

3 Local leave: Staycation is the answer for many residents



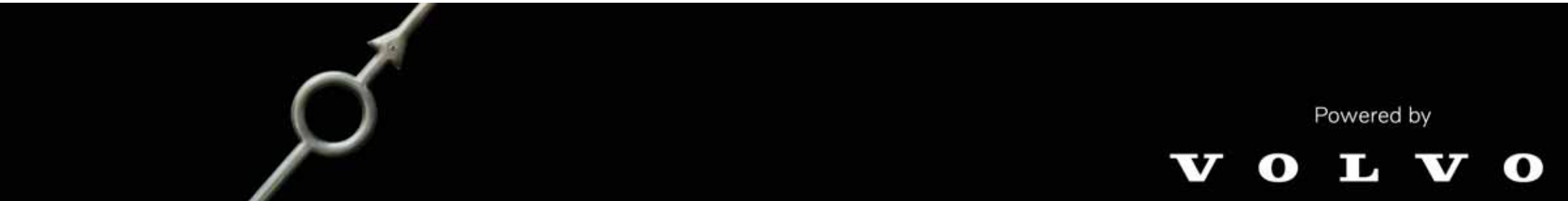
8 Independence of Uber drivers a bumpy road



11 Festival-goers revel in return of live music at Kaleidoscope



16 Japan celebrates gold rush on day of Olympics upsets



Kuwait to build logistics cities to attract foreign investment

Planned zones, ‘smart port’ to also help support diversification drive



KUWAIT: A family is seen at Shuwaikh Beach as the sun sets behind Jaber Causeway on Friday. — Xinhua

KUWAIT: Kuwait plans to establish logistics cities on recently acquired land to support the local economy and attract foreign investment, Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) announced yesterday. Sheikh Yousef Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, KPA Director-General, said these cities will be built on an area of 2 million square meters and designed by global design agencies to ensure high standards that will support e-commerce.

The aim of the logistics cities' project is to find a logistical solution with competitive prices for foreign companies that wish to store their goods regionally in Kuwait, attract foreign investment and fulfill economic growth, as well as support a diversification drive in the sources of income, Sheikh Yousef said. Each of the planned "logistics cities" will serve a particular purpose, he elaborated, saying these zones will prove beneficial to small- and medium-sized enterprises, in addition to offering firms abroad lucrative investment opportunities.

Kuwait will turn into a re-export and shipping center to neighboring countries, in addition to providing job opportunities for citizens in the fields of storage,

artificial intelligence and warehousing logistics, Sheikh Yousef added. "The first project is a maritime single window system that links three ports together for efficiency," he said.

The second "smart port" project will connect the systems of all related parties to release and secure the flow of goods electronically, he added. The facility will serve as a "contact point" linking all concerned bodies, besides using automation and innovative technologies to easily manage day-to-day operations. Meanwhile, KPA will establish its first dry port to serve the flow of goods, which will reduce the accumulation of trucks on the borders, Sheikh Yousef stressed.

On KPA revenues, Sheikh Yousef said an increase of 400 percent over the last six years pushed total assets to \$186 million, an accomplishment he attributed to meticulous and intricate planning. The marine freight industry was hit hard by the COVID pandemic, coupled with recent "mishaps at sea" that brought a large chunk of global trade to a standstill, he added, expecting stranded ships to be on the move again once business picks up. — Agencies

News in brief

COVID affecting more children

KUWAIT: A senior pediatric consultant said in a TV interview sponsored by the health ministry that a number of children have died in Kuwait from the coronavirus, adding the number of infected children admitted to intensive care units has increased recently. Younger, unvaccinated populations are enduring the effects of the rapidly spreading Delta variant of COVID-19, with children representing a higher percentage of positive cases than in the past, according to health officials in the US.

MP asks about spyware

KUWAIT: MP Osama Al-Shaheen yesterday sent a series of questions to the interior minister asking if Kuwait or Kuwaiti officials had been targeted by the Pegasus spyware built by the Zionist NSO Group. Shaheen alleged the program was used by some countries to spy on activists and opposition figures, and asked if any Kuwaiti personality had been targeted. The malware is at the center of a storm after a list of about 50,000 potential surveillance targets was leaked to rights groups.

Heatwave to continue

KUWAIT: Temperatures in Kuwait are expected to hover around 50 degrees Celsius this week as the mercury touched 52 degrees Celsius in Kuwait City yesterday. According to the meteorological department, no immediate respite is likely from the ongoing heatwave conditions. Abdaly and Kuwait Airport recorded a maximum temperature of 50 degrees Celsius, while Jahra recorded 51 degrees Celsius. Other areas of the country also witnessed above-average temperatures.

Actor to be deported

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has decided to deport Pakistani actor Farhan Al-Ali, charged with violating public decency on social media, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. A security source said the deportation order is effective despite the court of cassation's verdict overturning a two-year jail sentence handed to Ali by the criminal court. "The administration of the deportation prison will determine the date of his deportation for his homeland within 48 hours," the source told Al-Qabas.

Cabinet likely to ease COVID curbs amid drop in cases

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet is expected today to ease coronavirus restrictions after health authorities said efforts to contain the disease witnessed good results amid a sharp drop in cases. Dr Khaled Al-

Jarallah, head of the consultative committee to counter the coronavirus, said yesterday the success of the health system in containing the Delta variant wave is an indication for more easing of curbs.

"The continuation of the health system in containing the Delta variant wave paves the way for more reopenings, although with caution, depending on immunization," Jarallah said on his Twitter account. He said the number of patients in hospitals and cases in intensive care units has stabilized in the past days, adding that directives have been issued to step up vaccination in areas of infection and among foreign residents as more vaccines are available.

The emergency coronavirus committee, headed

Tunisians fete new Olympic king Hafnaoui

TUNIS: On the day Tunisia marked the moment the monarchy was abolished in 1957, they will have permitted themselves to at least celebrate an Olympic king after a sensational performance in Tokyo from Ahmed Hafnaoui. The 18-year-old produced a devastating late burst way out in lane eight yesterday - Republic Day in Tunisia - to win the 400 m freestyle in 3min 43.36sec, overhauling Australian Jack McLoughlin.

"When I saw the flag of my country being raised and I heard the national anthem I had tears in my

eyes," he said afterwards. "I felt so proud. I dedicate this title to all the Tunisian people. You have a champion now!" His gold, combined with compatriot Ons Jabeur's eye-catching run to the Wimbledon women's quarterfinals, has allowed sport to provide a welcome distraction for the hard-pressed Tunisian people this summer.

There could be more to come as Hafnaoui bids to add the 800m freestyle title tomorrow - and his idol, double Olympic swimming champion Oussama Mellouli, will attempt to win a third career gold when he tackles the 10 km open water event at the grand old age of 37 on Aug 5. Jabeur may have lost her first-round match at the Olympics on Sunday - perhaps her Wimbledon exertions took their toll - but she has done her bit off the court too.

Continued on Page 2

Iran hails Guard nurse's golden shot in Tokyo

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday celebrated 41-year-old Javad Foroughi, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hospital nurse, who won gold in the 10m air pistol to become the country's oldest and newest Olympic champion. Foroughi, who survived COVID-19 in the Middle East's worst-hit country, on Saturday became Iran's first medal winner in any shooting event at the Olympics.

"Foroughi makes history with a golden shot," headlined the government daily Iran, splashing his picture on the front page - as did many other newspapers in his homeland. The ultraconservative Javan published a picture of Foroughi giving a military salute on the podium as Iran's national anthem played. "An unex-

pected medal... won by a Guards nurse who is at the same time a defender of health and of the shrine," the newspaper wrote.

The term "defender of the shrine" refers to those who work on Iran's behalf in Syria and Iraq, which also house major sanctuaries in Shiite Islam. At the beginning of May, Foroughi told public television channel Salamat ("Health" in Persian) about serving at field hospitals in Syrian war zones, including at Palmyra. Media reports said Foroughi contracted COVID-19 in August last year, and also helped to battle the virus at home in Iran, which has reported nearly 89,000 deaths out of more than 3,690,000 infections.

After his winning shot in Tokyo, state television broadcast a report from Baqiyatallah Hospital in Tehran, which is run by the IRGC, and in which his colleagues hailed Foroughi's victory. Guards chief Hossein Salami also celebrated the win, the movement's Sepahnews website reported, calling the shooter an "exuberant Guard of the Islamic revolution". President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, who takes office next month, spoke to Foroughi by phone just a few minutes



TOKYO: Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui poses with his gold medal winning after the final of the men's 400m freestyle swimming event during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Center yesterday. — AFP



TOKYO: Gold medalist Iran's Javad Foroughi celebrates on the podium after winning the men's 10m air pistol final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Asaka Shooting Range on Saturday. — AFP

after his successful shot, media reports said. Foroughi has said he began his professional shooting career just four years ago in 2017. On Saturday he became his country's oldest Olympic medal winner. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir receives Crown Prince, Parliament Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also separately received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-

Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Later on, he hosted Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha (integrity) Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker

Ghanem at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and Justice Minister Roumi. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolences to President

of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, on the death of his sister Kurbonbi Rahmonova. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA

Donations seek to save Tunisia from COVID catastrophe

TUNIS: With Tunisia's health system close to collapse after being overwhelmed by a surge of COVID-19 cases, other countries and even individuals have stepped in to stem the crisis. European and Gulf nations, Tunisians abroad and ordinary citizens have organized equipment and vaccine donations that are now helping to battle the pandemic.

The small North African nation of 12 million people had been struggling to come up with the necessary vaccine doses even before COVID-19 really began to hit hard. Now more than three million doses, most of them donated, have been sent, with the number set to reach five million by mid-August, the health ministry says. China and the United Arab Emirates have each supplied 500,000 doses, while neighboring Algeria gave 250,000.

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne at the French ministry for Europe and foreign affairs told AFP that France this week alone sent more than one million AstraZeneca and Janssen doses, enough to vaccinate "a tenth of the adult population". But either because of sluggish diplomatic efforts by Tunisia or the global shortage of doses, vaccines have arrived late.

Tunisia has received just a sixth of the number of doses promised under the Covax program, set up to ensure a fairer distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to lower-income countries. It now has one of the world's highest coronavirus death rates. According to an AFP count on Wednesday based on official reports, Tunisia recorded 1.4 daily deaths per 100,000 population over the previous seven days, placing it second-worst globally on this metric after Namibia.

Swamped morgues

Tunisian Internet users have shared videos of panicked families unable to find beds for loved ones, of

medics worrying about oxygen shortages and of bodies crammed into swamped morgues. Dr Hechmi Louzir of the Pasteur Institute in Tunis told AFP that donations will mean the vaccination programme can speed up, and thus reduce the spread of the virus. Tunisia could "achieve our goal of vaccinating about 50 percent of the population by mid-October", he said.

Even in pre-COVID 'normal' times, Tunisia's public hospitals suffered from poor management and a lack of resources. At the beginning of summer, they put out a plea for help - for personal protective equipment and intensive care resources in particular. Groups including the country's organization of young doctors, Tunisian embassies abroad and even private citizens organized fund-raising events.

"The mobilization of civil society saved Tunisia from a catastrophic scenario," said gynaecologist Cyrine Chedly, a member of an organization of young doctors in Kairouan. The central city was one of the first to be badly hit by the pandemic, with some bodies left lying in rooms next to live patients for up to 24 hours because of a lack of staff to take them to overstretched mortuaries. "Donations of oxygen concentrators have made it possible to reduce the number of serious cases and deaths" at the city's main hospital, Dr Chedly said.

Ons Jabeur, the celebrated Tunisian tennis player now in Tokyo for her third Olympics, auctioned two racquets and raised \$27,000 to help finance an intensive care unit. Before the pandemic, the country had only 90 intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the public sector: now, helped by donations, it has 500. Tunisians arriving from abroad are allowed to import one oxygen concentrator per traveler, free of import duty.

Doctors post pictures of these items and other equipment on social media, to show donors they are being put to use. But providing more sophisticated health care equipment can be stymied by coordination problems and bureaucratic obstacles. One field hospital supplied in May by the United States was not up and running until July, and another donated by Qatar is still not operating because of a lack of oxygen. — AFP

Protests mark global anger at COVID curbs

PARIS: More than 100,000 people protested in Australia, France, Italy and Greece on Saturday, sparking clashes with police as they railed against COVID-19 measures and government sanctions against the unvaccinated aimed at prodding more people into getting jabs. Dozens of protesters were arrested after an unauthorized march in Sydney, with the city's police minister branding those who took part as "morons".

Organizers had dubbed the protest a "freedom" rally. Attendees carried signs and banners reading "Wake up Australia" and "Drain the Swamp". In France, where police deployed teargas and water cannon against some protesters, an estimated 160,000 took to the streets in nationwide protests against President Emmanuel Macron's health pass that will drastically curtail access to restaurants and public spaces for unvaccinated people.

"Freedom, freedom", chanted demonstrators in France, carrying placards denouncing "Macron, Tyrant", "Big Pharma shackles freedom" or saying "No to the pass of shame". The demonstrations highlight the conflict globally between people caught between the advice of the World Health Organization and other public health agencies and the need to earn a living - or simply to return to a pre-pandemic lifestyle.

In Indonesia and the UK, governments have pressed ahead with easing of restrictions even in the face of surging. Meanwhile, around 5,000 people demonstrated in Athens, carrying placards touting slogans such as, "Don't touch our children", according to an AFP journalist at the scene. And in Italy protesters gathered in Rome to demonstrate against a mandatory "green pass" for indoor dining and entertainment.

Earlier in Sydney, demonstrators pelted officers with pot plants and bottles of water as they defied a month-long stay-at-home order, a day after authorities suggested the restrictions could remain in place until October. New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said she was "utterly disgusted" by the protesters whose "selfish actions have compromised the safety of all of us". Police said they issued nearly 100 fines and arrested 57 people. In Melbourne, meanwhile, six people were arrested, police said.

New South Wales Police Minister David Elliott said a team of detectives would be scouring footage to identify and charge as many people as possible in the coming days. "Sydney isn't immune from morons," he said. Sydney, a city of over five million people, is struggling to contain an outbreak of the Delta variant, first identified in India and now spreading globally.

After escaping much of the early pandemic unscathed, around half of Australia's 25 million people are now in lockdown across several cities. There is growing anger at the restrictions and the conservative government's failure to provide adequate vaccine supplies. Just 11 percent of the population is fully vaccinated. In France, as elsewhere in Europe, the government is making it harder for reluctant citizens to put off getting the jabs.

Legislation now being considered by lawmakers will make vaccinations compulsory for certain professions, while the controversial health pass will severely restrict social life for holdouts from the end of July. There were signs the tougher measures announced on July 13 were having the desired effect: 48 percent of the population were fully vaccinated as of Friday, up eight percentage points from July 10.

While more than three-quarters of French people backed Macron's measures, according to a July 13 Elabe poll for BFMTV, a sizeable and vocal minority do not. Elodie, 34, a care assistant at a Strasbourg nursing home, denounced "the blackmail of caregivers who were at the front line" during the first wave and who are now threatened "with 'no more pay' and even being fired. "They've been lying to us since the beginning," she said. — AFP

Tunisians fete new Olympic...

Continued from Page 1

Tunisia is facing a record number of coronavirus contaminations with public hospitals facing an unprecedented influx of patients. Jabeur announced a fortnight ago she was auctioning one of her racquets to help Tunisian hospitals fight COVID-19. Jabeur, who will add a personal donation to the amount collected during the sale, said the money raised would be used to buy "drugs and medical equipment". Jabeur's long-term goal is for her exploits to inspire more Arab women, especially North African, to take up tennis.

The success of Hafnaoui, eight years younger than Jabeur, appeared to be as much of a surprise to him as to his rivals and most of those watching. His Tunis-based coach Jabrane Touili danced up and down the rows of empty seats left empty because of

the coronavirus-related ban on spectators. "I train alone with my coaches, it is difficult but the result speaks for itself," Hafnaoui said.

The teenager's basketball player father inspired him to take up swimming. "He told me to try my hand at swimming because it is good for one's health and for building up the body," he said. "With time I began to gain in confidence. These last two years I began to win races at Arab and African meetings and further afield like at the French championships."

Little wonder then that Hafnaoui said his thoughts turned to his parents as he stood on the medal podium. Before the Games began, Mellouli praised his younger compatriot but there were words of warning for him too - which ring ever more pertinently now. "I am happy to pass the torch to him," he told Tunisian radio station IFM in July. "Ayoub (Hafnaoui's middle name) has had some difficult times. He had to give up his studies so he could succeed in swimming. He took a risk as regards his future. I hope he will strike a balance between his financial and psychological welfare." — AFP



ROME: A protester holds an Italian flag as he takes part in a demonstration in Piazza del Popolo on Saturday against the introduction of a mandatory 'green pass' for indoor dining and entertainment areas. — AFP

Local

Staycation is the answer in Kuwait as COVID-19 renders vacation 'a dream'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Despite the opening of the airport to incoming residents from August 1, many are opting to stay in Kuwait during their scheduled annual vacations. Jason Banawa, a restaurant manager from Batangas City in the Philippines, said he planned to go on vacation last year, but he couldn't because of the coronavirus pandemic. This year too, a vacation is still a dream.

"I had two months of accumulated leave. I was very much willing to go to the Philippines, but I had these 'what-ifs' on my mind - what if Kuwait suddenly closes the airport again? What if I contract the Delta variant of the virus while on leave? The most ridiculous thing is the sky-high prices of air tickets. So I chose to stay at home in Kuwait with my baby," Banawa said.

Banawa's company told him to take his annual leave now since work is slow during summertime. "I will have pro-

longed bonding with my baby girl and wife, since I am also not comfortable going outside. My plan is to do some household chores, probably clean the house daily and cook for my wife, since she is working," he said.

"I wanted to be with my parents and friends and enjoy the summer with my family back home. But because of the prevailing situation, I don't want to get stuck abroad without work. We need work even more now since the pandemic is hurting us all," Banawa added. His vacation started last week and he will return to work in the middle of September. "It means long hours of sleep and online games. I will also search for online opportunities and will probably try my luck at several games," he said.

Online selling

Speaking about online opportunities, Gritel Trinidad's vacation has been spent well due to online selling. She started her vacation on July 1 and will return to work

in August. "Since the pandemic began, we cannot enjoy time outside Kuwait, so I thought of doing something productive to earn money. After a week I had got bored, so I contacted several of my friends who are into the resale business. I asked them about the business and they willingly shared their secrets. I am now selling online and even after I return to work in August, I will continue with this newfound online opportunity. It gave me not just an extra income, but connection with customers. I have become friends with many of them," Trinidad said.

Sandeep's vacation was also put on hold this year due to travel restrictions and uncertainty whether he will be allowed to re-enter Kuwait. "If I go to India, I doubt whether I can come back, so better to cancel plans to be with my family in Rajasthan," said Sandeep. "My vacation started on July 1, and I'm expected to rejoin the company on August 2," he said.

Sandeep was able to take advantage



of his annual leave in Feb 2020. "It was during that time when everything turned upside down. Thank God I was able to enter Kuwait, otherwise I would've been stuck in India. I pity my child as he wants me to with him, but this cannot happen this year," he said. During Sandeep's month-long staycation, he stayed with friends, visited malls and spends most of his time talking to his family in India.

Hassan, also from India, was set to get

married last June after getting engaged in 2019. But the wedding was postponed due to the pandemic. "I promised my fiancée in 2019 to marry her in 2020, but since the airport was closed, we agreed to delay the wedding," he said. From August 1, Kuwait International Airport will begin admitting passengers of all nationalities, provided they have valid residencies and are fully vaccinated with jobs approved by Kuwait.

Firemen control blaze in Naayem scrapyard



KUWAIT: Four teams from the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) controlled yesterday a blaze, which erupted in the Naayem scrapyard earlier this morning. A press state-

ment by the KFF said that an emergency call alerted the firefighters of the incident in which several discarded vehicles went up in flames.

The teams addressed the situation and managed to contain the fire with no human casualties reported, concluded the statement. —KUNA

2.4 million packs of chewing tobacco found in 4 containers



KUWAIT: Shuwaikh Port customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle 2.4 million packs of chewing tobacco in four containers arriving from a Gulf country. Four 40-ft containers were meticulously searched by inspectors Friday evening, who found 111,000 bags of

chewing tobacco. The second container contained 154,000 bags of chewing tobacco, the third container had 2 million bags, while the fourth contained 140,000 more bags of chewing tobacco, which is not allowed to be imported into Kuwait.

Kuwait Navy plans drill with live ammunition



KUWAIT: Kuwait Naval Force announced yesterday they will perform a drill with live ammunition tomorrow and Wednesday from 7 am to 7 pm at sea locations

shown in the map. Kuwait Naval Force advised nationals and residents to avoid approaching the identified locations in order to ensure safety. —KUNA



KUWAIT: A picture showing Kuwaiti and US ships participating in the Combined Task Force 152 (CTF 152) in February 2019.

Journal shed light on Kuwaiti Coast Guards' efforts in the Gulf

KUWAIT: The quarterly American journal UNIPATH, published by the US Central Command (CENTCOM), has shed light on efforts and achievements of the Kuwaiti Coast Guards for maintaining security in the Arabian Gulf.

The magazine, according to a statement by the Kuwaiti



Kuwaiti and US navymen pose for a group photo. —KUNA photos

Ministry of Interior yesterday, noted that Captain Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al Sabah took command of the Combined Task Force 152 (CTF 152) in February 2019. The Kuwaiti Coast Guards, operating under umbrella of the CTF 152 unit, has been carrying out wide-scale patrols in the Arabian Gulf waters as part of the efforts to maintain regional security. Moreover, commanders of the GCC countries' naval forces have expressed confidence in the Kuwaiti naval force. The Kuwaiti Naval Force joined the Combined Task Force, based in Bahrain, in 2010. The squad comprises elite navymen, state-of-art warships and reconnaissance aircraft. The American journal concluded its report by noting that the 152 squad under the Kuwaiti command kept security in the Arabian Gulf under tight control. —KUNA

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KISR earns US patent for invention

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) announced yesterday that it has earned a patent from the United States Patent and Trademark Office for an innovative technology which works on desalination and air conditioning simultaneously. A statement issued by KISR indicates that researchers at the Water Research Center Dr Hasan Abdullaheem and Dr Mansour Ahmed have developed a new technology that works to provide fresh water and air conditioning, which will benefit countries in dry climates due to a significant rise in temperatures such as Kuwait. It added that the idea of the innovative system is to heat both air and sea water, then increase the humidity of the air using heated water, then the air is cooled to remove moisture and produce fresh and cold water. It pointed out that the invention contributes to water security and sustainability of fresh water production and air conditioning, in addition to reducing financial and environmental burdens of desalination and air conditioning operations. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A herder is seen with camels in Kuwait's desert. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

979 flights during Eid: Civil Aviation

KUWAIT: A total of 979 flights were operated at Kuwait International Airport, carrying 98,934 passengers, during the Eid Al-Adha holiday (July 15 - 24), the Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced yesterday.

'Signs of recovery' at Kuwait airport

KUWAIT: Around 4,000 passengers arrived to Kuwait on 55 flights on Saturday, while 5,600 left on 58 flights the same day, operations manager at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation Mansour Al-Hashimi said, describing it as a "sign of the aviation sector's recovery" in Kuwait.

Foreign Minister receives WHO's new representative

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday the credentials of the newly appointed World Health Organization's (WHO) Representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez. In the reception ceremony held at the Foreign Ministry, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser wished the WHO official success during his tenure, and hoped that both sides would pursue means to further progress and bolster relations. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets the newly appointed World Health Organization's Representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez. —KUNA

Over 10,000 beneficiaries from Eid project in Jordan

AMMAN: Head of Kuwait Red Crescent Society's (KRCS) mission to Jordan Farouq Khazal said yesterday that more than 10,000 people from Syrian refugees and other vulnerable members of the society benefited from the society's Adhahi 2021 sacrificial meat project. Khazal said - in conclusion of the four day program - that the team distributed sacrificial meat on refugees living in random camps including women, elderly and disabled people in different Jordanian provinces. Before moving to camps in Amman, Madaba, and Al-Karak provinces, KRCS had distributed portions of sacrificial meat on women, men, children at Jordan Deaf Club, he noted. In cooperation with Jordan Red Crescent Society, KRCS worked on

beneficiary lists that would give priority to the less fortunate and most needy people.

Khazal valued the continuous partnership between KRCS and its Jordanian counterpart in implementing aid and humanitarian programs in the Hashemite Kingdom, praising in the same time, the efforts of Kuwaiti Embassy in Jordan in facilitating the KRCS mission and it is supervising the distribution process. On Tuesday, KRCS launched Adhahi 2021 project in presence of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom Aziz Al-Daihani in coordination with Jordan Red Crescent that extended for the past four days in different parts of the Kingdom. —KUNA



DWC presents 'Halal Appreciation Award'

KUWAIT: The board members of Diplomatic Women's Committee - Kuwait presented the first "Halal Appreciation Award" to the participants of an event held on the occasion of Kuwaiti Women's Day 2021. This award is the first of its kind to be presented to the distinguished Kuwaiti personalities by Sheikha Halah Bader Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Honorary President of DWC in recognition of their exceptional performance, and out-

standing services for the country.

The Halal achievement award for year 2021 was presented to Anne Claire, the French Ambassador to Kuwait, Hideko Hadzalic, the Representative of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kuwait, Kamil Abduljalil, Director of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti, Director of Al-Sabah Medical Center.

DWC board members also presented a shield of honor to Sheikha Halah Al-Sabah for her dedicated efforts and valuable services for the committee, wishing her and the DWC board continued success for achieving their goals towards the development of social and cultural relations with the international community through diplomatic enclave accredited to the State of Kuwait.


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Thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in former Taliban bastion

Vatican fraud trial to expose London secrets



AMRITSAR: Commuters make their way through a water-logged street after a rain shower in Amritsar yesterday. — AFP

India monsoon death toll climbs to 127, dozens still missing

Floodwater levels remain elevated after rivers burst their banks

MUMBAI: The death toll from flooding and landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains in India climbed to 127 yesterday, officials said, with rescuers searching for dozens more missing. The country's western coast has been inundated by torrential rains since Thursday, with the India Meteorological Department warning of further downpours over the next few days.

Flooding and landslides are common during India's treacherous monsoon season, which also often sees poorly constructed buildings buckle after days of non-stop rain. Experts say climate change has caused the annual deluge to increase in frequency and intensity.

In Maharashtra state, 117 people have been killed, including more than 40 in a large landslide that hit the hillside village of Taliye some 250 kilometres (155 miles) southeast of Mumbai Thursday. Villager Jayram Mahaske, whose relatives remained trapped, told AFP that "many people were washed away as

they were trying to run away" from the landslide.

Another villager, Govind Malusare, said his nephew's body had been found after the landslide hit his family's home, but that his mother, brother, sister-in-law and niece were still missing. The landslip flattened dozens of homes in a matter of minutes, leaving just two concrete structures standing and cutting off power, local residents told AFP.

In Posare village 210 kilometres south of Mumbai, the National Disaster Response Force said four bodies were found overnight. In parts of Chiplun, water levels rose to nearly 20 feet (six metres) on Thursday after 24 hours of uninterrupted rain. The water levels have since started to recede.

Eight patients at a local COVID-19 hospital also reportedly died after power supply to ventilators was cut off. "The water level reached the ceiling of my shop, there was so much water inside," a shopkeeper told Indian news broadcaster NDTV, pointing to sludge and debris around him.

"All the shops in this area have been completely damaged. The flood has left so much soil behind, we can't even resume work." Rescuers were working in waist-deep mud to search for 100 people still missing in the state with the help of excavators.

Record rainfall

In neighbouring Goa, a woman was feared to have drowned from the flooding, officials said, in what Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said were the "worst floods since 1982". North Goa official Ajit Roy told AFP floodwaters have since receded with people who were evacuated returning to their homes.

In the coastal plains spanning Maharashtra and Goa, floodwater levels remained elevated after rivers burst their banks and forced terrified residents to seek safety on rooftops and upper floors. Further south in Karnataka state, the death toll rose to nine overnight, with four others missing, officials said.

Power supply was disrupted in the 11 affected districts and there were crop losses across vast swathes of land. Climate scientist Roxy Mathew Koll of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology said climate change was warming the Arabian Sea. The higher water temperatures were causing the air above to become warmer and hold more moisture, sparking more extreme rainfall events, he said.

"We are seeing a three-fold rise in widespread extreme rainfall events... since 1950," Koll told AFP, citing a study he co-authored that was published in Nature. He added that a hill station south of Mumbai, Mahabaleshwar, reported 594 millimetres of rain on Friday — the highest since the start of records a century ago.

"In recent years, the impact of climate change (on monsoons in India) is much more obvious. In fact, what has happened in Europe, China and the rest of the world is similar to what's happening in India." — AFP

Macron pressured to apologise for nuke tests in French Polynesia

PAPEETE: French President Emmanuel Macron faced pressure to apologise for the devastating impact of decades of nuclear testing as he kicked off his first official trip to French Polynesia. During his four-day visit, Macron plans to address the legacy of nuclear testing from 1966 to 1996 as France developed atomic weapons, as well as discuss the South Pacific territory's strategic role and the existential risk of rising seas posed by global warming.

Residents in the sprawling archipelago of more than 100 islands located midway between Mexico and Australia are hoping Macron apologise and confirms compensation for radiation victims. The tests remain a source of deep resentment, seen as evidence of racist colonial attitudes that disregarded the lives of islanders.

After touching down Saturday, Macron, whose 2020 trip was postponed due to the pandemic, met hospital workers fighting COVID-19 in the semi-autonomous territory where

many are wary of vaccines. "I want to send a very strong message to call on everyone to get vaccinated," he said, adding: "When you're vaccinated, you're protected and you hardly spread the virus, or at least much less."

'Highest thyroid cancer rates'

Macron will be "encouraging several concrete steps" regarding the legacy of nuclear tests, with the opening up of state archives and individual compensation, a French presidential official who asked not to be named said.

French officials denied any cover-up of radiation exposure at a meeting earlier this month with delegates from the semi-autonomous territory led by President Edouard Fritch. The meeting came after French investigative website Disclose reported in March that the impact from the fallout was far more extensive than authorities had acknowledged, citing declassified French military documents on the 193 tests.

Only 63 Polynesian civilians have



FAA'A, FRENCH POLYNESIA: France's President Emmanuel Macron (2nd L) attends a welcoming ceremony with French Polynesia's President Edouard Fritch (L) on the tarmac upon his arrival at Faa'a international airport for a visit to Tahiti in French Polynesia yesterday. — AFP

been compensated for radiation exposure since the tests ended in 1996, Disclose said, estimating that more than 100,000 people may have been contaminated in total, with leukaemia, lymphoma and other cancers rife.

"We're expecting an apology from the president," said Auguste Uebe-

Carlson, head of the 193 Association of victims of nuclear tests. "Just as he has recognised as a crime the colonisation that took place in Algeria, we also expect him to declare that it was criminal and that it is a form of colonisation linked to nuclear power here in the Pacific." — AFP

Ten killed in Croatia bus crash

ZAGREB: At least ten people were killed and dozens of others were injured yesterday when a bus slipped off the highway in eastern Croatia, police said. The passengers were travelling on a regular bus line between the German city of Frankfurt and the Kosovo capital Pristina, a police official told reporters.

The injured were hospitalised in the eastern town of Slavonski Brod close to where the crash occurred, a police statement said. A total of 45 people were admitted to a Slavonski Brod hospital including eight who sustained serious injuries, its head Josip Samardzic said.

There were no immediate details on the ages or nationalities of the passengers or the possible cause of the accident. The bus had Kosovo license plates. — AFP

Another presidential hopeful arrested in Nicaragua

MANAGUA: Another presidential candidate was arrested in Nicaragua on Saturday, police said — the seventh detained by Daniel Ortega's government in the lead-up to elections on November 7. Noel Vidaurre was put under house arrest, accused of "undermining the sovereignty" of the country, in the latest of a series of arrests condemned by the United States and European Union.

Long-term Nicaraguan leader Ortega is expected to seek a fourth consecutive presidential term in the elections. Ortega, 75, will be the

ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front's candidate for the presidential vote, Gustavo Porras, the speaker of Nicaragua's assembly, confirmed last week.

Seven opposition presidential hopefuls have been among 28 people detained by Ortega's government. In a clampdown that began on June 2, Ortega's government has rounded up political rivals in a series of house raids and night-time arrests on charges of threatening Nicaragua's "sovereignty."

On Saturday, political commentator Jaime Arellano was also put under custody at his home. Julie Chung, the top US diplomat for Latin America, said on Twitter the two were "just the latest victims of a despicable campaign to criminalize peaceful opposition."

The charges are rooted in a law initiated by Ortega and approved by lawmakers in December that has been widely criticized as a means of

freezing out challengers and silencing opponents ahead of the election. The law bars "those who ask for, celebrate and applaud the imposition of sanctions against the Nicaraguan state" from seeking public office.

Increasing authoritarianism

Vidaurre, 66, was one potential candidate for the Alianza Ciudadanos por la Libertad group standing against Ortega. Presidential candidates will be able to register from July 28 to August 2. Ortega says the people rounded up by his forces are "criminals" seeking to overthrow him with US backing. But the clampdown has drawn international condemnation and fresh sanctions, with the United States branding the long-term leader a "dictator." The European Union has said it was "inconceivable" the November elections "will be anything remotely approaching a democratic competition." — AFP



MANAGUA: File photo shows, 2001 vice-presidential candidate of Nicaragua for the Conservative Party, Jose Antonio Alvarado (C) and the presidential candidate of the same party, Noel Vidaurre (R) speak with friends, after waiting 56 hours at the Supreme Election Council to see if a resolution would allow Alvarado to participate in the 2021 election. — AFP

International

Angered by COVID response, thousands of Brazilians protest against Bolsonaro

Protest marches were planned in 400 cities and towns

RIO DE JANEIRO: Tens of thousands of Brazilians took to the streets Saturday to demand the impeachment of President Jair Bolsonaro, who is facing increasing pressure as the pandemic exacts a devastating toll.

It was the fourth weekend of protests called by leftist political parties, labor unions and social groups against Bolsonaro, who is being investigated for allegedly turning a blind eye to a scheme to embezzle government funds in the purchase of vaccines.

Protest marches were planned in 400 cities and towns. In Rio de Janeiro, thousands of people in red clothes and wearing face masks marched with banners bearing slogans berating the embattled leader, including “No one can take any more” and “Get out corrupt criminal.”

Organizers said they were part of a day intended to galvanize the country “in defense of democracy, the lives of Brazilians and getting Bolsonaro out.”

In Rio and elsewhere, protesters complained about Brazil's late-starting vaccination program and high unemployment rate, and demanded more emergency aid for poor people grappling with the pandemic.

“It is very important that everyone who feels offended or oppressed by this government comes out to the streets, because we need to fight for the

return to democracy,” Laise de Oliveira, a 65-year-old social worker, told AFP.

Brazilian press carried images and reports of streets thronged with anti-Bolsonaro demonstrators in 20 of Brazil's 26 states through early afternoon.

Record low approval

Neither the organizers nor the authorities have released an overall estimate of the number of people attending the marches.

But large demonstrations were planned in Sao Paulo, Brazil's most populous city with 12.3 million residents, and the capital Brasilia.

Bolsonaro, criticized for remarks in favor of exploiting protected areas of the Amazon, his views on guns, and an ambitious privatization program, is enduring his worst stretch since coming to power in 2019.

His approval rating is at a record low 24 percent and polls suggest he could lose October's presidential election to his main rival, leftist former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, whose Workers Party was one of the forces behind Saturday's demonstrations.

Brazil has suffered nearly 550,000 deaths because of Covid, a toll surpassed only by that of the United States, which has almost 120 million more people.

Bolsonaro has been famously dismissive of the



BRASILIA: Supporters of the Workers' Party (PT) take part in a protest against the government of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro at the Esplanade of Ministries in Brasilia. — AFP

health crisis, the need to wear face masks, and lockdown measures to halt the spread of the virus.

On June 30 the opposition in congress presented an impeachment complaint that is an amalgam of some 100 others already filed with more than 20

different charges against the president.

But Bolsonaro still has enough support in congress to block these initiatives, including that of the speaker, who decides whether the complaints are allowed to proceed. — AFP

Iraq says militants planned other attacks during Muslim holiday

BAGHDAD: The Islamist militants believed to be behind last week's deadly suicide bombing of a Baghdad market had planned more attacks during the Eid-al Adha festival, Iraq's interior ministry said yesterday.

The ministry released photos of five suspects arrested, including three brothers, after last Monday's attack that, according to the official toll, killed 30 people and was claimed by the Islamic State group.

Iraqi security forces have dismantled “two terrorist networks in the provinces of Anbar and Kirkuk responsible for the July 19 attack in Sadr City”, a poor Shiite district of Baghdad. “They were planning other attacks in other parts of Baghdad and other provinces during Eid,” a ministry statement said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi announced Saturday the arrest of the “terror cell” behind the Baghdad market bombing. Iraqi television broadcast overnight the “confessions” of the five, who were dressed in yellow prison suits, a common practice in major criminal cases in Iraq.

The attack sparked revulsion and renewed fears about the reach of IS, which lost its last territory in Iraq after a gruelling campaign that ended in late 2017, but retains sleeper cells in remote desert and mountain areas. The bombing hit the Al-Wehilat market in Sadr City, where many families were crowded on the eve of the Eid al-Adha, the most important Muslim holiday.

The announcement of the dismantling of the cell came on the eve of Kadhemi's departure for Washington, where he was to meet US President Joe Biden today. The Iraqi prime minister, under heavy pressure from powerful pro-Iranian factions in his country, is hoping for a substantial announcement on the withdrawal of US troops in Iraq. — AFP

Six soldiers killed in Boko Haram attack in Cameroon: Governor

YAOUNDE: At least six Cameroon soldiers were killed Saturday in an attack by Boko Haram in the far north of the country, the governor of the region said on state television. Heavily armed Boko Haram fighters “arrived at around four o'clock in the morning on six vehicles”, the governor of the Far North Region, Bakari Midjiyawa, told CRTV television.

“We deplore the deaths of our six soldiers, who died in action, and four more were injured.” The attack took place in Sagme, a few dozen kilometres from the border with Nigeria, from where Boko Haram originates.

According to a police report, confirmed by several local sources, eight soldiers were killed. Boko Haram and its breakaway faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have increased their deadly attacks against security forces and civilians in the far north of Cameroon in recent years, as well as in the border regions with three neighbouring countries, Nigeria, Niger and Chad.

They have also frequently kidnapped civilians, particularly women and children. Fighting with Boko Haram and ISWAP jihadists has killed more than 36,000 people since 2009 and driven almost two million people from their homes in northeastern Nigeria. In mid-June, Boko Haram confirmed that its leader, Abubakar Shekau was killed after clashes with ISWAP. — AFP

Vatican fraud trial to expose London secrets

VATICAN CITY: A once-powerful Catholic cardinal and nine others stand trial at the Vatican this week in an embezzlement scandal that allegedly saw charity funds used in a ruinous London property venture.

Ex-cardinal Angelo Becciu, who served as the equivalent of a papal chief of staff for Pope Francis before being fired last year, has been charged with crimes including embezzlement and abuse of office.

It is the first time a cardinal has been indicted by Vatican criminal prosecutors and Becciu, 73, will be the headliner of a trial set to last months. The defendants face jail time or stiff fines if found guilty.

The alleged graft will have enraged Francis, 84, who has vowed all-out war on corruption and has increased oversight of the Vatican's finances, dogged for decades by scandal.

Tomorrow's hearing is expected to be purely technical and the trial, held in a makeshift courtroom in the Vatican Museums, may be adjourned to after the summer break. It was not clear whether Becciu, stripped of his red biretta, will be present.

It follows a two-year probe into how the Secretariat of State—the key department in the Vatican's central administration—managed its vast asset portfolio and, in particular, who knew what about a disastrous 350-million-euro (\$415 million) London investment.

‘Substantial losses’

Two London-based Italian financiers were involved in buying the 17,000-sq metre building—a former Harrods warehouse in Chelsea intended for conversion into luxury apartments.

Gianluigi Torzi and Raffaele Mincione are charged with embezzlement, fraud and money laundering. The building's purchase at an inflated price meant “substantial losses for the Vatican, and dipped into resources intended for the Holy Father's personal charitable work”, the Holy See said before the trial.

The first part of the purchase happened while Becciu was No. 2 at the Secretariat of State, and in charge of the purse strings. Between 2013 and 2014, the Secretariat of State borrowed over 200 million dollars, mainly from Credit Suisse, to invest in Mincione's Luxembourg fund. Half went to buying part of the London property.

The rest was for stock market investments, but Mincione used it for high-risk ventures. The Holy See, which had no control over where the money went, tried to pull out in 2018.

Taking control

Torzi was brought in and tasked with brokering the purchase of the rest of the building and cutting ties with Mincione—but he instead allegedly joined forces with him.

He arranged for the Holy See to give Mincione £40 million (48 million euros; \$55 million) for the shares in the part of the London building it did not already own.

But Torzi then allegedly inserted a



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis waves as he delivers the Sunday Angelus prayer from the window of his study overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican yesterday. — AFP

clause into the paperwork which gave himself control of the property. He is accused of demanding 15 million euros to relinquish control.

Mincione and Torzi were helped, prosecutors claim, by Enrico Crasso, a former Vatican investment manager, and employee Fabrizio Tirabassi, both of whom face a series of charges including fraud.

Embarrassingly for Francis, among those standing trial are two men previously tasked with regulating Holy See finances, including the former head of its financial regulator, Swiss lawyer Rene Bruehlhart.

‘The Cardinal's lady’

Becciu has been charged with

embezzlement and abuse of office over the purchase of the London property. He has also been charged in relation to donations totalling over 800,000 euros he is accused of making to a charity run by his brother.

Becciu is also linked to defendant Cecilia Marogna—dubbed “the Cardinal's lady” by the Italian press—accused of pocketing money earmarked for freeing captive priests and nuns abroad. Prosecutors claim the top hierarchy in the Vatican—including pope ally Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Becciu's boss—were in favour of the London venture, without realising what was going on. Becciu, who has denied any wrongdoing, says he is the victim of a plot. — AFP



GUATEMALA CITY: Demonstrators hold portraits of dismissed Guatemala's Special Prosecutor against Impunity, Juan Francisco Sandoval, during a protest to demand the resignation of Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei and Guatemala's Attorney General Maria Consuelo Porras. — AFP

Anti-graft investigator flees Guatemala to ‘safeguard his life’

GUATEMALA CITY: Guatemala's top anti-graft investigator, Juan Francisco Sandoval, fled the country Saturday to “safeguard his life,” hours after he was sacked in a move that sparked international backlash, a human rights official said. Guatemalan Ombudsman Jordan Rodas accompanied Sandoval to the Salvadoran border “in light of the difficult decision to leave the country to safeguard his life and integrity due to recent events,” according to the Central American country's human rights body.

Sandoval had been fired from his post as head of Guatemala's Prosecutor Against Corruption and Impunity (FECI) on Friday by Attorney General Consuelo Porras. Sandoval said he had encountered many obstacles in his work at FECI and that he was told not to investigate President Alejandro

Giammattei without the attorney general's consent, saying this request went “against the autonomy and independence” of FECI.

The Attorney General's Office said he had been let go due to “constant abuses and frequent violations” of the institution and that attempts had been made to “undermine” the “work, integrity and dignity” of Porras.

His firing sparked criticism from the US State Department, which has called him an “anti-corruption champion”, as well as outcry from humanitarian groups, civil society and businesses. Acting Assistant Secretary for the US State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Julie Chung, condemned Sandoval's sacking in a tweet on Friday, saying it “is a significant setback to rule of law.”

“It contributes to perceptions of a systemic effort to undermine those known to be fighting corruption,” she added. The Center against Corruption and Impunity in the North of Central America (CCINOC) also hit out at Porras' decision, saying it would create “setbacks in the fight against corruption in the region.” — AFP

Florida building collapse recovery mission nears end

MIAMI: The search for victims of the Florida apartment building collapse a month ago Saturday is drawing to a close, as rescue teams halted work at the site of the disaster that killed at least 97 people. “It's hard to believe that a month has now passed since perhaps the greatest tragedy in our community's history,” Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said on Twitter on Saturday.

“While the site of the collapse was confined to the size of just one block in a close-knit city, its reverberation has been felt far beyond our county, touching lives all over the world,” she added in a video posted on social media.

Rescue workers ended their search on Friday for victims at the site of the Champlain Towers South, a 12-storey beachfront building that partially collapsed overnight on June 24. With the exception of a teenager who was rescued in the first hours after the collapse, rescuers were unable to save any of the building's residents who had not escaped, and announced on July 7 that they were abandoning the search for survivors.

After the removal of thousands of tons of rubble, all that remains of the building north of Miami beach are a few foundation walls. Authorities have identified 97 bodies, but believe one victim is still missing, Levine Cava said this week.

Miami-Dade police continue to search for the 98th victim at the site where the building debris was deposited. While the exact reason for the collapse remains unknown, preliminary findings have shown some of the building's structure appeared degraded. The rest of the building was brought down in a controlled explosion July 4 to allow for the recovery operation to continue. A memorial honoring the victims may be built on the site of the disaster, officials said last week. — AFP

International

Thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in former Taliban bastion

Afghan forces capture four Taliban for Eid rocket attack

KANDAHAR: More than 22,000 Afghan families have fled from their homes to escape fighting in the former Taliban bastion of Kandahar, officials said yesterday, as authorities arrested four suspected insurgents over this week's rocket attack on Kabul. Since early May, violence has surged across several provinces including in Kandahar after the insurgents launched a sweeping offensive just days after the US-led foreign forces began their final withdrawal.

The Taliban's deadly assault has seen the insurgents capture scores of districts, border crossings and encircle several provincial capitals. "The fighting has displaced 22,000 families in the past one month in Kandahar," Dost Mohammad Daryab, head of the provincial refugee department, told AFP.

"They have all moved from the volatile districts of the city to safer areas." Yesterday, fighting continued on the outskirts of Kandahar city. "The negligence of some security forces, especially the police, has made way for the Taliban to come that close," Lalai Dastageeri, deputy governor of Kandahar province, told AFP.

"We are now trying to organise our security forces." Local authorities had set up four camps for the displaced people

who are estimated to be about 154,000. Kandahar resident Hafiz Mohammad Akbar said his house had been taken over by the Taliban after he fled. "They forced us to leave... I am now living with my 20-member family in a compound with no toilet," said Akbar.

Fears of fighting to increase

Residents expressed concerns the fighting might increase in days ahead. "If they really want to fight, they should go to a desert and fight, not destroy the city," said Khan Mohammad, who moved to a camp with his family. "Even if they win, they can't rule a ghost town."

Kandahar, with its 650,000 inhabitants, is the second-largest city in Afghanistan after Kabul. The southern province was the epicentre of the Taliban's regime when they ruled Afghanistan between 1996 to 2001.

Ousted from power in a US-led invasion in 2001 after the September 11 attacks, the Taliban have spearheaded a deadly insurgency that continues to this day. Their latest offensive launched in early May has seen the group take control of half of the country's about 400 districts.

Earlier this week, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff General Mark Milley said the Taliban appear to have

"strategic momentum" on the battlefield. But global rights group Human Rights Watch said there were reports the Taliban were committing atrocities against civilians in areas they had captured, including in the town of Spin Boldak near the border with Pakistan they captured earlier this month.

"Taliban leaders have denied responsibility for any abuses, but growing evidence of expulsions, arbitrary detentions, and killings in areas under their control are raising fears among the population," said Patricia Grossman, associate Asia director at HRW said in a statement.

The authorities meanwhile announced they had arrested four men they said belonged to the Taliban, accusing them of carrying out this week's rocket attack on Kabul. "A Taliban commander, Momin, along with his three other men, have been arrested. They all belong to the Taliban group," ministry spokesman Mirwais Stanikzai told reporters in a video message.

At least three rockets landed near the palace on Tuesday as President Ashraf Ghani and his top officials performed outdoor prayers to mark the start of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. The attack was however claimed by the jihadist Islamic State group. He said Momin was a key organiser of the rocket attack, and the



KABUL: A woman gets her fingerprints read to submit her passport application at an office in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

group was also involved in other attacks. The palace was also attacked last year as hundreds gathered for Ghani's inauguration for a second term as president. That attack was also claimed by IS. The

Taliban have announced ceasefires during past Islamic holidays in recent years, offering respite to Afghans who can visit family in relative safety, but no such offer was made on this occasion. —AFP

Typhoon In-Fa drenches public in eastern China

NINGBO: Typhoon In-Fa uprooted trees and drenched communities in knee-deep water in parts of eastern China, but there were no reports of major damage as it made landfall yesterday. Sea, air and rail traffic had been shut down across a swathe of the coast centered on the major shipping port of Ningbo, where the weakening typhoon rumbled ashore around midday packing winds of up to 38 metres per second, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

Response teams in Ningbo cleared away fallen trees in the city centre, while residents in some neighbourhoods waded through floodwaters and merchants piled up sandbags in front of their businesses to keep out water. The typhoon hit as the central province of Henan was still cleaning up after torrential downpours dumped a year's worth of rain in just three days last week.

Government officials yesterday added another five dead to the toll from the freak flooding in Henan, raising the total to 63. In-Fa's effects were also felt yesterday in the metropolis of Shanghai, China's largest city, with strong gusts of wind and steady but not heavy rainfall.

All inbound and outbound flights were cancelled yesterday for the city's two international airports, as were dozens of scheduled trains, while activity at the ports of Shanghai and Ningbo — two of the world's largest — was also shut down.

The government announced that it would extend a suspension of railway services in and out of Shanghai through midday today. Some public



ZHENGZHOU: Soldiers clean up a street following floods caused by heavy rains in Zhengzhou, in China's central Henan province. — AFP

attractions in Shanghai and other cities, including Shanghai Disneyland, also were closed and residents were warned to avoid outdoor activities.

The meteorological administration said that after landfall In-Fa would weaken but continue to hover over a wide expanse of eastern China for days, ringing itself out and bringing heavy rainfall, possibly to areas still recovering from last week's flooding.

"It is necessary to be highly vigilant and prevent disasters that may be caused by extreme heavy rainfall," the administration said yesterday.

China has suffered an annual summer flooding and typhoon season for millennia, but the record rainfall this past week in Henan has prompted questions about how cities could be better prepared for freak weather events, which experts say are happening with increased frequency and intensity due to climate change.

Millions were affected by the Henan floods, with some trapped without fresh food or water for days, and economic losses have run into the billions of dollars. — AFP

Frenchman on hunger strike in Tokyo over 'abducted' kids

TOKYO: A Frenchman on hunger strike in Tokyo seeking access to his children said an appeal from President Emmanuel Macron to Japan's leader had "changed nothing", as his protest entered its third week.

Vincent Fichot, 39, says his two children were abducted by their Japanese mother, and he has been on hunger strike since July 10 in a bid to be reunited with his family.

For two weeks, the former finance worker — who has lived in Japan for 15 years — has sat night and day outside a train station near the Olympic Stadium, where the opening ceremony for the virus-postponed Tokyo Games was held on Friday.

Macron, who attended the ceremony with Paris set to host the next Olympics in 2024, held talks Saturday with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

During their meeting, Macron brought up Fichot's "extremely tragic situation", according to the French

president's office, which called the issue a "priority".

Joint custody of children in cases of divorce or separation does not exist legally in Japan, where parental abductions are common and often tolerated by local authorities.

Fichot's wife accused him in court of domestic violence but later retracted the claim, he said. His wife's lawyer refused to comment to AFP, but denounced "biased" media reports.

"While it's good that Suga and Macron at least discussed my case... it has changed nothing about the situation my children are in, so I will continue," the Frenchman told AFP yesterday.

After the leaders met, Macron tweeted about the two countries' "exceptional" relationship — drawing ire from Fichot, whose health is beginning to deteriorate.

"France doesn't even know if my children are alive," he said on Saturday of his six-year-old son and



TOKYO: File photo shows French resident Vincent Fichot, whose two children have been abducted by their Japanese mother, poses for a photo following an interview with AFP. —AFP

four-year-old daughter, who he has not seen since August 2018.

"It's unbelievable. It's 'business' first and our children after that."

Macron's advisors, but not the president himself, met Fichot during

their short trip to Japan.

No official numbers exist, but rights groups have estimated that about 150,000 minors are forcibly separated from a parent every year in the East Asian archipelago. — AFP

"These civilians were being held and used by ADF as human shields. Currently, they are going about their usual business freely," Ngongo said. At the end of May, authorities accused ADF rebels of killing at least 50 civilians in Boga and Tchabi, and attacking a refugee camp in Irumu.

A historically Ugandan Islamist group that the United States links with the so-called Islamic State, the ADF is the deadliest of scores of armed militias that roam the mineral-rich eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

India, on the frontline of climate change

NEW DELHI: Swathes of India are battling deadly floods and landslides after heavy monsoon rains, just the latest example of how the vast country is on the frontline of climate change. In the first seven months of this year alone the impoverished nation of 1.3 billion people has experienced two cyclones, a deadly glacier collapse in the Himalayas, a sweltering heatwave and killer floods.

Melting glaciers

In February, a ferocious flash flood hurtled down a remote Indian Himalayan valley, sweeping away homes, a hydro plant and around 200 people. Only 60 bodies have been found. Experts believe the cause was a massive chunk of glacier — 15 football fields long and five across-breaking off high in the mountains.

A glaciologist who investigated the site told AFP the catastrophe was "clearly a fallout of climate change and in itself a tell-tale of our future". In the Indian Himalayas, about 10,000 glaciers are receding at a rate of 30 to 60 metres (100 to 200 feet) per decade as global temperatures rise. In 2013, a flash flood in the same area killed 6,000 people.

More cyclones

Cyclones are not a rare sight in the northern Indian Ocean but scientists say they are becoming more frequent and severe as sea temperatures rise. In May Cyclone Tauktae claimed 155 lives in western India including dozens working on oil rigs off Mumbai. It was the fiercest storm to hit the area in several decades.

Barely a week later Yaas, with winds the equivalent of a category-two hurricane, killed at least nine people and forced the evacuation of more than 1.5 million in the east. With waves the height of double-decker buses, hundreds of thousands lost their houses. "I have lost my home, everything," said one survivor.

Hotter and hotter

India's average temperature rose around 0.7 degrees Celsius (1.3 degrees Fahrenheit) between the beginning of the 20th century and 2018. It will rise another 4.4 degrees by 2100, according to a recent government report.

In early July, tens of millions of people sizzled in just the latest heatwave across northern India. India's weather department has declared a heatwave almost every year in the last decade with temperatures sometimes touching 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit).

The Hindustan Times newspaper reported that heatwaves had claimed more than 17,000 lives in India since 1971, according to top meteorologists. Currently just five percent of Indian households have air conditioning compared with 90 percent in the United States and 60 percent in China. But the market is forecast to boom in the coming years, driving up energy consumption in what is already the world's third-largest carbon emitter.

Torrential rains have hit India's western coast in the past few days triggering landslides and a deluge of sludge, leaving more than 75 dead and dozens missing. The hillside resort of Mahabaleshwar reportedly saw nearly 60 centimetres (23 inches) of rain in a 24-hour period, a record. The neighbouring resort state of Goa is reeling under its worst floods in decades, its chief minister said. — AFP

DR Congo army says 150 hostages freed from Islamist militia

BUNIA: The army in the Democratic Republic of Congo said yesterday its troops have freed over 150 people taken hostage by the ADF Islamist militia, blamed for thousands of deaths

in the country's east. "The army was able to release more than 150 civilians: women, elderly people, children and young people," said Jules Ngongo, spokesman for the army in Ituri province.

He said this was possible after the army's offensives against ADF from July 18th to 20th in Boga and Tchabi in Irumu territory in the northeast. Boga and Tchabi are some 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of Bunia, the capital of Ituri province where rebels from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have taken hold.

MONDAY, JULY 26, 2021

Business

Boeing set to face investor scrutiny as woes plague jets

Jets grapple with myriad challenges after messy start to 2021

EVERETT: The aviation industry appears to finally be past the worst of the coronavirus downturn, but Boeing's to-do list remains extensive following a messy start to 2021.

The problems this year include electrical issues with the 737 MAX jet, fuselage troubles on the 787 and yet another delay in the timeframe for the 777X. The myriad challenges reflect the changed regulatory climate facing Boeing in the wake of a pair of 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019 that claimed 346 lives and led to a 20-month grounding of the aircraft.

"Unfortunately for Boeing right now, the added scrutiny is justified," said Ken Herbert, an aviation analyst at Canaccord Genuity. Chief Executive Dave Calhoun on Wednesday will update investors on its latest set of challenges when the company reports second-quarter results.

He will likely discuss the prospects for the 787 Dreamliner following Boeing's move earlier this month to cut production after identifying another issue with the aircraft. In May, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) formally notified Boeing that the 777X would need more than two years of additional testing and analysis before it could be certified, saying the jet was "not yet ready" to advance to the next stage of evaluation.

More scrutiny

In April, Boeing notified 16 airlines flying its 737 MAX planes of an electrical issue, leading to the immediate grounding of more than 100 jets. Carriers resumed service on the jets in May after regulators approved Boeing's proposed fix. Boeing has also pushed back the timeframe for new deliveries of presidential plane Air Force One and experienced numerous setbacks on the KC46 Air Force tanker.

Boeing's efforts to get back on track have been complicated by disruptions to supply chains and personnel during the pandemic that have weighed on the broader economy. The company's decision to consolidate 787 production to South Carolina and shift operations from Washington state has also led to disruption. But experts say a good portion of the problems stem from the aftermath of the MAX crashes, including a withering September 2020 congressional report that blasted Boeing as overly focused on profit to the detriment of engineering.

The report said Boeing suffered from a "culture of concealment" from regulators at the FAA, who themselves practiced "grossly insufficient oversight" of the company.

"The investigations have shown failure in both organizations—Boeing as the manufacturer and the FAA as the overseeing body," said Bertrand Vilmer, head of the consultancy Icare. "Now the FAA is trying to get back on track," Vilmer said. "They are looking more closely for problems, and they are finding them."

Both Boeing and the FAA have been changing procedures following recommendations from reviews of what went wrong with the MAX. "Changes happening on both sides are leading to more oversight and supervision," said Hassan Shahidi, head of the Flight Safety Foundation, a nonprofit. "What is important for safety is making sure that system is rigorous and robust, based on data and timely information provided to all parties," Shahidi said.

Surfacing problems?

Boeing, for its part, said it has been acting "methodically" to enhance safety practices. With the 787, for example, "the decision to slow down production schedules for additional inspection and perform any necessary rework is the

some support such as pay topping the minimum wage and supplemented health care coverage—but it designates drivers as self-employed, meaning they do not have the right to some regular employee benefits such as collective bargaining.

Happy trails?

Uber says a recent survey found 82 percent of drivers are "happy" that Proposition 22 is in place. But Nathan, a driver in San Diego who asked that his last name not be used to protect his privacy, said he felt some of the company's promises went unfulfilled. "We had more independence, more freedom... we had more ability to control how much money we made," he said. "Uber was finally working towards making drivers happy."

Transparency and price control are two things that Nathan wanted from Uber, and he thought he was getting those things. But within three months of Prop 22 passing, the company did away with an option to dictate fare prices using a "multiplier" during periods of high demand, he lamented.

Drivers still have the option of picking which rides they want to provide, but say that the amount of information they get to see before deciding which fares to accept has dwindled.

For example, Uber only starts sharing aspiring riders' destinations after a driver has blindly accepted five out of 10 trips. An Uber spokesperson told AFP that about a third of drivers were refusing more than 80 percent of fares before the tweaks, which were made to improve the reliability of the service.

"With the recovery from the pandemic, we wanted to make sure that passengers have a car when they need it and that all drivers have more trips on average," the spokesperson said.

New horizons?

Critics argue that calculations regarding how much



EVERETT, US: In this file photo a Boeing 777X airplane takes off on its inaugural flight at Paine Field in Everett, Washington. —AFP

right course of action, even if it may have an operational impact from time to time," the company said in an email to AFP. The FAA is also demanding more from Boeing before it signs off on things.

Boeing proposed using an algorithm for inspections of the 787 in May, and the FAA required the company suspend deliveries while it studied the proposal, which it did not want to accept without checking the underlying data,



OAKLAND: In this file photo, Uber driver Sergei Fyodorov discusses why he supports a yes vote on Proposition 22 in Oakland, California. —AFP

drivers earn hourly do not take into account time ride-share or delivery drivers spend waiting around. They also contend that most drivers will not be eligible for the touted contributions to health insurance coverage.

Meanwhile, Uber has been offering incentives to get drivers back on the road as rider demand picks up after being stalled by the coronavirus crisis. Drivers may still be wary of COVID-19, and could be getting financial help from government aid to the unemployed. And, as with the rest of the job market, the pandemic may have prompted some to shift gears on careers. "People did training, or they found other jobs," Cee said. "The pandemic helped us realize we were hooked, trapped in an abusive relationship with Uber."

The Rideshare Drivers United group seeks to mobilize members against the Proposition 22 model, which Uber hopes to spread beyond California. The San Francisco-based company's ride-share business was hard hit during the pandemic, but it has seen its food delivery and trucking units pick up speed. Uber has yet to post a profit. —AFP



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell testifies before a Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee hearing, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. —AFP

important and useful."

But Stovall said not to expect much in the way of details. "On the one hand, they will try to assure people that the Fed is ever vigilant and does have the ability to make a difference. But on the other hand (they) will be pretty unspecific on what and when they plan to do things," he said.

A more-pressing decision for the Fed will be what to do about its monthly purchases of at least \$80 billion in Treasury debt and at least \$40 billion in agency mortgage-backed securities, which were part of the emergency measures taken as the economy collapsed last year.

Morris said the Fed must figure out when to scale them back, and how to do it without causing stock markets to gyrate. "It's still tricky with them, and Powell is going to be very careful," he said. —AFP

Uber driver independence a bumpy road

OAKLAND: Uber driver Mae Cee scoffs at the notion, touted by the global ride-share service, that she and her peers are self-employed contractors—and that most of them are happy with the arrangement. In California, labor legislation endorsed by voters last November in a referendum, known as Proposition 22, effectively overturned a state law requiring Uber, Lyft and other app-based, on-demand delivery services to reclassify their drivers and provide employee benefits.

That legislation, heavily backed by the companies themselves with \$200 million in campaign spending, may have officially resolved the status of so-called "gig workers." But many of them are still bitter and angry, and say they have all the inconveniences of being independent, and none of the advantages. They also accuse Uber of rolling out benefits while Prop 22 was being debated—and then retracting them.

"No way I'm an independent contractor—not even close, it's such a joke," said Cee, an activist in a Rideshare Drivers United group. Drivers for companies such as Uber and Lyft use their own cars and chose their own work schedules in what the companies describe as cherished independence.

But how work days turn out is orchestrated by a sophisticated computer algorithm that artfully nudges drivers to accept as many fares as possible—including less profitable routes.

Some drivers see the situation as basically having a software version of a manager, making them tantamount to employees—without the security such an arrangement would give them. Prop 22 does guarantee

Fed to meet as inflation, virus variants muddle US recovery

WASHINGTON: As rising prices and the spread of new COVID-19 variants increase risks to the US economy, Federal Reserve officials are expected to maintain their easy money policies intended to help American companies and workers survive the pandemic damage.

But as the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) begins its two-day policy meeting Tuesday, markets and traders will be watching for hints of when it will begin tapering its massive monthly debt purchases. The bond buying program aimed to ease lending conditions during the crisis, but has come under scrutiny recently as inflation has soared to record levels as businesses reopen and consumers spend the savings built up during the worst months of the pandemic.

And focus also will be on any sign the Fed is rethinking its pledge to keep the benchmark lending rate at zero until the economy achieves maximum employment. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly said the rise in inflation is a temporary effect of the economy getting back to normal, and that the Fed has tools to respond if the surge goes on too long. But Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA Research said the swiftness of the price spike likely has surprised the central bank.

"I think they're still saying it's transitory but they're squirming in their seats, feeling a bit anxious that the numbers have come in higher than expected," he said. However, the Fed is not expected to alter its stimulative policies this week or at any point this year.

Powell has promised to communicate clearly in advance of any policy shift, and analysts believe he may wait to do that at the annual central banking conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming scheduled for August.

Troubled recovery

Central bankers are convening during an uncertain moment for the world's largest economy. The fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 has prompted some parts of the United States to reimpose mask-wearing rules and sparked worries it could undermine the recovery. At the same time data is showing prices surging across the economy, a consequence of supply chain snarls, shortages of components, unique dynamics like rental car companies moving to rebuild fleets and "base effects," or the comparison to the depressed prices of the year-ago period. At the Fed's last meeting in June, signs of growing hawkishness appeared, with a majority of FOMC members predicting at least two rate hikes in 2023, and seven expecting one as soon as next year, according to quarterly economic projections. In March, a majority foresaw no rate hikes until after 2023.

Powell has downplayed those predictions, but Daniel Morris, chief market strategist at BNP Paribas, said analysts will be watching to see if the central bank chief's thinking has changed, particularly when he speaks to reporters after the meeting. "I think there's still that kind of debate, are they more hawkish?" he said. "Any info we can get from Powell during the press conference to try to help settle that debate will be

Profits at India's Reliance fall on COVID impact

MUMBAI: Profits at Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries dropped sharply between April and June this year, the company said, as Asia's third-largest economy battled a vicious second wave of COVID-19.

The oil-to-telecoms giant, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a consolidated net profit of 122.73 billion rupees (\$1.65 billion) in the quarter ending June 30, a 7.25 percent fall compared to the same period last year. Even though its quarterly revenues jumped by 58 percent year-on-year to 1.44 trillion rupees, aided by its flagship oil and gas businesses, its retail arm took a hit as a spike in infections prompted shop closures.

"COVID-related restrictions on store operations during the quarter impacted our retail business operations and profitability. This is a temporary phenomenon," Ambani said in a statement. "I am happy that our company has delivered robust growth despite facing a highly challenging operating environment caused by the second wave of the COVID pandemic," he added.

Its telecom business Jio added 14.3 million subscribers during the quarter, recording a nearly 10-percent increase in operating revenue. Ambani is locked in a high-stakes battle with Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, as Amazon and Reliance fight for a share of India's massive e-commerce market.

The two firms are currently engaged in a row over Ambani's acquisition of domestic retail giant Future Group — which Amazon has sought to delay, with a Singapore-based arbitration panel asking Reliance to halt the deal. Reliance has dismissed the panel's order, saying its agreement with Future Group complies with Indian law.

The behemoth has also sought to limit its dependence on its core fossil fuel business, unveiling a \$10 billion plan to invest in renewable energy last month. The investment includes a 5,000-acre manufacturing facility in India's western state of Gujarat, with the company aiming to produce 100 gigawatts of solar power by 2030.

Reliance, which operates the world's biggest oil refining complex in Gujarat, has a market capitalization of more than \$182 billion.

The company's shares closed down 0.74 percent in Mumbai on Friday ahead of the earnings announcement. —AFP

Business

AVEVA signs up to join United Nation's Race to Zero campaign

Industrial software leader joins initiative to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050

DUBAI: AVEVA, a global leader in industrial software, driving digital transformation and sustainability, yesterday announced that it has become the 47th company in the FTSE 100 to join the United Nation's Race to Zero campaign. "By joining the Race to Zero initiative



Peter Herweck

and aligning to the highest level of ambition for climate targets under the Paris Agreement, AVEVA is leading by example on climate action. We are demonstrating our commitment to work across our entire value chain to help avoid global impacts from climate change. We are also pleased to be joining many of our customers in this initiative, as well as key partners, including Microsoft, Accenture and Schneider Electric, that have already committed to this pledge," commented Peter Herweck, AVEVA CEO.

Race to Zero is a global campaign designed to rally leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, and investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery that prevents future threats, creates jobs, and unlocks inclusive, sustainable growth. It aims to mobilize a coalition of leading net zero initiatives and is the largest ever alliance committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Collectively participants now cover nearly 25 percent of global CO2 emissions and over 50 percent of GDP. AVEVA's objective is to build momentum and spur rapid action

around decarbonization ahead of COP26, where governments must strengthen their contributions to the Paris Agreement.

Andrew Griffith MP, the UK's Net Zero Business Champion also commented, "Congratulations to AVEVA on joining the UN's Race to Zero campaign. This demonstrates great leadership and goes hand in hand with the company's work to support clients like National Grid and Anglian Water in creating a positive impact on the environment. AVEVA joins 46 other FTSE100 companies in the Race to Zero, together representing over a trillion pounds in market capitalization. With just 100 days to go until we host the COP26 Summit in Glasgow - the time to act is now."

Collaborating to nurture sustainability

AVEVA has already joined a number of corporate sustainability initiatives to date that bring together companies to work on climate challenges collectively, including BSR and the UN Global Compact. Most recently AVEVA joined The Renewable Energy Buyers Alliance (REBA) a joint collaboration of large clean energy buyers, energy providers, and service providers that, together with NGO partners, are unlocking the marketplace for all nonresidential energy buyers to lead a rapid transition to a cleaner, prosperous, zero-carbon energy future.

"AVEVA, remains committed to lead sustainable innovation and we are taking affirmative actions to embed sustainability into our operations, our culture and our core business strategy," commented Herweck. "By being part of the Race to Zero initiative, we are leading by example and setting the direction we will



take to drive sustainability throughout our own operations, and the software we develop for our customers globally. We will continue to formalize our sustainability pledges across all our focus areas as well as develop interim goals to help us report and communicate on our progress, and we look forward to sharing more details in the months to come."

Yesterday's AVEVA announcements builds on a

recent climate mitigation commitment made by AVEVA as part of its long-term sustainability agenda. In June 2021, the company announced its commitment to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions across its operations (Scopes 1 & 2) by 2030, as well as its plans to submit ambitious mitigation targets for external validation by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) before the end of the fiscal year.

Burgan Bank reveals winners of Yawmi Account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Hiyam Ali Alawam
2. Khaled Faisal Al-Subaie
3. Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah
4. Abdredha Ali Albaghli
5. Aishah Ali Akbar

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

IMF board okays big lending hike for poorest nations

WASHINGTON: The IMF board announced it had approved a massive increase in its ability to provide interest-free loans to low income countries to help them recover from the pandemic's economic destruction. The COVID-19 crisis has drained resources set aside for these countries-most are which are in sub-Saharan Africa-far faster than anticipated, and their needs will remain high, the International Monetary Fund said.

The changes, which the IMF board approved July 14, include a 45 percent increase in the limits on normal lending, and removes altogether the caps on access for the poorest countries.

However, officials made clear the IMF is not offering nations a blank check. "The decision to raise access limits is not a directive to lend more across all IMF programs-rather, it provides the flexibility to provide more zero interest financing for countries with strong economic programs to handle the pandemic and the path to full recovery," said Sean Nolan, deputy director of the Strategy Policy and Review Department. The Washington-based crisis lender provides the financing largely through "multi-year lending arrangements," unlike in 2020, when most aid was pushed out through emergency programs that disbursed immediately and were not conditioned on economic policies.

The fund dramatically increased its financing to poor nations last year, eight times higher than the average in the prior three years, and said demand "is projected to continue at elevated levels for several years." The IMF also is working to boost funding for its Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) to provide the zero-interest loans, calling for an initial injection of about \$4 billion, including from member contributions.—AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

Growth worries boost demand for safe haven assets

KUWAIT: Last week was light for the US economy in terms of economic releases. Nevertheless, the major inflows into the US government 10-year treasury bonds sent yields tumbling to 1.126 percent, a level not reached since February of this year. Global growth worries continues to intensify and boost demand for safe-haven assets as the spread of the Delta variant is casting worries on investors and their sentiment. Interest rate hike probabilities in the US have declined since the beginning of July when the market was pricing at least 1 hike towards the end of 2022. However, the market became more hesitant amid continued developments of the global health condition in the pace of the recovery for the world's largest economy and is currently pricing an 81 percent chance of a hike in February of 2023.

Markets react

Volatility was the theme of last week with treasuries fluctuating from a low of 1.126 percent to a high of 1.313 percent reacting to global growth concerns and investors' sentiment. Equities had a similar movement with between reaching 4-week lows and then recouping the losses to end the week on par as earnings optimism pushed global stocks back towards record highs despite mixed date.

ECB policy meeting

The European Central Bank has made significant changes to the working of its forward guidance in last week's policy meeting. The changes reflected revisions to its monetary policy framework announced earlier this month. The general council "expects the key ECB interest rates to remain at their present or lower levels until it sees inflation reaching two per cent well ahead of the end of its projection horizon and durably for the rest of the projection horizon and it judges that realized progress in underlying inflation is sufficiently advanced to be consistent with inflation stabilizing at two per cent over the medium term".

During the press conference, ECB president Christine Lagarde clarified that the new guidance has three legs: that 2 percent has to be reached "well ahead" of the end of the forecast horizon, that inflation should remain there "durably" for the rest of the fore-

'Patient' ECB vows longer support as virus risks grow

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde warned of growing economic "uncertainty" caused by the fast-spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus, as the bank pledged to keep support for the eurozone in place for longer. "The euro area economy is rebounding strongly," Lagarde said. "But the pandemic continues to cast a shadow, especially as the Delta variant constitutes a growing source of uncertainty." The highly contagious variant-which has forced renewed restrictions in several countries-could dampen the recovery "in services, especially in tourism and hospitality," she added.

Lagarde said the ECB would show "patience" in helping the 19-nation currency club through the health crisis, signaling that key interest rates would stay lower for longer. Thursday's meeting of the ECB's 25-member governing council was the first since the bank unveiled a new inflation target of two percent, ditching the previous goal of "close to, but below two percent".

cast horizon, and that the Governing Council (GC) will have to decide whether the progress towards the new 2 percent aim is "sufficiently advanced." She then went on to clarify that "well-ahead" can be interpreted as the mid-point of the inflation forecast.

The single currency fluctuated throughout the week from 1.1750 to 1.1830 before closing the week lower at 1.1771.

Eurozone PMIs

The eurozone composite PMI showed a sharper-than-expected increase in July, rising from 59.5 to 60.6 with economists expecting a reading of 60.0. That represents the strongest reading since July 2000. The manufacturing PMI fell from 63.4 to 62.6, broadly in line with consensus of 62.5. Hence, the upside surprise came in services, where the activity index jumped from 58.3 to 60.6 beating expectations of 59.3.

UK PMIs saw a sharp slowdown in July, with the manufacturing index down from 63.9 to 60.4 and below expectations of 62.4 and the services index down from 62.4 to 57.8 which was also lower than the consensus of 62.0. Both the manufacturing and services headline readings were the weakest since March 2021, while an optimism index for the composite PMI (of all sectors) fell to its lowest in nine months, as the delta variant took hold in the UK. Of all firms surveyed, 32 percent mentioned an increase in output while 16 percent reported a drop. Of the latter group, this was attributed to "severe shortages of raw materials and the impact of COVID-19 isolation on staff availability".

UK retail sales

Retail sales figures released last week in the UK indicated solid gains of 0.5 percent versus the expected decline of 0.1 percent on monthly basis. As plans for the UK economy to resume normally, the spread of other coronavirus variants are casting doubts on the prospect of the timeline required for the country to resume its course normally. The cable have been resilient this past week as it reached a 3-month low of 1.3572 but was able to reverse the movement and climb back to opening level of 1.3787.

Prices remain in range

Oil prices took a dip on Monday and Brent fell below the \$70 mark for the first time since early June. The movement was reversed on Tuesday and Brent prices climbed above the \$70 level and closed the week at \$74.10.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30070

In a revamped "forward guidance" statement released after the meeting, closely scrutinized by markets for hints on future policy moves, the ECB said rates would stay at record-low and even negative levels until inflation is seen "durably" reaching the new target.

Governors also made no tweaks to their 1.85-trillion-euro (\$2.2 trillion) pandemic emergency bond-purchasing program (PEPP), the bank's main tool to counter the virus impact.

The ECB's ultra-loose monetary policy measures are aimed at keeping credit cheap in the eurozone to encourage spending and investment. Lagarde said the "easier to understand", updated guidance underlined the ECB's "commitment to maintain a persistently accommodative monetary policy stance".

ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski was underwhelmed however, calling the new language from the ECB "old wine in new bottles".

German worries

Some disagreement has emerged among ECB governors about when to start weaning the euro area off the massive stimulus. But concerns about the increase in coronavirus infections appears to have hit pause on the debate, with Lagarde saying "none of us would want to tighten prematurely" and risk derailing the rebound.

She said the PEPP purchases will remain in place

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma weekly, salary draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign for Sunday July 18 and July 25, 2021. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman yesterday.

The results of the draws were as follows:

For July 18, 2021

1. Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah
2. Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Jamal Saad Al-Otaibi

For July 25, 2021

1. Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Rachid Salah Khazzam
2. Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Habiba Ali Al-Obaid

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan of five times the salary and a maximum of KD 10,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt amounting to KD 10,000 or above to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 1 percent from their transferred debt.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

The bank revealed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time.

until at least the end of March 2022, or until the ECB "judges that the coronavirus crisis phase is over". German Chancellor Angela Merkel earlier Thursday warned of "exponential growth" in COVID-19 infections, after a period of relatively low numbers allowed the country to ease curbs on hotels, restaurants, shops and other businesses.

Surging prices

During her press conference, Lagarde was grilled about the bank's new inflation target, which she has described as a more "simple" and "symmetric" goal, meaning the bank will allow inflation to temporarily overshoot or undershoot before stepping in. The tweaked inflation goal is the main outcome of an 18-month strategic review at the ECB's first since 2003.

Eurozone inflation has been stubbornly low for years despite extraordinary stimulus efforts from the ECB. But global consumer prices have surged in recent months, driven by one-off factors linked to the pandemic such as post-lockdown demand and supply chain bottlenecks.

Investors are on red alert over the price hikes owing to fears they could force policymakers to raise interest rates, hindering the post-COVID recovery. Lagarde said the jump in eurozone inflation-at 1.9 percent in June-"is expected to be mostly temporary", and the ECB will look through it.—AFP

Business

solutions by stc partners with PASS to offer parking management solutions

A new market segment under stc's one-stop-shop business arm

KUWAIT: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, has partnered with local smart parking solutions provider, "PASS", to offer a range of cutting-edge parking management solutions. solutions by stc released a statement noting that the newfound partnership will help expand the Company's product line as it enters a new market segment to further expand its digital product line. Considering that parking management solutions in itself is a new market segment, PASS has been a local pioneer in providing such services with a successful track record of accomplishments. Through this collaboration, solutions by stc will be the exclusive provider of this innovative technology to both B2B and commercial segments on behalf of PASS, while providing additional services to support SMEs in adopting this streamlined solution. The addition of this service under solutions by stc aims to further diversify the Company's offering portfolio, expand its market reachability, and provide customers with customized solutions based on their unique requirements.

The smart parking solution integrates several technologies to digitize the user experience when entering



and exiting parking structures. The Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) device enables smart parking by using an optical character recognition to read vehicle license plates and store data on all vehicle movement both in and out of the structure.

The smart parking solution is designed for pay-to-park parking structures and is a perfect solution for

both employees and employers to keep track of all parking related information. Through the 'subscription system', employers will be able to manage parking spaces efficiently, while eliminating the use of parking tickets, payment by cash, or any unnecessary human interaction. This feature helps eliminate all contact associated with entering and leaving a parking structure, serving as a valuable feature considering the ongoing pandemic and social distancing.

Another feature included in the application is 'pre-booking'. Pre-booking allows users to reserve a parking spot in advance before arriving to the parking structure. While users will not be able to reserve a specific spot, they will be designated a vacant spot in a nearby location, still saving valuable time during busy times. By using modern and innovative technological solutions, solutions by stc currently provides an extensive offering line for corporate customers, assisting them in their digital transformation journey. The Company applies a design thinking approach while collaborating with market leaders to provide its customers with effective tools that can enhance efficiency. As a business solutions provider, solutions by

stc also offers a range of connectivity solutions, fixed or wireless services, 5G technology, ICT, IoT and the IT products and services. The Company also launched the 5G LIVEBUS, a safe and smart bus solution supported by 5G connectivity to provide a safe and convenient method of transportation for passengers.

The Company commented that it is proud to partner with an innovative provider that has a proven track record in applying smart parking solutions within the local market. The addition of such solutions will widen solutions by stc's offering line following its commitment to provide customers with integrated and innovative solutions that enable digitization across multiple operational aspects and sectors.

solutions by stc aims to continue exploring new alternative methods of applying digital and tech-based concepts that can greatly enhance the efficiency and productivity of existing activities. As the digital era continues to expand through transformative milestones, the Company aims to keep pace with the rapidly evolving tech-world and become the gateway to its customers' appetite for digital innovation.

New Huawei FreeBuds 4 set to take your audio experience to next level

KUWAIT: Sound is that one essential element that completes the overall experience. Everyday, we are surrounded with sound coming from all directions and while it is something we are often used to, it sometimes cuts us from what we actually want to hear. Check out the Huawei FreeBuds 4, Huawei's latest True Wireless Stereo (TWS) Bluetooth earbuds that continues the legacy of the open-fit earbuds with Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) technology that started with the Huawei FreeBuds 3.

Offering studio-quality sound as well as open-fit ANC and unmatched air-like comfort, the Huawei FreeBuds 4 doesn't just work with Huawei products, but also with devices running Android and iOS. Through the Huawei AI Life app, users are able to adjust settings or perform various controls such as wear detection, quick control, status query, noise cancelation and device management.

Immersive high-resolution audio with studio-quality sound

While speakers can handle all frequencies created by sound, the same is not the case with earbuds or headphones, which is why there is a need to innovate on how sound can be perfectly replicated despite the narrow frequency range. With the Huawei FreeBuds 4, it uses a classic 14.3mm dynamic driver with a lightweight yet durable diaphragm that brings improved dynamic response to help avoid split vibrations that cause distortions in audio output. The earbuds use a Liquid Crystal Polymer (LCP) composite diaphragm made of polymer for greater durability that brings improved middle and treble sounds. In various test, dynamic drivers that use an LCP composite diaphragm can support a frequency range of up to 40 kHz which can deliver professional-grade sound quality with richer and fuller trebles.

Using this dynamic driver isn't enough, and Huawei has implemented a bass tube on the earbuds to create a more pulse-pounding bass. This tube connects to the rear chamber of the audible unit with the external air holes and is part of a newly upgraded bass enhancement engine, bass tube and motherboard that form an independent sealed sound cavity. This results in an enhanced airtightness and acoustic pressure and increased bass performance that is wasn't possible before on a small earbud.

More than just the impressively rich bass, clear vocals and rich details, the Huawei FreeBuds 4 also uses Adaptive Ear Matching (AEM) technology for the first time in open-fit earbuds. Using this technology, it can intelligently optimise the audio effect and output, allowing users to have a consistent and high resolution audio quality no matter how they're wearing the earbuds.

Aside from the hardware enhancements to bring rich treble and powerful bass performance, Huawei FreeBuds 4 feature Adaptive Ear Matching (AEM) technology in open-fit earphones for the first time. By automatically detecting user's ear shape and wearing condition, Huawei FreeBuds 4 can intelligently optimize the audio effect, allowing users to have consistent and high resolution audio quality regardless of the wearing situation.

Leading the industry with open-fit noise cancelation

Earbuds that feature ANC usually come with an in-ear design, but despite the technical challenges Huawei managed to bring ANC to open-fit earbuds: the open-fit earbuds offer a more pleasant and super comfortable wearing experience as the user is less likely to feel a build-up of air pressure within.

Challenges like how the earbuds should fit in user's ears for absolute comfort as well as a proper noise cancelling algorithm brought about the adoption of dual microphones used on the



HUAWEI FreeBuds 4. Together with AEM technology, it helps address the issue by automatically adjusting the music depending on the user's ears. When users turn on noise cancellation, the earbuds automatically detects the ear canal shape and wearing conditions and then assigns the best suited noise cancellation parameters for the best listening experience.

Additionally, Huawei FreeBuds 4 has a staggered wind-proof structure that prevents wind noise from being generated at the source. This design effectively blocks strong winds from blowing directly into the microphone, allowing for better wind-proof effects.

Ergonomic design for an air-like comfort

More than just the performance, earbuds should also offer comfort levels that will allow it to be worn for long periods. In the case of the Huawei FreeBuds 4, Huawei created a 3D evaluation system that mainly looks at the wearing comfort of earbuds from three elements that include suction pressure, stability and stuffiness. Stress tests are then done to simulate how the earbuds are worn. Using 10,000+ human ear models, the Huawei FreeBuds 4 was created factoring in the comfort assessment on these tests to guarantee an optimal wearing air-like comfort for all users.

Huawei AI Life app

An audio assistant for a better lifestyle

The Huawei FreeBuds 4 can also work as an external microphone when shooting videos. Thanks to the high-sensitivity microphone, it is able record high-fidelity sound using a sample rate of 48 kHz that help retain much if the detail on the audio being recorded. Low Latency Mode is also supported on the Huawei FreeBuds 4 which is perfect for users who love playing fast-paced games.

Most of the time users want to control play-back or answer calls without the need to take out their smartphones, which is why the Huawei FreeBuds 4 feature intuitive controls built right on the earbud. Tapping twice on the stem allows users to answer/reject a call, play/pause music, play previous/next song and enable voice assistant while swiping up and down will control the volume. Additionally, long pressing on the stem of the earbuds can enable/disable noise cancelation.



In this current digital age, many users typically own more than one device and it could be a hassle if they want to connect the earbuds to multiple devices that would require to be set up every time it is being used. Huawei FreeBuds 4 supports dual device connections whether if it's a Huawei smartphone, tablet, PC, smartwatch or even devices from other brands.

In one scenario, when the user is watching on the tablet and there is an incoming call on the smartphone, the tablet will automatically pause the episode and the earphones will switch to the smartphone for the user to pick up the call.

In staying true to its technological innovations, the Huawei FreeBuds 4 joins Huawei's line up of products that have transformed the way users interact with devices. This is a true testament to Huawei's capabilities in delivering what the user wants and in turn taking audio experience to the next level.

NBK concludes its campaign to reward users of Mobile Banking

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has concluded the campaign for rewarding its customers signing up to NBK Mobile Banking or opting to NBK Push Notifications instead of SMS notifications after completing all bimonthly draws conducted throughout the campaign, in which many customers won valuable prizes from Huawei.

This campaign comes in line with NBK's keenness to provide the most advanced digital banking services and payment solutions to its customers and enabling them to make all their transactions quickly and easily. The campaign that lasted for three months with the last draw conducted on 13 July, 2021, gave all customers who switched from SMS notifications to NBK Push Notifications available for all NBK Mobile Banking users, since it was first launched, the chance to enter draws and win prizes.

NBK announced the names of the following winners:

- Fatimeh Ali Melyouni
- Shemali Ali Al-Shemali
- Phani Kumar Katuri
- Ghina Qasem Moosouly
- Wejdan Faisal Al-Hammadi
- Mohammad Fahad Al-Mutairi

On this occasion, Hala Al-Shoaibi, Head of Digital Service Quality Management, National Bank of Kuwait said: "We aim to encourage our customers to use digital channels for all their transactions and payments."

"We have a huge technological infrastructure that enables us to provide top-notch digital services, especially through NBK Mobile Banking, under which we strive to provide continuously updated services," she added. Al-Shoaibi emphasized that NBK is keen to launch unrivaled campaigns all year round, in line with its strategy to reward customers through an array of exquisite draws, prizes and offers. NBK Push

Notifications enables NBK Mobile Banking users to receive real-time alerts about all transactions made on their accounts and credit cards through mobile notifications including transaction details as an alternative for SMS notifications. The service allows customers to receive notifications 24/7, wherever they are, inside or outside Kuwait, as long as they are connected to the internet.

NBK Push Notifications is a continuation of a number of services added to NBK Mobile Banking App to cope with the fast-paced modern lifestyle, with dramatically increasing reliance on smartphones in daily life. These services include NBK Geo Alerts, which allows customers to receive notifications about available offers and discounts on their smartphones at specific locations while shopping nearby.

Winners: A top-notch digital experience packed with exceptional prizes

The winners who showed various reactions, agreed on the top-notch digital banking experience

provided to them by NBK, which is also packed with exceptional rewards and prizes. The participants said that NBK Mobile Banking helps them make all transactions easily and quickly anytime, anywhere. Some of them pointed out that their close connection with NBK stems from being NBK Customers since childhood, and throughout those years, it was always the bank they know and trust.

The winners also expressed their pleasure with the prizes they received, which encourage them to do sport and lead a healthy life.

financial obligations, the Central Bank of Kuwait has enacted a set of controls that banks must adhere to when providing finance, whether for employees or retirees, taking into account the financial conditions of each of these two categories. Such controls require banks to offer financial advice, provide all the information about the financing contract, and clarify the details of the financing process, e.g. rate of return/discount rate to the finance amount, number of installments, details of each installment and other information before signing the contract with the customer. In addition, the bank should give the customer a period of two days to review the contract and read the terms and conditions carefully, so that the customer can be aware of his/her rights and obligations under the contract before signing it.

The campaign "Diraya" aims to enhance and support the goals of the Central Bank of Kuwait and its social program which aims to spread banking knowledge among society members, increase public awareness on the most important financial issues and on the way to protect assets from fraudulence. Also, it aims to highlight the banking sector role in general, and the banking products provided by the private sector, by introducing a set of instructions and information on regular basis through social media in cooperation with Kuwait banking association and local banks. The campaign shall continue till the end of this year. It is worth noting that KFH works always on organizing training courses for its employees to increase their experience level, and encourage them to transfer these information in a simplified manner to customers through direct contact in the service centers, social media channels and various electronic channels of the bank.

pre-pandemic level in the second quarter of 2021. However, the "steady growth in domestic demand exceeds production expansion capacity in a wide range of sectors," the bank added.

As a result, "businesses find it easier to transfer higher costs to prices". Friday's rate hike is the highest since Russia was hit in 2014 by a fall in oil prices and Western sanctions following Moscow's annexation of Crimea. That year the central bank abruptly raised its key rate to more than 17 per cent. After months of historically low inflation, consumer prices began climbing in March 2020, driven by a drop in the ruble's value. The central bank started raising its historically low rate the same month. In June, Russian annual inflation remained high at 6.5 percent according to the state statistics agency, the highest level since 2016 and well above a bank forecast of 4.0 percent. The bank's next monetary policy meeting is set for September 10. —AFP

KFH continues its supportive efforts to 'Diraya' campaign

KUWAIT: As part of "Diraya" campaign, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to improve the financial literacy of various customer segments and highlight the benefits of the banking services and products it provides. Through the "Diraya" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association to spread banking awareness, KFH is keen to educate customers about personal finance operations.

KFH explained that personal finance is provided by banks to individuals to meet their personal needs, adding that this financing is divided into two types: consumer finance and housing finance. Consumer finance is a medium-term personal finance of maximum KD 25,000 over a period not exceeding five years, for financing goods and services such as buying cars, furniture, or educational or health services, while housing Finance is a long-term personal finance maximum KD 70,000 over a period not exceeding fifteen years for purchase, building or renovation of private housing.

KFH added that in order to regulate the provision of personal financings in a way that enables the customer to benefit from such facilities without being exposed to default risk, and to avoid burdening the customer with

Russia hikes rate to fight inflation

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank raised its interest rate by 100 basis points to 6.5 percent-its biggest increase since a 2014 currency crisis-as the country battles soaring food prices. The Russian economy was hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic and the 2020 oil price crisis, and authorities are under pressure following a leap in prices for staple goods such as sugar, sunflower oil and eggs.

"Inflation is developing above the Bank of Russia's forecast," it said in a statement, adding that the increase in its key rate aimed to "constrain this risk" and return inflation to 4.0 percent. According to the bank's estimates, the Russian economy reached its



Festival-goers attend the Kaleidoscope Festival in Alexandra Palace Park in London on Saturday. — AFP photos



FESTIVAL-GOERS REVEL IN RETURN OF LIVE MUSIC AT KALEIDOSCOPE

Nearly 10,000 music fans savored new-found freedoms at London's Kaleidoscope Festival on Saturday. "I'm really excited to be here, I haven't done anything like this in two years", said Leonie Louis, one of the festival-goers, who decorated with sequins and flower crowns, braved the stormy weather to invade the grounds of north London's Alexandra Palace, a legendary music venue that has previously hosted Pink Floyd, the Rolling Stones and Jay Z.

"It's really nice to just see everybody out and drinking and just enjoying themselves," Louis told AFP from the comfort of a deckchair in the palace gardens. Kaleidoscope, which featured bands including Groove Armada and The Coral along with renowned comedians and writers, is one of the largest live events to have taken place in England since the country lifted its last coronavirus restrictions on July 19.

Louis, a 24-year-old management consultant, said that it was "a great time" to open up again, adding that people

have "had enough of being cooped up and going in and out of lockdown". "Obviously, there's never going to be a perfect time... coronavirus is never going to completely go away. We have to learn to live with it," she said.

Negative tests

The health situation has, however, made organizing the gig "hard", according to Alexandra Palace event manager, Simon Fell. He feared a last-minute cancellation, with sudden changes in health rules common in recent months. "How do you sell tickets to people if you don't really know if the event will take place? It's a very difficult position to be in," he told AFP. "It has been really hard for all contractors, production teams, security teams. It's been a challenging environment," he added.

No masks were to be seen around the main stage, only the broad smiles of festival-goers, swaying with beers in hand and enjoying the panoramic view of London. Families mingled with extravagantly-dressed ravers, united in antici-



pation for the return of music on the stage. Joshua Briggs, 25, said he was a "little bit" anxious about the health risks, with the so-called delta variant causing a spike of infections across the country.

"But at the same time, I know everyone here has had a negative test in the last 48 hours," he said. "Whereas, walking through central London, there's as many, if not more, people. So in a weird way it actually feels safer here than on my commute to work."



Music as therapy

Sitting next to him on a straw bale, his friend Stephen Parsons, 25, sporting a trendy floral shirt, said he was "overwhelmed" and that the afternoon music had given him a new sense of optimism. "The music has completely lifted my spirits," said the reveler, who came from Bedford, about 100 km north of London, for the day. He spent a year-and-a-half in lockdown watching many concerts online, but said that nothing could repli-

cate the atmosphere of live music.

"The reason that I love coming to festivals is seeing the big bands, but also coming to these smaller stages and just experiencing that completely unique atmosphere," he said. "You can't have this on Zoom! It's not the same, not the same at all." — AFP



This photo taken on July 19, 2021 shows people hiking up to watch the sunrise from the summit of Mount Fuji, some 70 km west of the capital Tokyo. —AFP photos



People hike to the summit of Mount Fuji.



'Purified': Japan's hikers return to Mount Fuji

For a year, the peak of Japan's iconic Mount Fuji has been off-limits because of coronavirus, but now hikers are flocking back to catch the spectacular sunrise above the clouds. The active volcano's symmetrical slopes were closed to the public last summer due to the pandemic, and only reopened this month. In the early hours of a recent morning, more than 100 people were gathered at the summit of the sacred mountain, which is capped with treacherous ice and snow for most of the year.

"Fuji has always been revered. It is a mountain that is an object of worship," said Takeo Tokunari, a 34-year-old hiker. "Even though I am not particularly religious, I do feel purified by coming here, somehow." Fuji-san, as it is known in Japanese, is the quintessential symbol of the country currently hosting the virus-postponed Tokyo Olympics.

Cycling events are taking place on and around its slopes, with the steep climbs of the long-distance road race challenging even the fittest athletes in Japan's sweltering summer heat. The

3,776-m mountain is about two hours from central Tokyo by train. But it can be seen for miles around, and has been immortalized in countless Japanese artworks, including Hokusai's world-famous "Great Wave".

Just after 4:30 am, after a long night of climbing and a short rest on the mountainside, hikers were treated to the majestic sight of the sunrise. Climbers at the summit can watch it breaking through the clouds behind a traditional "torii" gate on the mountainside. "I have already climbed other mountains, but Mount Fuji is special," said Haruka Fujimori, a 23-year-old flight attendant. "It is a volcano not connected to any other mountain range, it stands alone majestically on the landscape, I find it beautiful."

Mizuki Ogawa, also 23, told AFP at the summit that climbing Fuji had been a personal challenge. "In my daily life and at work, I sometimes experienced difficult situations that made me lose confidence in myself," she said. "So I challenged myself to climb Mount Fuji to try to regain my confidence."

But while the mountain is awe-inspiring, it's also dangerous. The climbing routes from the fifth station on its slopes to the top are only open from early July to September. The rest of the year the mountain is deemed too treacherous to climb and lodges and toilets on climbing routes are closed to discourage would-be hikers. But that doesn't always stop people, and in October 2019 a man died after falling down part of the mountain while livestreaming.

Fuji last erupted in 1707, and while it has not shown any signs of life in recent decades, experts say an eruption could shower Tokyo in ash and force hundreds of thousands to evacuate. But right now, it's the preserve of early-morning adventurers like Chikako Kubo, 29. "There is something fresh and divine: A sunrise is a start, an opportunity to take stock and start something new," she said. — AFP

Greece's first underwater museum opens ancient world to dive tourists

Emerging from the crystal-clear turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea, Hans-Juergen Fercher has just returned from his fourth dive to where mounds of 2,500-year-old wine pots mark the site of an ancient shipwreck - and Greece's first underwater museum. "This is a combination of diving and archaeological diving. It's diving into history," says the 48-year-old psychiatrist after pulling himself onto the deck of the Triton dive boat. "It makes it special and unique."

The museum beneath the waves at Peristera, a rocky outcrop off the island of Alonissos, opened in 2020, though the site has been largely mothballed until now due to COVID-19 restrictions. As Greece opens up its vital tourism industry, the site offers an example of a new and more sustainable source of revenue.

Divers like Fercher and Danish wine-cellar maker, Lisette Fredelund, are willing to pay Å95 (\$110) a dive - about 50 percent more than the cost of a regular recreational scuba outing - for a guided tour of a site once the preserve of professional archaeologists. "It was just amazing," said Fredelund. "I was just, while we were down there, trying to imagine what it had been like being on a vessel transporting wine."

More to come

More wrecks have been discovered in the area - the middle of the country's largest marine reserve - holding out the prospect that more such museums will open. Greece has made diving part of its focus to attract visitors since legislation passed in 2020 making it possible to access such sites, Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis told AFP.

"This is a type of tourism that attracts people all year round, a special audience that pays generously to dive," he said, adding that 10 new diving parks are ready to be licensed under the process provided for by the legislation. On board the Triton, a group of six more visitors don their scu-

ba gear and plunge into the sea, closely following their guide. About 300 people have paid to visit the wreck since the museum opened, according to Alonissos Mayor Petros Vafinis.

Vafinis - himself an avid scuba diver - joined a group of tourists as they one by one launched themselves off the rear deck of the Triton into the sea. All visitors must first undergo a briefing about the site and the strict rules - such as keeping at least two meters away from the artifacts.

High expectations

After a short swim from the boat, the tour guide leads the group down through changing layers of light and increasing cold to the sea bed almost 30 m below. "My expectations were really high from the briefing, and it fulfilled everything," said George Giasemidis, a Greek tourist who visited the area specifically to see the wreck. Due to the depth and technical difficulty of the descent, only qualified divers are allowed to visit the wreck of a ship that was delivering wine and other goods when it foundered, around the fifth century BC.

More than 4,000 two-handled amphorae are anchored in the sand, their positions marking out the outline of the wooden vessel, the remains of which have been washed away over time. "We want to propose another kind of tourism to the people who come. I don't want intensive tourism we can find anywhere else," Vafinis said.

With four other wrecks discovered nearby, the goal is that they will in turn become accessible, adding Alonissos to the must-do list for divers around the world. "It goes to put Alonissos on the world diving map, to have like an underwater safari of ancient wrecks," said Kostas Efsthathiou, co-owner of the Triton diving center. — AFP



Scuba divers visit the underwater museum in the Aegean Sea off the coast of the Greek island Alonissos on July 20, 2021. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

WITH FIRST POSTHUMOUS ALBUM,
PRINCE PIERCES AMERICAN CONDITION

Prince's estate will soon issue a completed record from the mercurial artist's storied music vault, the first never-before-heard album released since the musician's shock death five years ago. "Welcome 2 America" - a 12-track album finished in 2010, but shelved for reasons unknown in the famous vault at Prince's Paisley Park compound near Minneapolis - offers a prophetic window into social struggles at today's forefront, delving into racism, political division, technology and disinformation.

Melding urgent lyricism with languorous funk, the pop shapeshifter Prince sings of America as the "land of the free / home of the slave". The artist, who died at 57 on April 21, 2016 following an accidental fentanyl overdose, could not have known that in the years following his death his beloved home city would explode in furor and protest after the police killing of George Floyd, a Black man.

But Prince was a career activist, advocating for the empowerment of Black people in the recording industry and beyond. "You go to school just to learn / about what never existed," Prince sings on the closing track "One Day We Will All



In this file photo taken on June 16, 1990, musician Prince performs on stage during his concert at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

B Free. But if your history only burns / it's better to resist it."

The album, out July 30, sees Prince level "a laser-focused assault on the condition of America", said Morris Hayes, Prince's longtime keyboardist and musical director. "What's going on with social media, social justice, and social con-

sciousness... this is a concerted effort to really speak about these things," said Hayes, who co-produced the album. "I really dug how raw it was, and as far as my production, I just wanted to keep it to where its raw and I don't get in the way of what he's trying to say."

'Liberty and justice'

For Hayes, the singular artist "was way ahead", like a "sage sitting in the Himalayas somewhere", in foreshadowing the current moment. "He wanted, I believe, a country that actually stood for what it said it stood for: liberty and justice for all," Hayes told AFP in an interview. "And we painfully know that that's not the case." For Prince a key component of freedom was ownership, according to Hayes: "if you don't own your own things, you don't have any freedom."

The artist was well known for taking labels to task, famously scrawling "slave" on his cheek and changing his name to an unpronounceable "love symbol" in the 1990s to protest Warner's bid to rein in his prolific musical output. Hayes said Prince - who didn't carry a cell phone and memorized necessary phone numbers - also discussed freedom in terms of

technology and devices, which he saw "as something that handcuffed people."

But while the album tackles decidedly weighty topics - "Running Game (Son of a Slave Master)" centers on racism, while "Same Page, Different Book" touches on religious strife - the album also includes vintage danceable and carnal slow jam Prince in the mix. "Hot Summer" is a major-key, guitar-heavy, feel-good track, while the sparsely arranged "When She Comes" featuring the artist's falsetto recalls the hypersexual "Dirty Mind" Prince of yore.

Excavating the vault

An untold number of songs - upwards of 8,000, per Princian lore - were stored in the vault under Paisley Park, though some of its contents have been moved to the Los Angeles climate-controlled storage facility Iron Mountain. "It was crazy," Hayes says of the vault. "All of this music, like all over the floor, all stacked up to the ceiling. You have to think about how prolific a cat has to be to have his own vault full of stuff. And I mean FULL of stuff."

Hayes recalled that in the mid-1990s Prince told him he had taken time off for

the first time. "He said, 'never in my career have I taken a week where I didn't write a song and pick up my guitar.'" The release of Prince's vast trove of music remains a sensitive subject; the superstar was controlling of his work, image, and carefully constructed enigmatic persona. Doing right by him is no small challenge.

Previously the estate has re-released expanded versions of Prince's milestone albums, like "1999" and "Sign O' The Times," along with demos of songs he wrote that eventually became other artists' hits. Prince was never clear about his intentions for his unheard work, but he had taken steps to preserve his tapes, films, scripts and music along with his Paisley Park compound, leading his estate - run by his sister and five half-siblings - to believe he wanted it shared. Asked by Rolling Stone in 2014 what he wanted to come of his oeuvre after he was gone, Prince himself was characteristically nebulous. "I don't think about 'gone.'" — AFP

Gladiator, Braveheart actor dies in Turkey

Scottish actor Mike Mitchell, who starred in Gladiator and Braveheart, has died at the Turkish holiday resort of Fethiye, local media reported yesterday. He was 65. He is believed to have died of a heart attack, the private DHA news agency reported. The actor, who was on holiday in Fethiye in southwest Turkey, was found dead in a cabin at a marina, it said.

The marina's manager, Burak Ardahan, who checked the cabin after the actor was inside for a long time, found him lying on the ground and called medical services. Mitchell's body was taken to a morgue for an autopsy to establish the cause of death, the DHA reported. — AFP



The Cordouan lighthouse is seen at low tide on June 10, 2021 off the coast of Le Verdon-sur-Mer, southwestern France. — AFP photos

France's 'king of lighthouses' wins UNESCO listing

Battered by the wind and swell for 400 years and nicknamed the "king of lighthouses", France's Cordouan beacon on Saturday won recognition from UNESCO. The lighthouse, which will be added to UNESCO's World Heritage List, is the last to be inhabited in France and only the second after Spain's La Coruna to win the plaudit from the world heritage body.

Cordouan was built at the very end of the 16th century and stands in the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Gironde estuary in southwestern France in a "highly exposed and hostile environment", according to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee which announced its decision on Saturday. The lighthouse was designed by engineer Louis de Foix, and was later remodelled by engineer

Joseph Teulere in the late 18th century.

Describing it as a "masterpiece of maritime signaling", the committee added: "Cordouan's monumental tower is decorated with pilasters, columns modillions and gargoyles. "It embodies the great stages of the architectural and technological history of lighthouses and was built with the ambition of continuing the tradition of famous beacons of antiquity, illustrating the art of building lighthouses in a period of renewed navigation, when beacons played an important role as territorial markers and as instruments of safety."

The increase in its height in the late 18th century and changes to its light chamber at the same time were also noteworthy, the committee said. They "attest to the progress of science and technology of the period. Its architectural forms drew inspiration from ancient models, Renaissance Mannerism and the specific architectural language of France's engineering school Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées". — AFP



Lighthouse keeper Thomas Dalisson, 38, cleans the lamp of the Cordouan lighthouse.



Prince's costumes and his guitar are on display at Paisley Park.

At Paisley Park, Prince's 'aura of mystique' lives on

To the uninformed eye Paisley Park, Prince's home and studio in suburban Minnesota, could be anything - an abandoned mall, a government compound, a utilitarian office building. It's only the 11-foot purple love symbol statue, the unpronounceable glyph the artist famously went by during a dispute with his label, that gives the 65,000-square foot complex away as belonging to the artist beloved as Prince.

Situated just off the highway leading southwest out of the Twin Cities in the municipality of Chanhassen, Paisley Park served as the virtuoso international pop star's creative and literal home, a sanctum where he spent nearly three decades before he collapsed in an elevator there, dying soon after of an accidental painkiller overdose.



Prince's microphone is on display.

Sunlight streams in from the glass pyramid that crowns the complex, where white doves watch over the breezy atrium painted with blue skies and fluffy clouds. With four recording studios, a soundstage and a club, Paisley Park for years hosted artists including Madonna, Miles Davis and Patti LaBelle, also holding concerts and impromptu performances to the delight of fans. The estate was a site of pilgrimage even before the artist's death at 57, and today has taken on new life as a museum.

Faced with a tax burden following Prince's passing, his estate looked to monetize the compound. Six days a week fans can take guided tours at costs ranging from \$45-\$160, depending on the experience. Visitors must seal their cell phones in special pouches at the entrance, and much of Paisley Park prohibits photography, a bid to stay in line with the artist's wishes. "Prince always preferred that you experience things here at Paisley through your own lens, rather than your camera," Mitch Maguire, the complex's managing director, said during a visit by AFP. "Prince was really good at creating an aura of mystique."

'Move mountains'

Prince's living quarters are off-limits completely - "there's something that I think is really reverential about ensuring



Prince's shoes on display at Paisley Park.

that those spaces remain just his" - as is the storied vault where he stored troves of unreleased music, Maguire explained. Exhibit rooms house Prince memorabilia including gold records, flashy costumes, motorcycles and a "purple room" that pays homage to his seminal album "Purple Rain."

The 12,500-square-foot soundstage, designed for concerts and tour rehearsals, is now backdropped by a giant screen that displays archival Prince concert and video footage, with many of his instruments and concert attire on display for visitors. In another room the museum is putting on a special exhibition, showing hundreds of Prince's custom-made shoes - including heels, platform sneakers and roller skates-in all their fur-lined, glittering, iridescent, hand-painted glamour.

Prince was a mainstay of Minneapolis' cultural scene, regularly hosting surprise concerts with little notice at Paisley Park. And years before he directed the museum, Maguire was a fan in the crowd. "I think the accessibility that we had as folks who lived in this community to

Prince's genius is really second to none," he said.

And to watch him perform there? "It's difficult to articulate; I don't think there are enough words in the English lexicon to fully do it justice," Maguire continued. "You just got the sense this guy could move mountains by his gifts, and he was very generous in terms of sharing those gifts with us. The compound continues to hold live music events and also has hosted artists' recording sessions there, including the likes of Beck."

"Part of what it means to continue to foster Prince's legacy is just that - to continue to make this an active creative space," Maguire said. In 1985, two years before his complex opened, Prince released the song "Paisley Park" on his seventh album "Around The World in a Day," describing a utopian community that was as much spiritual as it was tangible. "Love is the color / This place imparts," Prince sang. "Admission is easy / Just say you believe. Paisley Park is in your heart." — AFP



The "love" symbol outside of Paisley Park, Prince's home and studio in Chanhassen, Minnesota on June 30, 2021. — AFP photos

History-seeking Biles makes flawed entrance at Tokyo Games

TOKYO: American gymnastics superstar Simone Biles got off to a shaky start in her quest for five gold medals and Olympic history in Tokyo yesterday, as an Uzbeki mother-of-one bid a poignant farewell after a remarkable career spanning eight Games.

At 46 years old, Oksana Chusovitina, gold medalist at her debut Olympics in Barcelona in 1992, has earned the right to occupy her time in more sedate ways than exploding up a 25 meter runway and somersaulting backwards over a vault against competitors younger than her son.

Among those rivals is Biles, who kept the wheels on her bid to level Soviet great Larisa Latynina's record of nine gymnastics gold medals, but her qualifying performances were peppered with rare imperfections.

On the floor, Biles over-rotated after one series of mesmerizing tumblers and went off the mat, drawing a gasp from at least one onlooker in the near-deserted Ariake Centre. She rolled her eyes after another unsteady landing over on the vault, and her performance director Tom Forster expressed disbelief after an untidy end to her beam routine. "Simone

took three big steps on the beam dismount, I've never seen her do that before," said Forster.

Biles qualified top in the all-around and vault, and was second on the floor, with the USA occupying the same position behind the Russians for tomorrow's team final. But in the beam standings she paid for her flawed ending to lie sixth of the eight progressing. Biles also booked a place for the uneven bars final, though, which the 19-time world champion missed at Rio 2016, as the eighth qualifier.

While there were many moments of dazzling Biles brilliance, Forster was thankful this was only qualifying. "We're going to be okay... this is not the finals, this is getting into the finals, this might be a great awakening for us," he said. He said there was work to do. "Mostly fixing steps on the floor. Staying in bounds would help," he added, putting the lapses down to "nerves".

Biles later chose to focus on the USA's team title defense rather than any personal ambitions of adding to all the precious metal on her sideboard. "I feel we did a pretty good job. Obviously there are little things we need to work on, so we'll go back and practice and work on that, just

so we can do our best performance at team finals, because that's what matters." One gold medalist from Rio out of luck yesterday was Sanne Wevers.

'Tears of happiness'

The Dutch beam outgoing champion had to wait 13 minutes for the judges to announce her score but when they did it sent her not to the final, but to the airport. "They've just told me I will be on the plane home tomorrow. So, my short-term future is just about packing my bags and going home," she said, adding that she had reached the same assessment of her routine as the judges "in a lot less time!".

Another gold medalist, but from much further back than Rio, departing Tokyo was the evergreen Chusovitina. She received a hugely affectionate ovation from her team, rivals, media and photographers when she narrowly failed to qualify for the vault at her eighth and last Olympics.

Born in 1976, Chusovitina's Olympic odyssey began in Barcelona in 1992, where she won team gold, adding silver in the vault in Beijing 2008. "We thank her for her contributions to artistic gymnastics," the stadium announcer said as teams, officials and journalists applauded. She said later she had been crying "tears of happiness, because so many people



TOKYO: USA's Simone Biles competes in the uneven bars event of the artistic gymnastics women's qualification during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Ariake Gymnastics Center in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

German gymnasts bring bodysuits to Olympic competition

TOKYO: Germany's women's gymnastics team made a statement the minute they stepped into the venue for Tokyo Olympic qualifying yesterday, swapping leotards for full-length bodysuits. Several German gymnasts debuted the one-piece outfits, which cover all of their legs and most of their arms, at the European championships. And the Olympic team were wearing them in training at the Ariake Gymnastics Centre earlier this week, with three-time Olympian Elisabeth Seitz saying it was "about what feels comfortable".

"We wanted to show that every woman, everybody, should decide what to wear," she said after Friday's training. The team said then that they would vote on whether to wear the unitards during Sunday's qualifiers. Appearing in the final session of the day, the team's four athletes filed out

onto the floor in the bodysuits, featuring bedazzled plum legs and a white upper portion. In April, Seitz and teammates Sarah Voss and Kim Bui all wore the full coverage outfits. Voss said on Friday the team had agreed as group with their coaches to start competing in the bodysuits.

"We were used to being in just a leotard on beam, and some girls said they wanted to feel more comfortable in training," added the 21-year-old, competing at her first Games. "We are allowed to wear shorts (in training), so you don't have the uncomfortable feeling of your leotard slipping when you have to do many routines a day."

The decision, which Seitz has described as "an important signal", also comes against the backdrop of a series of abuse scandals that have rocked the world of gymnastics in recent years. In the United States, for-



TOKYO: Germany's Pauline Schaefer-Betz competes in the artistic gymnastics balance beam event of the women's qualification during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Ariake Gymnastics Center in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

mer team doctor Larry Nassar was found guilty of sexually assaulting at least 265 identified victims over two decades, including star Simone Biles. In Britain, accusations of abuse have

made headlines while in Greece former gymnasts complained of having suffered decades of abuse "akin to torture" at the hands of one of their coaches. —AFP

American teen Zolotic triumphs in taekwondo as Jones's dreams shattered

TOKYO: Jade Jones's dreams of becoming the first athlete to win three Olympic taekwondo titles were shattered yesterday as the Briton exited at the last-16 stage in Tokyo, beaten by Kimia Alizadeh of the Refugee Olympic Team. Alizadeh - Iran's first ever female Olympic medalist when she won bronze in 2016 before defecting in 2020 - let out a shriek of delight as she beat Jones 16-12 in the 57kg bout.

Jones's supporters from Team GB were visibly stunned, with three-time taekwondo world champion Bianca Walkden bursting into tears and having to be led away by another team member. Alizadeh, who is Germany-based and had defected from Iran in January 2020, did have previous form against Jones, beating her in the 2015 world championships.

Jones said she had few excuses for her under-par performance, although she admitted not having her family present due to coronavirus restrictions had made an impact. "I'm absolutely gutted-it's not how

I planned my day to go and I'm just really frustrated with myself," said Jones. "I just put too much pressure on myself going into it, and I really did feel it more than I expected on the day. Not having my family there to push me out of that fear zone really did affect me, and I'm just gutted that I couldn't have done more on the day."

Alizadeh's hopes of equaling or improving on her Rio performance ended with defeat by Tatiana Minina in the semi-final and a loss to Turkey's Hatice Ilgun in the bronze medal final. Jones was succeeded as Olympic champion by American teenager Anastasiya Zolotic, who beat Russian athlete Minina 25-17 in the final.

Zolotic, 18, whooped with delight as the three-round contest reached its end, ripping off her helmet and running into the arms of her coach. "Yes! Yes! Yes! I won!" she yelled, and blew kisses at the camera. She then picked up an American flag and ran a lap of celebration in a virtually empty arena due to coronavirus protocols-but even that failed to rid her of her smile.

Team GB did not come away empty-handed, as world champion Bradley Sinden took silver in the men's 68kg category, losing 34-29 to Uzbekistan's Ulugbek Rashitov. The 19-year-old trailed his British opponent with eight seconds remaining, but a late head kick secured him the gold and a first-ever Olympic medal for his country in the sport.



TOKYO: USA's Anastasiya Zolotic celebrates winning against Russia's Tatiana Minina in the taekwondo women's 57kg gold medal bout during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Makuhari Messe Hall in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Sinden, 22, failed to heed his coach's advice from the sidelines-"Don't look at the scoreboard"-with 40 seconds remaining and him leading 23-19. As Rashitov tumbled to the ground on top of his coach in celebration, Sinden wiped a tear away and stood looking forlornly at a TV screen. —AFP



OYAMA: Austria's Anna Kiesenhofer rides as she leads during the women's cycling road race of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Fuji International Speedway in Oyama, Japan, yesterday. —AFP

on Anna van der Breggen, who was targeting back-to-back golds after winning in Rio, and then Van Vleuten cut loose at the 2km mark, but it was much too late.

Kiesenhofer shot through the 1km run-in smiling and constantly looking

over her shoulder in full knowledge that the gold was hers in a massive upset of the formbook. Drenched in sweat, she collapsed to the ground after coming through the finish line, screaming in delight, hands on helmet in near-disbelief. —AFP

'Refreshed' Osaka wins on return as Barty dumped out of Olympics

TOKYO: Japan's Naomi Osaka won in straight sets on her highly-anticipated return to the court at the Tokyo Olympics yesterday, while world number one Ashleigh Barty crashed out in the first round. Osaka, the star of the opening ceremony, defeated China's Zheng Saisai 6-1, 6-4 and said she felt "refreshed" after taking an eight-week break for mental health reasons.

"I felt really nervous being in Japan and playing here for the first time in maybe two years, and for it to be my first Olympics," said Osaka, chosen as the first tennis player to light the Olympic cauldron on Friday. "It was definitely really nerve-racking. But I am glad I was able to win, she is a very tough opponent."

The Australian Open champion had not played since May, when she walked out of Roland Garros saying that media commitments were harming her mental health. "I feel like more than anything I'm just focused on playing tennis. Playing the Olympics has been a dream of mine since I was a kid," she said, in her first appearance before media. "I feel like the break that I took was very needed, but I feel definitely a little bit refreshed and happy again."

Osaka showed few signs of rust as she reeled off the opening five games on the Ariake Coliseum center court, which likely would have been packed to capacity if not for a spectator ban because of coronavirus restrictions. The second seed broke the 52nd-ranked Zheng for a 2-1 lead in the second set and closed out an 87-minute victory on her third match point.

The 23-year-old Osaka is attempting to become Japan's first Olympic tennis champion. She will play Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic in the last 32. Osaka is now the clear favorite for gold after Barty, the reigning Wimbledon champion, dropped serve twice in each set and made 55 unforced errors in a 6-4, 6-3 loss to Spain's 48th-ranked Sara Sorribes Tormo.

"I'm disappointed I wasn't able to get through today, it just wasn't my day," said Barty. "I never really felt comfortable out there and wasn't able to play the match on my terms. I was a bit erratic and made too many errors." Sorribes Tormo will go on to face France's Fiona Ferro in the second round.

Meanwhile defending champion Andy Murray withdrew from the men's singles with a quad muscle strain just hours before he was scheduled to play Felix Auger-Aliassime. Murray, 34, will stay in Japan to play doubles with Joe Salisbury. The pair won their opening match of the competition on Saturday. —AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates a point against China's Zheng Saisai during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games women's singles first round tennis match at the Ariake Tennis Park in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Kiesenhofer takes shock road race gold after Van Vleuten gaffe

TOKYO: Austrian mathematician Anna Kiesenhofer claimed a shock gold in a women's Olympic road race yesterday that saw veteran Dutchwoman Annemiek van Vleuten mistakenly think she had won. The 30-year-old national time trial champion Kiesenhofer, who holds a doctorate in applied maths from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia having also studied at Vienna and Cambridge Universities, held her nerve after a long breakaway that the main peloton never managed to reel in.

Van Vleuten made up for a horrific crash at the Rio Games in 2016 with silver, although she admitted to a massive gaffe after thinking she had won when she crossed the line. Italian Elisa Longo Borghini bagged bronze for the second consecutive Games. "It's incredible, I couldn't believe it, even when I crossed the line," said Kiesenhofer. "I planned to attack at kilometer zero and I was happy I could

get in front. That is something I could not take for granted because I am not good at riding in the peloton.

"I am happy that I was not too scared and I just went for it. I attacked and together we worked more or less together — it was helpful to have a group. I saw I was the strongest and I knew I had the climb before the long descent. I'm pretty good at descending so I got some more time and then it was just like a time trial to the finish."

Van Vleuten acknowledged that her raised-arm finish had been in vain. "Yes, I thought I had won," she said. "I'm gutted about this, of course. "At first I felt really stupid, but then the others (her teammates) also did not know who had won."

In a dramatic finale to a long day's ride, the peloton reeled in France's Juliette Labous and with under four kilometers to go, the gap to Kiesenhofer was cut to under three minutes. First, two-time world champi-

Home boy Horigome crowned first Olympic skateboarding champion

TOKYO: Japanese world champion Yuto Horigome held his nerve to be crowned skateboarding's first Olympic gold medalist after winning a tense street competition in Tokyo yesterday. The 22-year-old, who grew up just a stone's throw from the Olympic venue, landed three huge tricks in a row to eclipse American favorite Nyjah Huston, who imploded to finish seventh.

In searing heat at Ariake Urban Sports Centre, Horigome finished with scores of 9.35, 9.50 and 9.30 for a total of 37.18, with Brazil's Kelvin Hoefler second and US skater Jagger Eaton third. "This is special because it was held in Koto City, where I was born," said Horigome. "For me it's very meaningful, very inspiring." But there was disappointment for Huston, the much-hyped multiple world champion, who ended with four straight falls in the tricks section as he wound up second-last in the final. Competition took place in front of rows of empty blue seats at the purpose-built arena, with fans barred from most Olympic events over the coronavirus.

It was the first of four gold medals to be handed out in skateboarding's Olympic debut, with women's street to be contested on Monday followed by the men's and women's park competitions. "There's an extra pressure here," Huston said. "I've been skating pro-contests for 15 years now but there's Street League, X Games, but if you compare that to the Olympics there's no comparison."

Head in his hands

Huston flirted with disaster in the heats, when he

fell on his first run and botched his first two of five attempts at a one-off trick. But he fought back with a 9.13 and 8.96 to make the final in third place, with Horigome sixth.

In the final, Horigome had his head in his hands after a mistake on his first run, and the world number two fell twice in his second run before recovering his poise in the tricks section. The free-flowing Japanese reeled off four scores over 9.0, interrupted by a fall on his second trick, tracked by Hoefler and Eaton as Huston faltered.

The skating was contested on ramps, rails and ledges on an undulating, unshaded stretch of concrete baking in 33 degrees Celsius (91 degrees Fahrenheit) heat near Tokyo Bay. Skaters each had two 45-second runs on the equipment and five shots at a one-off trick. Their best four scores out of the seven make up their final total.

Olympic competition crowns a long journey for the counter-culture pursuit, which emerged as "side-walk surfing" — an alternative to surfing — in California in the 1950s. After decades of organic growth, skateboarding was included in the inaugural X-Games, created by broadcaster ESPN, in 1995, paving the way for an increasingly slick and organized sport.

"Considering that snowboarding has been in the Olympics since 1998, I'm surprised it took this long for them to figure it out," skate legend Tony Hawk, speaking in Tokyo this week, said of skating's Olympic inclusion. "I believe they needed a youthful energy to the summer Games and it's overdue." —AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Yuto Horigome competes in the men's street final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Sports Park Skateboarding in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

News in brief

Suarez Navarro wins

TOKYO: Carla Suarez Navarro secured her first win after recovering from cancer as she defeated Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in the first round of the Tokyo Olympics yesterday. The Spaniard, a former world number six, returned to action at the French Open last month having been diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in September 2020. She lost in the first round at both Roland Garros and Wimbledon, where she was beaten in three sets by eventual champion Ashleigh Barty. But Suarez Navarro, playing at her fourth Olympics, won for the first time since February of last year, beating Wimbledon quarter-finalist Jabeur 6-4, 6-1. "I am really happy. For me, it was tough all these months. I was so happy on the court and I really enjoyed this week," said Suarez Navarro, who underwent eight sessions of chemotherapy as part of her recovery. —AFP

Rowing schedule disrupted

TOKYO: The tropical storm approaching Tokyo has forced Olympic organizers to postpone tomorrow's rowing finals because of the danger of strong winds. The storm, named Nepartak, is due to come over eastern Japan tomorrow, bringing rain and gusty winds to the capital. "Based on the weather forecasts received from the Tokyo2020 Olympic Games weather services, adverse weather is expected on Tuesday 27 July 2021 which would bring high winds and strong gusts creating unequal and potentially unrowable racing conditions," Olympic organizers said in a statement. The rowing finals due to have taken place on Tuesday, including the women's four and men's four events, will be moved to Wednesday. That means a knock-on effect on other finals, which will now be moved from Thursday to Friday. Organizers had already brought forward rowing heats as a "protective measure" on Saturday because of the storm. —AFP

Olympics 'sign of hope'

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis said yesterday he hopes the Tokyo Olympics, which opened Friday, will be a sign of hope and "universal brotherhood" during the coronavirus pandemic raging around the world. "In this period of pandemic, let these games be a sign of hope, a sign of universal brotherhood and of a healthy competitive spirit," the pontiff said at the end of the Angelus prayer. "May God bless the organizers, the athletes and all those who are collaborating for this great celebration of sport," he told faithful gathered on Saint Peter's Square. The Games opened officially on Friday in a nearly empty stadium after being postponed for a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

'Unique' opening ceremony

TOKYO: The Paris 2024 Olympics will feature a unique opening ceremony with the city's River Seine the scene for the curtain-raising spectacular, said French President Emmanuel Macron. In an interview with the French sports daily L'Equipe published yesterday, Macron revealed that barges on the Seine and its quays would provide the urban setting for the ceremony on July 26, 2024. "We want it to be a ceremony of the people, open to all and unique in terms of the experience it will provide. Something that makes sense to the French people and conveys a message to the rest of the world," the 43-year-old leader said in Tokyo on the sidelines of the delayed 2020 Games. "We want something unique and revolutionary," he said. The Seine and its banks have undergone a radical transformation over the past five years after decades of serving as a city-center highway. Most riverside roads now serve as pedestrian routes. —AFP

Wonder-trick gives Yuto gold medal for his Pokemon

TOKYO: Japan's Yuto Horigome said he would hang his gold medal on his Pokemon stuffed toy after he unveiled a wonder-trick to become the Olympics' first skateboarding champion yesterday. Horigome was trailing after two poor runs in the final but he

Chen comeback, 'Flamingo' Li complete China lifting hat-trick

TOKYO: Chen Lijun made a stunning comeback to complete a Chinese hat-trick as the world's most populous nation continued to dominate the Tokyo Olympics weightlifting on Sunday, with Li Fabin also winning gold. Lying fourth in the men's 67kg class, 6kg adrift of Colombia's Luis Mosquera after the snatch, world record holder Chen needed to clean and jerk 187kg, 1kg short of the world record, to take gold.

Moments before, Mosquera thought he had snatched a dramatic win when his final 180kg attempt was reinstated by the jury on an agonising TV review, after being initially ruled a 'no lift', to give him a 331kg aggregate. It forced Chen, successful at 175kg, to pile on an extra 12kg on the bar for an all-or-nothing shot at gold in the Tokyo International Forum.

The 28-year-old from the southwestern city of Chongqing completed an unerring lift before screaming and punching the air in delight as he relegated Mosquera to silver by the slimmest of margins, 1kg. "I felt confident," Chen, who equaled his personal best set at the 2019 World Championships, told reporters. "Because I already had the experience to lift this weight. The clean and jerk is my strength, so even when I was behind after the snatch I knew I could do it."

Mosquera said he had suffered mixed emotions

Nishikori aims to 'bring better news', lift COVID gloom

TOKYO: Japan's Kei Nishikori pledged to win as many matches as possible at the Tokyo Olympics to brighten the somber mood in a city under a state of emergency because of rising coronavirus infections.

Nishikori, a 2016 bronze medalist in Rio de Janeiro, eliminated fifth seed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4 to reach the second round of the men's singles yesterday. The former world number four has battled a succession of injuries to his wrist, elbow and shoulder in recent years, but produced a vintage display to beat the talented Rublev.

"I was really playing great. It's been a while since I played like this and beat a top-10 player, I think it's been

reeled off a string of monster moves, including a nollie backside 270 railslide that he had never performed before in competition.

The Tokyo native scored 9.50 for the trick, the highest score for any move in the final, as he won ahead of Brazil's Kelvin Hoefler and Jagger Eaton of the United States, with American star Nyjah Huston seventh. "That was new to any competition. I started to practise that trick just before the finals, it's something I've never tried in any final," the Tokyo native said. "I was very nervous but I was so happy I made it."

The 22-year-old had four scores over 9.0 as he

before his final lift was allowed to stand. "I thought I had lost it but then I was so elated," he said. "The Chinese are the best, so to say I was just one kilogram behind, I feel very proud."

Minutes earlier, a delighted Italian Mirko Zanni, 23, smashed his clean and jerk personal best by 4kg to snatch a surprise bronze with a 322kg total, just ahead of South Korea's Han Myeong-mok. Zanni kissed his medal as he spoke to reporters and then looked to the sky. "I can't believe this. I know my granddad was watching and helped me do it," he said, revealing his grandfather, his inspiration, had died 10 years ago.

Irawan silver

Earlier in the day, Li Fabin had made it two out of two Tokyo weightlifting medals for China in the men's 61kg bodyweight category, as he saw off Indonesian veteran Eko Yuli Irawan, who became only the fifth lifter in history to win four Olympic medals. The flamboyant Li pulled off his signature one-legged 'flamingo lift' on his opening clean and jerk at 166kg on his way to a 313kg total and an 11kg margin over Asian Games champion Irawan in the 61kg class.

"It's a lift I wouldn't suggest anyone else should learn," said Li, who somehow manages to regain his balance by standing on one leg while holding a massive weight above his head. "Standing on one leg is not a regular balance move. I can only do it because I have great core and abdomen muscle strength."

Irawan, who went lift-for-lift with Li in a pulsating two-horse race, was left with a final attempt at 177kg to win gold, which would have extended his own clean and jerk world record by a massive 3kg. It proved too

two years already," said Nishikori. "I was a little worried that I'd get nervous on the court, but I wasn't so that's a good sign, especially in the first match. I'm really happy with the way I played today."

Nishikori, whose ranking has dropped to 69, will play Marcos Giron of the United States in round two. After ending Japan's 96-year wait for an Olympic tennis medal in Brazil, Nishikori is hoping to challenge for gold at home along with women's favourite Naomi Osaka.

"This is something I dreamed of when I was little," he said. "I think especially now with the COVID situation, if I can win as many (matches) as I can I think that brings better news, and that's something I'm trying to do this week." The 2014 US Open runner-up is appearing at his fourth Olympics, although strict health rules due to the COVID-19 pandemic mean fans are barred from most venues. "Of course, if there are fans and spectators I will enjoy it much more, but it is what it is. I have to focus on what I have to do and not to think too much on the court," said Nishikori. —AFP

Indonesian badminton ace playing for COVID-victim brother

TOKYO: An Asian champion badminton player is gunning for glory at the coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Olympics in memory of his brother who died of the disease. Indonesia's Jonatan Christie was competing at a tournament in Thailand earlier this year when he learned that his older brother, Ivan, had contracted the illness back home. The 23-year-old Christie's mother, father and brother all eventually ended up in hospital, but his sibling suffered most.

"After I came back from Thailand, my moth-

er said to me, 'he is already sick,'" the 2018 Asian Games badminton champion said. "My mother and father were ill at the same time, but in a different hospital to my brother. I was going to my father and mother's hospital, and then in the evening I was going to my brother's hospital, so I had to take time out for them."

Ivan sadly died, and it was up to Christie to tell his parents the heartbreaking news. "After my brother passed away, I have not told my mother and father for maybe one week," said Christie, who defeated Aram

Mahmoud of the Refugee Olympic Team in his Tokyo opener on Saturday. "I kept it alone. After my father and mother is good again, then I had to tell them. Of course, my mother is crying a lot."

Christie, the world number seven, says that his parents have now recovered and are "happy to see me in the Olympics". But the memory of his brother is never far away as Christie attempts to stamp his mark on the badminton in the Japanese capital — even if his preparations were badly disrupted by the family tragedy. "This is for him and I want to do my best for him," he said. The coronavirus saw the Tokyo Games delayed by a year and most events are taking place without spectators. —AFP

dominated the tricks section, in a repeat of the world championships final in June where he denied Huston a fourth straight title. Skaters each have two 45-second runs on the equipment and five shots at a one-off trick. Their best four scores out of the seven make up their final total.

Horigome, who grew up near the Olympic venue but is now based in the United States, said he would hang the medal with his others — on his Pokemon toy. "First of all I want to show it to my friends and family who supported me," he said. "Afterwards I'll keep it in my house. I have other medals on my Pokemon so maybe I'll keep it next to them." —AFP



TOKYO: (From left) Silver medalist Colombia's Luis Javier Mosquera Lozano, gold medalist China's Chen Lijun and bronze medalist Italy's Mirko Zanni stand on the podium for the victory ceremony of the men's 67kg weightlifting competition during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo International Forum in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

much but Irawan's second consecutive silver meant he became his country's most decorated Olympian after bronzes at the London and Beijing Games.

The 32-year-old from rural Lampung in Sumatra, who herded goats as a boy, joined four-time medallists American Norbert Schemansky, Germany's Ronny Weller, Bulgaria's Nikolay Pechalov and Greece's Pyrrhos Dimas. But Irawan lamented his disrupted preparation in coronavirus-ravaged Indonesia. "The training was harder, yes," he told AFP. "We have been training in COVID lockdown since January." —AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Kei Nishikori serves to Russia's Andrey Rublev during their Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games men's singles first round tennis match at the Ariake Tennis Park in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP



TOKYO: Indonesia's Jonatan Christie hits a shot in his men's singles badminton group stage match against Refugee Olympic Team's Aram Mahmoud during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Musashino Forest Sports Plaza in Tokyo on Saturday. —AFP

Surfing finally makes Olympic bow under blazing Japan sun

ICHINOMIYA: Under blue skies and a blazing sun, surfing made its Olympic debut yesterday, more than a century after Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku first pushed for its inclusion at the Games. The action began early at Tsurigasaki Surfing Beach, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Tokyo, with the first surfers paddling out in favorable wave conditions.

Brazil's Italo Ferreira, the 2019 world champion, who learned to surf standing on the foam box his father sold fish from, caught the first wave as the men's heats got under way. "I'm so glad to be here, for sure," said Ferreira, dripping with water and beaming as he stood on the dark brown sand. "It's special for the fans, for the surfers. All the surfers are watching at home. It's special for everyone."

Yesterday's competition saw the start of the men's and women's heats — featuring 20 riders in each event. But it also marked a huge milestone for the sport in general, with efforts to get it added to the Olympic program dating back more than 100 years.

"I cannot take my mask off, but behind this mask is a very happy face," said flamboyant International Surfing Association president Fernando Aguerre, resplendent in a Hawaiian shirt, straw hat and shell necklace. "I believed that it was possible, but many times there were such odds against us. So difficult. There was not really a clear process for a couple of decades."

The biggest names in the competition safely negotiated the opening rounds, with Ferreira and Brazilian compatriot Gabriel Medina winning their men's heats.

In the women's event, American Carissa Moore and Australian seven-time world champion Stephanie Gilmore both progressed. The waves yesterday were bigger than they had been leading up to the competition, with Ferreira saying they offered "more opportunity" for spectacular moves.

Storm threat

Conditions have been helped by a tropical storm approaching off the Japanese coast, which could dramatically affect the four days of competition. "Everyone can say they know the ocean and they have advantages or whatever, but every wave is different," said Japan's Kanoa Igarashi. "It's about adapting, about who can surf the best in every condition, and I think the winner will be well-deserved."

Igarashi, whose father grew up surfing on the same beach, is one of the home favorites, with his bleach-blond hair and mega-watt smile. But fans have been locked out of all but a handful of events at the Tokyo Games, with organizers wary of turning them into a virus super-spreader event.

Large barriers prevented locals from sneaking a look at the surfers, although a huge sign in support of female Japanese rider Mahina Maeda could be seen draped on a nearby hill. "I had a ticket for the final, but we're in a pandemic so it can't be helped," local guest-house owner Muneharu Yamaura told AFP. "Only the people who surf here are excited about it. People who don't — I don't think they welcome it."

There was plenty of excitement inside the venue



CHIBA: Brazil's Italo Ferreira rides a wave during the men's Surfing first round at the Tsurigasaki Surfing Beach, in Chiba, yesterday during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

however, with every surfer stepping onto the Olympic stage for the first time. "It's a fun experience, it's amazing being here," said American John John Florence, who failed to make it through the first heat but quali-

fied through the repechage later in the day. "I was thinking that all the way to 2024, 2028, hopefully it will be in those Olympics as well. I think it's amazing for our sport and I'm happy to be here." — AFP

Ledecky edges Titmus in 400 free heats as Olympic records tumble

TOKYO: Katie Ledecky edged Australian arch-rival Ariarne Titmus yesterday to be quickest in the 400m freestyle heats, setting the scene for an epic battle for gold, on a Tokyo night that saw two Olympic records fall. The American great kickstarted a grueling schedule, which will also see her tackle the 200m, 800m and 1500m freestyle, by touching in 4mins 00.45secs at the Tokyo Aquatic Center, where heats are in the evening and finals each morning. Titmus, who stunned the Olympic champion at the 2019 world championships and has been posting red-hot times this year, cruised through the next heat in 4:01.66, with both keeping plenty in the tank for Monday's final.

"It's gonna be a great race with Ariarne and a lot of great swimmers in that field," said Ledecky, who won gold in the 200m, 400m, 800m and 4x200m free relay in Rio in 2016. She added that she didn't pay attention to times, after being told how Titmus went. "I mean we were (always) going to be there in the middle lanes in all likelihood, it'll be a great race tomorrow."

Titmus threw down the gauntlet at the Australian trials last month, with a sizzling 3:56.90, the second fastest of all-time and just outside Ledecky's world record 3:56.46. "I felt really good, probably the most relaxed I've felt in a while," said the Australian, who will also challenge Ledecky in the 200 and 800. "Tonight was really about trying to conserve your emotions for tomorrow morning."

Cleared the nerves

Fellow Australian sensation Kaylee McKeown got her maiden Olympic campaign off to a flying start with a storming 100m backstroke heat. The 20-year-old smashed Regan Smith's world record last month, the only Olympic distance mark to fall this year, and, given her form, is considered the gold medal favorite.

She touched in a new Olympic record time of 57.88, just minutes after Smith had also lowered the mark to 57.96, with her swim following Canadian Kylie Masse doing the same with her 58.17. The previous Olympic best of 58.23 had not been bettered since 2012 with the woman who held the time until Sunday, Australia's Emily Seebom, still racing and in contention.

"To get out there and put up a really good swim cleared out the nerves so hopefully moving onwards and upwards," said McKeown ahead of the semi-finals today. "I put the pressure on myself to be honest. I like the nerves, it means you're going to do something special and you care about what you're doing." — AFP



TOKYO: China's Shi Tingmao (left) and Wang Han pose with their gold medals on the podium after winning the women's synchronized 3m springboard diving final event during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Center in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

China win first diving gold of Tokyo Games

TOKYO: China's "Dream Team" diving squad launched their bid for a golden sweep at the Tokyo Olympics with an ominous victory yesterday — with a little help from a superstitious grandfather. Shi Tingmao and Wang Han claimed a dominant win in the women's synchronised 3m springboard, with Canada taking silver and Germany bronze.

Afterwards, Shi — who now has three Olympic gold medals in her career — talked about how her grandfather changed her name when she was a child because he believed that it would bring her greater sporting success. She used to be called Shi Tingting — the latter is a common name in China — but it can also sound like "stop".

"This happened when I was very young," the 29-year-old said, appearing to laugh behind her red mask. "Because I used to be a gymnast from the age of four, then at eight I started diving. But Shi Tingting was actually not a great name for an athlete. So my grandfather spent days looking through dictionaries for names trying to find a name that would be good

for an athlete and what name would help me as an athlete. And actually I think it did help me a great deal, so I'm grateful for it."

Shi, who also won synchronized 3m springboard gold at Rio 2016, and Wang had been hot favourites on day one of diving at the coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Games. And the pair did not fluff their lines, leading from the first round on the way to taking the title with 326.40 points.

Canada's Jennifer Abel and Melissa Citrini-Beaulieu won silver (300.78 points), with Germany's Lena Hentschel and Tina Punzel earning bronze (284.97 points). It continues a strong start to the Games for China, who enjoyed golden success on Saturday in shooting, fencing and weightlifting.

China underlined their supremacy in diving by winning seven of eight golds in Rio — Britain surprisingly nabbed the other. But there are high hopes back home that the Chinese can go one better in the Japanese capital. Tears in their eyes, Shi and Wang embraced warmly at the end, then held hands on the podium at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre, where spectators are barred as part of virus-prevention measures.

Wang, 30, for whom this was a first Olympic medal, warned that China were only just getting started and said hard training was behind the team's success. "We make all of the effort we can in our training every day," she said. "We have already worked for five years, and we are fully ready for this." — AFP



TOKYO: An underwater view shows USA's Kathleen Ledecky during a heat for the women's 400m freestyle swimming event during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Center in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsia	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Lijo Davis holder of passport number R5453235 on behalf of my son Antonio holder of passport number R8271668 Do hereby change name to ANTONIO LIJO. (C.0620) 26-7-2021

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NOTICE

July 14, 2021



Mr. Shahbays Israel Khan, son of Mr. Israel Khan, resident of H No 187 Near Amritlal Shop Baina, Vasco Da Gama, South Goa, Goa-403802 and Mrs. Meezaba Javed Shaikh, daughter of Mr. Javed Shaikh, resident of 03, Haji Abdulla Noor Mohammed Building, B/28, J.B. Marg, Parel, Mumbai, Maharashtra-400012 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) /letters/ telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

K. R. Rethina
(K.S. Rathore) First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer,
Embassy of India, Kuwait

Japan celebrates gold rush on day of upsets at Olympics

TOKYO: A Japanese skateboarder claimed a piece of Olympic history as the host nation enjoyed a gold rush on a day of upsets at the Tokyo Games yesterday. The second full day of competition saw 18 gold medals up for grabs, including the first ever in skateboarding, one of several new sports introduced in Tokyo as part of an International Olympic Committee drive to attract younger fans.

A perfectly scripted final saw Japanese world champion Yuto Horigome strike gold in a tense street competition. The 22-year-old, who grew up just a stone's throw from the Olympic venue, landed three huge tricks in a row to eclipse American favorite Nyjah Huston, who finished seventh. "This is special because it was held in Koto City, where I was born," said Horigome. "For me it's very meaningful, very inspiring."

Horigome's victory was one of four golds snafled by Japan yesterday. The haul included a remarkable judo double, with brother and sister Uta and Hifumi Abe both winning Olympic titles within an hour of each other.

Uta Abe was first to strike gold in the women's under-52kg category, beating Amandine Buchard of France in the final. She then cheered on as her big brother Hifumi overpowered Georgian judoka Vazha Margvelashvili in the under-66kg gold medal fight.

Earlier, unheralded swimmer Yui Ohashi had sparked the Japan gold spree in an action-packed morning finals session at the Tokyo Aquatics Center. Ohashi powered to victory in the women's 400 individual medley, toppling Hungary's defending champion Katinka Hosszu.

Ohashi — whose previous best performance on the world stage was a silver medal at the 2017 World Championships — touched in 4:32.08 ahead of US duo Emma Weyant and Hali Flickinger. "I swam believing in myself. I really did not think of winning the gold," said Ohashi.

Cycling, tennis upsets

Ohashi's win was upstaged however by Tunisian teenager Ahmed Hafnaoui, who pulled off a massive shock in the men's 400m freestyle to take gold. The 18-year-old had only qualified eighth-fastest for the final but produced a devastating late burst to win in 3min 43.36sec, overhauling Australian Jack McLoughlin, who took silver in 3:43.52.

"I just can't believe that, it's amazing," Hafnaoui said. "I felt better in the water this morning than yesterday and that's it. I'm the Olympic champion now." It was Tunisia's first ever Olympic medal in the event and just their third gold ever in swimming.

Champions Brazil held, Gignac rescues France in Olympic football

TOKYO: Reigning champions Brazil were held to a goalless draw by the Ivory Coast in the men's Olympic football competition yesterday, while Andre-Pierre Gignac's hat-trick in a 4-3 win over South Africa kept France's hopes alive.

Brazil, who won gold for the first time five years ago on home soil in Rio, could have moved to the brink of qualification for the knock-out stage in Yokohama but were denied by a stubborn Ivory Coast. It could have been worse, though, as they had to play more than an hour with 10 men after Aston Villa midfielder Douglas Luiz's 13th-minute red card for bringing down Youssouf Dao when he was through on goal.

Eboue Kouassi's late dismissal evened up the numbers, but the Ivorians held on as former Barcelona winger Malcom missed a late chance for the South Americans. Brazil lead Group D on goal difference ahead of



TOKYO: Japan's Uta Abe celebrates winning the judo women's 52kg final bout against France's Amandine Buchard during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Nippon Budokan in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

The other swimming medals were split between the US and Australia, with Chase Kalisz winning the 400m medley and Australia taking gold in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay in a world record time of 3:29.69.

The upsets extended beyond the pool later Sunday, with Australian world number one Ashleigh Barty crashing out in the first round of the women's tennis singles. Barty, the reigning Wimbledon champion, lost 6-4, 6-3 to Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Austrian mathematician Anna Kiesenhofer meanwhile claimed a shock victory in the women's cycling road race, which ended in bizarre fashion with Dutch veteran Annemiek van Vleuten crossing the line mistakenly thinking she had won.

Van Vleuten punched the air as she finished, oblivious to the fact that Kiesenhofer had broken away from the peloton earlier to take gold. "Yes, I thought I had won," van Vleuten said. "I'm gutted about this, of course. At first I felt really stupid, but then the others (her teammates) also did not know who had won."

Golf chaos, Biles wobbles

Elsewhere yesterday, a century-long wait to see surfing at the Olympics came to an end at

Tsurigasaki Surfing Beach. Blue skies and blazing sunshine greeted surfers as they paddled into the Pacific Ocean for the men's and women's heats. It marked the culmination of efforts to get surfing added to the Olympic program which date back more than 100 years.

The specter of COVID-19 meanwhile continued to stalk the Olympics, with the men's golf tournament upended by two high-profile withdrawals. World number one Jon Rahm was ruled out after returning a positive test — his second COVID-19 positive in two months — while Bryson DeChambeau also saw his Olympic hopes end with a positive case.

In gymnastics, US superstar and defending champion Simone Biles produced a rusty performance in qualifying, with several uncharacteristic mistakes in a near-empty arena. Biles rolled her eyes after one unsteady landing on the vault and had her performance director Tom Forster shaking his head in disbelief after a shaky end to her beam routine.

"Simone took three big steps on the beam dismount, I've never seen her do that before," said Forster. "We're going to be okay... this is not the finals, this is getting into the finals, this might be a great awakening for us," he said. — AFP

France almost 'on plane back'

There was still time for France to snatch a winner, as Gignac found Teji Savanier to drill in a low strike in the second minute of added time. "After each South African goal it felt a little more like we were on the plane back," said Gignac, who has played for Mexican club Tigres since 2015. "We saw the joy after Teji's goal and we gave ourselves a final against Japan. With heart, we can do well. We don't want to return to France."

South Africa, who were hit by two players testing positive for COVID-19 in the Olympic Village before the tournament started, will need to beat Mexico in their last group game and hope Japan get the better of France to have any chance of making the last eight. The hosts held on to register their second straight win with a 2-1 success against Mexico, who are second above France on goal difference.

Goals from Real Madrid youngster Takefusa Kubo and Ritsu Doan put them in control inside the first 11 minutes and it proved enough despite Roberto Alvarado halving the deficit. Spain moved to the top of Group C as Mikel Oyarzabal's late strike — their first goal of the tournament — downed Australia 1-0. Argentina beat Egypt 1-0. In Group B, Honduras came from behind to beat New Zealand 3-2 and South Korea thrashed 10-man Romania 4-0 to leave all four teams on three points. — AFP



TOKYO: Kuwaiti skeet shooter Abdullah Al-Rashidi participates in the first round of Tokyo Olympics skeet qualifiers held at the Asaka Olympic fields. — KUNA

Games. The delegation includes national coach Bader Abbas, player Yaqoub Al-Youha and player Madhawi Al-Shammari. The athletics competition for Madhawi Al-Shammari will start on the 30th of this month in the 100m race, while the athlete Yaqoub Al-Youha will participate on the 3rd August in the 110m hurdles. — KUNA



Tokyo Olympics medals table after yesterday's events (G = Gold, S = Silver, B = Bronze, T= Total):

	G	S	B	T
China	6	1	4	11
Japan	5	1	0	6
United States	4	2	4	10
South Korea	2	0	3	5
Russian Olympic Committee	1	4	2	7
Italy	1	1	3	5
Australia	1	1	1	3
France	1	1	1	3
Hungary	1	1	0	2
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Austria	1	0	0	1
Ecuador	1	0	0	1
Iran	1	0	0	1
Kosovo	1	0	0	1
Thailand	1	0	0	1
Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
Canada	0	2	0	2
Netherlands	0	2	0	2
Brazil	0	1	1	2
Taiwan	0	1	1	2
Britain	0	1	1	2
Indonesia	0	1	1	2
Serbia	0	1	1	2
Belgium	0	1	0	1
Bulgaria	0	1	0	1
Colombia	0	1	0	1
Georgia	0	1	0	1
India	0	1	0	1
Romania	0	1	0	1
Spain	0	1	0	1
Germany	0	0	2	2
Kazakhstan	0	0	2	2
Turkey	0	0	2	2
Ukraine	0	0	2	2
Estonia	0	0	1	1
Zionist entity	0	0	1	1
Mexico	0	0	1	1
Mongolia	0	0	1	1
Slovenia	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	0	0	1	1

USA lose first men's Olympic basketball game since 2004



SAITAMA: USA's Kevin Wayne Durant (right) fights for the ball with France's Rudy Gobert during the men's preliminary round group A basketball match between France and USA during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Saitama Super Arena in Saitama yesterday. — AFP

TOKYO: A USA team led by 11-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant were beaten 83-76 by France in a huge Olympic basketball upset yesterday. The French, with a team containing NBA players including Rudy Gobert and Evan Fournier, inflicted the Americans' first defeat at an Olympics since the 2004 Athens Games.

Durant was held to just 10 points in the first-round game and was unable to inspire his team as the French came from behind to take control in the final quarter. The Americans had looked rusty in the build-up to Tokyo, losing to Nigeria in a warm-up game, and the defeat will underline Durant's fears expressed before the Games that his side will not face a "cakewalk" in Japan. Fournier was sensational for France, top-scoring with 28 points. Although the Boston Celtics player only scored four from 12 from beyond the three-point line, he found his range when it mattered to help the French stun the Americans.

"I tried to be aggressive. As an NBA player I know the players we were fac-

ing. We had to show the team how to attack them," Fournier said. France clawed back from a 10-point deficit to set up a breathless final quarter and as the USA failed to find any rhythm, the French smelled victory in the Saitama arena, where spectators were absent because of coronavirus measures.

Fournier's three-pointer with 57 seconds remaining put his team ahead 76-74 and when Durant hit the rim with a three-pointer himself the French closed out the game with a succession of free throws. When Jayson Tatum fouled Nicolas Batum, the French veteran NBA forward hit both from the line to seal a famous victory.

Utah Jazz center Gobert played down the French victory. "I mean it's great, but until we have what we want to have around our neck, it doesn't really matter," Gobert said. "Every single guy that came in the game brought us something," he added. "It's really the team that we want to be and it's exciting for the rest of the tournament." The USA face Iran in their next game on Wednesday when France take on the Czech Republic. — AFP