurkacz was only Federer's 14th defeat at Wimbledon in 119 matches, and the first time he had been beaten in the tournament in straight sets since a first-round exit at the hands of Mario Ancic in 2002.

It was also the first time he had lost a set 6-0 at Wimbledon and just the third time at a Slam. "With everything that comes after Wimbledon, we were always going to sit down and talk about it because clearly now Wimbledon is over," Federer said after the match. "I got to take a few days. Just see, okay, what do I need to do to get in better shape so I



LONDON: In this file photograph taken on August 5, 2012, Switzerland's Roger Federer returns the ball to Britain's Andy Murray in their London 2012 Olympic Games men's single gold medal match at Wimbledon in south London. — AFP

can be more competitive." He slipped to ninth in the ATP rankings after Wimbledon — his lowest position since

March 2017. "Rest up, @rogerfederer," Wimbledon tweeted. "It was great having you back this year." — AFP

News in brief

Rashford out for 12 weeks?

LONDON: Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford could be sidelined for up to three months after deciding to have surgery on a shoulder issue following Euro 2020, according to reports on Tuesday. Rashford, 23, had a scan earlier in the day on the issue which has hampered the England striker since the end of the club season, the Daily Telegraph and the BBC reported. He will only be able to have the operation at the end of July due to the surgeon's availability. Rashford played five times for England in Euro 2020 and missed a penalty in the shootout loss to Italy in the final. — AFP

Leonard undergoes surgery

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles Clippers star Kawhi Leonard faces a lengthy injury layoff after undergoing surgery to repair torn knee ligaments, the team said Tuesday. Leonard missed the final eight games of the Clippers' playoff campaign after injuring his right knee against the Utah Jazz last month. The team initially said Leonard had sprained the knee but said in a brief statement on Tuesday he had suffered a partial tear of his right anterior cruciate ligament. Typically torn cruciate ligaments take several months to recover from, meaning Leonard is likely to miss a substantial part of the 2021-2022 campaign. — AFP

Roma signs Rui Patricio

ROME: Portugal international goalkeeper Rui Patricio has signed a three-year contract with Serie A club Roma from Premier League side Wolverhampton Wanderers, the Italian club announced. The 33-year-old becomes new Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho's first signing in a deal which runs until June 2024 and is worth an initial 11.5 million euros (\$13.5 million) plus bonuses, the club said. Euro 2016 winner Patricio, who has 97 caps for Portugal exited in the last-16 of Euro 2020 to Belgium. He joined Wolves in 2018 from Sporting Lisbon. — AFP

Equal points system

NEW DELHI: The International Cricket Council yesterday said the next World Test Championship will have a "simpler" equal points system to decide the finalists after the previous system came under criticism. The second championship will kick off with a five-Test series between hosts England and India in August and September. The ICC switched from the original system of total points to percentage of points won midway through the first championship which was severely disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. Each match will now earn 12 points for a win, four for a draw and six for a tie, the ICC said in a statement. — AFP

US Olympians seek 'corporate knowledge', says Budenholzer

MILWAUKEE: US Olympic basketball coach Gregg Popovich's struggling group of NBA stars is having to build the "corporate knowledge" that became a trademark of Popovich's NBA championship teams in San Antonio. So says Milwaukee Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, who spent 17 seasons as an assistant to Popovich with the Spurs, being on his staff for four championship runs.

Budenholzer, whose Bucks trailed Phoenix 2-1 in the NBA Finals entering last night's game four in the best-of-seven matchup, noted how his squad has come together over years of talent playing alongside one another just as the Spurs' top teams did. "It takes a lot of time to figure things out," Budenholzer said. "There's no

replacement for reps and experiences and being defended different ways and having to navigate different things defensively."

The US Olympians, seeking a fourth straight gold medal at Tokyo, came together only four days before an exhibition loss to Nigeria and then dropped a second match to Australia on Monday. Americans had lost only twice before in exhibition play since the original "Dream Team" began the NBA's Olympic era in 1992.

A campaign that has extended a month later than normal due to COVID-19 pandemic issues forced the late gathering. Three players in the NBA Finals — Milwaukee's Khris Middleton and Jrue Holiday and Phoenix's Devin Booker — will join the US Olympic squad once the league crown is decided. But that might mean they don't arrive until just before the US opener on July 25. And when it comes to "corporate knowledge" building, Budenholzer says: "No, you can't get that in two minutes or two games or a couple practices. It's real and it takes real time." — AFP

— AFP

Guerrero, Ohtani lead AL to All-Star victory

LOS ANGELES: Vladimir Guerrero Jr crushed a monster home run and Japanese star Shohei Ohtani pitched a scoreless inning to help extend the American League's All-Star Game winning streak with a 5-2 win over the National League in Denver on Tuesday.

Los Angeles Angels ace Ohtani — who made history by also leading off the American League's batting line-up — threw down 10 strikes in a 14-pitch first inning before being replaced. Ohtani, Major League Baseball's home run leader with 33 at the halfway stage of the season, was unable to make much impression with the bat however, grounding out in the first and third in his two at bats.

Instead, the hitting pyrotechnics were led by Toronto Blue Jays slugger Guerrero Jr, who crushed a solo shot to left center field in the top of the third to put the AL 2-0 up after Marcus Semien's single scored Aaron Judge in the second.

Guerrero's home run was enough to earn him Most Valuable Player honors, the youngest player in history to earn the accolade. The 22-year-old's homer also came 15 years after his father Vladimir Guerrero Sr smashed a home run in the 2006 All-Star Game. "It means the world to me," Guerrero Jr

Durant gets US back on track in Argentina blowout

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored 17 points as the United States bounced back from consecutive defeats to score a convincing 108-80 victory over Argentina in a pre-Olympic exhibition on Tuesday. Gregg Popovich's US squad, the reigning Olympic champions, had been jolted by defeats to Nigeria and Australia in the opening two games of their Las Vegas training camp before heading to Tokyo for the Olympics next week.

But a more polished performance on Tuesday got US preparations firmly back on track, with Durant leading a slick offensive effort to take care of the Argentinians at the Mandalay Bay Events Center. Durant was one of five US players to finish in double figures with the Brooklyn Nets star hauling down six rebounds.

Bradley Beal added 17 points while Zach LaVine chipped in with 15. Portland's Damian Lillard added 13 points which included a trio of three-pointers. Bam Adebayo also impressed with 12 points from 18min 19sec on court. "We played with more intensity," Adebayo said. "We really honed in on the defensive side and were really locked in. We were just playing basketball, reading off each (other) and making plays. That's our gift."

Popovich was pleased with signs that his team's stamina had improved. "Against Australia we competed well, rebounded, played defense, ran the floor



DENVER: Shohei Ohtani #17 of the Los Angeles Angels pitches in the first inning during the 91st MLB All-Star Game at Coors Field on Tuesday in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

said through an interpreter after the game. "I just want to thank my dad — Dad, this is for you."

The win was the eighth-straight All Star game victory for the American League team. Guerrero helped the AL into a 3-0 lead in the top of the fifth, grounding out to send in Teoscar Hernandez. Xander Bogaerts extended the AL lead with a single to allow Cedric Mullins to cross home plate.

Tampa Bay Rays catcher Mike Zunino's solo home run gave the AL insurance with a 5-1 lead at

the top of the sixth. Australian pitcher Liam Hendriks — becoming the first Aussie to feature in two All-Star Games — then locked down the win with the save in the ninth inning. "The first one was surreal and the second one makes me the first ever Australian to get to two and that's special," Hendriks said afterwards. "It's near and dear to my heart and hopefully it gets more Aussies involved in baseball. It's a world game now. There's a lot of us over here and hopefully there's more to come." — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Kevin Durant #7 of the USA Men's National Team handles the ball during the game against the Argentina Men's National Team on Tuesday at Michelob ULTRA Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

and had good pace for a half and then it dissipated for a half," Popovich said. "Tonight, we maintained that pretty much throughout the game. Hopefully that's a sign we're getting better."

Former NBA players Luis Scola led the scoring for Argentina, with the 41-year-old veteran finish-

ing with 16 points. Nicolas Laprovittola added 13 points while Facundo Campazzo had 12. The United States face a rematch against Australia in their next warm-up game on Friday before completing their training camp with a sendoff game against Spain on Sunday. — AFP

Asian champions Qatar held by Panama in Gold Cup opener

DOHA: Asian champions Qatar were held to a 3-3 draw by Panama in their opening CONCACAF Gold Cup Group D game on Tuesday. Qatar, playing in the championship for teams from North America, Central America and the Caribbean as part of their preparations for the 2022 World Cup, took the lead three times but were pegged back by the Panamanians. The game in Houston was delayed by nearly two hours after a severe weather warning. Qatar took the lead in the 48th minute, Akram Arif sweeping home emphatically from close range after Pedro Miguel headed into his path from the edge of the six-yard area.

Panama equalized in the 51st minute, with a cleverly worked move from a corner carving out an

opening for Rolando Blackburn, whose accurate header flew into the bottom right hand corner. Qatar regained the lead only moments later however when Akram Alif's superb through ball sent Almoez Ali racing through on goal.

The 24-year-old striker took his time before rifling home a low shot into the bottom corner to make it 2-1 on 53 minutes. Panama were level within five minutes however, punishing slack defending by Qatar when Yoel Barceñas's long pass into the area somehow eluded the defense to find Blackburn, who prodded home for 2-2.

Barceñas looked to have cost Panama a share of the spoils in the 61st minute after conceding a penalty which Hassan Al-Haydos duly converted to make it 3-2. But Qatar's defense again proved vulnerable late on, and when Abdiel Ayarza was bundled over by Abdelkarim Hassan in the 74th minute, Eric Davis duly stepped up to level it at 3-3. Qatar almost snatched victory in the final minutes of stoppage time when Mohammed Muntari burst clear of the defense only for a desperate cover tackle from Harold Cummings to clear the danger. — AFP

Sports

Olympics chief vows to minimize virus risk to Japan

TOKYO: Olympics chief Thomas Bach pledged yesterday "not to bring any risk" to Japan with the Games, seeking to reassure a skeptical public as virus cases surge just over a week before Tokyo 2020 begins. Fans have been banned from Olympic events in the capital, which is under emergency restrictions to curb rising infection numbers that yesterday hit highs not seen since January.

As more athletes arrive in Japan and move into the Olympic Village, International Olympic Committee chief Bach promised a safe summer Games. "We are making all our efforts and the Japanese people have all our commitment to contribute in the best way to fight this virus and not to bring any risk to the Japanese people," Bach told reporters after meeting Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

Bach said "85 percent of all the residents in the Olympic Village and almost 100 percent of the IOC members and staff coming here to Tokyo arrive vaccinated. "This is why I'd like to humbly ask the Japanese people to warmly welcome the athletes from all around the world who have overcome, like the Japanese people, so many challenges."

Japan has seen a less severe COVID-19 outbreak than many other countries, with around 15,000 deaths overall, but experts warn another wave driven by more infectious variants could stretch medical facilities. Around 20 percent of the population are fully vaccinated, and Tokyo's emergency measures, mainly limiting alcohol sales and restaurant opening hours, will be in place throughout the Games.

Yesterday, there were 1,149 new cases recorded in Tokyo, the highest since January 22. In opinion polls, the Japanese public have consistently expressed apprehension about Tokyo 2020, which was postponed by a year due to the pandemic and

will finally open on July 23. Organizers announced the decision to ban spectators from all but a tiny number of Olympic events last week, following repeated warnings from experts about the risk of crowds gathering as infections rise.

Doubts 'every day'

In an exchange with major global press agencies later yesterday, Bach said his team had strived to maintain a confident stance after Tokyo 2020 was postponed in March last year. "In these 15 months, we had doubts every day. This was a situation of high uncertainty," he said. "Quite honestly, it was way, way more complex than we thought it would be when we agreed on this postponement."

But by projecting confidence and taking decisions seriously, the IOC kept other parties on side, from athletes to sports federations and local authorities, Bach said. "Only because they all stayed on board, we can be here now, nine days before the opening of the Games."

The US softball team moved into the Olympic Village yesterday, local media said, the day after the compound opened without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games. But the arrival of the Refugee Olympic team was delayed after an official tested positive in Doha, the IOC said. All the team's athletes tested negative.

While in Japan, athletes will face strict virus rules and are banned from eating at local restaurants or interacting with the public. Olympic officials on Wednesday stressed that a tiny percentage of the people coming into Japan for the event had tested positive for the virus.

Of the more than 8,000 people who arrived between July 1 and 13, three tested positive after arrival and were isolated, with their close contacts



TOKYO: International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach speaks to the media after meeting Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

also "subject to the relevant quarantine measures", the IOC said. While Tokyo 2020 will not have the same celebratory atmosphere of previous Olympics, Bach said audio of crowds at past Games will be played to encourage athletes, while TV audiences worldwide can contribute to a virtual "clapping" map. Bach is scheduled to visit Hiroshima tomorrow on

a visit he denied was politically motivated, saying it would show the IOC's "commitment to peace" on the first day of the Olympic truce. The truce — adopted by the United Nations — aims to ensure a halt to all hostilities, allowing the safe passage and participation of athletes and spectators for the Games. —AFP

US to send second-largest team in history to Olympics

LOS ANGELES: The United States will send the second-largest team in its history to compete at the Tokyo Olympics this month with women athletes making up more than half of the delegation for a third straight Summer Games, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) said Tuesday.

The USOPC said in a statement that 613 athletes would take part in the Olympics, which open in Tokyo on July 23 after a one-year postponement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Only the 648-member 1996 US Olympic team — when the Games were staged on home soil in Atlanta — was larger. The 2021 team also includes 329 women, the third Summer Olympics in a row that female athletes have outnumbered their male counterparts.

"Team USA is ready. Our roster

includes 613 remarkable athletes, one of our biggest teams ever, all who qualified to participate in these Games," said USOPC chief executive Sarah Hirshland. "In these extraordinary times, these athletes have shown perseverance, dedication and focus and have inspired us all. We are thrilled to support them as they live their dreams of competing on the biggest stage in sport."

The team includes 193 returning Olympians, including one seven-time Olympian — equestrian's Phillip Dutton — and eight five-time Olympians. Fifteen athletes are competing in their fourth Olympics while 39 are participating in their third Games.

Multiple Olympic medalists spearheading the US challenge include track and field star Allyson Felix (nine medals), swimmer Allison Schmitt (eight), swimmer Katie Ledecky (six)



EUGENE: Allyson Felix celebrates with her daughter Camryn after finishing second in the Women's 400 Meters Final on day three of the 2021 US Olympic Track and Field Team Trials at Hayward Field on June 20, 2021 in Eugene, Oregon. —AFP

and gymnast Simone Biles (five).

"The journey to be a part of the 2020 U.S. Olympic Team was like no other," said Rick Adams, USOPC chief of sport performance. "This team is

special: these Games are special. The commitment from Team USA athletes and the National Governing Bodies never wavered, and for that we are grateful." —AFP

Less is more as Lyles targets 200m gold

LOS ANGELES: Noah Lyles may have abandoned ambitious plans for an Olympic sprint double, but the charismatic US star believes less may well be more as he targets 200m gold in Tokyo. After a dazzling performance at the World Championships in Doha two years ago, where he stormed to victory in the 200m, Lyles declared he was planning to take a crack at the 100m-200m double in Japan.

That bold dream ended abruptly at last month's US Olympic trials in Eugene, where Lyles never looked comfortable through the opening rounds of the 100m before trailing in a distant seventh in the final. But he looked more like his old self a week later in the 200m final, where he surged to victory in a world-leading 19.74sec to see off the challenge of Kenny Bednarek and teenager Erriyon Knighton.

Lyles says rediscovering a sense of "fun" held the key to his return to form after a tumultuous year that saw him open up about his treatment for depression as

America faced a racial reckoning following the death of George Floyd.

"I went out there and I had fun," Lyles said. "Another thing I've been struggling to have this year was some fun on the track. I know I've said a lot, 'The day I stop having fun is the day I leave.' And I was not having fun this year, and I did not want to leave. I was like, 'I know this can be fun. I just have to bide my time.' Going out there, it was fun again."

With the 100m off the agenda in Tokyo, Lyles is free to concentrate on the race that has always been his strongest suit. After cruising through the opening rounds of the 200m at the trials last month, his sense of relief was palpable.

Depression battle

"It always feels natural when I come back to the 200," he said. "I don't have to stress too hard. I don't have to think about too much. 'I don't even have to worry about if I get a good start or not, because I know, whatever the situation is, I can always come back in my turn and then slingshot off, be strong in my finish. It's really a comfortable feeling.'"

Lyles made headlines last year when he revealed on social media he had been receiving treatment for depression, something which deepened during the anxious months of the Covid-19 pandemic and the events following Floyd's death in May. In August, Lyles said he



DES MOINES: In this file photo taken on July 27, 2019 Noah Lyles competes in the Men's 200 Meter heats during the 2019 USATF Outdoor Championships at Drake Stadium in Des Moines, Iowa. —AFP

had been using antidepressant medication, describing it as "one of the best decisions I have made in a while."

"Since then I have been able to think without the dark undertone in mind of nothing matters," he said in a post on Twitter. "It got to the point where I was just so deep, deep inside of myself that I was just putting on a face and doing what I needed to do." Lyles said of his mental health struggles. —AFP

Tokyo 2020: the Refugee Olympic Team

LAUSANNE: The Tokyo 2020 Games will see 29 displaced athletes living in 14 countries around the world compete as part of the Refugee Olympic Team. The squad arrives in Japan yesterday. Here is a look at the history of the team, its debut at the 2016 Games, its growing place in the Olympic movement and the path towards Tokyo 2020:

Creation

Marathon runner Guor Marial, a refugee living in the United States, competed at London 2012 as an independent athlete, having made the qualifying time. He had escaped Sudan, was not a US national and his newly-independent South Sudan homeland did not yet have an Olympic committee.

Following a global refugee crisis that saw millions of people displaced around the world, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach announced the creation of the new team at the United Nations General Assembly in October 2015.

It first took part in the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics. Prospective competitors are supported by scholarships. Some \$2 million has been invested in refugee athletes since Rio. The team's performance in Rio triggered the launch in 2017 of the Olympic Refugee Foundation. It aims to provide one million young people affected by displacement with access to sport by 2024.

Flag and anthem

The athletes compete under the Olympic flag. If any medals are won, the flag will be raised and the Olympic Anthem played. The team's IOC code, EOR, comes from the French acronym Equipe Olympique des Réfugiés. The team will be the second to enter the Tokyo opening ceremony parade of nations, following traditional first entrants Greece.

Rio 2016

Ten athletes took part: five originally from South Sudan, two each originally from Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and one from Ethiopia. Six competed in athletics, two in swimming and two in judo. 800 meters runner Rose Lokonyen, who fled on foot from South Sudan to Kenya aged 10, carried the flag at the opening ceremony. Judoka Popole Misenga, who escaped the DR Congo and sought asylum in Brazil, did so at the closing ceremony.

Tokyo 2020

Some 56 athletes were supported by the IOC scholarships, of which 29 were chosen to compete in Tokyo. The selection criteria was based on sporting performance and their refugee status being confirmed by the UN Refugee Agency. Personal background, as well as a balance of sports disciplines, gender and regions were also taken into account.

The 29 athletes include nine originally from Syria, five originally from Iran, four originally from South Sudan

and three originally from Afghanistan. They will compete in 12 sports. Six competitors from 2016 are returning for Tokyo, including Lokonyen and Misenga.

Also returning is 23-year-old Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, who competed in Rio less than a year after she and her sister Sarah used their swimming skills to pull to safety their water-logged boat carrying another 18 migrants and refugees from Turkey to Lesbos. The team includes some decorated athletes.

Kimia Alizadeh, who defected from Iran to Germany last year, won a bronze medal in Rio in taekwondo. Javad Mahjoub, a judoka who fled Iran and is now a refugee in Canada, won gold at the 2013 Asian Judo Championships.

Hamoon Derafshpour, also originally from Iran but now in Canada, won bronze at the 2018 World Karate Championships. The delegation includes 20 coaches and 15 team officials. Travel and participation expenses are covered. They will stay in the Olympic Village, just like any other team. —AFP

A greener Games? Tokyo 2020's environmental impact

TOKYO: Olympics organizers have pledged to prioritize sustainability at the Tokyo Games in an attempt to demonstrate how countries such as Japan — a top carbon emitter — can work towards a greener future. Their initiatives include furnishing the Olympic Village with recyclable cardboard beds, using electricity from renewable sources and minimizing waste at competitions. But like all big global events, Tokyo 2020 will leave an inevitable imprint on the planet. Here are some key points to know about its environmental impact:

2.73 million tons of CO2

The most recent official estimate of the Tokyo Games' carbon footprint — more than some countries such as Montenegro emit in a year. It includes 1.5 million tons of CO2 generated through the construction or renovation of venues and other infrastructure.

But it does not account for a ban on overseas spectators to limit coronavirus infection risks. When their air travel and accommodation emissions are excluded, the total footprint should come down by around 340,000 tons of CO2, organizers say. They will publish a final evaluation after the Games are over.

Carbon offsetting

The figure is already lower than that of the Rio and London Olympics, and Paris has set an even more ambitious target of 1.5 million tons as host of the 2024 Games. Tokyo 2020 also says it plans to "offset" its footprint by purchasing carbon credits, which finance local projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to around 4.38 million tons of CO2. But such programs are controversial. Activists accuse big business of paying for a quick fix rather than seeking to overhaul their operations, and some offset projects have failed to deliver.

'Renewable' electricity

Games organizers have set a target of using 100 percent renewable electricity at Olympic sites during the event. But only 30 to 35 percent of this power will come directly from green sources, mainly solar energy and bio-fuel, a Tokyo 2020 spokesman told AFP. "For venues that cannot procure renewable electricity through power companies, we will convert their non-renewable electricity into renewable electricity using green power certificates," the organizers say.

These credits certify that the same amount of clean energy has been injected into the country's power grid, or that an equivalent amount has been saved through renovating homes in Tokyo to make them more energy efficient.

Reusing and recycling

Tokyo 2020 says it is "continuing to work to ensure that 99 percent of goods procured for the Games are reused or recycled", renting items where possible and selling on those that were purchased new. The scope of this goal is limited, however, as it chiefly refers to furniture for the Olympic Village as well as office and IT equipment for Games operations. Some fixtures have been specifically designed to be recycled, such as the beds in the Olympic village, which are made from reinforced cardboard. Medals are made from recycled consumer electronics, and podiums from old plastic.

Waste management

With spectators barred from nearly all events at the Games — the first ever to be held almost entirely behind closed doors — the mountains of consumer waste usually left behind by big crowds may be less of a concern. Organizers have set a target of reusing or recycling 65 percent of waste generated during the event. There will be separate bins at venues and the Olympic Village for plastic bottles, cans, paper, food waste, with anything not sorted properly separated at a later stage. Non-recyclable waste will be converted into energy by being burnt, organizers say, while paper has been chosen over single-use plastic where possible, such as at canteens. —AFP

Demonstrators gather at vandalized mural over England football racism

WEST DIDSBURY: Anti-racism demonstrators gathered on Tuesday at a mural of striker Marcus Rashford after it was vandalized amid a deluge of abuse against England players. Throughout the day, hundreds gathered at the mural to the England player in the Withington area of Manchester which had been defaced with racist abuse as Rashford and his black teammates Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were targeted online over the side's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy on Sunday.

Against a backdrop of heartwarming messages and England flags placed on the mural in Rashford's hometown Kate Caine, 42, said she was "disgusted at the behavior of the people after Sunday night and the racist comments".

"I'm a Mancunian born and bred and proud to be a Mancunian and I'm so proud of what Marcus Rashford has done for this country," she added. Before he was attacked by trolls after missing a penalty in the shoot-out defeat by Italy, Rashford, 23, had become a hero to many inside and outside football by successfully lobbying British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to provide free school meals for under-privileged children during the coronavirus pandemic.

Ohmar, 17, said he had come down to the mural to put up some notes and show his support. "A player like him doesn't deserve anything like this. No player does, because he's done a lot to support his country during the pandemic, giving meals to the unfortunate kids," he said.

Johnson's government was forced to deny charges of hypocrisy over racism in football as he readied to meet social media executives following a deluge of abuse against England players. In an emotional statement, Rashford said he will "never apologise for who I am", after he was one of three black players targeted by racists online over the weekend's loss to the Azzurri.

The striker said he had been "on the verge of

tears" when he saw the mural was covered in messages of support. Rashford's England team-mate Tyrone Mings criticized Home Secretary Priti Patel, saying she had "stoked the fire" by defending fans who booed players taking the knee.

Patel had previously said taking the knee was "gesture politics" and Johnson, who has enthusiastically waged verbal war on so-called woke politics, had also equivocated for days over the issue. But his spokesman insisted the prime minister had all along wanted fans to back the team, amid doubts over whether Downing Street can now go through with a plan to welcome the players to a post-tournament reception.

At a cabinet meeting, Johnson told his ministers "the abuse was utterly disgraceful and has emerged from the dark spaces of the internet", according to the spokesman. He said that in his meeting later Tuesday with representatives of social media companies, the prime minister will "reiterate the urgent need for action, ahead of tougher laws coming into force" in Britain.

The allegation of hypocrisy levelled against the government by Mings and even some Conservative MPs is particularly dangerous for Johnson, as the England team basks in widespread sympathy after its agonizing loss. "I'm Marcus Rashford, 23-year-old black man from Withington and Wythenshawe, South Manchester. If I have nothing else I have that," the Manchester United forward wrote on Twitter.

"I can take critique of my performance all day long, my penalty was not good enough, it should have gone in but I will never apologise for who I am and where I came from," Rashford added.

Taking the knee

Premier League clubs have taken the knee since last year following the murder of George



MANCHESTER: Anti-racism protestors demonstrate by a mural of England forward Marcus Rashford after it was defaced on Tuesday in Manchester, northwest England. — AFP

Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in the United States. Patel had said on Monday the racial abuse of the three players was "disgusting", but Mings issued a stinging response.

"You don't get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labelling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics' and then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against, happens," he tweeted.

England manager Gareth Southgate said the

online abuse was "unforgivable", and captain Harry Kane also lashed out at the trolls. "They deserve support and backing, not the vile racist abuse they've had," he said. "If you abuse anyone on social media you're not an England fan and we don't want you."

The racist attacks have been strongly condemned also by the English Football Association. Its president, Prince William, said he was "sickened" by the abuse. — AFP






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