



NOTICE

Eid Mubarak to all our readers!

Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition from July 20-23. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.net and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @KuwaitTimes

4 Few customers at livestock market before Eid Al-Adha



13 French shocker 'Titane' wins Palme d'Or as Lee slips up



15 Nihonmatsu greets Kuwait's Olympians in Kuwaiti style



Powered by

VOLVO

OPEC+ agrees on modest output boost from August

Kuwait awarded higher production baseline as part of deal

Amir greets people of Kuwait on Eid



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is received by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after he returned home on Saturday after a private visit abroad. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan yesterday relayed Eid Al-Adha greetings from HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Kuwait's citizens and residents, wishing they continue to live in amity, security and safety.

The Amiri Diwan, in turn, addressed Eid greetings to HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince and HH the Prime Minister. HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf returned home on Saturday after a private visit abroad. — KUNA

VIENNA: The world's leading oil producers agreed yesterday to continue to modestly boost output from August, after the United Arab Emirates blocked a deal earlier this month. An OPEC+ meeting agreed to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to help fuel a global economic recovery as the pandemic eases, the Vienna-based group said in a press statement.

The grouping will "assess market developments" in December, it said. The deal also extends a deadline on capping output from April 2022 to the end of 2022. Earlier in July, negotiations of OPEC+ members on easing production cuts became deadlocked due to a row between the world's largest oil exporter Saudi Arabia and neighboring United Arab Emirates.

Since May, the 23-member grouping, which also includes Russia, had raised oil output bit by bit, after slashing it more than a year ago when the coronavirus pandemic crushed demand. The aim was to return to pre-pandemic production levels, with the alliance still pumping 5.8 million bpd less than it was before the pandemic.

In a rare challenge to OPEC leader Saudi Arabia, the UAE rejected the proposed deal earlier this month as "unjust", leading to a stalemate. But in a compromise, yesterday's discussions agreed to adjust output quotas next May for the UAE, Iraq, Kuwait, Russia and Saudi Arabia itself, meaning their actual cuts will be less. Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman, who chairs the OPEC group, declined to say how the quotas were set and beneficiaries chosen, saying it had been part of "consensus building".

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak told public television channel Russia 24 that the meeting confirmed "our desire to be constructive and to find a consensus". "The pandemic is not yet overcome, but we are seeing that thanks to vaccination all over the world, demand for our production is recovering as is the use of cars and air planes," he said. "It is therefore very important for us to fulfil our responsibilities and allow a recovery of the world economy."

Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Higher Education Mohammad Al-Faris, in a statement received by KUNA after heading Kuwait's delegation online, noted Kuwait's achievement in agreeing to raise the country's future baseline production to 150,000 barrels per day, as part of extending the agreement, starting from May 2022.

He expressed his joy over the cooperation and understanding between all OPEC+ members for the benefit of the oil markets, hailing the efforts of Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz and his Russian counterpart Novak to reach the agreement. The situation is currently optimistic in oil markets, boosted by the growing numbers of coronavirus vaccinations and resumption of tourism in many countries, which created economic recovery and increased demand for oil, said Faris.

Observers had expected a deal. "A flurry of talks were held on Saturday to try and close the gap," tweeted Herman Wang, an editor of S&P Global Platts, which specializes in coverage of the energy industry.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Iran quake felt in Kuwait

KUWAIT: A 5.4-magnitude earthquake, occurring in the southwest of Iran, was felt in Kuwait, Kuwait National Seismic Network (KNSN) said yesterday. Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi, an official at KNSN, said the quake happened at 5:34 pm local time in Kuwait at a depth of 10 kilometers. The quake's epicenter was 310 kilometers away from Kuwait City, he added. KNSN is an entity affiliated with the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). — KUNA

Egyptian activist freed

CAIRO: Egyptian activist and journalist Esraa Abdel-Fattah, one of the symbols of the 2011 revolution, has been freed after nearly 22 months in pre-trial detention, lawyer Khaled Ali said yesterday. Abdel-Fattah, 43, was arrested in Oct 2019 on charges of "spreading false news" and "collaborating with a terrorist group". Her detention sparked international condemnation, with the US calling it "scandalous". — AFP

Sudan inflation soars above 400%

KHARTOUM: Inflation in Sudan has jumped to more than 400 percent, state media reported yesterday amid popular discontent over rising prices after a series of IMF-backed economic reforms. "The annual inflation reached 412.75 percent in June, compared with 378.79 percent in May," the official news agency SUNA reported, quoting a government statement. — AFP

Afghanistan recalls Pak envoy

KABUL: Afghanistan yesterday said it was recalling its ambassador to Islamabad and other senior diplomats over "security threats" after the top envoy's daughter was briefly kidnapped in the Pakistani capital. While few details have been released about the incident, Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said Silsila Alikhil was abducted for several hours on Friday by unknown individuals and "severely tortured". — AFP (See Page 7)

Saudi stages second hajj of COVID era

MAKKAH: Hajj pilgrims streamed out of the holy city of Makkah and into the Mina valley yesterday, launching the rituals of the great pilgrimage which Saudi Arabia is holding in a scaled-down form for a second year. Only 60,000 fully vaccinated citizens and residents of the kingdom are allowed to take part, far from the

vast crowds that descend on Makkah in normal times when the ritual draws some 2.5 million pilgrims.

Since Saturday, groups of pilgrims have been performing the "tawaf" at Makkah's Grand Mosque, circling the Kaaba, a large cubic structure draped in golden-embroidered black cloth towards which Muslims around the world pray. After that, they have been making their way to Mina, where they will spend the night. Mina sits in a narrow valley surrounded by rocky mountains, some five kilometers from the Grand Mosque, and is transformed each year into a vast encampment for pilgrims.

Continued on Page 2



MINA: Pilgrims rest at their camp in Mina near the holy city of Makkah yesterday. — AFP

Algeria, Morocco intensify crackdown on journalists

TUNIS: Authorities in both Morocco and Algeria have detained and put on trial several journalists on charges ranging from harming national interests to

sexual assault, and their courts have imposed stiff sentences. These measures have sparked international condemnation while critics at home say the trials are politically motivated. Authorities, however, insist the judiciary is independent.

Today, a Moroccan court is due to deliver a verdict in the trial of rights activist Omar Radi who has been in detention for almost a year on charges of espionage and rape, which he denies. The case, in a closed-doors trial criticized by human rights watchdogs, comes on the heels of a July 10 five-year jail

sentence against Moroccan journalist Soulemane Raissouni for indecent assault.

In Algeria, which has been rocked by intermittent pro-democracy protests since 2019, press freedoms are also being flouted, rights groups say. Prominent Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni was sentenced to two years in jail in September for "inciting an unarmed gathering" and "endangering national unity". "In the Algeria of 2021, a word can land you in prison, you have to be careful with anything you say

Continued on Page 2

Tensions over Aqsa incursions by Zionists

JERUSALEM: Zionist police clashed with Muslim protestors yesterday at a flashpoint Jerusalem Old City shrine as Jews were headed there to mark a religious holiday, police said. The tensions and the Jewish pilgrimage to the highly sensitive Al-Aqsa mosque compound were condemned by the Palestinians.

The Zionist entity's rightwing nationalist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stood by the state's decision to allow Jews to visit the site. The EU delegation to the Palestinian territories in

a tweet said it was "concerned over ongoing tensions" and urged that there be no "acts of incitement". It also called for respect for the site's status quo and urged Zionist, religious and community leaders to urgently "calm down this explosive situation".

The incident took place on the Jewish festival of Tisha B'av, marking the day of the year thousands of years ago when, according to tradition, both Jewish temples located on the Temple Mount were destroyed. The holy site lies in east Jerusalem, which the Zionist entity occupied and annexed in 1967, but is administered by the Muslim Waqf organization.

The Waqf condemned the "violations and attacks" carried out by "Jewish fanatic groups, with the

Continued on Page 2



JERUSALEM: Members of the Zionist security forces stand guard as a group of Orthodox Jews enters the Al-Aqsa mosque compound yesterday. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince congratulates Amir on return to Kuwait

Sheikh Nawaf receives phone call from Sultan of Oman

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received a letter from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of his return to Kuwait. In the letter, His Highness the Crown Prince congratulated His Highness the Amir on his safe return after the successful medical checkups abroad. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked His Highness the Crown Prince for his sincere sentiments.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had returned home on Saturday after a private visit abroad. Upon arrival, His Highness the Amir was received by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, senior Sheikhs, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-

Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and senior state officials.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday a phone call from Sultan of Oman Haitham Bin Tareq. Oman's Sultan congratulated His Highness the Amir on the advent of Eid Al-Adha, expressing his best wishes to the people of both nations on this Islamic occasion praying to Allah Almighty to bestow His Highness the Amir with everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to his country. His Highness the Amir expressed the deepest thanks for Sultan Haitham for his sincere feelings that reflected the deep-rooted historical bilateral ties between both countries, wishing Sultan Haitham everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to Oman and its people under the wise leadership of its Sultan. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is greeted upon his arrival back home. — Amiri Diwan photo

Algeria, Morocco intensify...

Continued from Page 1

or write," said Drareni, freed in February under a presidential pardon for detainees of the Hirak protest movement.

The head of media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Christophe Deloire, is a vocal critic of the treatment of journalists in both Algeria and Morocco. RSF has ranked Algeria 146 out of 180 countries and territories in its 2021 World Press Freedom Index, while Morocco was at 136. "In Algeria... and Morocco... the judicial system is being used to help silence journalists," the report said.

Human Rights Watch's acting executive director for the Middle East and North Africa, Eric Goldstein, sounded the alarm back in Aug 2020 ahead of the verdict against Drareni. "Morocco and Algeria are neighbors and rivals... vying for diplomatic supremacy in the Maghreb region, sparring over Western Sahara, and insulting each other's governments daily via state-influenced media," he said in a statement.

"Algerian and Moroccan authorities might compete in many domains, but when it comes to disliking bold journalism and commentary, they agree," he added. "Morocco's modus operandi is to file a host of specific criminal charges, while the Algerian authorities prefer vaguely defined penal code offences," Goldstein said.

The sentence against Drareni, a symbol of the struggle for press freedoms who worked for French-language TV 5 and media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), outraged fellow journalists. Drareni was arrested in Algiers in March 2020 while covering the pro-democracy Hirak movement, which swept former strongman Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power in 2019. The protests continued after Bouteflika's ouster, with demonstrators demanding a sweeping overhaul of a ruling system in place since Algeria's 1962 independence from France.

Another emblematic figure of the crackdown in Algeria is Rabah Kareche, who was sentenced to one year in prison in April for spreading false infor-

mation "harmful to public security". The detention of Kareche, a correspondent for French-language newspaper Liberte in Tamanrasset in Algeria's far south, came after he published an article on a Tuareg protest movement in the area.

Rights groups said yesterday an Algerian court sentenced a journalist to two years in jail and suspended him from his state radio station job because of online posts. Sayed was not present for the verdict on Saturday, and the court in the northwestern city of Tabessa also issued an arrest warrant for him, the CNLD prisoners' support committee said. "The journalist Adel Sayed was sentenced in absentia to two years in jail without parole... and took him off work at the radio station in Tabessa where he worked for 26 years," CNLD said on Facebook.

Sayed reacted quickly with an ironic post on Facebook in which he said he would surrender to the authorities and was "honored to be imprisoned". He also "thanked" President Abdelmadjid Tebboune for making his sentence possible. "I had never imagined such glory in the new Algeria: Two years in prison, an arrest warrant and a sacking after working at the radio station for 26 years," Sayed wrote.

The five-year prison sentence handed to Raissouni sparked rare criticism last Monday of Morocco by its influential ally the United States. The State Department said it was "disappointed" by the ruling against Raissouni. "We believe the judicial process that led to this verdict contradicts the Moroccan system's fundamental promise of fair trials for individuals accused of crimes and is inconsistent with the promise of the 2011 constitution and His Majesty King Mohammed VI's reform agenda," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Price said Washington was also raising with Rabat other journalists' cases. RSF has said Raissouni's trial was "tainted by irregularities" and called for the release of the 49-year-old, who staged a hunger strike of more than 90 days. Morocco's prosecution insisted, however, that Raissouni had been "prosecuted for crimes that have nothing to do with his journalistic work".

Algeria and Morocco have also been tightening the screws on foreign correspondents, making it difficult for them to obtain accreditation. "This discredits these countries and threatens to undermine their image, even some diplomatic ties," said RSF's Deloire. — AFP

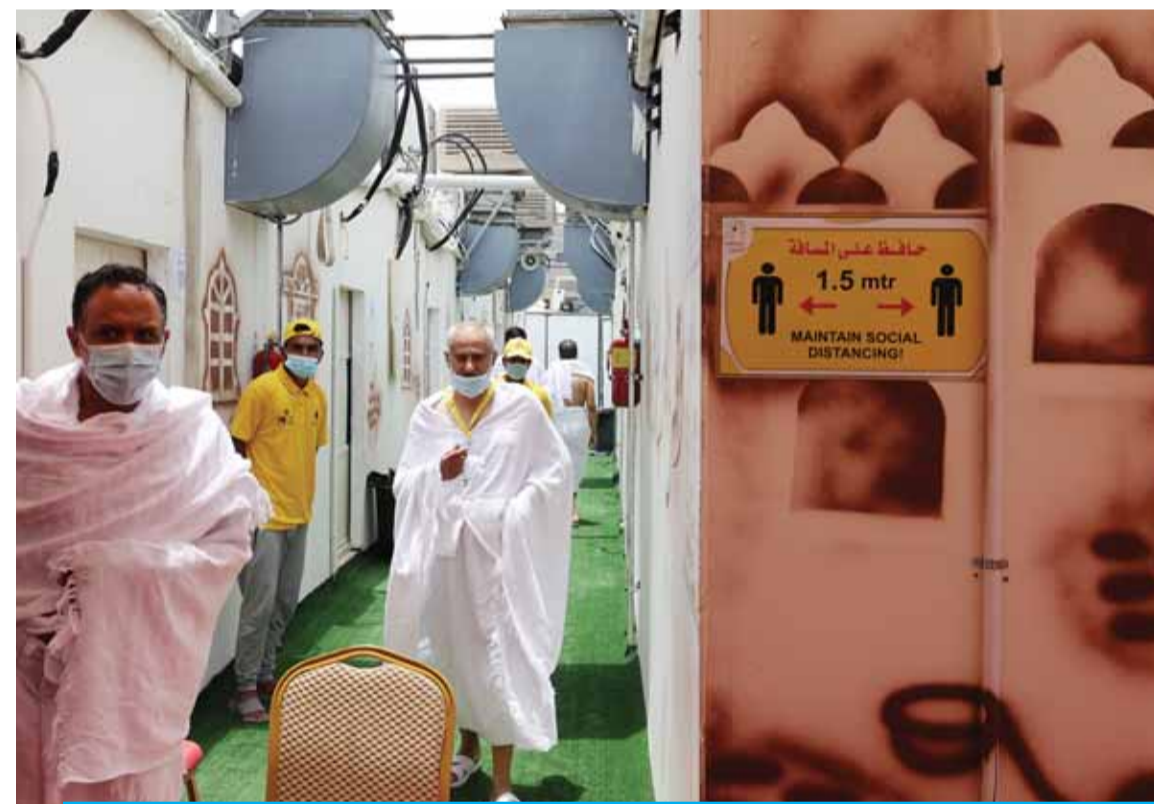
Tensions over Aqsa incursions...

Continued from Page 1

support and political cover of the (Zionist) government," it said in a statement carried by official Palestinian website Wafa, claiming the Zionist entity was "aiming for a religious war". And the Palestinian Authority accused the Zionist entity of "tampering with the security and stability of the region" by

enabling the "incursions" of worshippers.

Newly sworn-in premier Bennett, who is from the Zionist entity's religious right but heads a coalition including leftist and Islamist parties, said he had "instructed that the organized and safe visits by Jews to the Temple Mount continue, while maintaining order at the site". In a second statement following the Waqf and PA condemnations, Bennett stressed that "freedom of worship on the Temple Mount will be fully preserved for Muslims as well", pointing to the upcoming festival of Eid al-Adha. Two years ago, when the Jewish and Muslim holidays coincided, violence at the site left dozens of Palestinians wounded and led to seven arrests. — AFP



MINA: Pilgrims walk in an alley at their camp in Mina near the holy city of Makkah yesterday. — AFP

Saudi stages second hajj...

Continued from Page 1

Pilgrims were brought there yesterday on buses which were only half-filled to respect social distancing rules, and authorities provided 3,000 electric cars to transport the elderly and those with limited mobility. "We have applied social distancing inside the camps, where there are four pilgrims in each room. We have put barriers between each bed to apply social distancing," tour operator Hadi Fouad told AFP. "For the common areas at the camp, like the prayer area and the cafeteria, we have assigned a security company whose guards are spread throughout the camp to make sure there is no crowding."

In the high point of the hajj, worshippers will today climb Mount Arafat. Also known as the "Mount of Mercy", it is the site where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) delivered his final sermon. Worshippers will undertake hours of prayers and Quranic recitals there. After descending the following day, they will gather pebbles and perform the symbolic "stoning of the devil".

The hajj, usually one of the world's largest annual religious gatherings, is one of the five pillars of Islam and must be undertaken by all Muslims with the means at least once in their lives. This year's pilgrimage is larger than the pared-down version staged in 2020 but is drastically smaller than in normal times, creating resentment among Muslims abroad who are barred once again. Participants were chosen from more than 558,000 applicants through an online vetting system, with the event confined to fully vaccinated adults aged 18-65 with

no chronic illnesses.

"I thank God that we received approval to come, even though we did not expect it because of the small number of pilgrims," said Abdulaziz bin Mahmoud, an 18-year-old Saudi. Saddaf Ghafour, a 40-year-old Pakistani woman travelling with her friend, was among the women making the pilgrimage without a male "guardian", which was a requirement until recently. "It is a privilege to perform hajj among a very limited number of pilgrims," she said.

Saudi Arabia has so far recorded more than 507,000 coronavirus infections, including over 8,000 deaths. Some 20 million vaccine doses have been administered in the country of over 34 million people. The hajj, which typically packs large crowds into congested religious sites, is potentially a super-spreader event for the virus.

But the hajj ministry has said it is working on the "highest levels of health precautions" in light of the pandemic and the emergence of new variants. Pilgrims are being divided into groups of just 20 "to restrict any exposure to only those 20, limiting the spread of infection", ministry undersecretary Mohammad Al-Bijawi said. Aside from strict social distancing measures, authorities have introduced a "smart hajj card" to allow contact-free access to camps, hotels and the buses to ferry pilgrims around religious sites.

The hajj went ahead last year on the smallest scale in modern history. Authorities initially said that only 1,000 pilgrims would be allowed, although local media said up to 10,000 eventually took part. "Public health teams are monitoring the health status of pilgrims around the clock upon their arrival in Makkah," said Sari Asiri, director of the hajj and umrah department at the health ministry, of this year's precautions. Anyone found to be infected would be taken to isolation facilities, he added. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Faris takes part in the OPEC+ meeting yesterday. — KUNA

OPEC+ agrees on modest output...

Continued from Page 1

Oil prices - which had already been sliding owing to concerns about the global economy - plummeted in April 2020 as coronavirus spread around the world and battered global consumption, transport and supply chains.

OPEC+ last year decided to withdraw 9.7 million bpd from the market and to gradually restore sup-

plies by the end of April 2022. Benchmark oil prices rebounded as a result and have reached two-and-a-half-year highs. The main international oil contracts have been trading around \$75 per barrel.

Economic rivalry was at the heart of the feud between OPEC members as the Gulf states try to cash in on their vast oil reserves as they face the beginning of the end of the oil era. Disagreements between Saudi Arabia and UAE are usually resolved behind palace walls and rarely spill into the open. Ministers from OPEC+ countries have gathered frequently since the spread of the new coronavirus to assess the market with the next meeting scheduled for Sept 1, according to yesterday's statement. — KUNA

Local

No COVID-19 vaccine without appointment, health ministry says

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health urged people in Kuwait yesterday to make sure that they arrive to take their COVID-19 vaccine only after they receive a text message detailing the time and place of their vaccination. The ministry statement came in response to rumors which circulated on social media yesterday and claimed that people could get vaccinated without a prior appointment at certain vaccination centers yesterday.

Meanwhile, Kuwait began yesterday offering vaccines to children aged 12-15 ahead of the start of the school year in September. In the meantime, the ministry announced that COVID-19 vaccination centers will remain open during the Eid Al-Adha holiday from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm. Furthermore, it noted that around 160,000 residents were vaccinated against COVID-19 in field vaccination campaigns launched around Kuwait recently.

Kuwait had reported 1,226 new cases and 18 deaths on Saturday, which put total infections and deaths at 384,573 and 2,211 respectively. Total active cases reached 16,855 as of Saturday, while 330 patients were receiving treatment in intensive care units, ministry spokesperson Dr Abdallah Al-Sanad said. Total recoveries stood at 365,507 as of Saturday when 1,515 new recoveries were announced.



KUWAIT: People queue up for COVID-19 vaccine doses at a vaccination center in Kuwait yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Indian Doctors Forum releases health guide on COVID-19

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Indian Doctors Forum, Kuwait released its annual 'Health Guide 2021' titled 'COVID-19 Explained' at an event organized by the Indian Embassy, Kuwait on Saturday. Indian Ambassador Sibi George released the health guide. The launch event was also attended by Ministry of Health Assistant Undersecretary Mohammad Al-Kashti, Kuwait Medical Association President Dr Ahmad Thuwaini Al-Eneizi; KIMS Secretary General Dr Fawaz Al-Refae and Indian Doctors' Forum President Dr Amir Ahmed, in addition to several senior doctors and Indian community representatives.

"It is a rich repository of invaluable information on all that we need to know about COVID-19 and all the associated nuances explained lucidly by our medical experts in plain, simple language. You would also be happy to note that the health guide is being made available free of cost," the ambassador said while releasing the guide.

George said the embassy was very delighted to partner again with Indian Doctors Forum and be part of an initiative that will be highly useful for everyone. Congratulating the Indian Doctors Forum team, he said, "the entire editorial team who have



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George, Mohammad Al-Kashti, Dr Ahmad Thuwaini Al-Eneizi, Dr Fawaz Al-Refae, Dr Amir Ahmed and senior doctors during the launch of the 'Indian Doctors Forum Health Guide 2021' at the Indian Embassy on Saturday.

worked hard to compile this health guide." He said the Indian Doctors Forum team is always in the forefront of the efforts of the embassy in ensuring the welfare of the Indian community in Kuwait.

Talking about Kuwait's invaluable support to India when the country faced a difficult situation during the second wave of the pandemic with a severe shortage of medical oxygen, the ambassador said Kuwait was one of the major suppliers of medical assistance to India. "On behalf of the India government and the 1.3 billion people of the country, I extend my sincere gratitude to the leadership,

government and people of the friendly State of Kuwait for all the kind assistance. My special thanks to all the concerned authorities who worked tirelessly, even during the holy month of Ramadan and the day of Eid Al-Fitr, to ensure continuous flow of the much-needed medical oxygen from Kuwait to India through successful air-sea bridge operations," he said.

"The Indian embassy will organize a virtual event on July 29 to express gratitude to all those who helped India overcome the second wave," he stated.

Qurain warehouse fire under control



KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze that gutted a warehouse in Qurain yesterday morning. Wood and flammable liquids were kept in the warehouse located in the area's markets zone, Kuwait Fire Force said,

noting that firemen from three different fire stations dealt with the blaze. No injuries were reported in the incident as an investigation was opened. KFF added.

In my view

Two Thousand Dinars: A Lamentable Legacy

By Nejouad Al-Yagout

First, we heard that residents above the age of 60 would not be allowed to renew their residencies if they did not hold a college degree. Then, after outrage on social media (by locals, to be sure, since any outrage by a resident would lead to arrest or deportation), there was talk that the rule may not be implemented; instead, we heard that those who came up with the decree would, at least, reconsider the age bracket, perhaps hiking it up to residents over 70 years of age (which in and of itself is lamentable).

Then, it was back again to 60 a few months ago, but with a proposal to fine residents annually (that is when talk of KD 2,000 arose). This latter proposal brewed for a while until it was announced only recently - in the midst of a pandemic, in the throes of increased unemployment and suicides and drug taking and crimes, and in the whirlwind of murders and corruption - that the Public Authority of Manpower would "allow" residents above the age of 60 who do not hold university degrees to renew their residency provided they pay an annual fee of KD 2,000; as though by making it look like a favor, a permission granted, so to speak, the harsh brutality of the cost of remaining in Kuwait would seem less pronounced, brushed under the rug. Though already considered official by all of us who read about it in the news, it appears that the "decision" needs a couple more weeks, perhaps, to be considered bureaucratically official, unless a person with strings will use his position of power to take a stand against it. The likelihood of such a selfless act transpiring is well, let's just say, unlikely. Highly unlikely.

Although many residents above 60 who have graduated from college may have breathed a collective, perhaps even audible, sigh of relief, many others will be in tears, for they have parents and siblings aged 60 and above who live with or near them and who do not hold college degrees, and they themselves, holders of college degrees, will not be able to afford such a fee to keep the family together. And what about us locals? We cannot ignore the two-thousand-dinar elephant in the room. Many of us who work in the public or private sector, with or without university degrees, or even with Master's degrees and PhDs, would not ourselves be able (or willing) to pay such a lofty fee. Two. Thousand. Dinars. Imagine. And if we think this will not affect us, we are wrong. "They" are us! They, who we consider expatriates and foreigners and residents are us. We are them. We are one in this society. All of us. Each one of us, a thread of the same fabric, interwoven. What hurts us hurts them and vice versa. Let this register for all of us. Again and again and again.

There are residents in their sixties who were born here and have lived here their entire lives; residents who do not want to go "home" because their "home" is here, in Kuwait, where they belong, with us. Kuwait is the land in which they want to be buried, in which their parents were buried. After all their years of service to our country, we are now showing them the door under the pretext of making rules we know people cannot implement, all so that residents can leave of their own accord. But they will not leave of their own accord. Ever. They will leave because neither they nor their university-degree-holding families were able to pay such an outrageous sum; they will leave because they are tired of living in a country that does not want them here. So many have left already; others are waiting for the right moment to leave. Others are waiting anxiously to see whether things will get better (or get worse).

We cannot stay silent. We cannot. And the last thing residents need is sympathy; if we are to feel sorry for anyone, we should feel sorry for ourselves for who we have become. Instead of patronizing them with our sympathy, residents should be applauded for their resilience, their bravery, and their contribution. They should be rewarded; they should be given more benefits as time elapses, not less. We have a lot to learn from them. Even while many are treated as second-class members of the community, they stay, they work, and they support their families. This rhetoric of residents profiting from us is immature and arrogant; we must remember they are doing us a favor, a huge one, by being here as well. We are in this together; and in a healthy community, that is how things work; we give and we take; we take and we give.

Some residents may still find a way to stay here, in their home. But with this new "fine," there is no way they can save money or help their families. And how can we sleep at night knowing we are creating obstacles for residents to send money back home? How can we sleep at night knowing that there is no money to pay for a parent's kidney transplant or a relative's tumor removal or a child's education because the money is being paid to an oil-rich country instead? What principles are we building our foundation on? These are certainly not our principles. And as long as we hold on to these pseudo-principles, we will continue to create laws which protect us and ostracize others, laws which are far, far away from the values of our heritage, founded on hospitality and inclusivity. Aren't we tired of this us vs them attitude? Do we really want a Kuwait for Kuwaitis? Is this our legacy? Can't we remember who we are?

It's done. All we can do now is lament and ensure we resurrect a new Kuwait based on the ideals of our welcoming forefathers who never flinched at demographics. All we can do now is remember that what goes around comes around. This is a law. It is not a doomsday prophecy, but a warning, an invitation to recalibrate, a chance, an opportunity, to restore the karmic balance. This is our chance to wake up and ask ourselves: Is this our legacy? And we should ask ourselves this question every night. That way, we can rectify the situation before karma knocks on our door. Loudly and fiercely.

Two thousand dinars. Let's remember that number. For it may come back to haunt those of us who stayed silent, those of us who spoke out for justice only when it came to our rights and, often, at the expense of others.

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Fewer customers than usual at livestock market before Eid



KUWAIT: A vendor waits for customers at a sheep market in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh yesterday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Pakistan Ambassador sends Eid greetings

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider released the following statement on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha:

"On the auspicious occasion of Eid Al-Adha, I extend warm greetings to entire Kuwaiti leadership, government and the brotherly people of the State of Kuwait. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Muslims all over the world on Eid Al-Adha. I extend my warm greetings to all my fellow countrymen residing in Kuwait and appreciate their role in the development of Kuwait.

"We celebrate this special occasion as "Sunat-e-Ibrahimi" in remembrance of the obedience of Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) and the reverence of Hazrat Ismael (AS), who set an extraordinary example of sacrifice and selflessness. Allah Almighty tested His chosen servants by putting them to various challenges. These great personalities have been fully successful in the tests, giving us a lesson that the key to success is to be steadfast in the face of trials and difficulties and to be ever ready to make any sacrifice.

"This happy occasion will bring a lot of happiness and accomplishments in our lives. We must not forget the deserving people while celebrating the joyful moments. Currently, the world is faced with serious challenge of COVID-19 pandemic and human beings all over the world are suffering due to this pandemic. United, we can defeat this challenge with resolve and commitment.

"On this special occasion we reaffirm our resolve to abide by our religious and national values of peace, prosperity, compassion, commitment to the welfare of society, spirit of sacrifice and universal brotherhood. By the virtue of this blessed day, we pray to Allah Almighty that peace and harmony prevails in our region as well as at global level. May Allah guide us to the peace and prosperity."



Ambassador of
Pakistan to Kuwait
Syed Sajjad Haider

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: For the second year, Muslims around the world will celebrate Eid Al-Adha amid the coronavirus pandemic. The Feast of the Sacrifice will again be a low-key event for many, as the world struggles to contain the virus. "In normal circumstances, we would've had many customers by now. But customers are few because of the pandemic; last year it was the same," Sunu, a Bangladeshi livestock vendor, told Kuwait Times.

Kuwait Times visited the livestock market yesterday to observe preparations and inquire whether prices have been affected by the pandemic. "Prices are the same as last year, but we have more choice this time," said Sunu, who has been working at the livestock market for the past seven years. The livestock market is located in Rai near the Friday Market.

"Sheep from Romania are cheaper because they are smaller compared to Kuwaiti, Iranian and Jordanian breeds," he said. Jordanian sheep have a price tag of KD 120, Kuwaiti sheep are sold for KD 150 to KD 200, while Romanian sheep are available for KD 60 only. The price of Australian sheep is between KD 60 and KD 80, depending on the size, and there are sheep from Syria and Saudi Arabia as well.

The vendor said livestock prices normally go up at the time of Eid. "Today, barely a few people came to purchase the sheep. Probably tomorrow we will have a bigger crowd of customers. Prices usually go up by KD 5 to KD 15 per head when demand is high," Sunu said.

Despite the pandemic, there haven't been any shortage of stocks. "We have enough stocks. There are very few activities, no company celebrations and no parties, so we mostly rely on individual customers only," he said. Children's entertainment venues are still closed, while all summer activities and camps have been banned.



Kuwait Times
ESTABLISHED 1961
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED



- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net



KUWAIT: Camels at the livestock market as people visit to buy sacrificial animal ahead of the Eid Al-Adha in Kuwait on Saturday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Police fire rubber bullets at protesters denouncing Thai PM

Tigray war spills into neighboring Oromia, Afar regions

Page 6

Page 7



SCHULD: German Chancellor Angela Merkel (2ndR) and Rhineland-Palatinate State Premier Malu Dreyer (R) talk to residents during their visit in the flood-ravaged village of Schuld near Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, Rhineland-Palatinate state, western Germany, yesterday. —AFP

Europe flood death toll tops 180

Merkel sees 'surreal' wreckage, Belgium death toll jumps to 27

BERLIN: Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday that she was horrified by the "surreal" devastation in the flood-ravaged region of Germany, as the toll in western Europe reached at least 184 people dead with dozens still missing. Wearing hiking boots and offering pandemic-safe fist bumps to rescue workers, the veteran leader walked through the village of Schuld in Rhineland-Palatinate state, one of the two hardest-hit regions in western Germany.

Merkel, who is retiring from politics after September's elections, listened to the accounts of residents where the swollen Ahr river swept away houses and left debris piled high in the streets. "It is a surreal, eerie situation," a visibly shaken Merkel told reporters, as she pledged quick aid to rebuild. "It is shocking — I can almost say that the German language doesn't have words for the destruction that's been wreaked."

At least 157 people have died since Wednesday in Germany's worst flooding in living memory, police said. In Rhineland-Palatinate state alone, authorities reported 110 dead and 670 injured. At least 27 people have lost their lives in neighbouring Belgium. Rescue crews were sifting through rubble to find victims and survivors, often

in dangerous conditions. Police deployed speedboats and divers to recover bodies swept away in the torrents.

Historic heavy rainfall also battered Switzerland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. As the waters began to recede in Rhineland-Palatinate and neighbouring North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), concern shifted south to Germany's Upper Bavaria region, where incessant rains inundated basements and led rivers and creeks late Saturday to burst their banks.

One person died in Berchtesgaden Land, a spokeswoman for the Bavarian district told AFP. In the eastern state of Saxony, authorities reported a "significant risk situation" in several villages. In Austria, emergency workers in the Salzburg and Tyrol regions were on high alert for flooding. The scenic town centre of Hallein was under water. Pope Francis expressed his "nearness" to the people of the stricken regions. "May the Lord welcome the deceased and comfort their loved ones, may he sustain the efforts of everyone who are helping those who have suffered serious damage," he said yesterday.

'Sorry' for laughing

German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz pledged more

than 300 million euros (\$354 million) in emergency aid for people who lost homes and businesses, with the cabinet to approve a much larger reconstruction package on Wednesday. The disaster has increasingly taken on political overtones in Germany, which heads to the polls on September 26 for a general election that will mark the end of Merkel's 16 years in power. With experts saying climate change is making extreme weather events more likely, candidates vying to succeed her have called for more climate action.

Armin Laschet, the premier of hard-hit North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) state and frontrunner in the race, said efforts to tackle global warming should be "speeded up". But Laschet scored an own goal Saturday when he was filmed laughing in the devastated town of Erftstadt in NRW, where a landslide was triggered by the floods. In the footage, Laschet could be seen chattering and joking in the background as President Frank-Walter Steinmeier gave a statement expressing his sympathies to grieving families. "Laschet laughs while the country cries," wrote the top-selling Bild daily. Laschet later apologised on Twitter for the "inappropriate" moment.

Divers, armoured vehicles

The scale of the flood impact was gradually becoming clear in Germany, with damaged buildings being assessed, some of which will have to be demolished, and efforts under way to restore gas, electricity and telephone services.

In some areas, soldiers used armoured vehicles to clear the debris clogging streets. Local authorities in NRW and Rhineland-Palatinate said dozens of people remain unaccounted for across both states. They have stressed, however, that disruption to communication networks made a precise assessment difficult, and the real number of missing could be lower. "I've lived here my whole life, I was born here, and I've never seen anything like it," said Gregor Degen, a baker in the devastated spa town of Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, near Schuld.

Across the border in Belgium, the death toll jumped to 27 with many people still missing. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Alexander de Croo visited the flooded areas of Rochefort and Pepinster together on Saturday. "Europe is with you," von der Leyen tweeted afterwards. "We are with you in mourning and we will be with you in rebuilding." —AFP

13 dead as petrol tanker explodes in Kenya

NAIROBI: Thirteen people were killed and others seriously burned when a "huge fireball" engulfed a crowd in Kenya as they siphoned fuel from an overturned petrol truck that ignited without warning. Police said yesterday the death toll could rise, with investigators trying to account for the missing, and charred bones found among the twisted wreckage of the fuel tanker.

The truck collided with another vehicle and turned over late Saturday near Malanga, some 315 kilometres (195 miles) northwest of Nairobi, on the busy highway between Kisumu and the border with Uganda.

Onlookers rushed to the crash site with jerrycans to collect the leaking fuel but shortly after the truck exploded, consuming the crowd in a terrible inferno. "We were woken up by a very loud blast. When I rushed out, I saw a huge fireball and people were screaming," said nearby resident Jack Odhiambo.

Those on the scene first managed to get away safely with some fuel, said witness Magdalene Adhiambo. But others went back for a second round, and the crowd grew larger as more and more people arrived hoping to get lucky. "That's when the fire started," she said.

Wycliffe Otieno said he had just started filling his jerrycan when the slick around him ignited. "I was able to run to safety... I just don't know how lucky I was, because I have been told the people we were with did



KISUMU: People stand next to a burnt out petrol tanker that burst into flames when it overturned in western Kenya, while a crowd thronged to collect the spilling fuel, on the busy highway between Kisumu and the border with Uganda, yesterday. —AFP

not survive," Otieno said from his hospital bed.

'Burned with their motorbikes'

Charles Chacha, a local police chief in Siaya County where the accident occurred, said 24 people were in hospital with serious burns. Earlier, he said children were among those injured. Investigators were still combing the charred wreckage and fear the death toll could climb.

"The death toll we have as of now is still 13. These are bodies at the mortuary," Chacha said. "However, we have people who are unaccounted for. We will require a proper examination to determine if there were people burnt completely at the scene, where bones were found." —AFP

23 dead in landslide, wall collapse in India monsoon rains

MUMBAI: At least 23 people were killed after several homes were crushed by a collapsed wall and a landslide triggered by heavy monsoon rains in India's financial capital Mumbai, authorities said yesterday.

Rainwater also inundated a water purification complex, disrupting supply "in most of the parts of Mumbai", a megacity of 20 million people, civic authorities said. A falling tree demolished a wall in the eastern suburb of Chembur during yesterday's early hours, burying nearby residents, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said. Seventeen bodies have been recovered from the rubble, it added, with rescue operations ongoing. "In the adjacent house, I saw a small girl who was trapped in the

debris. She was shouting 'save me, save me'," Firoz Khan, who was caught up in the downpour in Chembur, told AFP.

"Her body was trapped in the mud. Somehow, I managed to pull her out. She had injuries in her legs. I narrowly survived this collapse." Another resident, Manda Gautam Pradhan, said she had seen "rocks and mud... gushing down the hill along with the rainwater". In the suburb of Vikhroli in the city's northeast, six people were killed after a landslide hit five homes early Sunday, the NDRF added.

Building collapses are common during India's June-September monsoon season, with old and rickety structures buckling under days of non-stop rain. Last month, 12 people were killed when a building collapsed in a Mumbai slum. And last September, 39 people died when a three-storey apartment block collapsed in Bhiwandi near the financial capital. Mumbai has been hit by downpours since Saturday, with local transport services affected. The city's civic body did not say when the water supply was expected to be restored, but advised residents to boil the liquid before using it. —AFP

15 missing after ship sinks in Liberia

MONROVIA: Between 15 and 17 people are missing after a vessel sank off the coast of Liberia, the West African state's government and coastguard said yesterday. Search and rescue operations are ongoing, Liberia's Maritime Authority Commissioner Eugene Lenn Nagbe told reporters

in the capital Monrovia. Coastguards have pulled 11 people from the water, he said. A coastguard official also told the press conference that 15 to 17 people were still believed to be missing. Rescue operations began late Saturday afternoon after the authorities received a distress signal from a vessel named Niko Ivanka.

Nagbe, the maritime commissioner, said that the ship had left Monrovia on Saturday morning and was heading for the central port city of Buchanan when it began to take on water. Early reports of the incident suggested that the vessel sank in the southeast of the country. —AFP

Syria regime fire kills 7

EHSIM: Syrian regime artillery fire killed seven civilians including three children in the country's last major rebel bastion of Idlib, a Britain-based war monitor said yesterday. The shelling hit in the village of Ehsim late Saturday, in the south of the Idlib region, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A family member told AFP that visitors had gathered to congratulate a male relative on getting married when the shelling struck their home. Earlier in the day, rockets fired by pro-government forces killed six civilians in the village of Sarja, including three children and a rescue worker, meaning at least 13 were killed in total in Idlib on Saturday. The shelling in Ehsim came hours after President Bashar al-Assad took the oath of office for a fourth term, pledging to "liberate" areas still beyond government control. The deaths are the latest viola-

tions of a ceasefire deal agreed by rebel backer Turkey and government ally Russia in March 2020 to stem a regime offensive on the jihadist-dominated stronghold.

An AFP photographer in Ehsim saw rescue workers under floodlights cut through a collapsed ceiling to retrieve the body of a woman. Bundling her body up in a blanket, they then gently lowered it down a ladder and carried it into an ambulance.

The Observatory said she was among four women and three girls killed in the

bombardment. Bordering Turkey, the northwestern Idlib region is home to around three million people, more than half displaced by fighting in other parts of war-torn Syria. Many rely on humanitarian aid to survive.

The region is dominated by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, but other rebel groups are also present. Syria's war has killed around half a million people and forced millions more to flee their homes since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests. —AFP



EHSIM: Members of the Syrian Civil Defence (White Helmets) remove the body of a woman from the rubble of a house hit by regime artillery fire in the village of Ehsim. —AFP

International

South Africa president rallies base as riot cleanup goes on

Violence will damage S Africa's reputation and set back economic progress

SOWETO: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa joined post-riot clean-up efforts yesterday as his government warned against vigilantism and sought to avert racial conflict following the unrest. The country was gripped by more than a week of chaos that claimed more than 200 lives as looters ransacked shopping centres and unidentified groups torched key industrial infrastructure and blocked trade routes.

The violence was the worst in post-apartheid South Africa and erupted after former president Jacob Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail for snubbing a corruption inquiry. His trial for graft in a separate case is due to resume today.

"We all admit there were lapses... we will gather ourselves and do a proper review," Ramaphosa told a crowd outside a mall in the Soweto township. "People want to defend what we have in the form of democracy, our constitution and economy." Ramaphosa is under mounting pressure as only one of the suspected masterminds of what officials have called an attempted "insurrection", which caused an estimated \$1 billion of damage, has been arrested.

When asked if he would shake up his ministers responsible for security he said: "We are reviewing the situation, yes." Access to basic necessities like food has become a pressing issue in the areas affected by looting, arson and violence as many stores were destroyed while others remain closed.

Many in the worst-hit KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province are now going hungry. At a branch of the Grace family church in Durban, trestle tables were piled high with donated fresh vegetables and bread to prepare food parcels for those in need of food. Police Minister Bheki Cele has warned against "vigilante acts" after residents of Phoenix outside Durban, a township of mostly Indian-origin South Africans, were accused of

victimising their black counterparts.

'We are still scared'

"If we hear that people are being racially profiled at roadblocks set up in the area... (people) including police, are being intimidated, violated and in extreme cases people are being beaten up, and their cars are searched and torched (this) is simply criminal and won't be tolerated," he said in a statement late Saturday.

A taskforce of 10 detectives would be deployed to the area to investigate the deaths of 20 people during the mayhem, he added. Of the 212 people reported killed nationwide, some were shot and others died in looting stampedes.

Alongside the human and economic toll, officials closed several beaches around Durban warning of possible contamination after a chemical spill at a factory set ablaze during the mayhem. Ramaphosa will visit malls in Soweto township, the most populous part of Gauteng Province—the country's economic powerhouse—which also saw rioting and looting, to support business owners with clean-up efforts.

"The leadership of the (ruling) African National Congress (ANC) will assess the damage caused by the recent looting and vandalism and to engage communities and various stakeholders in the rebuilding and reconstruction programme," the party said in a statement.

Yesterday marks Mandela Day, in honour of democratic South Africa's first president Nelson Mandela, and would be a day of jubilation for the ANC under normal circumstances. Pope Francis prayed for South Africa yesterday, saying that violence had rocked the country "already hit by health and economic challenges because of the pandemic".

Many in industry, particularly tourism which



DURBAN: Community members of Inanda community begin cleaning up the looted Dube Village Mall in Durban yesterday. After the area was severely affected for several days by looting and unrest, local residents are trying to return to normality. —AFP

accounts for 7 percent of GDP, worry that the violence will damage South Africa's reputation and set back economic progress. Traffic was back to normal along a main highway linking the country's north to the Port of Durban which had been closed for days.

But businesses in Durban are seeking security assurances. "In as much as we are over the hurdle now, we are still scared," Zanele Khomo of the

Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry told AFP. "The world is looking at us with those (negative) eyes, but we want to tell them that South Africa has a lot of good people and we have a lot of good stories to tell," said Siyanda Nxumalo, a headteacher in Durban, who helped to clear up the Dube Village Mall outside Durban following the unrest. —AFP

Invisible wounds: France faces up to war trauma

PARIS: Christophe came close to death in Afghanistan, Raphael saw one body bag after another in the Sahel region of Africa, while Omar does not even want to talk about what he experienced on the battlefield. Bit by bit, the trauma settled in, over the course of many years.

The French military recognises the problem of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for its troops, among the busiest and most exposed in the Western world in terms of active deployments in deadly environments. But it is seeking to ease the trauma endured by thousands of them with new techniques also practised by Western allies including Canada and the United States.

Omar, 35, a former navy commando, has battled PTSD for a decade, causing his relationship to break up and repeated hospitalisation after deployment in Guiana in 2012 and then the experience in Afghanistan that he still refuses to discuss. Youssef, 44, a former military intelligence agent, took part in numerous operations that left him sometimes violent, sometimes filled with fear. "An unpleasant force surges up in you, your family abandons you, people don't really understand," he told AFP. Some 2,800 French soldiers were found to be suffering from psychological injuries from 2010 to 2019, five times more than the number with physical injuries.

In the ground army alone, 70 percent of the 1,000 injured servicemen on long-term sick leave suffer from PTSD. The problem has become all the more acute with France's almost decade-long deployment in the Sahel region of Africa to fight jihadists, where 50 of its troops have been killed and some 5,000 French troops are operating. For victims such as Omar and Youssef, who like other sources asked for their surnames not to be disclosed, conventional sports rehabilitation and therapy had little effect. To better support them, the French armed forces are now experimenting with a new approach, already successfully applied in Canada, Israel and the United States to offer a step-by-step re-emergence into daily life and help planning a future.

No white coats

This is the principle behind Athos House, a residence run by the military in Toulon in the south of France which looks after some 15 veterans who have stared death all too closely in the eye. Here, there are no white coats or hospital beds but sporting activities, communal meals, painting, DIY and vocational activities to learn new skills for jobs after the military.

The veterans are free to come and go as they please. "They can find peace among themselves," said Luc de Coligny, a former French marine who leads the residence. A similar one can also be found outside the southwestern city of Bordeaux.

"We are aspiring to something other than therapy for those affected," said doctor Xavier Desruelles, a medical adviser to the army chief of staff. "They must learn to get used to life again while they have a tendency to close in on themselves." Omar has found new hope here. "We are surrounded by comrades with the same experience, we understand each other," he said. He has returned to sport, lost weight and found a smile. He is also preparing to end his military career by starting training as a heating engineer. Youssef makes clear his "desire to be cured" and wants to find a job that involves "green spaces", saying: "Office, computer, I couldn't." —AFP

UK govt in COVID confusion ahead of 'freedom day'

LONDON: The UK government was thrown into turmoil yesterday by its own rules on COVID self-isolation just as it controversially prepares to ditch pandemic curbs in England. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and finance minister Rishi Sunak will be working remotely in the week ahead after they came into contact with a person infected with COVID, Downing Street said.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid confirmed on Saturday he had tested positive for COVID-19 and was now self-isolating for 10 days. He had a "lengthy" meeting with Johnson on Friday, according to the Sunday Times, and also appeared alongside other ministers in parliament last week. The prime minister nearly died of COVID last year.

Initially, a Downing Street spokesperson said both Johnson and Sunak were taking part in a government pilot that enables them to continue working from their offices, while self-isolating outside of work. Yet in an update after a storm of anger over the announcement, the spokesperson reversed position and said neither official was participating in the pilot, but would conduct business remotely.

Johnson will remain at the prime minister's country retreat at Chequers northwest of London, where

he was staying when contacted by COVID tracing officials from the National Health Service (NHS). Sunak acknowledged the outcry provoked by Downing Street's initial statement, after millions of schoolchildren and workers were forced to stay home under the tracing rules.

"Whilst the test and trace pilot is fairly restrictive, allowing only essential government business, I recognise that even the sense that the rules aren't the same for everyone is wrong," he tweeted. "To that end I'll be self isolating as normal and not taking part in the pilot." The development came just as Johnson's government prepares to ditch most pandemic restrictions in England today, despite daily infection rates now topping 50,000 — behind only Indonesia and Brazil.

Keir Starmer, leader of the main opposition Labour party, said the government was in "chaos" after sending mixed messages about what it expects the public to do from today. "Yet again the Conservatives fixed the rules to benefit themselves and only backtracked when they were found out," he said. "They robbed the bank, got caught and have now offered to give the money back."

'Pingdemic'

The government insists that with two-thirds of the adult population now fully vaccinated, the risk can be managed despite rising infections, and Monday has been dubbed "freedom day" by many UK media. Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick told BBC television it was still the "logical moment" to replace legal diktats with "personal judgement",

Tigray war spills into neighboring Oromia, Afar regions

ADDIS ABABA: Rebels in Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray have carried out operations against pro-government troops in neighboring Afar region, a spokesman said yesterday, opening a new front in the widening eight-month conflict.

The "very limited action" targeted special forces and militia fighters from Oromia region, Ethiopia's largest, who were massing along the Tigray-Afar border, the rebel spokesman, Getachew Reda, told AFP.

"We took those actions to ensure those forces are sent back to Oromia, and we have managed to do that," Getachew said, adding that there were some casualties but he could not provide figures.

"Our action was very limited to dispersing the peasant militia from Oromia that was mostly press-ganged into fighting the useless war." Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray last November to detain and disarm leaders of the region's then-ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

He said the move came in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps. The 2019 Nobel Peace laureate

declared victory in late November after government forces took the Tigray capital Mekele, but TPLF leaders remained on the run and fighting continued.

Last month the war took a stunning turn when pro-TPLF forces retook Mekele, Abiy declared a unilateral ceasefire and the army mostly pulled out of Tigray.

But after rebel leaders launched a new offensive intended to regain control of western and southern Tigray — contested areas that have been occupied by fighters from Amhara region, which borders Tigray to the south — Abiy vowed to "repel" them. The government has since mobilised forces from regions that had previously been untouched by the conflict, including Oromia. A spokesman for Afar region did not respond to requests for comment yesterday.

'Ethiopia's cancer'

A state media report published Saturday night accused the TPLF, which the government deems a terrorist organisation, of blocking aid into Tigray via Afar using "heavy shelling" and "heavy artillery."

"Rejecting the ceasefire by the federal government, TPLF is trying hard to expand the conflict into Afar region," the Ethiopian News Agency report said. Getachew denied any aid delivery had been disrupted.

"Where the fighting happened, there is no major highway that is being used for aid purposes," he said.

Getachew confirmed yesterday that rebel units were also active in northern Amhara region, where last week AFP journalists saw thousands of militia fighters mobilising in border towns in advance of planned anti-

much higher, in part because of low testing rates.

Last week, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control said it had detected the highly contagious Delta variant of the virus, putting officials on alert for a third pandemic wave. "The Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 (PSC), has put six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) on red alert as part of the preventive measures against a third wave of the pandemic," Secretary to the Government of the Federation Boss Mustapha said in a statement.

The states concerned are Lagos, Oyo, Rivers, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and the FCT. Lagos, the country's commercial capital, has been the epicentre of Nigeria's outbreak, accounting for more than a third of the nationwide total. Spokesman for the Secretary to the Government of the Federation Willy Bassej told



LONDON: File photo shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson gives an update on relaxing restrictions imposed on the country during the COVID-19 pandemic at a virtual press conference inside the Downing Street Briefing Room. —AFP

thanks to school summer holidays starting this week and the onset of hotter weather. But he conceded that the pandemic's current wave may not peak until September.

Jonathan Ashworth, Labour's health spokesman, said the government was being "reckless" with its plans for today, echoing many scientists who say the reopening endangers global health. "We are against opening up without any precautions in place," Ashworth told the BBC, attacking in particular the government's plan to drop a mandate for wearing masks. —AFP



ARKAY: Members of the Amhara militia gather in the village of Adi Arkay, 180 kilometers northeast from the city of Gondar, Ethiopia. —AFP

TPLF operations. "We have also conducted successful operations in Wag Hemra, which is in Amhara region, and even as we speak some units are operating in between Mai Tsebri (in western Tigray) and adjoining Amhara territory," he said.

In a statement posted on Twitter yesterday, Abiy referred to the TPLF "junta" as "Ethiopia's cancer". "As the saying goes, a Satan which stays long cannot be removed immediately," he said. "It is inevitable that it resists in one way or another. But surely, the junta will be removed so that it will not grow again." —AFP

AFP that "red alert" meant that states should "fully deploy all COVID-19 prevention and containment measures in place" and intensify "testing, identification, treatment and isolation of infected persons."

But the presidential steering committee added in its statement that "all states... should heighten their state of preparedness and continue to enforce all protocols put in place." "These steps are critical as we begin to see worrisome early signs of increasing cases in Nigeria," Mustapha said.

With Muslims celebrating Eid al-Adha next week, also called Eid el-Kabir in Nigeria, the government recommended that prayers be held outdoors and that indoor gatherings should be limited. It also recommended the suspension of the traditional Durbar festival showcasing horse riding displays. —AFP

International

Taleban leader 'favours political settlement' to Afghan conflict

'Let us resolve our issues among ourselves and rescue our homeland from the prevailing crisis'

KABUL: The Taleban's supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada yesterday said he "strenuously favours" a political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan even as the hardline Islamist movement has launched a sweeping offensive across the nation. The announcement comes as representatives of the Afghan government and Taleban insurgents sat down for a new round of talks in Doha over the weekend, stirring hopes that the long stalled peace talks were being resuscitated.

"In spite of the military gains and advances, the Islamic Emirate strenuously favours a political settlement in the country," Akhundzada said in a message released ahead of next week's Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. "Every opportunity for the establishment of an Islamic system, peace and security that presents itself will be made use of by the Islamic Emirate," he added.

For months, the two sides have been meeting on and off in the Qatari capital, but have achieved little if any notable success with the discussions appearing to have lost momentum as the militants made enormous gains on the battlefield. The two sides were due to talk again. The Taleban leader said his group remained committed to forging a solution to end the war but slammed "the opposition parties" for "wasting time".

"Our message remains that instead of relying on foreigners, let us resolve our issues among ourselves and rescue our homeland from the prevailing crisis,"

he added. The insurgents have capitalised on the last stages of the withdrawal of US and other foreign troops from Afghanistan to launch a series of lightning offensives across large swathes of the country. The group is now believed to control roughly half of the nation's 400 districts, several important border crossings, and have laid siege to a string of vital provincial capitals.

The Taleban have long appeared to be united, operating under an effective chain of command, and carrying out complex military campaigns despite perennial rumours of splits among the organisation's leadership. Questions remain over how firm a hand the Taleban's leaders have with commanders on the ground and whether they will be able to convince them to abide by a potential agreement if signed. The leader's statement notably made no mention of a formal ceasefire call for the Eid holidays.

Temporary ceasefires

Over the years, the Taleban have announced a series of short truces during Islamic holidays that initially spurred hopes that a larger reduction of violence would be implemented in the country. However the group has more recently been criticised for using the temporary ceasefires to resupply and replenish their fighters, allowing them to launch withering onslaughts on Afghanistan's security forces once the truce expires.



BALKH: In this picture taken on July 15, 2021, Afghan militia fighters keep a watch at an outpost against Taleban insurgents at Charkint district in Balkh Province. — AFP

The US-led military coalition has been on the ground in Afghanistan for nearly two decades following an invasion launched in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Fears are growing that Afghan forces will be overwhelmed without the

vital air support they provide, allowing for a complete Taliban military takeover or the start of a multi-sided civil war in a country awash with large stockpiles of weapons following nearly four decades of fighting. — AFP



GREAT BARRIER REEF: File photo shows an aerial view of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of the Whitsunday Islands, along the central coast of Queensland. — AFP

China denies politics behind UNESCO move on Barrier Reef

PARIS: A top Chinese official said yesterday that political tensions between Beijing and Australia were not behind a UNESCO recommendation to place the Great Barrier Reef on its endangered list. Deputy education minister Tian Xuejun is chairing this year's meeting of the UN cultural agency's heritage committee, which comes after years of worsening relations between China and Australia. The Great Barrier Reef has been put on a list of World Heritage sites that could be put on the in-danger list after losing half of its corals since 1995.

Australia has assailed the move, blaming global warming for the loss, while UNESCO experts argued that pollution run-off has contributed to the loss. Asked at an online press conference about "Australian government allegations" that Beijing pressed to have the Barrier Reef listed as endangered, Tian said the decision was based "on reports and data provided by Australia itself."

"Australia should fulfil its obligations to protect world heritage sites instead of making baseless accu-

sations against other member states" of UNESCO, he added. Both China and Australia are among the 21 nations on this year's heritage committee, which is evaluating nearly 50 new sites that could be added to its more than 1,100 World Heritage list.

The designation can be a boon for tourism, while encouraging governments to protect cultural or environmental treasures. Australia has assailed the recommendation to add the Great Barrier Reef to the in-danger list after seeing the 2,300-kilometre (1,400 miles) system lose half its corals since 1995.

It says it has spent billions of dollars to clean up coastal waters and says global warming is responsible for the mass coral "bleaching" that occurs when the invertebrates do not have enough algae to provide nutrients.

UNESCO experts counter that pollution run-off has contributed to a drop in water quality, pointing in particular at the Carmichael Coal Mine, and say clean-up efforts have fallen short. "Politics have subverted a proper process and for the World Heritage Committee to not even foreshadow this listing is, I think, appalling," Australia's Environment Minister Sussan Ley said in June.

But Tian said "the recommendation to include the Great Barrier Reef on the endangered list was made after an evaluation by the UICN," the International Union for Conservation of Nature, one of three advisory bodies to the heritage committee. A decision on the reef's status is expected around July 23. — AFP

testers scattering, coughing non-stop as they tried to rinse their eyes with saline solution. By late afternoon, the two sides were standing off as clouds of gas rose in the air. It remains unclear how many were injured.

'Just give us good vaccines'

Exactly one year ago, thousands of protesters amassed at the Democracy Monument calling for Prayut's resignation, the rewriting of the constitution and reforms to the kingdom's long-unassailable monarchy. Prayut had managed to hold onto power after 2019 elections—which were held under an army-scripted constitution—while popular opposition figures were increasingly hit with legal troubles.

That protest marked the beginning of a movement that has widened the discourse on taboo topics, including the role of the royal family-protected under a draconian defamation law. But as the impact of COVID-19 rapidly

Daughter of Afghan envoy to Pakistan briefly kidnapped

ISLAMABAD: The daughter of Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan was briefly kidnapped while on her way home in the capital Islamabad, the governments of both countries said Saturday. Salsila Alikhil was abducted for several hours and "severely tortured by unknown individuals", Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. "After being released from the kidnappers' captivity Ms Alikhil is under medical care at hospital," the statement said. Pakistan's ambassador to Kabul was summoned to lodge a formal complaint, the ministry added.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said Najibullah Alikhil's daughter was assaulted in her car, before the interior minister later published a statement saying she had been kidnapped. "Prime minister Imran Khan has directed the interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed to utilise all resources to apprehend the person involved in the kidnapping of the daughter of the Afghan ambassador in Islamabad," Ahmed himself tweeted.

Islamabad is leafy, spacious city with relatively tight security and a population of around one million people. The security of the ambassador and his family has been tightened, Pakistan's foreign ministry said, adding that the safety of the diplomatic missions were "of the utmost importance".

Relations between the two neighbours have long been strained. Kabul accuses Islamabad of offering a safe haven to Taleban militants who are waging a major campaign across the Afghan countryside. While Islamabad says Kabul turns a blind eye to militant groups launching attacks on Pakistan from its soil.

As fighting raged, war of words heated up this week between the two neighbours, with Afghan vice-president accusing the Pakistani military of providing "close air support to Taleban in certain areas", Pakistan strongly denied the claim, with a foreign ministry statement saying the country "took necessary measures within its territory to safeguard our own troops and population". — AFP

chipped away at Thailand's economy, the government's handling of the pandemic has become one of the movement's main grievances.

Thailand announced earlier this week it would pair a dose of the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine with the UK-developed AstraZeneca after authorities found that hundreds of medical staff who received Sinovac jabs had contracted the virus. "You do not need to do any mix-and-match vaccines—just give us good vaccines," demanded a young protester yesterday.

Acclaimed Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul also highlighted the country's situation on Saturday during his acceptance speech for the jury prize at Cannes for "Memorial". "I'm really lucky to be standing here and while many of my countrymen cannot travel. Many of them suffer greatly from the pandemic with the mismanagement of resources, of health care and vaccine accessibility," he said. — AFP

Young Pakistani's Taleban idealism ends with death

PESHAWAR: The last time Abdul Rasheed's family saw him alive was in May, when the young Pakistani left for Afghanistan to fight for the Taleban. He returned home last week in a cardboard coffin.

The militant group is waging an offensive across Afghanistan's countryside, snapping up territory and leaving the Afghan forces facing a crisis with the US and NATO all but gone. Many Pakistanis, inspired by religious faith or community pressure, have joined the fight across a border that doesn't distinguish between the Pashtuns who live either side.

"Rasheed sacrificed his life for a great cause," Rasheed's uncle, Maroof Khan, a Muslim cleric, told AFP over the phone from his home on the outskirts of Peshawar, just a few hours from the Afghan border. Throngs of people visited to congratulate the family after hearing news of the 22-year-old's death.

"He went there with a spirit of jihad. Now his young friends want to be martyred like him," Khan added. Pakistan's interior minister earlier this month publicly acknowledged that the families of Afghan Taleban fighters were living in the country's capital, while members of its rank-and-file were brought to the country for medical treatment or to be buried.

Pakistan has a long, complicated history with the Taleban. Since fleeing the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the group's leaders have been largely based in Pakistan, where they have been allowed to regroup, recruit and manage the insurgency from the safety of Pakistani cities. The issue is a particularly sensitive one for Islamabad, which has long been accused of supporting the hardline fundamentalists even while battling a Taleban offshoot within its own borders. The Afghan and US governments have begged Islamabad to bring the leadership to heel and force the Taleban to hammer out a peace agreement.

'University of Jihad'

The Taleban emerged in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar during the civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal from the country. But its ranks were filled with tens of thousands of Afghan refugees who had fled to Pakistan. Some Pakistani nationals also joined.

Security analyst Tahir Khan told AFP that authorities had more recently clamped down on people crossing to fight in Afghanistan, but the porous border in the rugged countryside meant some still made it. "The number of Taleban fighters from Pakistan is much lower than in the past," Khan said.

"Now the Afghan Taleban are so numerous they don't need fighters from Pakistan." Many—including Rasheed—had graduated from Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania madrassa near Peshawar, which was given the nickname the "University of Jihad" for its fiery ideology and the number of Taliban fighters it has produced.

For decades, Pakistani madrassas have served as incubators for militancy, indoctrinating tens of thousands of refugees who have few other options for education than the fire-breathing lectures from hardline clerics. Rather than crack down on the institutions, successive governments in Islamabad—who rely on the support of Islamist parties in coalition governments—have largely given the madrassas a free hand.

Taleban flags

Rasheed's family do not know exactly when or where he died, only that it happened somewhere in eastern Nangarhar province. Two police sources in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province told AFP that at least four dead bodies of Pakistani fighters had arrived from Afghanistan in recent weeks.

There were chaotic scenes in Rasheed's hometown when his body was brought back. Video clips posted to social media and confirmed by his family showed hundreds of people clamouring to touch his coffin and chanting religious slogans, some waving Taleban flags. Khan, his uncle, was later arrested and handed a two-week jail sentence. He was charged with organising an illegal gathering and propagating terrorism, a police spokesman told AFP. As visitors continued to pay their respects this week, Rasheed's father Nasir Khan sat on a traditional wooden charpoy bench, wearing glasses along with a flowing white beard. "Rasheed was a bright student," Nasir Khan said. "I pray that Allah accepts the martyrdom of my son." — AFP

Police fire rubber bullets at protesters denouncing Thai PM

BANGKOK: Thai police deployed rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon against protesters in Bangkok yesterday as demonstrators defied COVID-19 restrictions to call for Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha's resignation and mark the one-year anniversary of a pro-democracy movement. The kingdom is currently facing its worst COVID-19 wave, registering daily case records as hospitals buckle under pressure. Exacerbating the toll has been the government's slow procurement of vaccines, which has drawn criticism as Thailand's economy reels from increasingly severe restrictions on businesses.

Defying rules prohibiting gatherings of more than five people, protesters piled mock body bags flecked with red paint near the intersection of the capital's Democracy Monument. "We will die from COVID if we stay home, that is why we have to come out," shouted a protest organiser, who listed three demands.

"Prayut Chan-O-Cha must resign without any condition; the second is a budget cut to the monarchy and army to be used against COVID, and the third is to bring in mRNA vaccine." A giant banner with a picture of Prayut's mastermind of a 2014 coup—was unfurled on the road, with protesters then stomping on his face.

As they marched on the Government House, they were led by a frontline group wearing gas masks and hard hats and were joined by motorbike drivers who hoisted the mock body bags. But authorities deployed water cannon early and blocked the main road, forcing protesters to retreat.

Authorities also fired rubber bullets and tear gas, according to AFP reporters on the ground. It sent pro-



BANGKOK: Pro-democracy protesters push a fake guillotine past Democracy Monument as they march to Government House to call for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha in Bangkok yesterday. — AFP

International

Earth's richest man Jeff Bezos to blast off into space

Joining Bezos will be female aviator Wally Funk, who at 82 is set to be the oldest ever astronaut

NEW YORK: Jeff Bezos, the richest person in the world, is set to join the astronaut club tomorrow on the first crewed launch by Blue Origin, another key moment in a big month for the fledgling space tourism industry. The mission comes days after Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson crossed the final frontier, narrowly besting the Amazon magnate in their battle of the billionaires.

Blue Origin's sights are, however, set higher: both literally in terms of the altitude to which its reusable New Shepard craft will ascend compared to Virgin's spaceplane, but also in its future ambitions. Bezos founded Blue Origin back in 2000, with the goal of one day building floating space colonies with artificial gravity where millions of people will work and live.

Today, the company is developing a heavy-lift orbital rocket called New Glenn and also a Moon lander it is hoping to contract to NASA under the Artemis program. "They've had 15 successful New Shepard uncrewed flights and we've been waiting years to see when they're going to start flying people," Laura Forczyk, founder of space consulting firm Astralytical, told AFP, calling it an "exciting time" for enthusiasts.

New Shepard will blast off at 8:00 am Central Time (1300 GMT) on July 20 from a remote facility in the west Texas

desert called Launch Site One, some 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of the nearest town, Van Horn. The event will be live streamed on BlueOrigin.com beginning an hour and a half before.

Richest, oldest and youngest

Joining Bezos on the fully autonomous flight will be barrier-breaking female aviator Wally Funk, who at 82 is set to be the oldest ever astronaut, Dutch teenager Oliver Daemen, the company's first paying customer, who will become the youngest astronaut.

Rounding out the four-member crew is Jeff Bezos' brother Mark, a financier who directs the Bezos Family Foundation and works as a volunteer firefighter. The pair are best friends, and Jeff shared the moment he asked his younger sibling to join him in a viral video on Instagram last month.

Notably absent is the mysterious winner of a \$28 million auction for a seat, who had "scheduling conflicts" and will take part in a future flight, and has asked to remain anonymous, the company said. After lift-off, New Shepard will accelerate towards space at speeds exceeding Mach 3 using a liquid hydrogen/liquid oxygen engine with no carbon emissions.

The capsule soon separates from its booster, and the astronauts unbuckle and begin to experience weightlessness.

The crew will spend a few minutes beyond the Karman line — the internationally recognized boundary between Earth's atmosphere and space, at 62 miles altitude (100 kilometers), as the spacecraft peaks at 65 miles high (106 kilometers).

They will be able to admire the curvature of the planet — and the inky black of the rest of the universe — from large windows that comprise a third of the cabin's surface area. The booster returns autonomously to a landing pad just north of its launch site, while the capsule freefalls back to Earth before deploying three giant parachutes, and finally a thruster, to land gently in the west Texas desert.

Bigger prizes

Beyond the first flight, relatively little is known about Blue Origin's future tourism plans. The company has a history of secrecy, its existence only becoming public knowledge three years after its creation. It then pursued a policy of "self-imposed silence" until 2015.

Unlike Virgin Galactic, Blue Origin hasn't officially started selling tickets — Daemen won his spot through the auction process. The company wants two more flights this year, then "many more" in 2022, it told AFP.

Forczyk, the analyst, said it will all depend on the level of demand that is generated by these early flights, and



WEST TEXAS: File photo obtained May 19, 2021, courtesy of Blue Origin, shows a close-up of the New Shepard rocket as it launches in West Texas. —AFP

how well the industry recovers from accidents "which there inevitably will be, because spaceflight is inherently risky." Elon Musk's SpaceX will enter the fray in September with an all-civilian orbital expedition on its Crew Dragon, and is tying up with another company, Axiom, for visits to the

International Space Station.

Beyond tourism, Blue Origin would like to supplant SpaceX as NASA's leading private sector partner, and sees New Shepard as "sort of the stepping stone and also the way to make money along the way for the greater ambition," said Forczyk. —AFP

Space tourism lifts off

LONDON: After years of waiting, Richard Branson's journey to space this month on a Virgin Galactic vessel was supposed to be a triumphant homecoming. Instead, the jaunt attracted significant criticism — about its carbon footprint.

With Jeff Bezos set to launch on a Blue Origin rocket tomorrow, and Elon Musk's SpaceX planning an all-civilian orbital mission in September, the nascent space tourism industry finds itself facing tough questions about its environmental impact. Right now, rocket launches as a whole don't happen often enough to pollute significantly. "The carbon dioxide emissions are totally negligible compared to other human activities or even commercial aviation," NASA's chief climate advisor Gavin Schmidt told AFP.

But some scientists are worried about the potential for longer term harm as the industry is poised for major growth, particularly impacts to the ozone layer in the still poorly understood upper atmosphere. Virgin Galactic, which came under fire in op-eds on CNN and Forbes, as well as on social media, for sending its billionaire founder to space for a few minutes in a fossil fuel-guzzling spaceship, says its carbon emissions are about equivalent to a business-class ticket from London to New York.

The company "has already taken steps to offset the carbon emissions from its test flights and is examining opportunities to offset the carbon emissions for future customer flights, and reduce our supply chain's carbon footprint," it said in a statement to AFP. But while transatlantic flights carry hundreds of people, Virgin's emissions work out to around 4.5 tonnes per passenger in a six passenger flight, according to an analysis published by French astrophysicist Roland Lehoucq and colleagues in *The Conversation*.

That's roughly equivalent to driving a typical car around the Earth, and more than twice the individual annual carbon budget recommended to meet the objectives of the Paris climate accord. "The issue here is really one of disproportionate impacts," Darin Toohey, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Colorado, Boulder told AFP.

"I actually grew up on the space program and that got me into science... but if someone offered me a free ride, I would be very nervous taking it because I would know that my own footprint is way larger than it should be," he said.

Cleaner fuels possible

Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo uses a type of synthetic rubber as fuel and burns it in nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas. The fuel pumps black carbon into upper stratosphere, 30-50 kilometers (18 to 30 miles) high.

Once there, these particles can have multiple impacts, from reflecting sunlight and causing a nuclear winter effect, to accelerating chemical reactions that deplete the ozone layer, which is vital to protecting people from harmful radiation. "We could be at a dangerous point," said Toohey, who wants more scientific investigations into these effects before the launches become more frequent. Virgin has said it wants to conduct 400 flights a year.

Compared to Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo spaceplanes, Blue Origin's are much cleaner, according to a recent paper by scientist Martin Ross of Aerospace, which Bezos' company plugged on Twitter. That's because it burns liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen, which combusts as water vapor. Ross' paper found Blue Origin's vertical launch reusable rocket causes a hundred times less ozone loss and 750 times less climate forcing magnitude than Virgin's, according to ballpark calculations. But that doesn't mean it's totally clean. "It takes electricity to make liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen," Ross told AFP. "You could go back and calculate how much electricity was used to make the propellant," he said. "It depends how far back in the supply chain you look." —AFP

Two bears head for US from crisis-hit Lebanon

BEIRUT: Two endangered Syrian brown bears were headed to a new life in the United States yesterday after being rescued from cramped conditions in a Lebanese zoo, two charities said. Homer and Ulysses, each aged 18 and weighing 130 kilos (280 pounds), had been living in a zoo near the southern city of Tyre, animal rights association Animals Lebanon said.

They were freed "after convincing the zoo owner that they deserve better than the small cement cages they were kept in for over ten years", it said in a statement. The bears were to be flown out of Beirut late yesterday, headed for the Wild Animal Sanctuary in the US state of Colorado.

Syrian brown bears are a relatively

small subspecies of the endangered brown bear, but no longer exist in the wild in Syria or Lebanon, the UK-based Bear Conservation group says. Animals Lebanon director Jason Meir said the bears were likely imported from eastern Europe.

They had been supposed to travel in late 2019, but banking restrictions linked to Lebanon's economic crisis, then the coronavirus pandemic had postponed the trip. Four Paws, an international organisation also taking part in the relocation, said it had first met the bears in November 2019.

"Trapped in tiny cages, some smaller than a ping-pong table, the bears had no water, sporadic food, and inadequate shelter from the weather," it said in a statement. "Both bears not only suffered from malnutrition but also extreme stress." Meir said he was aware of about 30 lions and tigers as well as around 10 more bears still kept as exotic pets and in private zoos in the Mediterranean country. —AFP



TYRE: One of two Syrian brown bears is sedated and examined before being prepared to be transferred to the United States by members of the global animal welfare organisation Four Paws yesterday. —AFP

Historic flood engulfs renowned Belgian chocolate factory

CHAUDFONTAINE: As the floodwaters receded in the river valleys of industrial eastern Belgium, the smell of cocoa was mixed with the stench of spilled fuel oil and churned up river mud. Among the many businesses knocked temporarily out of action by the unprecedented inundation was the Galler factory, home to one of the country's iconic luxury chocolate brands.

Built on the banks of the now churning Vesdre river, in Vaux-sous-Chevremont in Chaudfontaine commune outside the city of Liege, the plant ships high-end bars to aficionados as far away as Japan. In Belgium, which styles itself the world capital of chocolate, it is accredited to supply the royal court of Philippe, king of the Belgians, alongside the likes of Godiva and Leonidas. But, after a week of torrential rains sent waves of water surging down the narrow valleys of this former coal-mining area near the German border, part of the front wall of the plant has collapsed.

Taking stock

Tools and workstations are swept into piles, and muddy water has stained the walls 1.8 metres (six feet) above its

normal level. "It's time to take stock," said Valerie Stefenatto, the 32-year-old communications manager, as she walked the premises in rubber boots, telephone in hand. "The priority now is to secure the factory and to get the electricity back on, to see if the machines are still working or not." Vats of raw ingredients had been knocked over or burst and the smell of chocolate drifted through the air.

At Galler and at other businesses across the south and east of the country, questions will be asked. Why were meteorologists' and climate scientists' warnings unheeded? Why did the government not act? Here, when the river level started to rise on Wednesday, staff stacked sandbags and shut off production, but they had no way of predicting the wall of water that hit on Thursday.

"The factory has been here since 1976. We've never known a flood in Vaux-sous-Chevremont," Stefenatto sighed. Things could have been worse. Stocks of finished chocolate were stored in a depot on higher ground, north of Liege, and the wider commune has seen five residents killed and dozens left homeless. "We have colleagues who have lost everything," Stefenatto said, as exhausted workers found plastic chairs on the parking area. "To get back on our feet, we'll have to focus on the morale of the troops."

Plans on hold

But a delivery truck and its 10 metre container has been tossed across the loading area, and it's too soon to say when the 60-strong workforce will be able to get back to work. Before the coronavirus pandemic, Galler produced

dancefloor espoused a similar view—with so many coronavirus vaccine doses available, why should those who have already been inoculated have to suffer because of those who aren't? "If you're refusing to get the vaccine, that's on you now," said Stephen Bennett, 21. Anthony Bawn, a 36-year-old screenwriter, agreed. "Why should we feel responsible for individuals who don't want to protect their own body?" he asked. "If they force me to (wear a mask), I'm going to go home."

'Not my problem'

For Los Angeles authorities, who announced the return to mandatory mask wearing in the middle of the week, there's a delicate balance to strike—the city has only really reopened in the last few weeks, and no-one wants to spoil the party.

But thanks to the Delta variant, COVID-19 cases are the highest they've been since March, and the United States has not yet introduced any form of vaccine passport. Many have chafed at the mask reintroduction, however. The Los Angeles county sheriff's



CHAUDFONTAINE: Photo shows piled up material at the Galler chocolate factory, destroyed by a severe flooding following heavy rainfalls, in Vaux-sous-Chevremont, near Chaudfontaine. —AFP

1,700 tonnes of chocolate per year and turned over 30 million euros. It had ambitious expansion plans, backed by a Liege consortium and by foreign investors.

"We don't yet know how long it's going to take. One, two, three months? It'll depend whether we decide to focus on certain markets, Belgian or European," Stefenatto told AFP. The storms have now moved east and south, bringing devastation to Germany and threatening Austria's Alpine valleys. The final economic and human toll in Belgium, where at least 27 are dead, is not yet known. —AFP

office has already announced that it will not enforce the new mandate, which according to the sheriff, is not based on science.

"It's going to be hard to enforce," said Ruben, manager of Trunks bar. "There's nothing we can do." "I'm not going to shove them on people's faces," sighed another bar manager. As midnight struck at Micky's, a worker tapped on his watch and hurriedly distributed masks to the establishment's dancers.

The barmen hesitated, before masking up themselves—but on the dancefloor, nothing much changed. Leo Johnson had his mask in his pocket. "I'm vaccinated," he said. "I have my mask in my pocket... I will not wear my mask if they don't ask me to."

It was, he pointed out, difficult to chat people up with half your face covered—a position shared by Adrian Barrios, 26. "In a bar setting, so much of your communication is through your smile and body language," he said. "A lot of that is inhibited through masks." For 26-year-old Krista, however, the solution was to lean in: resplendent in a rhinestoned mask, she chose to protect herself, but do it in style. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, JULY 19, 2021

NBK reports 1H2021 net profit of KD 160.8m

Total assets grew by 6.4% year-on-year to KD 31.6 billion

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait ("NBK", the "Bank" or the "Group") has announced its financial results for the six-month period ended 30 June 2021. NBK reported a net profit of KD 160.8 million (\$534.0 million), improving by 44.7 percent year-on-year.

Net profit for the three-months ended 30 June 2021 reached KD 76.5 million (\$254.0 million), a year-on-year increase of 128.8 percent from the comparable period in 2020.

Performance and operating highlights 1H 2021:

- Net operating income of KD 452.5 million (\$1.5 billion), increasing by 9.2 percent compared to 1H 2020
- Total assets grew by 6.4 percent year-on-year, to KD 31.6 billion (\$104.9 billion)
- Total loans and advances grew by 5.3 percent year-on-year to KD 18.5 billion (\$61.5 billion)
- Customer deposits decreased by 0.9 percent year-on-year to KD 17.4 billion (\$57.8 billion)
- Solid asset quality metrics, with NPL/gross loans ratio at 2.45 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 152 percent
- Robust Capital Adequacy Ratio of 18.2 percent, comfortably in excess of regulatory requirements

Commenting on the results, NBK Group Chairman, Nasser Al-Sayer, said: "Macroeconomic challenges and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to create headwinds in the first half of 2021. Despite this, the gradual recovery that we achieved in the first quarter continued into the second, with increased vaccine penetration and some easing of mobility and other restrictions leading to improved business confidence



Nasser Al-Sayer

- A gradual recovery has been achieved year-to-date while the future course of the pandemic and its impact on economic activity remains uncertain
- We are more committed than ever before to integrating impactful ESG strategies across all aspects of our business
- We are focused on delivering long-term sustainable growth across all business segments



Issam J Al-Sager

- The Group's performance demonstrated its solid growth prospects in addition to the stability and diversity of the Bank's balance sheet
- Long-term flagship initiatives are on track with cost management on the radar
- Strategy remains anchored in the diversity of our operations and accelerating digital excellence; hedging against uncertainties

and activity. We are cautiously optimistic that this trend will continue as the year progresses, which bodes well for the national economy and for the banking sector. The expansionary budget announced by the Kuwait government for 2021-2022, together with higher oil prices contributing more to state revenues, are positive for the business environment. However, the future course of the pandemic and its impact on economic activity remains uncertain and we expect return to normal

levels of activity to remain gradual."

NBK remains committed to supporting the economies where it operates including that of Kuwait, its businesses, citizens, and residents. By delivering on our social as well as economic responsibilities to the country, we are helping to build a stronger future for all. In this respect, we are more committed than ever before to integrating impactful ESG strategies across all aspects of our business. Our headquarters relocation to a new LEED gold build-

ing has led to considerable reductions in energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and water consumption. Meanwhile, our support for the vaccination rollout, including for our own staff, is an important part of our social commitment.

The soundness of NBK's fundamentals, our focus on efficiency, and our institutional strength as a national and regional leader are enabling us to respond effectively to the temporary challenges that we face. We are maintaining a conservative approach to risk, and to prudent balance sheet management, and focused on continuing to drive excellence in performance against these metrics across our operating markets."

NBK Group Chief Executive Officer, Issam J Al-Sager, commented: "NBK's performance in the first half demonstrated a number of strengths including solid asset growth, driven by increasing loans and advances as business volumes have begun to gradually normalize. The Group's net operating income grew by 9.2 percent year-on-year to KD 452.5 million (\$1.5 billion). Moreover, the stability and diversity of our funding mix on the other hand proved its vitality to the Group and the trustworthiness embedded in clients towards NBK in such times. We are see-

ing positive signs across sectors including buoyant demand for credit by households and a tentative acceleration in project activity in Kuwait, with about KD 2.2 billion (\$7.3 billion) expected to be tendered in 2021.

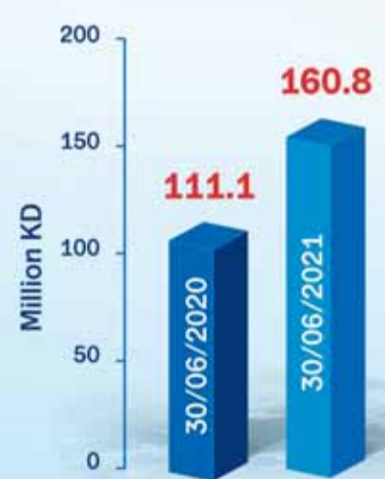
Although the low interest rate environment continues to challenge and pressure margins, the Bank proved resilient in preserving margin levels. Moreover, our flagship digital investments, a key pillar of our strategy, continues to be on track and we are effectively managing its related costs.

Our strategy remains anchored in the diversity of our operations, with business various segments making strong contributions to bottom line. Our scope to increase digitalization has achieved further success in delivering efficiencies within the organization and improving the convenience and quality of our products and services to customers. We are now focused on accelerating our drive towards digital excellence as we look forward after an extended period of uncertainty. We are proud to report that NBK continues to receive international recognition and respected awards, including ranking first among Kuwaiti banks in The Banker magazine's list of the Top 1,000 World Banks, and 9th in the Middle East, in June 2021."

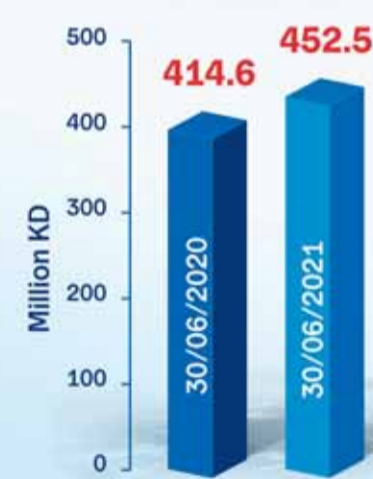


160.8

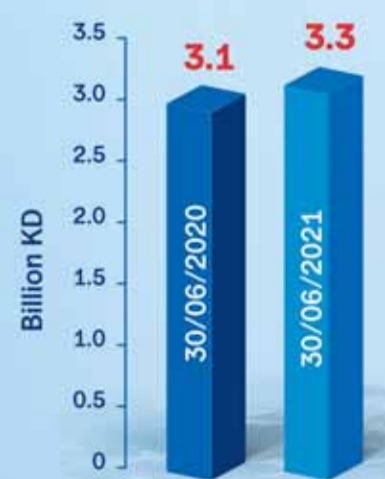
Million KWD
Net Profit for
the First Half,
2021



+44.7% Net Profit



+9.2% Net Operating Income



+8.6% Shareholders' Equity



+6.4% Total Assets

Business

Ahli United Bank reports net profit of KD 18m for H1 2021

Total assets grew up to reach KD 4.44 billion at the first half end

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank K.S.C.P announced its results for the first six months of this year. Accordingly, the bank has recorded a net profit for the first half of 2021 amounting to KD 18 million which is higher by two percent than the KD 17.7 million of net profits recorded for the same period last year.

The total assets have grown up to reach KD 4.44 billion at the end of the 1H2021. (KD 4.37 billion in December 2020). The net financing receivables have grown to reach KD 3.17 billion at the end of June 2021 representing a growth of two percent compared to KD 3.10 billion recorded at the end of 1H2020. Customer deposits portfolios have reached to KD 3.07 billion at the end of June 2021 representing a growth of 10 percent compared to KD 2.79 billion recorded at the same period last year. (Finances KD 3.11 billion and deposits KD 3.01 billion in December 2020).

The Capital Adequacy Ratio has reach 20.02 percent at the end of June 2021 which is comfortably higher than the CBK current minimum required ratio of 11 percent. The available margin will support the expansion in financing, services and operations as per the Bank's determined plans. The capital base of the Bank was boosted after the successful issuance and pricing of its \$600 million non-convertible Additional Tier 1 (AT1) Capital Mudaraba Sukuk.

The bank continued to follow a conservative policy when any facilities are classified as non-performing. Nevertheless, the non-performing facilities remained as low as 1.99 percent of the overall finance portfolio with a provision coverage ratio of 212.6 percent (excluding collaterals) at the end of June 2021.

Commenting on the results, Dr Anwar Al-

Mudhaf, Chairman of Ahli United Bank said despite the recovery signs, the continuing uncertainty as for COVID-19 pandemic, including any possible coronavirus variants and the resulting tightening of precautionary measures - and the extent of their impacts, have prompted the Bank to continue its conservative policy in managing various risks by supporting its provisions to be able to face any possible decline in the quality of assets, in addition to taking all necessary measures to protect its employees and clients.

Dr Al-Mudhaf pointed that AUB is still carrying out its community-based role in supporting government efforts in combating the spread of COVID-19, expressing his optimism about the improvement of the general scene at the level of all sectors, including the banking sector, with the reduction of COVID-19 impacts and gradual returning to normal life with the success of the national efforts in confronting the virus. Dr Al-Mudhaf hoped that the current year will witness a great success in strengthening the Bank's financial position, especially after the great achievement attained by issuing the Bank's successful pricing and issuance of \$600 million Non-convertible Additional Tier 1 (AT1) Capital Mudaraba Sukuk. The Sukuk Certificates attracted more than \$1.8 billion in orders at peak, covering three times the size of the target issue. The issuance was successfully listed in both Euronext Dublin in Ireland and in Nasdaq Dubai, which is again a clear indication of the confidence in the bank's solid performance as a leading Islamic financial institution in the region. Through this issue, we managed to provide a good source to support the bank's capital, which diversifies the sources of finance and capital, supports the Bank's finance base and strikes a balance

between different components of its capital thus continue its growth journey. The proceeds of the Sukuk will be deployed to support the expansion strategy adopted by the Bank.

Dr Al-Mudhaf expressed his thanks and appreciation to the bank's shareholders and clients for their support to the bank under these exceptional conditions. He also thanked the Central Bank of Kuwait and all the regulatory, health and security authorities, praising the efforts of the Executive Management and all the Bank's staff that enabled the bank to manage this crisis and deal with its consequences. Al-Mudhaf also praised the exceptional efforts made by the front-line staff in differing branches to meet client urgent needs during the various stages of the crisis.

Jehad Al-Humaidhi, the Acting Chief Executive Officer at AUB said: AUB has managed to maintain the momentum of its financial performance and operations, overcoming the consequences imposed by COVID-19 pandemic with minimal damage, and succeeded in converting challenges into growth opportunities in various areas of the Bank's business, through in-depth study of the market requirements, with its concern to provide advanced banking services and solutions that meet the needs of its valued client, both individuals and corporate, within resilient and smooth procedures and transactions that meet their aspirations.

Al-Humaidhi stressed: "We will continue to focus on expanding the bank's digital offers by enhancing our operating model and continuing to make strategic investments in our technology platforms, to provide seamless experience for our clients. This ensures that we will continue to achieve attractive returns for shareholders and strengthen our position in view of the changes

surrounding the banking sector.

Al-Humaidhi added: The positive results of the Bank uphold the efficiency and resilience of the policies and procedures that helped the bank develop its operations. These efforts were crowned by the many awards the Bank received during this period, including the "Best Bank in Private Banking, Kuwait 2021" by International Business Magazine. AUB was conferred this Award in recognition of its success in creating an effective model that has been achieved on the ground for its services provided to clients of Private Banking and Wealth Management, and the "Best Banking CIO of the Year Kuwait 2021" award by Global Banking and Finance Review conferred to Abdullah Yusef Jarah, the General Manager of Information Technology at AUB. This award is a recognition of the Bank's ability to provide an advanced IT infrastructure and the outstanding contribution of Jarah in supporting the industry.

In conclusion, Al-Humaidhi expressed her thanks and appreciation to the AUB's management and employees for their cooperation and dedication, which had the greatest credit for the Bank's success in attaining these good financial results. We would also like to reassure our valued clients of the Bank's readiness and its solid financial position, which enable it to provide all banking services, taking all precautionary measures to maintain the safety of its clients and employees.



Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf

Spain inches ahead with pension reform

MADRID: Spain will pay workers to postpone retirement as part of a pensions reform strategy that analysts warn does not go far enough to cut a huge deficit in the system. With nearly 30 billion euros (\$36 billion) of annual losses in 2020 and rising, Spain's social security budget is one of the biggest contributors to the country's ballooning public deficit.

The European Commission has long demanded that Spain reform its pension system and has made it a condition for accessing European Union economic recovery funds. Under a planned reform unveiled earlier this month that aims to get more people to work longer, Spain will give cheques worth up to 12,000 euros (\$14,000) per year to retirement-age workers who postpone their retirement.

Retiring early on the other hand would lead to a reduction in monthly payments. But the reform, which must still be approved by Spain's fragmented parliament, will also restore the indexation of pensions to inflation. "Pensioners will no longer have to worry about the evolution of their pension," socialist Budget Minister Maria Jesus Montero told a news conference last week after the cabinet approved the reform. A conservative government eliminated indexation in 2013, although in 2018 it hiked pensions in line with inflation following protests by pensioners against their loss of purchasing power. The 2013 reform also gradually increased the legal retirement age to reach 67 in 2027 from around 65 years currently.

'Not sustainable'

Rafael Pampillon, head of the economics department at Madrid's IE Business School, said that raising pensions in line with inflation every year was "outrageous". "The system is not sustainable. Pensions should be frozen," he told AFP. Demographics complicate the picture. Spanish has one of the world's longest life expectancies-around 83 years according to the World Health Organization-and Europe's lowest fertility rate after Malta's.

As a result, the number of youths under the age of 25 who enter the labor market each year is 30 percent less than those over 40, said Pampillon. Javier Diaz Gimenez, an economics professor at the IESE Business School, said that while other southern European nations like Italy and Greece face the same problem, "in Spain reform has been put off, the consensus has been to deny the problem." "People live longer, therefore they cost more, therefore their pensions should be lowered. That is hard because it means not keeping a promise to people who are about to retire" and who expect a certain sum after paying into the system for years, he added.

'Up in the air'

The government has said that details of the planned pension reform will be ironed out in the autumn. It will have to adjust payments based on available funds and extended life expectancy. Social Security Minister Jose Luis Escrivá recently sparked an uproar by suggesting that baby boomers-those born in the post-WWII baby boom between 1946 and 1964 - would eventually have to accept lower pensions, and quickly backtracked. With a general election expected in two years, no party wants to risk alienating the large block of older voters by proposing pension cuts, said Pampillon of the IE Business School. "Everything is up in the air," he added.

Jordi Fabregat of the Esade business school said part of the problem is that Spain offers generous public pensions, with monthly payments amounting to 80 percent of a worker's final salary compared with an average of 55 percent for all of Europe. "There is not the habit in Spain of saving for retirement," he added. The only chance for a deep, sustainable reform of the pension system is if "there is pressure from the European Union," said Fabregat. —AFP

In Los Angeles, 'tiny homes' spring up for homeless people

LOS ANGELES: In a parking lot in Los Angeles, a village of miniature prefab houses has sprung up, one of several sites in America's second-largest city where so-called "tiny homes" are being put up to help the homeless get back on their feet. The City of Angels has a large homeless population, second only to New York. Tens of thousands live rough-their tents, and their distress, are plain for any resident or visitor to see.

In the Tarzana neighborhood, 76 tiny homes paid for by the city have been erected. Each is 64 square feet (six square meters), and is equipped with two beds and shelving as well as air conditioning and heating. Each one costs \$6,500 and can be set up in just 90 minutes. Toilets and showers are shared, and state-of-the-art washing machines face large, bright orange tables under umbrellas. The set-up feels a bit like a campground.

Zuri-Kinshasa Maria Terry, 46, has just moved into the Tarzana development. The former stripper says she ended up on the streets a year ago, after two weeks in intensive care because she had contracted Covid-19, and waited two months for the tiny home village to open. "It was the scariest thing in the freaking world to be out there," Terry told AFP, adding she was "still grasping" the fact that she had found a steady place to live.

In addition to allowing a certain privacy, she said the main advantage of the tiny homes is "safety," as compared to either living on the street or in a traditional shelter.

'Building a case plan'

The Tarzana site is guarded 24 hours a day, and while residents do not get to keep the keys to their tiny homes, they can lock it from the inside, explains Rowan Vansleve, chief finance and administration officer of Hope of the Valley, a non-governmental organization that manages the development. The process begins with "a really hot shower, getting a great meal and then building out a case plan" to help the new resident get out of their precarious situation, according to Vansleve.



LOS ANGELES: Staff members (left) collect intake information from a new arrival at the Tarzana Tiny Home Village which offers temporary housing for people experiencing homelessness in the Tarzana neighborhood of Los Angeles. —AFP

uation, according to Vansleve.

"Once you've got a case plan, we're going to assign you a tiny home and you're going to work that plan however long that takes," he added. Residents have access to medical care and therapy, and three meals a day are provided. They are given lodging for three months at a time, which is renewable until the resident finds permanent housing, according to Brandon Hamner, the NGO's program manager for the Tarzana site.

Roots of the crisis

The first village of tiny homes in Los Angeles opened in early 2021 and several more followed. Similar initiatives have sprung up in recent years elsewhere in California, including San Jose, and in Seattle. For those who advocate for the homeless, the projects are a mixed bag. Mayer Dahan, founder of the Dream

Builders Project, says the tiny homes can be "a very positive transition" for some, but he said he worried about "the concept that solutions could be found by trying to resolve the symptoms, as opposed to the underlying issue." For Shayla Myers, a senior attorney at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, one problem is that "there is far too little affordable housing for people to exit out of these shelter facilities and into permanent housing."

While acknowledging that tiny homes are a better option for some, Myers insisted that these homes are in fact "incredibly expensive" because of the operating costs-and that California must do more. "There is no way to solve the homelessness crisis without addressing the root causes, which are poverty, wealth inequality and a lack of affordable housing options," she said. —AFP

Teeth gritted, Spain tourism rides 'COVID rollercoaster'

MADRID: The prospects for Spain's tourism sector are getting bleaker, with European reservations slowing over soaring COVID cases, but industry figures hope the summer won't resemble the catastrophe of 2020. The Exceltur tourism association said this week that it had seen a sudden slowdown in reservations after the French and German governments urged their citizens to avoid Spain, which has seen a recent surge in infections. "Bookings were going well but have slowed down, especially from France," Jorge Marichal, head of the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (CEHAT), told Spain's RTVE public broadcaster. "The situation changes very quickly and within hours. The whole summer will be the same-a roller-coaster ride in which we will have to make decisions as we go along."

The season started on a positive note: bookings at seaside hotels-which in April and May were 80 percent lower than in 2019 - improved in June, meaning the figure was only 60 percent below the same period two years ago, Exceltur said. At the start of July, the government restated its aim of drawing 45 million visitors this year, around half the number in 2019. Before the pandemic hit in spring 2020, Spain was the world's second-most popular tourist destination after France, and the sector accounted for around 12 percent of the economy. But the situation has deteriorated rapidly following a mass

outbreak among students celebrating in the Balearic Islands that quickly spread across the country. On July 8, France warned its nationals against travelling to Spain or Portugal on holiday because of a spike in Covid-19 cases caused by the highly-contagious Delta variant. The move sparked outrage across the Pyrenees although France's top diplomat later modified the warning, saying only that vaccination was a must before travelling to Spain.

Germany also declared all of Spain to be a risk area last week, including its two popular archipelagos-the Canary Islands in the Atlantic and the Balearic Isles in the Mediterranean. The Balearic Islands were downgraded by Britain as well this week to its "amber" travel list, removing them from the green list where they had been placed in late June. The move means that from Monday, any non-vaccinated British travellers will have to quarantine for 10 days after returning from the islands.

'Last minute'

"Any announcement from the authorities in our main visitor markets has an immediate impact," Maria Frontera, head of the Balearic Islands' hotel federation, told Cadena Cope radio. Before the pandemic, the islands' largest visitor groups were British, French and German nationals. But even though new bookings have slowed, few travellers had cancelled their bookings outright, she said. "For now, we're getting more reservations than cancellations." The same scenario is playing out on the Costa Brava in northeastern Spain where the French account for nearly half of all foreign tourists. While the warnings have slowed reservations, "bookings are still coming in," said Judit Lloberol, head of the Costa Brava's hotel association.

"There have been some cancellations but it's not been



MADRID: The tourism season in Spain started on a positive note: bookings at seaside hotels-which in April and May were 80 percent lower than in 2019 - improved in June, meaning the figure was only 60 percent below the same period two years ago, Exceltur said.

too dramatic." Visitors were being very cautious, she said, largely booking "at the last minute" with hotel occupancy rates not exceeding 65-70 percent on weekdays, at a time of year when they would normally be "overbooked". But on the southern Costa del Sol, a hotspot for British holidaymakers, bookings have surged in recent days after London lifted quarantine requirements for all vaccinated returning travellers, said Javier Hernandez of the region's hotel association. He said hotel occupancy rates were expected to average around 60 percent in July and August, barring any last-minute surprises.

Economic devastation caused by the pandemic nonetheless remains visible with nearly one in four hotels on the Costa del Sol not opening at all, and close to one in five in the Balearic Islands, industry figures show. —AFP

Middle East telecom operators collaborate to support Open RAN

- Zain, Etisalat Group, stc, Mobily and du come together to commit on implementation of Open RAN solutions
- Initiative to drive innovation, cost efficiencies and customer mobile experience

KUWAIT: Zain Group, Etisalat Group, stc, Mobily, and du, from Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (EITC), are joining forces to push forward the implementation of Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) solutions in their existing telecom networks, share their industry knowledge and experience setting a clear path to drive innovation for the ICT sector across the Middle East.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the five operators confirms commitment to deploy Open RAN across their footprint, providing an opportunity to traditional RAN vendors to adopt open interfaces, software and hardware to build more agile and flexible mobile networks in the 5G and 4G era, support new entrants with innovative solutions and achieve cost efficiencies in RAN deployments.

This partnership will open immense opportunities for operators and the telecom ecosystem with the availability of interoperable, competitive and commercial grade Open RAN products, building a framework to exchange best practices and technical outcomes. For customers, they will gain advantage with service catering to the local market requirements with faster time to market while using the most advanced mobile access networks. With operators focusing on introducing software capabilities in the Open RAN environment it will bring technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the forefront. Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Zain Group's Chief Technology Officer, commented: "This joint and innovative initiative by like-minded and visionary regional mobile operators is truly inspirational as it brings multiple benefits to all our stakeholders and further enhances the Middle East telecom sector's position on the ICT world map."

Hatem Bamatraf, Chief Technology Officer, Etisalat Group, said: "This is an extraordinary opportunity for the Middle East operators to come together to promote the development of an open technology that will help to enhance the flexibility and efficiency of our networks. I am excited about this partnership that will foster a diverse and secure 4G/5G ecosystem based on Open RAN solutions. This is also a testimony to Etisalat's commitment and leadership in innovation in the ICT sector and to development and adoption of Open RAN ensuring the best network experience for our customers." Hailham Alfaraj, Senior Vice President of Technology and Operations in stc Group, said: "stc is committed to the introduction of latest technologies and innovative 5G/4G mobile networks solutions.



Today's announcement signals the entry into a new era of operators' collaboration in Middle East to accelerate the development of Open Network technologies, which helps in diversifying our strategic technology growth."

He added: "Our commitment has always been to deliver a best-in-class mobile network to our deserving customers. This is an exciting milestone in stc's digital transformation journey; stc will continue to endeavor to always lead the market towards digital transformation, in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030."

Eng. Alaa Malki, Chief Technology Officer at Mobily, said: "Mobily is keen to strengthen this partnership, which copes with the latest innovations in ICT sector, as it improves the services provided to customers and build an advanced open access network."

Almalki added: "The implementation of Open RAN solutions supports the flexibility and provides more innovation in managing the network for more efficient operations. Mobily is willing to exert all efforts for the success of this partnership and forge several partnerships that push forward the development and innovation in the ICT sector."

Saleem Al-Blooshi, Chief Technology Officer, du,

said: "Driving innovation and Open RAN deployment is the shared responsibility of every telecom operator. At du, we are committed to working with our regional counterparts, which will enable us to create further value by increasing infrastructure flexibility and efficiency while accelerating technology adaption and network expansion across the UAE."

With Open RAN the industry is working towards standards and technical specifications that define open interfaces within the radio system, including hardware and software, so that networks can be deployed and operated based on mix-and-match components from different suppliers. Operators will be able to draw on the reinvigorated supplier innovation to drive cost efficiencies and more flexibly deliver customized services in response to evolving customer demands.

The introduction of Open RAN, virtualization and automation will enable a fundamental change in the way operators manage networks and deliver services. Operators will be able to add or shift capacity more quickly for end users, automatically resolve network incidents or provide enterprise level services on-demand for industry.

S&P downgrades Kuwait's credit rating to A+ from AA-

KUWAIT: Kuwait was downgraded by Standard & Poor's Global Ratings for a second time in less than two years after a fall in oil revenue and increased spending pressured the country's fiscal outlook. The sovereign credit rating was cut one level to A+ from AA-, the fifth-highest investment-grade level, according to a statement Friday.

S&P now rates Kuwait two notches lower than Fitch Ratings and on par with Moody's Investors Service, which lowered its own assessment of the country last year for the first time. S&P's outlook for Kuwait is negative. "The downgrade reflects the persistent lack of a comprehensive funding strategy despite the central government's ongoing sizable deficits," according to S&P analysts. "We consider that these persistent delays could ultimately leave Kuwait more vulnerable to potential future terms-of-trade shocks." The rating agency downgraded the sovereign in March 2020, citing materially lower oil prices. Although crude rebounded this year to more than \$70 per barrel, a delay to proposed laws that would allow the government to borrow or withdraw from its \$700 billion Future Generations Fund has left the treasury cash-strapped amid increased spending during the pandemic and delayed reforms.

Kuwait's economy will grow by only 0.5 percent in real terms in 2021, following a 8.9 percent contraction last year on oil production cuts and pandemic effects, according to S&P. It expects Kuwait's central government deficits will average 17 percent of GDP over 2021-2024. Kuwait's government has been unable to borrow since its debut Eurobond in 2017, forcing it to rely on its General Reserve Fund instead. Liquid assets there are close to being depleted, forcing the Finance Ministry to push through other measures to meet spending needs.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON
15 JULY 2021

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	28,028	6,934.05	0.2%	0.0%	14.6%	242,120,752	105,438,920	17,257	31.9	2.3	75.2%
Main Market	9,234	5,354.98	1.3%	0.7%	17.6%	895,920,474	94,389,374	32,922	9.0	1.7	24.8%
All Share	37,262	6,396.63	0.5%	0.2%	15.3%	1,138,041,226	199,828,294	50,179	26.2	2.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	21,358	1,445.79	0.3%	-0.2%	14.5%	143,843,964	55,638,221	6,946	33.4	2.3	56.62%
BASIC MATERIALS	968	1,085.75	-0.5%	-0.9%	20.8%	4,129,685	2,369,652	860	22.7	1.5	2.57%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	514	999.71	2.0%	2.6%	33.9%	16,390,363	4,548,333	2,097	7.2	6.5	1.36%
CONSUMER STAPLES	233	764.29	-1.9%	-2.5%	-6.6%	2,440,362	1,504,555	303	14.2	1.6	0.62%
ENERGY	297	1,427.60	0.8%	-0.2%	11.8%	23,230,252	918,038	895	12.4	1.3	0.79%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	3,330	1,200.92	3.1%	3.8%	29.2%	716,636,425	77,190,995	22,912	6.3	1.5	8.83%
HEALTH CARE	400	807.02	0.5%	2.1%	-2.4%	47,000	22,111	20	35.5	5.6	1.06%
INDUSTRIALS	4,009	1,129.56	-0.9%	-0.2%	26.8%	55,034,899	30,479,781	7,351	28.4	1.7	10.63%
INSURANCE	524	1,375.78	2.6%	-0.7%	19.0%	330,197	35,654	90	9.0	1.1	1.39%
REAL ESTATE	2,539	1,185.07	0.9%	0.0%	24.4%	150,451,424	18,761,429	6,353	17.4	1.2	6.73%
TECHNOLOGY	11	778.43	-5.3%	-5.3%	54.8%	1,840,047	191,339	188	N.A	0.9	0.03%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,290	1,072.94	0.3%	-0.7%	-2.7%	20,148,627	7,384,034	1,772	12.4	2.1	8.72%
UTILITIES	246	589.47	0.9%	-1.8%	-19.1%	3,517,981	784,152	392	20.1	3.5	0.65%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KHOT	92	33.1	51,907	4,031	22
DALQAN	259	21.0	6,179,421	1,486,182	412
KUWAITRE	309.0	20.7	66	19	2
ASIYA	50	13.4	45,925,197	2,278,368	1,239
TAAMEER	31.0	13.1	2,229,017	64,819	86

Top Losers

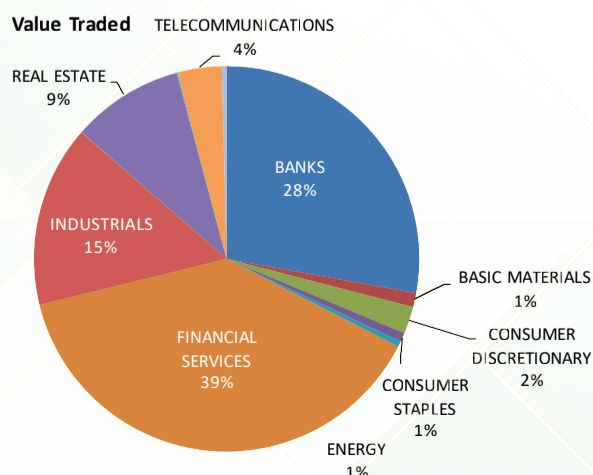
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFC	42	-14.1	300	13	3
SCEM	51	-9.6	63,540	3,276	2
QIC	63.3	-9.6	10,906	725	6
KGL	53	-7.9	6,359,624	334,795	330
HUMANSOFT	3499.0	-7.9	3,604,733	12,746,949	1,885

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AAYAN	148	5.0	160,225,809	23,280,376	2,173
MANAZEL	46	5.1	85,961,535	3,668,969	2,171
GFH	69	7.5	72,199,417	4,853,669	2,069
SECH	101	12.9	61,426,463	5,910,294	2,074
AUB	236	1.7	58,227,889	13,550,621	944

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AAYAN	148	5.0	160,225,809	23,280,376	2,173
KFH	763	0.9	21,274,309	16,101,632	2,092
AUB	236	1.7	58,227,889	13,550,621	944
HUMANSOFT	3499	-7.9	3,604,733	12,746,949	1,885
NBK	855	0.5	13,595,265	11,649,678	1,221



Market Summary:

- Last week has shown some divergence when comparing Premier market and Main market indexes. While the Main market was active and have both value and volume increased, Premier market volume dropped 24% while value increased only 3% which shows the weakness of the Premier market index whenever reaching the resistance level.
- While the Premier market is unable to overcome the resistance levels, yet it's holding its place at the support levels which illustrate that the current correction is temporary and the market might rebound in the coming couple of weeks supported by Q2 results, specially Banks' results.
- Technically, All Share is targeting 6495 and 6550 once overcome the resistance at 6430 while keeping the support levels at 6330 and 6715. Premier market is targeting 7173 once overcome the resistance at 7000 while keeping the support at 6880 and 6720. Main market on Thursday has overcome the resistance at 5335 and marching towards 5700 while keeping the support at 5240 and 5150.

Business

Mining and metals companies accelerate focus on sustainability

Schneider Electric, AVEVA join hands to drive sustainability initiatives

DUBAI: Schneider Electric, the leader in the digital transformation of energy management and automation, and AVEVA, a global leader in industrial software, driving digital transformation and sustainability, announced yesterday that their combined technology offerings are supporting the sustainability initiatives of mining companies in four key pillars: energy efficiency, yield improvement, low greenhouse emission technology adoption, and new green processes.

Global decarbonization is heavily reliant on the sustainable production of minerals and commodities. A thriving and healthy mining and metals sector is crucial for the global economy and to support the innovation of new technologies and materials needed for climate change reduction, environment protection, and the circular economy. Schneider Electric and AVEVA are providing the tools required by organizations to make informed decisions that will empower people across the mining, minerals, and metals value chains to be more strategic in their choices based on sound advice with sustainability in mind. They are assisting operators and managers in these choices leaving these organizations well positioned to tackle some of the challenges associated with adopting sustainable practices, potentially resulting in reduced operating costs and thus providing the rare ability of appeasing all stakeholders.

According to an IDC Technology Spotlight, sponsored by AVEVA and Schneider Electric, Transitioning to Sustainable Mining, Minerals and Metals Practices, the top three market pressures driving the sustainability agendas of mining and metals organizations are:

- Need to improve brand equity
- Reduce the risk of an adverse event
- Ensure compliance with current and future regulations

"Technology has a critical role to play in supporting mining companies," said Ben Kirkwood, Senior Research Manager, IDC Energy Insights -



Martin Provencher



Ben Kirkwood



David Willick

WW Mining. "Efforts to hit sustainability targets and gain greater visibility and control over operations will enable corporate insight and action relating to energy, water usage, and management of the operational environment. IDC's global analysis of the revenue growth and profitability of industrial companies shows that those with a committed and ongoing sustainability-based strategy combined with a long-term, funded, digital transformation agenda considerably outperform their competitors."

Digitalization

The IDC Technology Spotlight also reinforces the fact that as the industry continues to experience backlash from its perceived stagnant position on sustainability, platforms with added analytics are enabling improved operational efficiencies while enhancing the visibility of the changes being made.

"Digitally integrated operations can address key areas of an organization's sustainability agenda by combining power and process intelligence and con-



Speakers from Schneider Electric, AVEVA, IDC, Rio Tinto and Vale at the event

trols," said David Willick, VP North America, Mining, Minerals and Metals Segment, Schneider Electric. "Digitalization is a critical evolution for the resources industry, and Schneider Electric and AVEVA are uniquely qualified to help. We are experts at marshalling the power of connected systems and human insight to bring operational performance to its highest level. Together, we have won the trust of the world's leading companies with thousands of implementations onsite and in the cloud. Today our joint customers can benefit from our shared customer-centric innovation culture, unmatched R&D capabilities, and extensive sector-specific expertise."

"Although the benefits of digital transformation are crystal clear, the mining industry has thus far been limited by legacy infrastructure, data inadequacies, and piecemeal optimization programs," said Martin Provencher, Industry Principal, Mining, Metals and Materials, AVEVA. "Increasingly virulent cyberattacks and a growing mandate for decarbonized minerals have further emphasized the importance of having high data availability and

embracing a secure, cloud-first approach to visualize and contextualize enterprise-wide processes across global operations. The combination of Schneider Electric's energy management solutions, automation systems and services, and AVEVA's Digital Mining Transformation solutions enable our customers to transform conventional mining operations into intelligent, resilient and sustainable undertakings."

Corporate Knights recently named Schneider Electric the world's most sustainable company. According to the IDC Technology Spotlight, Schneider Electric's EcoStruxure platform combined with AVEVA's Digital Mining and Metals Transformation solutions can provide the operational and organizational insight required to make sustainable operations and improved decisions through the collection and analysis of data. The partner companies aim to decarbonize the mining, minerals and metals value chains through the provision of an industrial IoT platform with technology and software elements supporting the capability for energy management and automation.

In Senegal, giant sheep prized for Eid

DAKAR: A ram the size of a small pony tosses its head inside a sumptuous pen illuminated by flashing disco lights, before lunging at some ewes half its size. The skittish animal lives on a rooftop in Senegal's capital Dakar, alongside a dozen ewes, in an enclosure featuring ceiling fans, faux chandeliers and multi-colored lighting.

The plush surroundings underscore the deep affection owner Abdou Fatah Diop has for the breed of sheep known as Ladoum, which are native to the West African country. "It's a passion. I forget everything," Diop says of his sheep, adding that he spends more money on them than he does on his family.

But the sheep are still money-spinners. Businessman Diop, 40, sells lambs sired by his prize ram to other Ladoum breeders who want to improve their herds, for the equivalent of thousands.

Many are similarly enamored with sheep in the mostly Muslim nation of Senegal, where there are popular television programs dedicated to the animal. The most prized variety are the Ladoum: a smooth-haired breed with curled horns that can reach imposing heights of 1.2 meters (4 feet) or more at the shoulder. A wealthy elite also pays small fortunes for magnificent Ladoum

rams to sacrifice during the Islamic festival of Eid Al-Adha-also called Tabaski-which begins next week.

Senegalese breeders only developed the variety over the past 20 years, according to Diop, to accentuate the sheep's proportions and physical beauty.

About Kane, another top breeder, has dozens of Ladoum tethered under a white tent in the center of Dakar to sell for Tabaski. His clients will pay up to 2 million CFA francs (3,000 euros, \$3,600) for a sacrificial animal. "It's an exceptional breed that you can find nowhere else," he says, praising the sheep's "splendor".

'Mystify the neighbors'

Slaughtering flashy rams for Tabaski has become a marker of status in Senegal. But prices are far out of reach for many in the country, where about 40 percent live on less than \$1.90 (1.70 euros) a day, according to the World Bank.

There is still pressure to buy a good-looking sheep, however. In Dakar's largest ruminants' market, herders in colorful robes stroll among thousands of bleating sheep and goats.

Traders from neighboring Mali and Mauritania have come ahead of Tabaski to serve the city's clientele.

The market does a roaring trade over the festival period, according to its president Mamadou Talla, clearing about 150,000 euros (\$180,000) a day in sales and supplying half of the 260,000 sheep consumed in Dakar. Talla, 61, said that competing



DAKAR: A herdsman keeps watch over his sheep in the Keur Massar sheep market. Thousands of sheep are transported to Dakar ahead of Tabaski (Eid Al-Adha) celebrations. — AFP

for the nicest sheep is a uniquely Senegalese phenomenon and that customers are picky.

"Every Senegalese wants a big ram" the 61-year-old added, which can "mystify" the neighbours and make children happy. Not all sheep are exorbitant. Talla said many go for 60,000 CFA francs (90 euros, \$107), for example.

'Crackpots'

Several traders interviewed by AFP said that costs of upkeep and transport justified the seemingly high price of ordinary Tabaski sheep. For the deluxe animals, breeder Abou Kane argued that the rich have a religious obligation

to choose the nicest animal. "God demanded of us a sacrifice," he said. "You really shouldn't choose just anything". Some argue that the pursuit of beauty in sheep has little to do with Tabaski, however.

El Hadji Mamadou Ndiaye, an imam at Dakar's Great Mosque, said the rules dictate that the sacrificial animal be of a certain age, among other measures, but say nothing of an animal's size or beauty.

Culture, as well as individual vanity, play a role in the market for enormous Tabaski sheep, he suggested. "If you're not a crackpot, you just follow the criteria that are demanded," Ndiaye said. —AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

Fed maintains its stance amid rising inflation

KUWAIT: Consumer price index, a key measure of inflation for the Federal Reserve was released on Tuesday where it showed the pace of US consumer prices has accelerated unexpectedly in June.

The reading showed CPI rose last month at its fastest pace since August 2008, surging 5.4 percent from the previous year, while surpassing the 5 percent increase reported in May and the 4.9 percent rise forecasted by economists. On a monthly basis, the data showed price gains of 0.9 percent, the biggest one month jump since June 2008. Core CPI, the figure that strips out volatile items such as food and energy, rose from a yearly increase of 3.8 percent in May to 4.5 percent in June.

The inflation figure had investors, economists and policy makers scrutinizing the reading in the middle of a debate about the risk of runaway consumer prices, fueled by ultra-accommodative fiscal and monetary policy. Looking at the numbers it is apparent that price jumps have so far been most significant in sectors directly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The highest driver being prices of used cars which have soared due to a semiconductor shortage, semiconductors are an essential component in building new cars, and the shortage made new cars scarce,

driving the soaring demand to the limited used car market. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly invoked used car prices as evidence for the temporary nature of the current inflation surge.

Other factors having a hand in the rising figures included travel related expenses such as airfare, hotel prices and car rental costs, all rising due to lockdowns being loosened. Energy prices also surged as Americans shook off pandemic restrictions and took to the roads again. Fed officials had predicted in June that their preferred gauge of core inflation would rise by 3 percent this year before mellowing down to 2.1 percent in 2022. But Tuesday's reading saw economists believing that the surprisingly high inflation could pressure the regulator to consider slowing monetary stimulus by reducing asset purchases sooner than previously thought. The Biden administration has previously expressed confidence that the surge in prices would subside, and continued to defend that view after the data were published. The White House's Council of Economic Advisers on Tuesday stressed in a series of tweets that, outside of disruptions related to the pandemic and supply chain issues, core CPI had risen by 0.22 percent month over month, relative to 0.28 percent in May and 0.31 percent in April. "We're at a place where a set of pandemic related services are still normalizing their prices back to where they were before the pandemic. We're in a world where we see a very concentrated bottleneck around autos, and everything else in the core series we're seeing deceleration," a White House official said on Tuesday.

A day following the release of the US inflation date, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell testified in front of the Congress, where he fended questions from Republicans and Democrats alike, in a bid to

ease concerns over the Fed's response to surging inflation. Powell pushed back against suggestions that the regulator might be complacent about inflation risks, saying that the Fed was ready to act if needed to tame prices and that he sympathized with public concern over rising prices. "I know people are very worried about inflation, we hear that loud and clear from everybody, it is really going through the economy and through every business," said Powell.

Powell largely stuck to his view that the inflation increases would be transitory and will eventually subside. Powell did not break any new ground on monetary policy during the three hour hearing, he reiterated that the central bank would continue discussions later this month on reducing its \$120bn in monthly asset purchases, and that the Fed is not yet debating a rise in its main interest rate from its rock bottom level.

Powell sought to strike a balance between accepting that the inflation readings had caught the fed off-guard so far, while also stressing that the big picture had not changed. He said "It is still the same story. It is still the same parts of the economy that are producing this inflation. It is a pretty narrow group of things that are producing these high readings, but we are anxious like everybody else to see that inflation pass through." He also urged lawmakers to have "faith" in the Fed's judgment that it was still riskier to tighten policy too early than too late. "We really do believe and virtually all forecasters do believe that these things will come down of their own accord as the economy reopens - it would be a mistake to act prematurely."

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30055

Travel happy with Ooredoo roaming bundles

KUWAIT: Summer has always been the perfect season for travelling, and the holiday season has started. Thus, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, launched its roaming bundles at competitive prices designed to fulfill its customers' needs while travelling.

By subscribing to any of the roaming bundles: "Ooredoo Passport" or "My Country", customers will no longer need to purchase a local SIM card to enjoy telecommunication services, enabling them to enjoy unlimited benefits including unlimited Internet, calls within the visited destination and to more than 70 countries; all from their Ooredoo Kuwait number. Further, customers no longer have to worry about the rigors associated with mobile connectivity while travelling.

The "Ooredoo Passport", the first of its kind in the State of Kuwait, enables all prepaid and postpaid Internet customers to enjoy roaming services around more than 70 countries, as well as the opportunity to choose from the daily, weekly or monthly Internet or voice plans with unlimited benefits with flexible validity starting from KD 1 per day. The "My Country" roaming bundle supports one country, in which it gives customers the unlimited benefits available only in the customers' chosen country and will not roam outside it, and they can choose from 27 countries. Hence, the offer is valid for 30 days for KWD Ooredoo has customized these packages to fulfill the lifestyle of its customers and give them the best value at competitive prices. Hence, all Ooredoo roaming bundles start their journey from the plane with inflight roaming. Existing Ooredoo customers can choose from subscribing to a Voice (internet and minutes) or internet plan or purchase and Internet SIM, while for non-existing customers they can purchase a SIM to utilize it abroad.

Burgan Bank offers for Youth Account holders at Unique Hype

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Eid Al-Adha, Burgan Bank is offering its Youth account customers a KD 50 discount at Unique Hype. Unique Hype is one of the trendiest stores for streetwear clothing, limited-edition sneakers and apparel. Burgan Bank Youth cardholders can avail the offer on the shoes collection throughout the Eid holiday at Unique Hype store at Al-Hamra Mall.

Burgan Bank's partnership with Unique Hype is part of the Bank's objective to expand and diversify its promotional offers to the Youth account customers. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries, collectively known as the "Burgan Bank Group", in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks, which includes Gulf Bank Algeria - AGB (Algeria), Bank of Baghdad - BOB (Iraq & Lebanon), Tunis International Bank - TIB (Tunisia), and fully owned Burgan Bank Turkey. Furthermore, Burgan Bank has a presence in the UAE through its corporate office, Burgan Financial Services Limited.

Lifestyle | Features



French director Julia Ducournau poses on stage with US actress Sharon Stone, French actor Vincent Lindon, French actress Agathe Rousselle and US director and Jury President of the 74th Cannes Film Festival Spike Lee after she won the Palme d'Or for her film "Titane" during the closing ceremony of the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival on Saturday. — AFP photos



French director Julia Ducournau poses on stage with her trophy after she won the Palme d'Or for her film "Titane".



Norwegian actress Renate Reinsve poses with her trophy during a photocall after she was awarded with the Best Actress Prize for her part in the film "Verdens Verste Menneske" (The Worst Person In The World).



Hong Kong director Tang Yi poses with her trophy during a photocall after she won the Palme d'Or - Short Film for her film "All the Crows in the World".



Italian director Marco Bellocchio poses during a photocall after he received an honorary Palme d'Or.

FRENCH SHOCKER 'TITANE' WINS PALME D'OR AS LEE SLIPS UP

Shock-fest "Titane" took home the top Palme d'Or prize at Cannes on Saturday, revealed early at the closing ceremony in an embarrassing slip-up by jury president Spike Lee. French director Julie Ducournau is only the second woman to scoop the prize, for a movie that was one of the wildest, sexiest and most violent ever shown at the Cannes film festival.

"It's the first film ever where a Cadillac impregnated a woman. That blew my mind!" Lee said. "That's genius and craziness together." "Titane" tells the story of a woman who kills without a care, with brutal scenes that had many cinemagoers shielding their eyes during the opening night. Lee, the first black man to lead the jury, read out the winner at the very start of the prize ceremony, rather than introducing the first award of the night for best actor.

After an awkward pause and regrouping, the best actor award went to US actor Caleb Landry Jones for his chilling performance in "Nitram" about Australia's worst mass shooting. Making a film about the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, in which 35 people died, triggered harsh criticism of director Justin Kurzel in Australia. But critics were won over at the Cannes premiere, with Variety calling it a "devastating study of atrocity" that shows "quiet respect for the victims' dignity".

It was a huge night, too, for the previously unknown Norwegian actress Renate Reinsve, who was rocketed to stardom by her role in "Worst Person in the World". Her role as a twenty-something searching for her identity and pin-



Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi poses with his trophy after he won the Best Screenplay prize for the film "Drive My Car".

balling through relationships was a sensation, and caught the 33-year-old totally unprepared. "No one has seen me in anything," she told AFP after the premiere. "The other day I woke up and I puked. And today I woke up and I cried."

'Letting the monsters in'

When it finally became time to announce the Palme d'Or for real, Lee

said: "I apologize for messing up." But then he almost fluffed the presentation again, starting to announce the winner rather than presenter Sharon Stone, by which point Ducournau was giggling in the audience. She still broke into tears when



Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul poses with his trophy after he was jointly awarded with the Jury Prize for the film "Memoria".

the official announcement was made, and told the crowd: "This evening has been perfect because it's been imperfect. Thank you for letting the monsters in." The only other woman to win the top prize is Jane Campion for "The Piano" in 1993.

Other winners on the night included Leos Carax as best director for "Annette", the flamboyant rock opera starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard, and written by

eccentric Los Angeles pop duo Sparks. The second-prize Grand Prix was shared between Iran's two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi ("A Hero") and Finland's Juho Kuosmanen ("Compartment No.6"), while best screenplay went to Japan's



US actor Caleb Landry Jones delivers a speech on stage after he was awarded with the Best Actor Prize for his part in "Nitram".

Hamaguchi Ryusuke and Takamasa Oe for "Drive My Car".

The race had been wide open this year, with critics pointing to many possible successors to "Parasite", the South Korean hit which took home the last Palme in 2019 before making history by triumphing at the Oscars. Last year's festival was cancelled because of the pandemic.

Spit tests

There were doubts early in the festival about the COVID logistics, with some festival-goers grossed out by the spit tests required every 48 hours, and criticism on social media over unmasked attendees in the cinemas at early premieres. Restrictions were tightened, partying scaled back, and even though the stars couldn't quite keep themselves from hugs and kisses on the red carpet, the festival appeared to pass without a major outbreak.

But there was still plenty of star power. Tilda Swinton was ubiquitous on the red carpet, appearing in five films of the official selection. She starred in "Memoria" by Thailand's former Palme winner Apichatpong Weerasethakul, which shared the third-place jury prize with "Ahed's Knee" by Nadav Lapid. But Swinton was clear that her proudest moment was receiving the Palm Dog award on behalf of her three spaniels, who appeared with her in "The Souvenir Part 2". "Honestly, this is the prize to get," she said at Friday's canine ceremony, as she tied the red collar prize around her neck. — AFP

Deal! Sports trading cards boom in pandemic-era US

Inside an unassuming store in New York's Greenwich Village, around a dozen men unlock black briefcases, remove sports cards and begin to trade them - a growing hobby and industry that has boomed during the pandemic. Excitement is high after a San Francisco-based investment fund announced earlier that day that it had bought a card of Golden State Warriors' basketball star Stephen Curry for \$5.9 million, setting a new record.

Michael Campobasso, a 38-year-old jewelry dealer, hopes that sale will spur interest in his highly graded card of Curry from the three-time NBA champion's rookie 2009-10 season. "After that card this is probably one of his more coveted cards. I'd sell it for \$80,000," says Campobasso, who paid \$25,000 for it last year.

The sports trading card industry has been growing for several years but coron-

avirus lockdowns reinvigorated hobbyists and attracted new ones, with investors helping to send prices skyrocketing. "It's had a massive impact," Jacob Salter, product manager at Bleecker Trading which hosted the trade night in New York, said of the pandemic. "People were home, they were bored, cooped up in their house, reliving their childhood. They started buying sports cards," added the 25-year-old. The early days of lockdown coincided with the release in April 2020 of hit Netflix series "The Last Dance", about Michael Jordan's celebrated Chicago Bulls team of the 1990s. It sent demand for Jordan memorabilia soaring and contributed towards basketball cards taking center stage in the sports trading card world, which had long been dominated by baseball.

In February this year, a rare Jordan card signed by the six-time NBA champion himself sold for \$1.44 million at auction, breaking the previous record for a card of his by \$500,000. A LeBron James rookie card fetched \$5.2 million in April. Basketball cards dominate exchanges at the Bleecker Trading event, where organizer Salter estimates the total value of cards in the room over the course of the night at \$20 million.

The authenticity of the cards have all been attested to by grading companies, which rate them on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. Ratings factors



Traders exchange sports cards at Bleecker Trading in New York on July 6, 2021. — AFP photos

include rarity and condition. All of the cards are encased in see-through plastic "slabs", which the traders proudly display on racks inside hard suitcases that have combination number locks due to their contents' high-value.

For 28-year-old Vahe Hekimian, collecting sports cards started as a hobby that morphed into his main source of income. "It's a passion. I love it. But I also sell to keep going," he tells AFP, explaining that sports stars' performances impact

the value of their cards.

'Assets'

He once paid \$50,000 in a partial cash-trade transaction for rising NBA star Luka Doncic of the Dallas Mavericks who will represent Slovenia at this summer's Olympics. The most valuable trade of the night exceeds \$90,000 and involves multiple cards, including of baseball hotshot Shohei Ohtani and young NFL quarterback Justin Herbert. Those involved want

to remain anonymous.

Campobasso doesn't sell his card of Curry but he does strike a deal worth \$11,000. A 44-year-old collector calling himself Cage Lawyer, who owns a Jordan card worth half a million dollars, says trading cards are now increasingly seen as astute investments. "People view them as an alternative asset class now, something akin to art and cryptocurrency. People are looking for something to put their money in to hedge against inflation," he explains.

The frenzy is a boon for the growing number of investment groups now trading in sports cards. Alt, which invests in untraditional assets, estimates that the trading card market is currently worth \$15 billion. It splashed out the \$5.9 million on the autographed Curry card. Collectable is another company that engages in fractional ownership where investors buy shares in cards.

PWCC is a trading card marketplace that holds auctions and runs a secure vault where owners can store their cards. It expects to do over \$500 million in sales this year, roughly three times what it did in 2020, according to business development director Jesse Craig. "We're very confident that our industry is going to keep growing," he said. — AFP



NBA star Michael Jordan cards are displayed.



Soccer star Lionel Messi cards are displayed at Bleecker Trading.



A trader selects a card.

Sports

Rovanpera becomes youngest WRC race winner with Estonia Rally victory

TARTU, Estonia: Kalle Rovanpera, a 20-year-old Finn, became the youngest winner in the World Rally Championship when he took the Estonia Rally yesterday. Rovanpera beat Hyundai's Craig Breen by almost a minute and broke the record of another Finn, Jari-Matti Latvala, now his boss at Toyota, who was 22 when he claimed his first victory in Sweden in 2008.

The former Skoda driver, who lives in Estonia, was joined by his father Harri, a one-time rally winner, at the finish line. "It has been a difficult season and it's really nice to get it here in Estonia. It's almost a home rally and a lot of fans were here supporting," Rovanpera told the WRC's website.

"It has been a long season so far with not so good results, but we proved that the pace is there and now we can bring it home which is good," he added. Belgian Thierry Neuville finished third for Hyundai, 1min 12sec behind, after winning three of the day's stages and finishing second in the other three. Seven-time champion Sebastien Ogier finished fourth to extend his overall lead in the

drivers' championship to 37 points over Toyota team-mate Welshman Elfyn Evans who was fifth.

Home hope and four-time race winner Ott Tanak won three stages yesterday, including the closing power stage, but finished 22nd more than 1hr 2mins slower than Rovanpera after temporarily abandoning on Friday following three punctures on his Hyundai. He moved up to fourth in the overall standings, leapfrogging Tanak, and is 14 points behind third-placed Neuville.

Rovanpera had held the lead in Estonia since Friday's fourth stage as he followed in his dad's footsteps after Harri's Sweden Rally victory in 2001. Rovanpera junior was just 11 months old at the time of his father's sole success and began driving aged eight. He started competing as a 14-year-old in Latvia and won the national title in 2016 and 2017.

Son of a driver

He made his debut at the Wales Rally GB later that year and claimed his first points in Australia the following month. Last year, Rovanpera was the youngest

driver to reach the podium when he finished third in Sweden.

This season he finished second in the Arctic Rally on home snow before going one better on Sunday just across the Gulf of Finland less than five months later. Rovanpera is often compared to another prominent young driver, Max Verstappen, who is leading the Formula One standings for Red Bull.

Also the son of a driver, the Dutchman, who came through the Red Bull driver development program, made his Formula One debut in 2015 at 17 years 5 months and 15 days, before winning his first Grand Prix in 2016 at 18 years 7 months and 15 days. "I've heard it before and I think it's pretty flattering," said Rovanpera who has been connected to Red Bull since he was 16.

Rovanpera has plenty of time to dethrone the youngest ever WRC champion, Britain's Colin McRae, who won the title in 1995 at 27 years, 7 months and 25 days. "He is part of a new generation of drivers but he seems to be ready despite his young age and knows how to analyse with a lot of



KYAPA, Estonia: Finland's driver Kalle Rovanpera and Finland's co-driver Jonne Halttunen steer their Toyota Yaris WRC car during stage 15 Mustvee of the WRC Rally Estonia, the seventh round of the FIA World Rally Championship, on Saturday near Kaapa, Estonia. —AFP

experience," said his first boss at Toyota, four-time world champion Tommi Makinen. While Rovanpera rarely smiles in public he is not without a sense of

humor. He told AFP that he chose 69 as his car number because: "That way, when I put the car on its roof, the number stays the same". — AFP

Three people shot outside baseball stadium in US capital

WASHINGTON: Three people were shot outside a baseball stadium crowded with thousands of spectators in the US capital on Saturday, causing the game to be abruptly halted as fans were ushered out. Police initially tweeted four people had been shot, but Washington police second in command Ashan Benedict later said there were three wounded in the incident.

He said two of those hit were in one of two vehicles that was involved in a shootout. The third victim was a woman on the sidewalk outside the stadium where she had been attending the game. "At no time during this incident were individuals inside the stadium attending the game in any type of danger. This was not an active shooter incident. Everything took place outside the stadium," Benedict told reporters.

He said the woman was "expected to be OK." AFP journalists who were at the game said some spectators had rushed for the exits after hearing a dozen or more gunshots outside the stadium, while others remained in their seats at the announcer's initial urging.

Several bursts of automatic gunfire could be clearly heard in the stadium in footage of the game posted on social media, while another video showed streams



WASHINGTON: People are seen leaving the Nationals Park stadium as the game between the Nationals and the San Diego Padres was interrupted due to a shooting outside the stadium in Washington, DC, on Saturday. — AFP

of people sprinting away from the stands. The United States has a long and painful history of deadly gun violence, in the form of a steady daily toll of shootings as well as high-profile mass killings that have targeted schools, workplaces and shopping centers.

Non-life threatening wounds

The lights of multiple police cars lit up the street and sirens could be heard as the crowd attending the game between the Washington Nationals and the San Diego Padres was asked to leave the stadium, in the Navy Yard neighborhood of southern

Washington, DC. Police tweeted that the investigation was active but that "it appears there is no ongoing threat at this time."

The department initially said two people had been shot, and then later added that further "victims associated with this incident walked into area hospitals for treatment of gunshot wounds." The Washington Post quoted police as saying two of the wounded had non-life threatening injuries, with a man shot in the leg and a woman shot in the back. The condition of the third person was not immediately known. — AFP

Charlo, Castano battle to draw in super welterweight showdown

LOS ANGELES: Jermell Charlo and Brian Castano fought to a draw Saturday, denying either a historic victory that would have crowned one of them the first four belt undisputed champion in boxing's super welterweight division.

The showdown marked the first time all four 154-pound belts were on the line with Charlo keeping his three (WBC, WBA and IBF) and Castano retaining the WBO strap as a result of the draw. But the fight proved to be closer than expected with more-aggressive Castano proving he could take Charlo's best punch and deliver heavy blows of his own, especially in the middle rounds at the AT&T Center in San Antonio, Texas.

Judges delivered a split decision draw with one having it 114-113 for

Argentina's Castano, another 114-114 and the third raised eyebrows by scoring it a one-sided 117-111 in favor of American Charlo. Both fighters thought they won the bout, Charlo because he almost knocked down his rival in the second round and Castano because he controlled the tempo in the middle rounds.

"A draw isn't what I wanted to hear," said Charlo. "I won this fight. I hurt him a lot more. My power is serious. I had him in trouble in the second and 10th rounds. This is my first time experiencing something like this. This comes with boxing — wins, losses and draws." Charlo was looking for the spectacular knockout, while Castano was the more patient of the two, using a combination of body and head shots to score. — AFP



SAN ANTONIO: Jermell Charlo (right) and Brian Castano (left) exchange punches during their Super Welterweight fight at AT&T Center on Saturday in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait's wheelchair basketball team captain Hamad Al-Adwani (right) receives the championship trophy.

Kuwait wins Arab wheelchair basketball crown

KUWAIT: Kuwait Disabled Sports Club wheelchair basketball team won the Arab Championship after beating Jordan 49-37. Club Chairman Shafi Al-Hajiri dedicated the win to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government and people of Kuwait. Hajiri congratulated the athletes for winning this first event after the suspension of international participation due to the coronavirus pandemic. He said the club will reward the players with \$20,000.

Ahly punish 10-man Chiefs to win CAF Champions League

CASABLANCA: Egyptian club Al-Ahly won a record-extending 10th CAF Champions League title on Saturday with a 3-0 final victory over 10-man South African rivals Kaizer Chiefs in Casablanca. Mohamed Sherif scored his sixth goal of the competition after 53 minutes to put the Cairo Red Devils ahead at an empty Stade Mohammed V because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A brilliant goal from Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy on 64 minutes left little doubt about the outcome in a disappointing finale to the marquee African club competition. Amr el Sulaya rubbed salt into the wounds of Chiefs with a third goal on 74 minutes, slamming a back-heel past Nigerian goalkeeper Daniel Akpeyi.

Chiefs were struggling to contain Ahly late in the first half when they suffered a massive blow with the red-carding of Happy Mashiane. The forward stamped on the right leg of full-back Ahmed Tawfik and, after initially flashing a yellow card, the Burundi referee checked the foul on a monitor and changed his decision.

It was a historic victory for Ahly, who

became the first club to win back-to-back Champions League titles three times. South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane, who supported Chiefs as a child, became the first African coach to win the competition three times.

He succeeded in 2016 with South African club Mamelodi Sundowns, and again with Ahly last season in an all-Egyptian final against fierce rivals Zamalek. Ahly pocket \$2.5 million for winning the Champions League and are guaranteed at least another \$3.5 million when they compete in the FIFA Club World Cup in Japan.

Before travelling to the Far East, the Egyptian club that have won 22 African titles will play CAF Confederation Cup winners Raja Casablanca of Morocco in a one-off match for the CAF Super Cup. It was a bitterly disappointing first appearance in the final by Chiefs, whose lone CAF title came 21 years ago when they won the now defunct African Cup Winners Cup.

The Soweto outfit matched Ahly early on and had the lone shot on target in the opening half with an effort by Serbian forward Samir Nurkovic that Ahly goalkeeper and captain Mohamed el Shenawy comfortably saved.

Starting the second half with 10 men, Chiefs packed their defense in the hope of snatching victory through a breakaway goal or a penalty shootout. But the resistance lasted just eight minutes before being undone by a superb pass from Tawfik that Sherif chipped over Akpeyi. — AFP



LA CORUNA, Spain: Kuwaiti boxer Hamza Behbehani (left) participates in his first professional boxing match.

Kuwait's Behbehani wins first pro duel

LA CORUNA, Spain: The first professional Kuwaiti boxer Hamza Behbehani launched his pro career with a bang, as he knocked out his opponent in the first match held in La Coruna, Spain. Behbehani expressed his happiness to raise the Kuwaiti flag high in an international boxing championship. He said the match, though short, was diffi-

cult. "My opponent began with a strong and fast hook in an attempt to knock me out, but I was able to regroup quickly and was able to hit him with several punches that dropped him to the mat several times, prompting the referee to stop the match," he added. He said there will be several matches ahead leading to the world championship. World Boxing Council (WBC) representative in Kuwait Mishal Al-Fajji lauded this achievement for Kuwait, which reflects the high standard Kuwait sport has reached. "We will continue supporting Behbehani all the way to reaching the world championship, and this needs more effort and hard work," he said.

Sports

South African cases spark cluster scare in Olympic Village

TOKYO: Two South African footballers and a video analyst have tested positive for the coronavirus in the Tokyo Olympic Village, officials said yesterday, raising fears of a cluster just days before the opening ceremony. The cases further darkened a gloomy atmosphere around the 2020 Games, which will finally open after a year's delay on Friday but remain widely opposed by the Japanese public.

Players Thabiso Monyane and Kamohelo Mahlatsi and analyst Mario Masha are in isolation after testing positive, Team South Africa said, adding that the whole delegation had been following anti-coronavirus rules. "They have been tested on arrival, daily at the Olympic Village and complied with all the mandatory measures," a statement said. South Africa's rugby sevens coach Neil Powell also tested positive and is in isolation in the Japanese town where the squad are training.

"The timing of the positive results suggests that the PCR test in these individuals was done during the incubation period of the infection, which is how they could be negative in South Africa and then positive in Japan," said chief medical officer Phatho Zondi.

Organizers earlier said two athletes and a member of their support staff had become the first cases in the Olympic Village, without identifying those involved. Fifty-five cases linked to the Games have been discovered this month, including four athletes.

Competitors are flying in from around the world for the pandemic-delayed Olympics, which are facing a backlash in Japan due to the risk of fresh COVID outbreaks. The Olympic Village, a complex of apart-



NARITA: Members of the Netherlands delegation wait for screening and COVID testing upon their arrival on a flight from Amsterdam at Narita International Airport in Narita, Chiba Prefecture yesterday, ahead of the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. — AFP

ments and dining areas in Tokyo, will house 6,700 athletes and officials at its peak when the Games get underway.

The Tokyo Games will be held largely behind closed doors to prevent infections. The Japanese capital remains under a coronavirus state of emergency and has been battling a sharp uptick in cases. Olympic officials have been at pains to play down the health risks of the Games, which are taking place in

stringent anti-coronavirus conditions with athletes tested daily.

"Mingling and crossing of populations is very limited. We keep the risk to an absolute minimum level," Olympic Games executive director Christophe Dubi said yesterday. "We can ensure that transmission between the various groups is almost impossible."

But Tokyo residents appeared unsettled by the cases in the Village. "I thought the Olympic Village

would be safer, so I am amazed that the virus even got inside there. I think it's dangerous," cosmetics company employee Riyoka Kasahara, 23, said.

'Extra strain'

Separately, South Korean International Olympic Committee member Ryu Seung-min tested positive on arrival in Japan and was placed in isolation, a spokesman for the body said. On Saturday, IOC president Thomas Bach appealed for Japanese fans to show support for the Games, saying he was "very well aware of the skepticism" surrounding the event.

Athletes are arriving to find a restrictive environment, with daily testing, social distancing and no movement possible outside the Olympic "bubble". They are under orders to leave Japan 48 hours after their event. In another example of the difficulties, Australia's entire athletics team was quarantined before departure after a member of their entourage returned an inconclusive test. The official later tested negative. "We expect that there'll be cases associated with these Games and really what's going to matter is how we respond to that and to ensure that there's no complacency," said David Hughes, medical director of the Australian Olympic team.

On Saturday, Games chief Seiko Hashimoto admitted athletes are "probably very worried" about coming to Japan, pledging full transparency over COVID cases. Japanese and Olympic officials have also been forced onto the defensive over a welcome reception for Bach attended by 40 people, while Tokyo remains under a coronavirus state of emergency. — AFP



TOKYO: Kuwaiti Olympic shooting team pose for a group picture with locals from the Japanese city of Nihonmatsu.



Kuwaiti Olympic swimmers are greeted by locals from the Japanese city of Nihonmatsu. — KUNA photos

Kuwait's Olympians in Nihonmatsu City greeted in style

TOKYO: Kuwait's Olympians staying in the Japanese city of Nihonmatsu have received a warm welcome from locals in the surprising Kuwaiti style that would make them feel at home. Upon their arrival, a group of people from the Nihonmatsu Chamber of Commerce and Industry has greeted Kuwait's delegation near their hotel with a large banner reading in the Kuwaiti dialect of Arabic, "We are with you. Go for it. Welcome here," Vice-President Hideharu Ohta of the chamber said yesterday. "We hoped to extend our welcome to the athletes of Kuwait, which offered us tremendous support in response to the earthquake. As physical contact with them is prohibited due to COVID-19 concerns, we arranged a support event in this way while maintaining social distancing," Ohta said.

"We sincerely wish that the Kuwaiti Olympians will fully restore their energies here, which is rich with lush greenery, and that they will produce outstanding results in the upcoming games," he added. The heart-

warming banner is now displayed at the hotel's entrance to encourage the athletes before and after their training. In appreciation for Kuwait's support following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Nihonmatsu City, located about 200 km northeast of Tokyo, has applied to host the Kuwaiti team for a pre-games training camp.

At least 10 top Kuwaiti players are partaking in the Tokyo Games due between July 23 and August 8. Lara Dasthi and Abbas Qali will compete in swimming, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhel in rowing and Mohammad Al-Musawi in Karate. The other contenders are the shooters Abdulrahman Al-Faihan, Mansour Al-Rashidi, Abdullah Turgi Al-Rashidi and Talal Turgi Al-Rashidi. In the field-and-track, the participating Kuwaiti champions are Yaaqoub Al-Yoha and Madhawi Al-Shemhari.

An online seminar aiming at familiarizing the local residents with Kuwait was held earlier this month, in which Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) representative in Japan Miyoko Ishigami presented a one-hour lecture about the Kuwaiti life and culture. The event, organized by the city's chamber of commerce, included talks between Ishigami and former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Masahisa Sato, which was later joined by the former Representative of Japan Cooperation Center for the Middle East's "Japan Desk" in Kuwait, Akira Tanaka. — KUNA

Syria eyes Olympic success in Tokyo despite huge challenges

DAMASCUS: Syria is aiming to secure the war-battered country's fourth-ever Olympic medal in Tokyo, but one of its few world-class athletes is less optimistic after struggling to access coaching and facilities for the past four years. The decade-long civil war and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic have drained Syria's resources and left elite sport low on the list of priorities. High jumper Majd Eddin Ghazal, who finished seventh at the 2016 Rio Olympics before winning a bronze medal a year later at the world championships in London, has trained for years under Syrian coach Imad Sarraj, who he hails as one of the best in the country. But Sarraj moved to Oman in 2017 to train the national team there, leaving Ghazal without a coach close at hand. "We have not found a solution to

For Iraq's Olympians, the Tokyo dream is just taking part

BAGHDAD: For the four Iraqi athletes who have made it to Tokyo, there is no realistic talk of medals. Having overcome war, politics and pandemic, their dream is simply to participate. With state financial support cut off by political infighting for most of the run-up to the Games and their locked-down foreign coaches unable to offer more than virtual advice, Iraq's small squad of Olympians got there almost entirely by their own efforts. Right up to November of last year, when a new national Olympic chief was elected, watched over by the International Olympic Committee by video link, Iraq's very participation in the Games was in doubt. A nearly two-year battle for control of the National Olympic Committee's \$25 million budget had seen Iraq ostracized by the IOC and its athletes deprived of the monthly stipends they rely on to prepare for competitions. But despite the loss of state financial support and the difficulties of travelling to qualifying events during the coronavirus pandemic, two Iraqi hopefuls managed to qualify for Tokyo.

Training by email

Rower Mohammed Ryadh, 27, will take part in the men's single sculls for the second Games in a row. But he has no illusions about his medal chances after his French coach of the past nine years, Vincent Tassery, was prevented by restrictions linked to the pandemic from travelling to Baghdad for the rower's training sessions on the Tigris. "I have a French trainer and because of COVID he hasn't been able to come to Iraq so he sends me instructions by e-mail that I have to work on by myself," Ryadh told AFP at his makeshift training base on the river bank.

"So the goal is just to take part in the Olympic Games. We both know it's not worth even thinking about a medal," the rower admitted. To date, Iraq has won just a single Olympic medal — a silver for weightlifting in Rome in 1960 — but it is not for want of trying. At the 2016 Rio Games a total of 21 Iraqi athletes competed in an array of disciplines including



BAGHDAD: Iraqi rower Mohammed Ryadh practices for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on the Tigris River in the capital Baghdad on June 8, 2021. — AFP

this problem for four years," Ghazal said.

"I am adamant on coach Imad Sarraj... but he works in Oman and we are trying to get him to Tokyo," he added. Since returning from a few months of training in Oman in March, Ghazal has had to train without his coach, as the pandemic further complicated international travel. "The coronavirus affected the course of the training plan," he said. "My preparation for the Rio Olympics was better," added the athlete, who has not participated in any international competition since 2019.

'Nothing is impossible'

With little access to his coach, Ghazal said his confidence had taken a hit. "I don't know the truth of my caliber," he said. But the jumper with a personal best of 2.36 meters still holds out hope he could snatch a medal in Tokyo, which will probably be the 34-year-old's last Olympics. "Tokyo will be the fourth time I participate in the Olympics and I am optimistic," he said. "Nothing is impossible if the prerequisites for success are made available," he added. Syria has won a total of three Olympic medals in three different

football, judo, boxing and athletics as well as rowing. But this year just one other Iraqi apart from Ryadh qualified as of right — sprinter Dana Hussein, 35, for the women's 200 meters.

Hussein left it to mid-June to claim her berth with a qualifying time of 22.51 seconds as she took gold in the pan-Arab athletics championship in Tunis. Two other Iraqis were handed wildcard slots after coming close to their qualifying scores — 400 meter specialist Taha Hussein and shooter Fatima Abbas. The four makes up Iraq's smallest squad of Olympians since its Games in London in 1948.

Uday's long shadow

Iraq's Olympians were all children when Saddam Hussein's long years in power came to an end in the US-led invasion of 2003. But the country's Olympic movement is only now recovering from the brutal two-decade grip of the dictator's sadistic eldest son Uday who allegedly tortured athletes he deemed to have underperformed.

The committee Uday headed was dissolved by the US-led occupation authority after the invasion along with all of the other instruments of Saddam's rule. But the manner of its dissolution, and the uncomfortable fact that Saddam's Iraq took part in multiple Olympics before the dictator's overthrow, left a question mark over the legitimacy of the body that replaced it.

That cleared the way for the sports ministry to launch a campaign to oust it in February 2019, leaving athletes in financial limbo as the rump committee battled for control with a commission appointed by the ministry. A new committee was finally set up last year which held fresh elections to the IOC's satisfaction in November and Iraq returned to the Olympic fold.

But little of the state funding filters down to help individual athletes cover the travel and training costs involved in qualifying. "What's sad is that you go to these qualifying events and our authorities really don't care," sprinter Dana Hussein told AFP. "It's taken me 18 months of effort to book my place in Tokyo. I myself had to pay many of the costs of getting training abroad because the athletics federation has very limited means." Hussein called for the Iraqi authorities to draw up a long-term plan for the investment in sports infrastructure the country was deprived of during decades of war and international sanctions. "We need a long-term roadmap — money, equipment and a modern sports infrastructure," she said. — AFP



DAMASCUS: Syrian high jumper Majd Eddin Ghazal trains for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in Tishreen Sports City in Damascus on June 30, 2021. — AFP

sports, but the latest was at the 2004 Athens Games. Firas Mualla, a former open water swimmer and the current head of the Syrian Olympic Committee, insisted the team of six competitors had prepared well.

Alongside Ghazal, they include weightlifter Man Asaad, showjumper Ahmed Hamsho, swimmer Ayman Kalzieh, triathlete Mohamed Masso and Hind Zaza, a 12-year-old table-tennis player and the team's only female member.

Mualla said training this year was more challenging than preparations for Rio, but hopes were high, especially for the promising Asaad who finished 15th in the super heavyweight 105kg class five years ago. "We are optimistic about Man Asaad and his preparations were good. Asaad and Majd Ghazal are our most prominent team members," he said. "We hope Man will win a medal." But Asaad is still recovering from a shoulder injury he sustained at the 2020 Asian Weightlifting Championships in Uzbekistan. "After the Asian championship, I started having shoulder pains and I hope to get through it," he said. Undeterred, he trains everyday with his brother and coach, Qais, following a "calibrated and comprehensive plan". — AFP

Bucks beat Suns to move one win from end of 50-year NBA drought

PHOENIX: Powered by 32 points from Giannis Antetokounmpo and late heroics from Jrue Holiday, the Milwaukee Bucks moved within one win of their first title in 50 years by defeating the Phoenix Suns 123-119 on Saturday in the NBA Finals.

Khris Middleton added 29 points while Holiday contributed 27 points, 13 assists and a crucial steal from Phoenix star Devin Booker that led to his alley-oop pass to Antetokounmpo for a dunk in the final seconds to shut down a late rally by the host Suns.

The Bucks seized a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven championship series with game six tomorrow in Milwaukee. A seventh, if needed, would be played Thursday in Phoenix. "One game away," Holiday said. "We can't get too high on the horse. We know the last game is the hardest to win. We know they will come out and play desperate. We've got to do the same thing."

With the Suns seeking a go-ahead basket in the dying seconds, Holiday stole the ball from Booker and tossed a high pass to Antetokounmpo for a slam dunk. Middleton added a final free throw to seal the Suns' fate. "Big time steal by Holiday and great pass," Antetokounmpo said. "He trusted me, threw the ball up there. It was a great play by Holiday."

The Bucks could become only the fifth team in NBA Finals history to win the crown after dropping the first two games. "Going home to our fans is a great opportunity for us," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "The support

of our city, it's important. It's going to be meaningful. But you have to go make plays. You have to make things happen. Our guys, I think they'll be ready to do that."

Teams winning game five to take a 3-2 edge in the finals have won the title 72 percent of the time, 21 of 29 in all. "Tables are turned. Now we're the desperate team," Phoenix's Deandre Ayton said. "We had our chances of being up and trying to finish the job. They're up and now we got to go get it."

Middleton, who finished with seven rebounds and five assists, scored 11 points in the third quarter and Antetokounmpo added eight to lift the Bucks ahead 100-90 entering the fourth. The Bucks, who fell behind by 16 points after the first quarter, stretched their lead as large as 14 points before the Suns rallied.

Booker, who scored a game-high 40 points, hit a layup and a 3-pointer and Chris Paul followed with a layup to pull the Suns within 120-119. Booker rebounded a Holiday miss only to have Holiday make the steal and the lob to Greek star Antetokounmpo for the jam.

Holiday, who rebounded from 4-of-20 shooting in game four to hit 12-of-20 in game five, figured Booker would try to take the crucial shot and double teamed him defensively. "We knew he wanted to ball and wanted to take that last shot," Holiday said. "He turned right to me. I got the steal. Giannis was screaming for it and I threw it as high as I could. I do



PHOENIX: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks dunks the ball against the Phoenix Suns during Game Five of the 2021 NBA Finals on Saturday at Footprint Center in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

want to score but that's not the most important thing. I want to make it hard for them defensively." The Bucks need only one more win to end a half-century title drought. "We've got to keep playing good basketball and hopefully we can get a win," Antetokounmpo said.

Antetokounmpo, who had nine

rebounds and six assists, said it was the game the Bucks had awaited when all three of their big stars had impressive games. "It was the game for us to get going, all three of us," he said. "It was a great game for us. We went down 16, we kept our composure and we came back to win."

Seeing the Suns squandering the big lead was painful for Booker. "We came out and did what we intended to do and we let it go," Booker said. "They stayed with it and played resilient. Tough loss." Paul had 21 points and 11 assists for Phoenix while Bahamas big man Ayton had 20 points and 10 rebounds. — AFP



Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY
for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

www.moh.gov.kw

STEP 1: Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION STEP 2: FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION STEP 3: SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health