



3 Three killed in Fahaheel Expressway accident



5 Afghanistan will become 'pariah state' if Taliban seize power: US



12 Bob Odenkirk collapses on 'Better Call Saul' set



16 Kuwaiti shooters compete in men's trap qualification



Amir meets WHO chief, hails leading role played by body

Tedros visits Kuwait Vaccination Center, Jaber Hospital



KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Director General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at Bayan Palace yesterday. (Right) Tedros visits the Kuwait Vaccination Center at the fairgrounds in Mishref yesterday. — Photos by KUNA and Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace visiting World Health Organization Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus and his accompanying delegation. During the reception, HH the Amir praised WHO's leading role in promoting health and safety, as well as its efforts in facing the COVID-19 pandemic and diseases in general, reaffirming at the

same time continued and close cooperation with the organization in manifestation of Kuwait's pioneering humanitarian role.

Tedros expressed sincere appreciation to HH the Amir and Kuwait for its pioneering humanitarian role in supporting the organization, terming its contribution as "effective". HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received

Tedros at Bayan Palace. He praised the role played by WHO in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed on Kuwait's responsibility towards the international community to extend a helping hand through WHO, as well as pledging to provide \$60 million to organizations and countries affected by the pandemic.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-

Hamad Al-Sabah met Tedros too at Bayan Palace. Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and senior officials were present at all meetings. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah also met Tedros. During the meeting, both officials discussed the latest global health

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

18 killed in India crash

LUCKNOW: Eighteen migrant laborers sleeping on a highway in northern India after their bus broke down died when a truck rammed into the vehicle, police said yesterday. At least 19 others were injured in the accident in Uttar Pradesh state. Most of the passengers were returning home to the eastern state of Bihar after working in the states of Punjab or Haryana. The passengers got off the bus after its axle shaft broke and were sleeping next to it when a truck crashed into it from behind. — AFP

S Africa 'appalled' by Zionist status

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa yesterday vehemently objected to last week's "unilateral" decision by the African Union Commission to grant the Zionist entity an official observer status at the continental organization. In a strongly worded statement, the continental powerhouse said it "is appalled at the unjust and unwarranted decision of the AU Commission to grant (the Zionist entity) observer status in the African Union". — AFP

Morocco announces Stone Age find

RABAT: Archaeologists in Morocco have announced the discovery of North Africa's oldest Stone Age hand-axe manufacturing site, dating back 1.3 million years, an international team reported yesterday. The find pushes back by hundreds of thousands of years the start date in North Africa of the Acheulian stone tool industry associated with a key human ancestor, Homo erectus, researchers on the team told journalists in Rabat. — AFP

Chopper delivery sparks probe

KUALA LUMPUR: With Malaysians stuck at home due to a coronavirus outbreak, food delivery services are increasingly popular - but one customer has sparked an outcry by sending a helicopter across the country to collect a rice dish. Police are investigating an alleged breach of virus rules after the aircraft landed in Ipoh city to pick up 36 portions of the rice dish and returned to Kuala Lumpur, 180 km away. — AFP

New climate lingo boggles the mind

PARIS: One of the annoying things about global warming - besides the likelihood it will ravage life on Earth - is all the new words we are expected to learn in order to track our descent into climate chaos.

Beirut blast still haunts survivors

BEIRUT: A year after the cataclysmic Beirut port blast, Shady Rizk's doctors are still plucking glass from his body. The latest extraction was a centimeter-long sliver above his knee pit. "Almost every month, I find a new piece... the glass is still stuck in my thighs, my legs, and I guess, in my arms," said Rizk, a 36-year-old network engineer who was sprayed with shards during the

explosion. "The doctors said there will continue to be glass in my body for several years," he said.

The August 4 blast that thundered through the city levelled entire neighborhoods, killed more than 200 people, wounded 6,500 others and pummeled the lives of survivors. This dark blotch in Lebanon's chaotic history has since folded into a nightmarish year amid a stalled blast probe and an accelerating financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times.

With no politicians held to account and the country facing soaring poverty, a plummeting currency, angry protests and shortages of basic items

Continued on Page 2

Sinabung volcano spews ash

MEDAN: Indonesia's Mount Sinabung erupted yesterday, spewing a massive column of smoke and ash into the sky. The eruption of the volcano in North Sumatra province lasted about 12 minutes, a local geological agency said. "The volcanic material reached 4,500 meters into the air," the head of the agency's Sinabung monitoring post,

Armen Putra, told AFP. An image shared by the agency showed a column of thick, dark smoke coming from the crater.

Clouds of smoke and ash travelled 1,000 m away from the peak, the agency added. No evacuation orders were issued because the debris did not reach the nearest villages and there was no reported disruption to flights in the area. But authorities have instructed people to avoid a five-kilometer zone around the crater that has been left unoccupied for years as volcanic activity increased.

Sinabung, a 2,460-m volcano, was dormant for centuries before roaring back to life in 2010 when an eruption killed two people. — AFP

Rising temperatures have not only boosted the intensity or frequency of major storms and heatwaves, they have spawned rare or novel weather phenomena, accompanied by new more-or-less scientific names.

"Firenadoes", for example, occur when searing heat and turbulent winds rise above out-of-control forest fires in tornado-like columns. California and Australia have seen plenty of these vertical flame-throwers, and will likely see a lot more, scientists say. So-called "dry thunderstorms" in drought-stricken regions such as the southwestern United States are a big tease, producing thun-

der and lightning, but no rain.

The air below these high-altitude light-shows is so parched that any moisture produced evaporates on the way down. Then there are the fire-induced, smoke-infused "pyrocumulonimbus" clouds that darkened Australian skies during the Black Summer of 2019-2020; or "urban heat islands" in big cities everywhere that run a couple degrees Celsius hotter than surrounding areas. But nothing is more terrifying, perhaps, than the potentially deadly combination of heat and relative humidity.

Continued on Page 2



BEIRUT: Beirut port blast survivor Shady Rizk takes a picture on July 15, 2021 from the building hosting his former office overlooking Beirut's port, where he was standing at the moment of the devastating port blast last August. — AFP



KARO, Indonesia: People look on as Mount Sinabung erupts spewing a massive column of smoke and ash yesterday. — 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 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 Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets First Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates Hamad Al-Rahoumi and his accompanying delegation.

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 received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and separately, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received the visiting First Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates Hamad Al-Rahoumi and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Speaker Ghanim, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and head of the accompanying delegation Ahmed Khalifa Al-Shami,

Director of the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince, retired Lieutenant-General Jamal Muhammad Al-Dhiab and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs in the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince Mazen Issa Al-Issa as well as Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Nasser Hajji Al-Muzayen. His Highness the Prime Minister also received the visiting UAE delegation. Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday, a cable of congratulations and best wishes to King Mohammed VI of Morocco on the 22nd anniversary of his

accession to the throne, wishing the nation prosperity and development under the wise leadership of the monarch. 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. In other news, His Highness the Amir received a telephone call from Sayid Ammar Al-Hakim, chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. During the call, relations between the two countries and their peoples have been reviewed, and Al-Hakim wished His Highness the Amir everlasting well-being, and Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. His Highness the Amir thanked Al-Hakim for the good feelings and initiative, wishing him good health. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets First Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates Hamad Al-Rahoumi and his accompanying delegation.

New climate lingo boggles...

Continued from Page 1

A healthy human adult in the shade with unlimited drinking water will die if so-called "wet-bulb" temperatures (TW) exceed 35C for six hours, scientists have calculated. It was long assumed this theoretical threshold would never be crossed, but US researchers reported last year on two locations - one in Pakistan, another in the United Arab Emirates - where the 35C TW barrier was breached more than once, if only fleetingly.

An increase in algae blooms - sometimes known as "sea snot" - is one thing, at least, that can't be blamed on climate change, according to a recent study. A critical UN assessment of climate science currently under review by 196 nations, meanwhile, will highlight the rising threat of "tipping points" in Earth's climate system, according to sources who have seen drafts of the report.

Anyone who has tried to balance in a chair leaning back on two legs knows there is a point-of-no-return beyond which things crash to the floor. And so it is with kilometers-thick ice sheets atop Greenland and West Antarctica holding enough frozen water to lift oceans more than a dozen meters. It may take centuries or longer, but some scientists say that big chunks are already "committed", and the melting "locked-in".

Likewise with the Amazon basin. Climate change coupled with fires set ablaze to clear land for cattle and crops are pushing the world's largest tropical forest - a process dubbed "savannification" - into

arid expanses of grasslands. These shifts are accelerated by vicious cycles of warming that scientists call "feedbacks". As the thin crust of snow-covered ice floating on the Arctic Ocean, for example, gives way over the years to deep blue sea, the Sun's planet-warming radiation is absorbed rather than bounced back into space. The reflective capacity of white surfaces is called "albedo".

As for increasingly misnamed "permafrost", trust me, you don't want to know. (If you insist: Shallow tundra in Siberia and other sub-Arctic regions contains twice as much carbon as in the atmosphere. We'd all be better off if it stayed there.) How do humans react to all these grim tidings? Some slip into "doomism", the understandable but useless idea that the "Earth system" - now a branch of science - is in a terminal nose dive.

Humanity, they will point out, has almost used up its "carbon budget", and is on track to massively "overshoot" the Paris treaty goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels. Others are suffering from a mental state known as "solastalgia", which combines melancholy, grief and nostalgia for a world that seems to be slipping from our grasp.

At the other extreme, the "Greta effect" has given rise to a generation of uncompromising climate warriors inspired by the young Swedish activist, and known in Italy as "Gretini". Post-COVID, their parents dream of escaping to Bali or the Maldives for some "last chance tourism" before all the coral reefs die. But "flight shaming" for the carbon foot print of flying half-way across the globe may prevent them from getting off the ground. So the family might as well settle in for a "CliFi" movie on Netflix - Interstellar and Snowpiercer perhaps - or a documentary on how "blue carbon" in the ocean could save us all. — AFP

Beirut blast still haunts...

Continued from Page 1

from medicine to fuel, many survivors are simmering in the lead-up to the tragedy's first anniversary. "The explosion still lives inside of me," Rizk said, speaking to AFP from under the office building where he was when the blast went off. "With August 4 approaching, knowing that nobody has been caught or sent to prison, the anger is hitting hard," he added. "It makes you want to break things, take to the streets in protest, throw Molotov cocktails, spark a fire... anything to let the anger out."

Rizk was standing on a balcony overlooking the port, filming plumes of smoke rising from a warehouse, when the hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer stocked inside it exploded in front of him. The blast left him with more than 350 stitches and permanently impaired his vision. He can barely see at night now, making his world even darker in a country blighted by endless cuts. But physical scars are a secondary problem, he said. "The trauma, it rips you up inside," said Rizk, who is now planning to emigrate to Canada. "It's like internal crying."

Sitting in his clinic nearby, Rony Mecattaf said he is adjusting to the permanent loss of vision in his right eye after three surgeries and several meetings with specialists in Europe over the past 12 months. To compensate for blind spots, the 59-year-old psychotherapist always sits on the corner of the table and walks on the left side of the street. He laughs along when his friends jokingly call him the "one-eyed man".

Mecattaf said the past year has felt like a "shedding of illusions". "It's been an incredible illusion this country, this capacity that we always prided ourselves on, on being able to have fun... to live the life," Mecattaf said. "All of that got shattered." What remains is the reality of collective trauma and the lack of space to heal as the country slides deeper into chaos. "There is a survival mode we are all in," Mecattaf said. "This surviving process doesn't allow for a real and healthy time to process."

On the roof of her apartment in Mar Mikhael, a neighborhood severely damaged by the blast, Julia Sabra said she now feels unsafe at home. The 28-year-old singer moved back to her renovated flat five months after it was devastated by the explosion. "My boyfriend was unconscious on the floor, blood all over his face and leg," Sabra said. Since moving back, she said they have been "just terrified of any sound... doors shutting, storms, winds being too loud, hearing something fall down the stairs."

With the blast's anniversary date approaching, Sabra said she mostly felt "rage and hopelessness". "You can't get a break... you are trying to heal from a certain trauma or wound from the blast and you also have to deal with day-to-day shortages of everything," she said. In July, Sabra and her band - Postcards - played at the renowned Baalbek festival, including a track which explicitly references the explosion and is called "Home is so Sad" after a Philip Larkin poem.

The nagging drumbeat and ethereal vocals convey deep sadness and vulnerability, aptly capturing what has been the dominant mood for many Beirutis since the blast. "Something changed," Sabra said. "I'm not sure if I would say (Beirut) lost its soul. I still think it has a lot of soul, but it's a wounded soul." — AFP

Amir meets WHO chief, hails...

Continued from Page 1

developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, ways to face challenges resulting from it and enhancing bilateral relations between the two sides.

Sheikh Ahmad stressed Kuwait's supportive stand towards efforts exerted by the organization on all levels to contain the pandemic and prevent its spread. He praised and valued the efforts by WHO in this field, stressing the importance of internation-

al efforts to combat the pandemic and guarantee the equal distribution of vaccines to all countries.

Tedros expressed appreciation and gratitude to the regional and international humanitarian, distinguished and pioneering Kuwaiti role in supporting afflicted and affected peoples in the fight against epidemics and infectious diseases. He also praised the efficiency and effectiveness of all measures and efforts taken by Kuwait in confronting the pandemic. He expressed thanks to Kuwait for hosting a WHO office and the continuous support of Kuwait to the organization's goals and objectives.

Tedros later paid a visit to Kuwait Vaccination Center, accompanied by a number of top health ministry officials. He also made a similar visit to Jaber Hospital for COVID-19 patients.



BEIRUT: This picture taken yesterday shows a view of a 25-metre-tall steel sculpture dubbed "The Gesture" by Lebanese artist Nadim Karam, made from debris resulting from the aftermath of the blast at the port near the now-iconic damaged grain silos. — AFP

Local

As airport set to reopen for residents, challenges remain for unvaccinated

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Airport will reopen from August 1, and many residents stranded in various countries around the world are expected to return. But there are many challenges ahead for some of those stuck in Dubai. Kuwait has implemented a no-vaccine-no entry policy for those who are returning, requiring all residents to be fully vaccinated with jabs recognized by Kuwait - namely Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna.

Just before the rollout of vaccines in December last year, residents from certain countries had to spend 14 days in a third country before arriving to Kuwait, so many residents chose Dubai as their quarantine destination. But months after the implementation of this third-country quarantine rule, Kuwait cancelled the order, leaving hundreds if not thousands of Kuwait-based workers stranded in the Emirates.

One of them is Benjie Andales Coyus, who has been in the UAE for the last six months. "I came here on January 16, 2021, and my ticket to Kuwait was booked for February 10. But on February 7, Kuwait implemented a lockdown, so from then on I am anxiously waiting for any good news about the border reopening," he said. Coyus left his hotel in Dubai after spending more than two months there and moved in with a friend to save money.

"Here I am also paying for the small room, equivalent to KD 62. This amount is sent by my brother, who is also working abroad. If not for him, I couldn't survive in Dubai," he said. "My friend here is sharing food with me and sometimes some of his friends also share something. This is how I managed to survive in Dubai over the past six months."

Coyus has four children in the Philippines who

depend on his remittances, and according to him, they have waited long enough. "During the past six months, I sent nothing to my family. Thank God, they managed to live mostly due to the help of many people around them and by borrowing money from our relatives. If there's nothing to eat, they eat rice and salt. That is why I value my stay here and am praying to God that one day I will be able to return to Kuwait," he said.

"I hope the Philippine government does something for us. What we need is a vaccine. The UAE doesn't want to vaccinate us because we are visitors. We already informed the embassy here about our situation and their solution is for us to go back home. My visa is about to expire, and I want to start working again. I hope the UAE government will reconsider our status and administer us with the vaccine needed to re-enter Kuwait," Coyus pleaded. He said there are hundreds of Kuwait-based workers stranded in the UAE, while some have already gone back home.

Students stranded

Grace Martinez, a Filipina who is married to an Egyptian, said her two sons are stranded in Dubai since Jan 25. "My two sons, Rashid (23 years old) and Raed (21 years old) with their friend Jasmine are stranded in Dubai for the last six months. They are students in the Philippines and frequently visit us every six months so that their visa doesn't expire. But the pandemic has separated us for almost two years now," she lamented.

"When third-country quarantine was allowed, we immediately booked them tickets to Dubai. But they were caught with the new flight ban in Kuwait. They eagerly want to be home with us here in Kuwait," Martinez said. She said they were happy to hear about the reopening of the airport for foreigners, but



the new rules only apply to those who are fully vaccinated. "Our excitement was cut short when Kuwait announced only those who are fully vaccinated are allowed to come. How can they enter Kuwait when they are not vaccinated, let alone the fact that they are temporary visitors to the UAE? They are not residents of that country, so it's hard to get the vaccine," she said.

"I hope Kuwait will reconsider its decision for us.

Maybe they can allow our kids to undergo quarantine - we are more than willing to abide by their policies of quarantine. If they allow domestic helpers to do this, I hope they consider those who have already undergone six months of quarantine in other countries. Please have mercy on us - we need help, we need intervention, we need understanding for our predicament which we have endured for the past six months," she cried.

Al-Razi Hospital Tower vital in treating COVID-19

KUWAIT: Al-Razi Hospital Tower became one of the Kuwaiti health system's main facilities to help fight COVID-19 cases, especially emergency cases. The Tower includes an integrated medical team for intensive and internal care, as well as cardiologists, lung, dialysis and physiotherapy doctors. In remarks to KUNA yesterday, the health ministry COVID-19 team leader Dr Hashem Al-Hashemi said that the plan of using Al-Razi Tower as a COVID-19 treatment center began in 2020. He affirmed that the Tower is one of the newest medical buildings in the country, provided with modern technologies and professional health cadres. Moreover, he noted that the ministry has provided the tower with supportive medical services such as radiology, laboratories and pharmacies, in addition to a specialized emergency system to deal with COVID-19 critical cases.

Meanwhile, Head of Anesthesiology Department and Intensive Care Unit Dr Hussein Al-Mejadi said that the medical team in the Tower applies the



global protocols in dealing with the COVID-19 cases. He also noted that there is a 24/7 monitoring system to follow up with patients via cameras to help reduce the infection rate among medical staff and ensure their safety. The medical team meets with the patients' families on a daily basis to keep them updated with their relatives' health situation, he added. He indicated that the ministry is responsible for providing all requirements and supplies the Tower needs immediately and in a mechanism



completely different from what prevailed before the pandemic.

On the spread of the Delta variant, he said that the disease has become more severe, that the vast majority of the infected were unvaccinated. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been vague and unclear information about vaccines, but after vaccinating more than three billion people in the world, the effectiveness of the vaccine has become clear, he added. —KUNA

Vaccine certificate must be updated after passport renewal

KUWAIT: People vaccinated against COVID-19 in Kuwait and who have renewed their passports after receiving their digital certificates are required to go to the help desk at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref in order to update their certificates with the new passport number. This requirement is especially important for people planning to travel, in order to avoid problems registering their certificate online. Meanwhile, a health ministry source revealed that at least 50 percent of children aged 12-15 who have registered to vaccinate against COVID-19 have already received their first dose in the first 10 days since the health ministry started vaccinating this age group.

Kuwait's Ministry of Health had said on Tuesday that five people succumbed to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and 933 others have been infected with the disease over the previous 24 hours. The new figures raised death toll to 2,298 and total infections to 394,538 people as of Tuesday, the Ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. As many as 1,378 people recovered from the virus in the same period, taking the total to 378,810, he added, noting that the ratio of infection to recovery hit 96 percent.

Up to 301 patients were being treated at ICUs while active cases reached about 14,500 as of Tuesday, he said. The overall medical swabs rose by 12,442 to 3,352,915, he stated. The percentage of infected cases in Ahmadi hit 35 percent, in Hawally 25, Farwaniya 18, Jahra 12 and the Capital 10, he pointed out. Dr Sanad renewed his call for both citizens and residents to abide by health precautions and physical distancing, as well as avoid gatherings. He further urged the public to follow up official accounts of the ministry, and the bodies' guidelines and recommendations in order to control the spread of the virus. —KUNA

Three dead in Fahaaheel Highway accident



KUWAIT: Three people died and one was injured in a head-on collision between two SUVs on Fahaaheel Highway near Salwa yesterday morn-

ing. The accident happened when one of the vehicles was driving in the opposite direction, and crashed head-on with the other vehicle,



according to the police report. The three victims were identified as one Kuwaiti man, one man from the Gulf and one Asian woman, while the

injured man, Asian, was rushed to hospital for treatment, the interior ministry said in a statement. Further investigations are ongoing.

Four hurt in Khaitan fire



KUWAIT: Four people were injured in a fire reported yesterday in Khaitan. Three of the victims suffered from smoke inhalation and were treated onsite, while the fourth was taken to hos-

pital for treatment after he suffered mild burns, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. Farwaniya and Sabhan firemen rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call and evacuated the



building before tackling the blaze which gutted a second-floor apartment, KFF noted, adding that an investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire.



KUWAIT: Abdaly land border customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle around 1.25 kg of shabu drugs in a truck that arrived from Iraq yesterday. The drugs were found in the upper fittings of the driver's seat.

Local

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Divers are seen feeding sharks inside their tanks at The Scientific Center's Aquarium in Kuwait. —KUNA photo

Sarah Khan to speak at Active Minds Club open house

KUWAIT: Distinguished Toastmaster Sarah Khan will speak at the upcoming Toastmaster Active Minds Club open house. Khan is a speaker, activist and peace advocate who has worked in schools in California, England, Saudi Arabia and various media organizations including TEDx, Al-Jazeera AJ+ and other publications.

Active Minds Club is organizing a Zoom Open House on July 29, 2021 from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm with the theme 'The Journey of Self - Discoveries.' The meeting is open to the public. An open house is a fun, casual event, where guests can ask questions, meet members and get a feel for the unique Toastmasters culture.

Seasoned members of Active Minds will introduce the fascinating world of public speaking and leadership. The evening will also include the most exciting moment in Toastmasters, the Table Topics session in which guests are invited to participate. The Table Topics is that part of a Toastmasters meeting where participants are given the opportunity to practice impromptu speaking. Learning, fun, interaction, and networking, this is what you will find in the Open House event. It is time valuably spent and, hopefully, you will be convinced to attend a meeting and eventually join the club.

Kuwait crude oil up to \$74.25 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil gained \$1.23 during Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$74.25 pb compared with \$73.02 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Brent futures retreated two cents to \$74.48 pb and West Texas Intermediate dropped 26 cents to \$71.65 pb. —KUNA

Speaker Ghanem receives UAE's FNC delegation

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received in his office yesterday the visiting First Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, Hamad Ahmed Al-Rahoumi. During the meeting, both sides discussed the deep-rooted relations between the two brotherly countries and ways to advance cooperation, especially on the parliamentary side, Al-Dostour news network said in a statement.

The meeting touched on the importance of continuing to coordinate between the Kuwaiti and Emirati par-

liaments in the international parliamentary forums. The meeting was attended by a number of Kuwaiti MPs, and the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, and the Secretary General of the National Assembly, Adel Al-Loughani. After the meeting, the Speaker of the National Assembly held a lunch banquet in honor of the visiting guest and his accompanying delegation, which was attended by a number of MPs. Neyadi and his accompanying delegation arrived in the country on Tuesday, for a three-day official visit. —KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets the First Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council of the UAE Hamad Al-Rahoumi. —KUNA

Kuwait, US discuss bilateral relations

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and US Ambassador to

Kuwait Alina L Romanowski discussed yesterday bilateral relations and means to develop them. During a meeting, both sides reviewed issues of common interest mainly security issues, said the Ministry of Interior's public relations department. Meanwhile, Ambassador Romanowski thanked Minister Sheikh Thamer for the kind reception, stressing the vitality of issues discussed during the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski. —KUNA

Deputy FM receives Iranian Ambassador, outgoing Canadian envoy



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani. —KUNA photos



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets Ambassador of Canada Louis-Pierre Emond.

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Majdi Al-Dhafiri met yesterday with the Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani and outgoing Ambassador of Canada Louis-Pierre Emond. In the reception with Irani, Dhafiri discussed with the Ambassador means to develop ties between Kuwait

and Iran. Meanwhile, Dhafiri commended in his meeting with Emond the efforts of the outgoing Canadian Ambassador, wishing him the best in his future endeavors. Ayham Al-Omar, Assistant Minister for the Affairs of the Deputy Foreign Minister's office attended both meetings. —KUNA

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Chinese wounded in gun attack in Karachi

Tunisia in political turmoil as president fires more officials



TIANJIN: This photo taken yesterday, and released by China's Xinhua News Agency shows Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (R) meeting with Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, political chief of Afghanistan's Taliban, in Tianjin. —AFP

Afghanistan will become 'pariah state': US

We are facing an invasion that is unprecedented in the last 30 years: Ghani

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan would become a "pariah state" if the Taliban take control by force, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday, as a top-level delegation from the insurgent group visited China to assure officials of their international obligations.

"An Afghanistan that does not respect the rights of its people, an Afghanistan that commits atrocities against its own people would become a pariah state," Blinken told reporters in India, where he is on his first official visit.

In China, the Taliban's leadership assured Beijing the group will not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for plotting against another country. A delegation including co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar is in China for talks as the insurgents continue a sweeping offensive across Afghanistan — including areas along their shared border.

Their frontier is just 76 kilometers (47 miles) long — and at a rugged high altitude without a road crossing — but Beijing fears Afghanistan could be used as a staging ground for Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang.

Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naem told AFP those concerns were unfounded. "The Islamic Emirate

assured China that Afghanistan's soil would not be used against any country's security."

"They (China) promised not to interfere in Afghanistan's affairs, but instead help to solve problems and bring peace." Beijing confirmed the thrust of the talks, which were led on the Chinese side by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

But in Kabul Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani urged the international community "to review the narrative of the willingness of the Taliban and their supporters on embracing a political solution."

"In terms of scale, scope and timing, we are facing an invasion that is unprecedented in the last 30 years," he warned in a speech yesterday.

"These are not the Taliban of the 20th century... but the manifestation of the nexus between transnational terrorist networks and transnational criminal organizations."

In New Delhi, Blinken warned the Taliban they would have to change if they wanted global acceptance. "The Taliban says that it seeks international recognition, that it wants international support for Afghanistan. Presumably it wants its leaders to be able to travel

freely in the world, sanctions lifted, etc.," he said. "The taking over of the country by force and abusing the rights of its people is not the path to achieve those objectives."

The meeting in Beijing gifts legitimacy to an insurgent group craving international recognition — and a potential diplomatic shield at the UN — to match their military march across the nation.

"Wang Yi pointed out, the Afghan Taliban is a crucial military and political force in Afghanistan," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing. "China has throughout adhered to non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs... Afghanistan belongs to the Afghan people," he said, in stark contrast to the "failure of US policy towards Afghanistan".

Sweeping gains

Taliban officials have cranked up their international diplomacy in recent months, seeking global recognition for when they hope to return to power. They have made sweeping advances across Afghanistan since May, when US-led foreign forces began the last stage of a withdrawal due to be completed next month. Beijing hosted

a Taliban delegation in 2019, but back-door links with the insurgents existed before, through Pakistan.

Communist Party leaders in Beijing and the fundamentalist Taliban have little ideological common ground, but experts feel shared pragmatism could see mutual self-interest trump sensitive differences.

For Beijing, a stable and cooperative administration in Kabul would pave the way for an expansion of its Belt and Road Initiative into Afghanistan and through the Central Asian republics.

The Taliban, meanwhile, would consider China a crucial source of investment and economic support. "By getting the Chinese on their side, the Chinese would be able to provide them with diplomatic cover at the Security Council," Australia-based Afghanistan expert Nishank Motwani told AFP.

"It is important to note... when other countries open up their doors and engage with the Taliban it undercuts the legitimacy of the Afghan government and presents the Taliban almost as a government in waiting." The Taliban's campaign has so far seen them capture scores of districts, border crossings and encircle several provincial capitals. —AFP

More than half of German population fully vaccinated

BERLIN: More than half the population of Germany is now fully vaccinated, Health Minister Jens Spahn said yesterday, but concerns are growing about a slowdown in uptake. "41.8 million Germans now have full protection, while 61.1 percent have received at least one shot. The more people who get vaccinated, the safer we will be in autumn and winter," Spahn wrote on Twitter.

Germany's vaccination campaign accelerated in the spring after a sluggish first few months, yet the country remains some way off the 80 percent targeted for herd immunity. The inoculation drive has slowed to a snail's pace in recent weeks, sharpening fears of a fourth wave of infections driven by the more contagious Delta variant.

With case numbers also rising, the debate over how to convince more people to take the vaccine is set to become a key issue in the national elections scheduled for September 26. Unlike other European countries such as France and Greece, Germany has so far ruled out introducing compulsory jabs for certain parts of the population.

Last week, Chancellor Angela Merkel urged citizens to get vaccinated to curb what she called a "clear and worrying dynamic" in the infection rates. "Every vaccination... is a small step towards a return to normality," she said.

Merkel's chief of staff Helge Braun has also mooted possible further restrictions on public life for the unvacci-



BERLIN: Passengers stand on an escalator next to a sign pointing to a test center for COVID-19 coronavirus at the BER Willy Brandt airport in Brandenburg, near Schoenefeld und Berlin, yesterday. —AFP

nated, even if they can show a recent negative test. "Vaccinated people will definitely have more freedom than unvaccinated people" if case numbers rise again in the autumn, said Braun.

Germany has seen low infection numbers over the summer compared to many of its European neighbours, but cases have been creeping up over the past weeks. Yesterday, official figures showed 2768 new coronavirus cases over the last 24 hours, while the incidence had risen again to reach 15 cases per 100,000 over a seven-day period. According to the Robert Koch Institute public health agency, the Delta variant now accounts for more than 80 percent of all new infections in Germany. —AFP

Khalaf, out of her car and shot her dead in a possible war crime. The Treasury Department said the group has killed hundreds more since 2018 in a prison it runs near Aleppo and has integrated former members of the Islamic State extremist group. "Our designations today should serve as a reminder that the United States will use all its diplomatic tools to promote accountability of persons who have inflicted abuses and suffering against the Syrian people," said Aimee Cutrona, a senior State Department official handling Syria.

"These designations come at a moment in which we are seeing an increase of violence in northwest Syria. The United States continues to call for an immediate nationwide ceasefire and de-escalation of violence in Syria," she told reporters. The Treasury Department took action against five prison officials and eight prisons as it estimated that 14,000 people have been tortured to death as Assad crushes a decade-old uprising. It also imposed sanctions on Hasan al-Shaban, an alleged Al-Qaeda fund-raiser based in Turkey, and Farrukh Furkatovitch Fayzimatov, who is accused of funding the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, led by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate. —AFP

Tensions as US, Russia hold strategic stability talks

GENEVA: The United States and Russia were holding a fresh round of talks in Geneva yesterday aimed at stabilising the thorny relationship between Moscow and Washington. The talks are a continuation of the strategic dialogue which started last month in the Swiss city with the first summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden.

The meeting is taking place behind closed doors and with no media present. The talks, being led by US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, are expected to last most of the day. Moscow and Washington have both toned down expectations, with no spectacular results expected from the meeting — just as with the June 16 presidential summit.

The talks will cover the thorny issue of arms control. Bonnie Jenkins, who one week ago was confirmed as the under secretary of state for arms control and international security affairs, is part of the US delegation. "Through this dialogue, we seek to lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures," the State Department said when announcing yesterday's Geneva talks.

Ryabkov told Russian news agencies on Tuesday that the talks would allow Moscow to "understand how serious the mindset of our US colleagues is in

terms of establishing a concentrated, energetic dialogue in strategic stability". But he added: "I would not raise the bar of expectations."

Strained ties

The diplomacy comes amid tensions on multiple fronts between the two nations. Washington has warned the Kremlin it will take action if Moscow does not stop the wave of cyberattacks which, according to the US authorities, are largely coming from Russian territory.

Moscow denies any responsibility. Biden on Tuesday voiced concern about the recent increase in cyberattacks, including via ransomware, which typically see hackers encrypting victims' data and then demanding money for restored access.

He also accused Putin of seeking to disrupt the 2022 US congressional elections by spreading "misinformation". "It's a pure violation of our sovereignty," he said, while lashing out at his Russian counterpart. Putin has "a real problem, he is sitting on top of an economy that has nuclear weapons and nothing else," Biden said. "He knows he is in real trouble, which makes him even more dangerous in my view."

Putin has nonetheless welcomed Biden's efforts to bring more predictability to the relationship between the two global powerhouses. During their Geneva summit last month, the two presidents, who hold the world's largest nuclear arsenals, shook hands and spoke for more than three hours.

They stressed the importance of dialogue, noting that even at the height of the Cold War, Moscow and Washington spoke to each other to avoid the worst. —AFP

US slaps sanctions on Syria armed group with Turkey links

WASHINGTON: The United States yesterday slapped sanctions on a Syrian armed group that killed a Kurdish politician amid Turkey's 2019 incursion, vowing to keep pursuing accountability in the war-ravaged country.

The United States also took action against two men accused of funding extremists in Syria, including one based in Turkey, as well as five prison officials from President Bashar al-Assad's regime over torture. The Treasury Department said it was blocking any assets and banning any US transactions with Ahrar al-Sharqiya, a once obscure armed group that came under the spotlight as Turkey sent forces into northern Syria in October 2019 following talks with then president Donald Trump.

The UN rights office said that fighters from the group pulled a 35-year-old Syrian Kurdish politician, Hevri-

Austria court orders duo jailed for joining IS in Syria

VIENNA: An Austrian court has sentenced two men to jail over their involvement with the Islamic State group in Syria, a spokeswoman said yesterday, following a high-profile trial in the country that had one of Europe's largest per capita rates of IS fighters. A Chechnya-born man who fled to Austria in 2004 was sentenced to six and a half years in jail, while an Austrian was sentenced to four and a half years in verdicts late Tuesday following a weeks-long trial, the Vienna court spokeswoman told AFP. In 2013, the duo left Austria to join IS in Syria, according to the indictment cited by the APA agency. The first defendant

stayed one and a half years, while the second just stayed several months. Both can appeal the verdicts.

Their recruiter Mirsad Omerovic—a jihadist of Bosnian origin considered the central figure in Austria's extremist scene—was also found guilty, the spokeswoman said. Omerovic is already serving a 20-year prison sentence after a court in 2016 found him guilty of "belonging to a terrorist group", and so no further jail term was ordered. Initially seven people had been charged, including the duo's wives, and the Chechnya-born man's parents. But the women—one of whom has already separated from her husband—were acquitted of the charges of complicity. The Chechnya-born man's father died in December, while his mother is believed to be on the run. An arrest warrant has been issued for her. In 2017, authorities said that 300 people from Austria, which has a population of nine million, had travelled or attempted to travel to Syria since the civil war there began in 2011, one of the highest numbers per capita in the European Union. —AFP

International

Tunisia in political turmoil as president fires more officials

Civil society groups warn against 'illegitimate' suspension of parliament

TUNIS: Tunisia lurched further into political uncertainty yesterday, as President Kais Saied sacked more officials, days after he suspended parliament and assumed executive powers in what opponents labeled a "coup". Key civil society groups warned against any "illegitimate" extension of Saied's 30-day suspension of parliament, and demanded in a joint statement a timeline for political action.

After suspending parliament and sacking Hichem Mechichi as prime minister on Sunday, dismissing the defense and justice ministers on Monday, Saied then issued orders dismissing a series of top officials. Late Tuesday, 63-year-old Saied, a former law lecturer who was a political newcomer when he won a landslide 2019 election victory, issued decrees sacking a long list of senior government officials, including the army's chief prosecutor.

He has also lifted the parliamentary immunity of lawmakers, and assumed judicial powers. Saied says his actions are justified under the constitution, which allows the head of state to take unspecified exceptional measures in the event of an "imminent threat".

Political, economic, health crises

The moderate Islamist Ennahdha party, which was the largest faction in the coalition government, has labelled the power grab a "coup d'etat", while the US, EU and other powers have voiced strong concern. On top of the political turmoil, the North African nation is struggling with a crippling economic crisis including soaring inflation and high unemployment, as well as surging COVID-19 infections.

Tunisians are waiting anxiously for clarity on the next political steps. Saied, an austere legal academic who has said he is determined to revolutionize the political system through the law, said he would assume executive power "with the help" of a government whose new chief he would appoint himself. Names of possible candidates circulated Wednesday after Saied met with representatives of national organizations late Monday.

"President Saied will be very careful in choosing the future head of government, because he wants a trustworthy and loyal person who would adopt the same policies as him," said political scientist Slaheddine Jourchi.

The young democracy had often been cited as the sole success story of the Arab Spring, the tumult sparked across the region after Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian university graduate who could only find work as a fruit vendor, set himself on fire in December 2010. But, a decade on, many in the nation of 12 million people say they have seen little improvement in living standards, and have grown infuriated by protracted political deadlock with infighting among the elite. The ousted government had also been criticised for its handling of the COVID pandemic. Tunisia has one of the world's highest official per-capita death tolls.

'A great challenge'

"President Saied is faced with a great challenge: to show Tunisians and the world that he made the right decisions," added Jourchi.

After violent clashes outside the army-blockaded parliament on Monday, the Ennahdha party



TUNIS: People shop from pedlars along a road in the popular souk (market) of Bab el-Fellah in Tunisia's capital Tunis yesterday.—AFP

said "organized thugs" were being used to "provoke bloodshed and chaos". It urged its supporters "to go home in the interests of maintaining the peace and security of our nation".

On Tuesday Ennahdha said that, "for the sake of the democratic path," it is "ready to go to early legislative and presidential elections" while demanding "that any delay is not used as a pretext to maintain an autocratic regime."

Noureddine B'Hiri, a senior Ennahdha leader,

said the party had "decided to campaign peacefully to defeat" the president's plans.

But before any elections, "parliament should resume its activities and the military end its control," B'Hiri told AFP. In the 10 years since Tunisia's popular revolution toppled dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia has had nine governments. Some have lasted just months, hindering the reforms needed to revamp the country's struggling economy and poor public services.—AFP

Russia to boost Tajikistan army

DUSHANBE: Russia will bolster Central Asian ally Tajikistan's military with weapons, equipment and training amid a "deteriorating" situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, Moscow's defence minister said yesterday on a visit to the country.

Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will hold joint military drills next week near Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, where the Taliban has made huge military gains and claims to control 90 percent of the country's borders.

Speaking in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe where he met his counterpart Sherali Mirzo, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said Moscow had organised additional supplies of weaponry and equipment to bolster Tajikistan's army.

"We continue to train qualified Tajik military personnel. We prepare them both at our military universities and at the 201st Russian military base" Shoigu said, referring to Moscow's base in the country.

Shoigu, who blamed the worsening security situation on the "hasty" withdrawal of US forces, said Moscow was ready to offer "any necessary help to (our) Tajikistan friends". Afghanistan's government in Kabul has dismissed as a lie the Taliban's claim of near total border control.

But the militants last month seized control of Afghanistan's main Shir Khan Bandar border crossing with Tajikistan, following battles that sent several hundred soldiers from Afghanistan's national army retreating into the ex-Soviet republic.

The Taliban has continued to make gains in the north of Afghanistan. Last week, Tajikistan checked the combat readiness of its armed forces in the biggest such exercise in the country's history amid the Taliban's advance in Afghanistan.

Some 230,000 members of the Central Asian's security forces took part in the exercise and Dushanbe also relocated 20,000 troops to strengthen its force on the border with Afghanistan. A Tajik official from the emergency committee has said Tajikistan was ready to accept 100,000 refugees from Afghanistan.

But Tajik foreign minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin appeared to walk back that pledge at a Tuesday briefing. Muhriddin said Tajikistan was "not yet ready to name the exact number of refugees we can accept", citing the need for anti-coronavirus measures as a potential complication.—AFP

France owes French Polynesia 'a debt' over nuclear tests

PAPEETE: French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday that Paris owed "a debt" to French Polynesia over nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific territory between 1966 and 1996, but stopped short of apologising.

"I accept responsibility and I want truth and transparency together with you," Macron said in a speech to Polynesian officials during his first official trip to the territory, adding that there should be better compensation for victims of the tests.

"The nation owes a debt to French Polynesia. This debt is from having conducted these tests, in particular those between 1966 and 1974. Nobody can claim that they were clean." The legacy of French testing in the territory remains a source of deep resentment and is seen as evidence of racist colonial attitudes that disregarded the lives of locals. The tests were conducted from 1966 to 1996 as France developed nuclear weapons. Officials denied any cover-up of radiation exposure earlier this month 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.

Macron echoed the sentiments in his remarks on Tuesday. "I want to tell you clearly that the military who carried them out did not lie to you. They took the same risks... There were no lies, there were risks that weren't calculated, including

Turkey arrests American behind coup messaging app

ISTANBUL: A Turkish-born American linked to a messaging app used by organisers of a failed coup in 2016 has arrived in Istanbul and turned himself in to the police, state media reported yesterday. David Keynes, also known in Turkey as Alpaslan Demir, holds the copyright to ByLock, an encrypted messaging app that has been banned in Turkey and across parts of the Middle East.

The Turkish government believes the app was used by organisers of a failed coup in 2016 that claimed the lives of some 250 people and was followed by a sweeping political crackdown and

by the military."

"I think it's true that we would not have done the same tests in La Creuse or in Brittany," he said, referring to regions inside mainland France. "We did them here because it was further away, lost in middle of the Pacific," he said.

But Macron said he nonetheless "fully" stood behind France's post-war ambition to acquire nuclear arms, including for the defence of French Polynesia. France conducted its first successful atomic bomb test in 1960, making it the world's fourth nuclear power after the US, the Soviet Union and Britain.

Calls for apology

Ahead of Macron's four-day visit, residents in the sprawling archipelago of more than 100 islands located midway between Mexico and Australia had been hoping that Macron would apologise and announce compensation for radiation victims.

Only 63 Polynesian civilians have 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," Auguste Uebe-Carlson, head of the 193 Association of victims of nuclear tests, said ahead of Macron's visit. "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."

Meeting Macron on Tuesday on the island of Moorea, Lena Lenormand, the vice president of the association, renewed the call. "There are

mass arrests. The Anadolu state news agency said Keynes arrived in Istanbul on June 9 and turned himself in to the police under a "repentance law" that grants more lenient treatment to people who confess to crimes. It was not clear why state media reported Keynes's arrest more than a month after his arrival in Turkey or why he had decided to turn himself in. Anadolu said he was put in pre-trial detention and charged with terror-related offences that could see him jailed for up to 15 years.

Ankara blames the coup attempt on Fethullah Gulen, a US-based Muslim preacher who was an ally-turned-opponent of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Turkish leader responded to the failed putsch by ordering a comprehensive crackdown that officials say saw more than 321,000 people detained.

Most have been released, but the scale of the detentions has had a chilling effect on Turkish pol-



PAPEETE, FRENCH POLYNESIA: France's President Emmanuel Macron (C) walks with French Polynesia's President Edouard Fritch (centre left) and his wife Angeline Lehartel (centre right) during a visit at the presidency on the final day of his visit in Papeete, French Polynesia.—AFP

urgent demands, people who are suffering. We're asking you to own what the state did to these Polynesian people, for an apology and real support," she told Macron.

"We can't help but think that you are at the end of your term, so words are one thing, but afterwards, what will be done concretely?" she told Macron. In response, Macron said he was "committed to changing things" regarding compensation.

"I've heard you, and I've heard what you are asking of me, and you will see my response." In his speech, Macron said that since his election in 2017, there has been progress in compensation claims, but he admitted that it was not enough and said the deadline for filing claims would be extended.—AFP



Photo above shows the ByLock app was used by members behind the failed 2016 coup.

itics, leading to the detention of Erdogan's political opponents and shutdown of independent media. The courts have handed down life sentences to 3,000 people, according to Anadolu, while 4,890 defendants have been convicted over links to the coup bid.—AFP

Picking up pace: Health passes in Europe

PARIS: Health passes are being increasingly adopted by European countries and limit entry to certain public places to those who have been vaccinated, recovered from COVID-19 or tested negative.

Here's an overview:

Denmark and Hungary pioneers

Earlier this year Denmark and Hungary were among the first European countries to introduce health passes, which are usually available on paper or in digital format. In Denmark the pass is still required to enter places such as hairdressers and sports cen-

tres but it will no longer be necessary from Sunday in museums, cinemas and theatres, and from September in bars and restaurants.

In Hungary immunity certificates delivered from the time of the first vaccine shot are required in health establishments and to attend sports and music events, as well as gatherings of more than 500 people.

France and Italy join in

Several countries have followed the Hungarian and Danish examples, including Austria, where a "green pass" has been required since early July to go to restaurants and cultural centres. In Luxembourg a pass is asked for in shops.

In Azerbaijan a health pass has been mandatory since the beginning of June to enter sports centres or attend weddings. In Portugal such a certificate is required to stay in a hotel or play sport. It is also required to eat inside restaurants, but only at weekends in the most hard-hit regions.

France is one of the latest countries to have joined the system. The pass has been mandatory since July 21 in places of leisure and culture such as cinemas and museums which take in more than 50 people. From the beginning of August it will also apply to cafes and restaurants, fairs and trade shows, planes, long distance trains and buses, and medical establishments.

Italy will from August 6 impose a "green pass" to enter closed places like bars and restaurants, but also swimming pools, sporting facilities, museums, cinemas, theatres and theme parks. As in Hungary, the pass will be given from the first dose of vaccine. In Ireland the health pass is for the time being only needed for indoor eating and drinking in restaurants and pubs.

Regional measures

In Germany and Spain the imposition of health passes is a decision taken by the regions. In Spain, the northern region of Galicia recently became the first in the country to introduce the pass to enter bars and

restaurants in the hardest-hit places.

In the Canary Islands a health certificate will be required to go to cinemas, theatres and sports centres in towns where the incidence rate is more than 500 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. In Germany some regions require a vaccination certificate or a negative test to enter hotels, sports halls, cinemas and brothels.

In Russia the Moscow region in June imposed a health pass for restaurants but this was so unpopular it was scrapped three weeks later.

Voluntary in some countries

In Switzerland a health pass is voluntary in many places like bars and restaurants, fairs, theatres, cinemas, museums and swimming pools. The pass is only mandatory to join demonstrations of more than 1,000 people and in enclosed spaces like nightclubs. In Kazakhstan the restaurants and shops which use it have the right to open later and are exempt from restrictions imposed at the weekend.—AFP

International

Taliban tell China Afghanistan will not be base for separatists

Afghans have an important opportunity to stabilise their own country

BEIJING: A top-level Taliban delegation visiting China yesterday assured Beijing the group will not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for plotting against another country.

The delegation is in China for talks with Beijing officials, as the insurgents continue a sweeping offensive across Afghanistan — including areas along their shared border.

Their frontier is just 76 kilometres (47 miles) long — and at a rugged high altitude without a road crossing — but Beijing fears Afghanistan could be used as a staging ground for Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang.

Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naem told AFP those concerns were unfounded.

"The Islamic Emirate assured China that Afghanistan's soil would not be used against any country's security."

"They (China) promised not to interfere in Afghanistan's affairs, but instead help to solve problems and bring peace." Beijing confirmed the thrust of the talks, which were led on the Chinese side by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

But in Kabul Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani urged the international community "to review the narrative of the willingness of the Taliban and their supporters on embracing a political solution."

"In terms of scale, scope and timing, we are facing an invasion that is unprecedented in the last 30 years," he warned in a speech yesterday.

"These are not the Taliban of the 20th century... but the manifestation of the nexus between transnational terrorist networks and transnational criminal organisations."

Analysts say China, whose stated foreign policy position is non-interference in other countries' issues, is uneasy about the religiosity of the Taliban

given their proximity to Muslim majority Xinjiang province.

But the meeting gifts legitimacy to an insurgent group craving international recognition — and a potential diplomatic shield at the UN — to match their military march across the nation.

"Wang Yi pointed out, the Afghan Taliban is a crucial military and political force in Afghanistan," Zhao Lijian, foreign ministry spokesman told reporters in Beijing.

"China has throughout adhered to non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs... Afghanistan belongs to the Afghan people," he said, in stark contrast to the "failure of US policy towards Afghanistan".

"Afghan people have an important opportunity to stabilise and develop their own country."

Sweeping gains

Taliban officials have cranked up their international diplomacy in recent months, seeking global recognition for when they hope to return to power. They have made sweeping advances across Afghanistan since May, when US-led foreign forces began the last stage of a withdrawal due to be completed next month. Beijing hosted a Taliban delegation in 2019, but back-door links with the insurgents existed before, through Pakistan. Communist Party leaders in Beijing and the fundamentalist Taliban have little ideological common ground, but experts feel shared pragmatism could see mutual self-interest trump sensitive differences.

For Beijing, a stable and cooperative administration in Kabul would pave the way for an expansion of its Belt and Road Initiative into Afghanistan and through the Central Asian republics. The Taliban, meanwhile, would consider China a crucial source



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of investment and economic support.

"By getting the Chinese on their side, the Chinese would be able to provide them with diplomatic cover at the Security Council," Australia-based Afghanistan expert Nishank Motwani told AFP.

"It is important to note... when other countries open up their doors and engage with the Taliban it undercuts the legitimacy of the Afghan government and presents the Taliban almost as a government in waiting."

The Taliban's campaign has so far seen them capture scores of districts, border crossings and

encircle several provincial capitals.

Government forces have abandoned some rural districts without a fight, but are digging in to defend provincial capitals even as the insurgents tighten a noose around the cities.

Rights groups have accused the insurgents of committing atrocities in territories under their control, including in the border town of Spin Boldak, where Afghan officials accuse Taliban fighters of killing around 100 civilians. The nine-member Taliban team in China is led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, co-founder of the hardline movement. —AFP

China court jails billionaire Sun Dawu for 18 years

BEIJING: A Chinese court sentenced agricultural tycoon Sun Dawu to 18 years in jail yesterday for a catalogue of crimes including "provoking trouble" after the outspoken billionaire and grassroots rights supporter was tried in secret.

The court in Gaobeidian near Beijing said Sun was found guilty of crimes including "gathering a crowd to attack state organs," "obstructing government administration" and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a catch-all term often used against dissidents.

He was detained by police in November along with 20 relatives and business associates after his firm was embroiled in a land dispute with a state-owned competitor. The charismatic Sun built one of China's biggest private agriculture companies with his wife from a few chickens and pigs in the 1980s.

He has also been a vocal champion of rural reforms and a whistleblower during a devastating swine fever outbreak in 2019, posting photos of dead pigs online after local officials were slow to respond to the disease.

Sun was also fined 3.11 million yuan (\$475,000) by the court yesterday. The hearing began at Gaobeidian People's Court in northern Hebei province on July 15, according to his lawyers, who said in a statement that the secrecy of the trial

"violated legal guidelines and did not protect the defendant's litigation rights."

Sun had previously been sentenced to prison for "illegal fundraising" in 2003, but this was overturned after a massive outpouring of support from human rights defenders and the public. Video footage shared by his lawyers on Tuesday showed tight security outside the courtroom, with convoys of police vehicles and plainclothes officers. Sun's legal team said the trial was "not a normal legal trial," pointing to marathon hearings lasting over 12 hours as well as the complex charges involved.

'Misery beyond words'

Prosecutors alleged the Dawu Group deceived its employees, "seriously interfered with local orderly administrative management" and "endangered national grassroots political stability", according to a court witness account shared by his legal team.

In response, Sun said the Dawu Group was "wholly socialist, everyone is on the road to common prosperity, and Dawu employees live very well," according to the account. Sun during the trial described going on hunger strike and experiencing "misery beyond words" during his time in detention, according to the account.

The Dawu Group employed over 9,000 people before Sun's assets were seized by the state and employees forced out of work after Sun's detention in November. The businessman has for decades been a vocal critic of China's rural policies and has demanded greater freedom for farmers to organise to protect their economic interests.

He ran a website in the early 2000s that includ-

ed criticism of state-owned banks, which he accused of neglecting rural investment while funneling rural residents' savings toward urban projects. His farms were badly affected by the 2019 African swine fever outbreak, which decimated pig herds nationwide.

He criticised the Hebei local government for attempting to cover up the scale of the outbreak and posted pictures of thousands of dead pigs online-quickly forcing it to respond. China has cracked down on high-profile business figures critical of the Communist Party's rule in recent years, with former property developer chairman Ren Zhiqiang also jailed for 18 years last year after penning an essay lambasting President Xi Jinping's handling of COVID-19. —AFP



HEBEI: File photo shows Chinese billionaire Sun Dawu posing at a feed warehouse in Hebei outside Beijing. —AFP

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KARACHI: Security officials examine a vehicle that was carrying Chinese nationals in Pakistan's port city of Karachi yesterday, as at least one Chinese national was wounded in a gun attack in the southern Pakistani megacity of Karachi, police said, in the latest assault targeting Chinese citizens in the country. —AFP

siders. In April a suicide blast at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in southwest Balochistan province killed four people and wounded dozens. The ambassador was unhurt. —AFP

Hong Kong, the report said. Chang, 63, was once a frontrunner to become chief of the general staff but he was eventually assigned to head the National Defence University. The Mirror Media report said the unnamed Hong Konger who allegedly attempted to recruit Chang had been developing a spy network under the disguise of doing business since Tsai's predecessor Ma Ying-jeou, who was president between 2008 and 2016.

He was linked to China's Central Military Commission and had successfully recruited several retired Taiwanese officers, the outlet added, citing unnamed sources. Chang has denied any wrongdoing and claimed he strictly followed all confidentiality requirements during meetings with friends, Taiwan's official Central News Agency said. —AFP

India skips key London climate meet

NEW DELHI: India, the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, skipped a key climate meeting of more than 50 countries, the environment ministry said yesterday, citing technical and other difficulties. The two-day conference in London was the first face-to-face talks among governments in more than 18 months and offered a chance of compromise ahead of the pivotal COP26 climate summit in November.

The talks on Sunday and Monday followed a G20 meeting last week in Naples where the leaders failed to reach a consensus, with India, a big player in climate negotiations, resisting a timeline to phase out coal power generation. Other countries such as Russia, China and Turkey also resisted such efforts.

The London meeting also ended without an agreement to phase out the polluting fossil fuel, according to Britain's COP26 president, Alok Sharma. Gaurav Khare, spokesman of India's environment ministry, said the government had decided against attending the London conference as it had already made its views known at the G20 in Naples.

"We attended the G20 ministerial and made our stand clear. The UK Climate ministerial was right after that," Khare said in a statement. "It was being held in the middle of the parliament session (in India) so it was decided that this time we cannot be present."

Khare also said India wanted to participate virtually but couldn't "because of various technical issues". The London event covered the goal of keeping to the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise limit, exploring topics such as climate finance on which India has been vocal. —AFP

Chinese wounded in gun attack in Karachi

KARACHI: At least one Chinese national was wounded in a gun attack in the southern Pakistani megacity of Karachi yesterday, police said, in the latest assault targeting Chinese citizens in the country.

Local police said two masked assailants riding on a motorbike fired at a car carrying two Chinese nationals, who were working at a nearby factory in the city. One of the passengers sustained an injury to his arm in that attack.

"He is stable as fortunately he was not hit on any vital part of his body," Javed Akbar Riaz, the police chief of Karachi's southern district, told AFP. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian also confirmed the incident. "China is following this matter closely and the relevant case is still under investigation," said Zhao.

"This incident is an isolated case. We are fully

Taiwan probing ex-minister over China spy claims

TAIPEI: Taiwanese authorities are investigating whether a former deputy defence minister may have been recruited by a Chinese spying network, officials and media reports said yesterday. Chang Che-ping, in office from July 2019 to June 2021, was being probed for allegedly having multiple contacts with a Chinese spy organisation over meals, online news website Mirror Media reported citing sources, in what could be the island's highest level espionage case yet.

Taiwan and China have been spying on each other since the Nationalists fled to the island to set up a rival government in 1949, having lost the civil war on the mainland to the communists. Beijing has ramped up pressure since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, as she rejects its stance that the self-ruled, democratic island is part of China's territory.

When asked to comment on the report yesterday, Taipei district prosecutor's office confirmed an investigation was underway but had not concluded. The office declined to elaborate further. Mirror Media said Chang was being probed for meeting privately with a Hong Konger in charge of a spying group and received gifts from that person while he was chief of the Air Force Combatant Command.

His wife also accepted a paid-for trip to

Rights groups press to free S Lanka lawyer

COLOMBO: International calls mounted yesterday for the release of a Sri Lankan human rights lawyer and the repeal of anti-terror laws used to detain him for 15 months. Eleven rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists urged Sri Lanka to free Hejaaz Hizbullah who has been held since April last year. Hizbullah's case has also been highlighted by the UN Human Rights Council and the European parliament this year. "Hizbullah is one of many people detained for inordinate lengths of time without due process under Sri Lanka's draconian counter-terrorism laws," the rights groups said in a statement.

They called for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act which allows for the prolonged detention of suspects without judicial review. "We are deeply concerned by Sri Lanka's continuing use of the PTA to enable arbitrary detention, despite commitments made to repeal the act," the statement said. Dozens of people are held under the act. Hizbullah was a vocal advocate of minority Muslim rights and also successfully challenged a constitutional coup that briefly brought former president Mahinda Rajapaksa to power in October 2018. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2021

Gulf Bank's net profit grew by 40% in 1H 2021 compared to 1H 2020

Bank sustains its strong performance in 2021: Boodai

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. ("The Bank") announced its financial results for the first half ending 30 June 2021. The bank recorded a net profit of KD 16.5 million, an increase of KD 4.8 million or 40 percent compared to the first half of 2020 net profit of KD 11.8 million. The bank recorded an operating profit of KD 43.1 million, and took provision of KD 25.8 million, to reach the net profit of KD 16.5 million.

The improvement in net profit was mainly driven by a 6.5 percent or KD 4.0 million increase in net interest income mainly due to a decline in interest expense. Compared with 31st December 2020, total assets increased by 2.9 percent to KD 6.3 billion, gross loans and advances to customers climbed by 4.1 percent to KD 4.6 billion, and shareholders' equity increased by 0.8 percent to reach KD 643 million.

The bank's regulatory capital ratios are at a strong level with the Tier 1 ratio reaching 14.30 percent and was 480 basis points above the regulatory minimum of 9.5 percent. While the Capital Adequacy Ratio of 16.59 percent was 509 basis points above the regulatory minimum of 11.5 percent.

Commenting on the results, Gulf Bank's Chairman, Jassim Mustafa Boodai, said: "I am pleased to announce that Gulf Bank has sustained its strong performance in 2021, recording KD 16.5 million in net profit during our first half of the year. These results are a testament to Gulf Bank's sound policies, prudent management practices, as well as strategy built on maximizing value for our shareholders. Moving forward, we remain focused on our key pillars of:

- promoting corporate banking segment growth by increasing our product offerings and focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises;
- increasing our retail banking market share by

targeting the youth and the affluent client segments;

- and concluding our Bank's digital transformation process to improve our efficiency and competitiveness.

Strong capital

On the bank's regulatory capital position and recent bond issuance, Gulf Bank's CEO, Tony Daher, commented: "Despite the challenges that we continue to face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gulf Bank has successfully completed the redemption of its existing KD 100 million subordinated Tier 2 bonds, and the issuance of new KD 50 million Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds which was oversubscribed. This issuance optimizes the bank's capital adequacy, in compliance with Basel III frameworks, and supports our overall investment plans towards making Gulf Bank the leading Bank of the Future."

Partnership with Murex

As part of Gulf Bank's ongoing digital transformation plan, Gulf Bank recently announced the successful launch of its new MX.3 system in partnership with Murex for the development and automation of the Bank's capital markets and treasury platforms. The new system is provided by Murex, the leading global financial technology firm providing new treasury and risk management solutions that cater to today's financial markets.

Commenting on the launch of the Murex platform, Daher said: "We are very happy to launch our new treasury system after an 18-month partnership with Murex. The integrated solutions will offer a robust technological infrastructure that meets the evolving requirements of today's customers and provide an even more seamless workflow and better risk man-

agement. Moreover, the launch of the new treasury system seeks to make the most of our ongoing digital transformation, transforming Gulf Bank into a fully integrated digital bank."

Gulf Bank's aspiration is to be the leading Bank of the Future, where the Bank is spearheading its digital transformation with tech-driven solutions, fostering a performance-driven culture based on meritocracy and engagement, and adopting world-class risk management practices.

Innovative products

As part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing its product offering, Gulf Bank also launched its new MOUJ Cashback Prepaid card, the first card of its kind in the Middle East to combine both cashback and pre-paid features to its users, offering discounts at more than 850 outlets across Kuwait.

In addition, Gulf Bank earlier this year launched the new MasterCard Rose Gold credit card targeting women, with tailored benefits and exclusive discounts designed to reward the female customers.

Raising awareness with Diraya

With the objective of customer protection, Gulf Bank continues to support the Diraya campaign, an awareness campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association. Gulf Bank's efforts is a result of the Bank's commitment to educate customers, raise their awareness about their banking rights, as well as cybersecurity, and the overall role of the banking industry in developing the economy.

"A" credit ratings

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms



Jassim Mustafa Boodai

Tony Daher

of its creditworthiness and financial strength internationally, rated "A" by three leading credit rating agencies. Moody's Investors Service maintained the Long-Term Deposits Rating of "A3" with a "Stable" outlook. Fitch Ratings affirmed the bank's Long-term Issuer Default Rating of "A+" with a "Negative" outlook. Capital Intelligence affirmed Gulf Bank's Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of "A+" with a "Stable" outlook.

Thanks and appreciation

Boodai concluded his remarks by stating: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to extend our appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority for their dedicated efforts in supporting and promoting Kuwait's banking sector. I would also like to thank our shareholders, customers, and Board of Directors for their valuable contributions, with a special note of appreciation to our team members for their loyalty and dedication."

'Metaverse': The next Internet revolution?

PARIS: Imagine a world where you could sit on the same couch as a friend who lives thousands of miles away, or conjure up a virtual version of your workplace while at the beach. Welcome to the metaverse: a vision of the future that sounds fantastical, but which tech titans like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg are betting on as the next great leap in the evolution of the Internet.

The metaverse is, in fact, the stuff of science-fiction: the term was coined by Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel "Snow Crash", in which people don virtual reality headsets to interact inside a game-like digital world. The book has long enjoyed cult status among Silicon Valley entrepreneurs-but in recent months the metaverse has become one of the tech sector's hottest buzzwords, with companies pouring millions of dollars into its development.

Facebook fuelled the excitement further Monday by announcing the creation of a new team to work on Zuckerberg's vision of the metaverse. "This is going to be a really big part of the next chapter for the technology industry," Zuckerberg told tech website The Verge last week. Over the next five years, he predicted, Facebook would transition from "primarily being a social media company to being a metaverse company".

As with many tech buzzwords, the definition of the metaverse depends on whom you ask. But broadly, it involves blending the physical world with the digital one. With the help of augmented reality glasses, it might allow you to see information whizz before your eyes as you walk around a city, from traffic and pollution updates to local history.

But metaverse enthusiasts are dreaming of a future in which the idea could be extended much further, allowing us to be transported to digital settings that feel real, such as a nightclub or a mountaintop.

As workers have grown weary of video-confer-



Tech titans like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg are betting on metaverse as the next great leap in the evolution of the Internet.

ences during the pandemic, Zuckerberg is particularly excited about the idea that co-workers could be brought together in a virtual room that feels like they are face-to-face.

Digital casinos and Gucci handbags

Games in which players enter immersive digital worlds offer a glimpse into what the metaverse could eventually look like, blurring virtual entertainment with the real-world economy. As far back as the early 2000s, the game Second Life allowed people to create digital avatars that could interact and shop with real money.

More recently, plots of land in Decentraland—a virtual world where visitors can watch concerts, visit art galleries, and gamble in casinos—have sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars in MANA, a cryptocurrency. The hugely popular video game Fortnite has also expanded into other forms of entertainment, with 12.3 million people logging in to watch rapper Travis Scott perform last year. Fortnite's owners Epic Games said in April that \$1 billion of funding raised recently would be used to support its "vision for the metaverse".

And on Roblox, a gaming platform popular with children, a digital version of a Gucci bag sold in May for more than \$4,100 — more than the physical version would have cost. Cathy Hackl, a tech consultant who advises companies on the metaverse, said the next generation was more comfortable with the idea

national and economic security," the White House said. The administration is proposing to increase the 55 percent US-content requirement in the Buy American Act for supplies to the federal government to 60 percent in the short term and gradually to 75 percent.

The White House said the move, which applies to \$600 billion in annual government spending, would boost small- and medium-sized manufacturers around the country. The new initiative also offers new pricing schemes for government procurement that would favor domestic manufacturers for a slate of products deemed crucial to national security.

"As the pandemic made clear, supply chain disruptions can impact the health, safety and livelihoods of Americans — leaving us without access to critical goods during a crisis," the White House said in a statement. To promote the initiative Biden will speak Wednesday afternoon at a factory producing Mack trucks, an iconic US brand of heavy transport and industrial vehicles, in Pennsylvania.

Scott Paul, president of the manufacturers' group Alliance for American Manufacturing, applauded Biden's proposed legislation. "For too long, the law has been weakened by loopholes, waivers, tax oversight



of attaching real meaning to virtual experiences and objects. "My first concert was in a stadium. My son's first concert was (American rapper) Lil Nas X on Roblox. Just because it happened in Roblox, it didn't make it less real for him," she said.

Exhilarating, or dystopian?

Hackl rejects the dystopian vision presented in "Snow Crash" of a virtual world where people go to escape the horrors of reality, an idea that emerged again two decades later in the novel and Steven Spielberg movie "Ready Player One". Nor does she think the metaverse would necessarily involve everyone shutting out their neighbors with virtual reality headsets around the clock.

Facebook has invested heavily in technology that allows people to feel like they are physically somewhere else, such as its Portal video-calling devices, Oculus headsets and its Horizon virtual reality platform. But even Zuckerberg has admitted that existing virtual reality headsets are "a bit clunky", requiring far greater development for the kind of experiences he has described.

Wedbush tech analyst Michael Pachter said it was hard to predict whether Facebook could truly transform into a "metaverse company" in five years. "But they certainly have a huge advantage of having one billion people log on every day," he said. "If they offer entertainment options, it's likely they will succeed." —AFP



MCLEAN, US: US President Joe Biden leaves after addressing the Intelligence Community workforce and its leadership while on a tour at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in McLean, Virginia, Tuesday. —AFP

and overly permissive rules that allowed too many foreign goods to be purchased with tax dollars," he said in a statement. "That meant lost opportunities for American manufacturers — and lost jobs for American workers," Paul said. —AFP

Apple profit nearly doubles as lockdowns eased

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple said Tuesday its profit in the just-ended quarter nearly doubled amid improving consumer spending and a "growing sense of optimism" as pandemic lockdowns eased.

The California tech giant's profit rose to \$21.7 billion on growth in iPhone sales and its increasingly important digital services. Revenue surged 36 percent from a year ago to \$81.4 billion, the best ever for the tech titan's fiscal third quarter. "This quarter saw a growing sense of optimism for consumers in the United States and around the world, driving renewed hope for a better future," chief executive Tim Cook told a conference call.

"We are especially humbled that our technology has continued to play a key role in keeping our customers connected," Cook said an easing of pandemic lockdowns helped boost consumer spending in many parts of the world, with Apple benefiting from that.

He maintained that Apple can continue to grow as consumers seek new devices for superfast 5G wireless networks. "We're only in the early innings of 5G, but already its incredible performance and speed have made a significant impact on how people can get the most out of our technology," he said.

"Customers love iPhone 12 for its superfast 5G speeds." Apple shares were little changed in after-market trading following the results, which were stronger than most forecasts. Revenue from iPhone sales jumped some 50 percent and posted increases for its services such as digital payments, music, streaming television and gaming. The results come with Apple and other tech giants facing heightened pressure from antitrust enforcers around the world for their dominance of key economic sectors, which has increased during the pandemic.

Scott Kessler of the research firm Third Bridge said Apple was able to keep its momentum despite the global shortage of semiconductors, and sustained its growth in services, which have been important in diversifying its revenue stream. The chip shortage "didn't seem to impact iPhone sales, which rose 50 percent," Kessler said in a research note. "A major theme for the company over the last couple of years has been the emergence of services offerings and related revenues. Services accounted for more than 20 percent of revenues and have been a source of consistent growth." Daniel Ives at Wedbush Securities said Apple delivered stronger-than-expected results which should help boost share prices. —AFP



NEW YORK: People walk past an Apple retail store in New York City. —AFP

Biden steps up 'Buy American' program

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden announced a plan yesterday to strengthen "Buy American" policies, proposing to increase the US-made content in hundreds of billions of dollars of government purchases.

The White House said it was proposing legislation to update the 1933 "Buy American Act" to close loopholes and pressure businesses that supply the government to add more US-made inputs into their supply chains. The move comes as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in global supply chains that have left US markets short of critical products and materials, including semiconductors, building materials and toilet paper.

Biden's new proposal "would increase US content in the products the federal government buys and support the domestic production of products critical to our

Business

Burgan Bank reports solid results with a 36% revenues growth in Q2

Operating profit increased by 67% Y-o-Y to KD 39.9m in Q2 2021

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank K.P.S.C. announced its financial results for the second quarter ending on 30th June 2021. Burgan has generated revenues of KD 64.2 million in Q2 2021 as compared to KD 47.2 million in Q2 2020, an impressive increase of 36 percent Y-o-Y. The strong revenue growth was driven by higher Non-Interest Income, which increased from KD 14.7 million in Q2 2020 to KD 28.8 million in Q2 2021. Burgan's net interest income also grew to KD 35.4 million in Q2 2021 (vs KD 32.5 million in Q2 2020), a 9 percent Y-o-Y increase. The Net Interest Margins improved by 30 Basis Points Y-o-Y to reach 2.4 percent.

The operating profit increased by 67 percent Y-o-Y to KD 39.9 million in Q2 2021. Provisions continued to be high at KD 18.6 million in Q2 2021. Burgan's net income increased from KD 5.5 million in Q2 2020 to KD 19.0 million in Q2 2021, growing by 244 percent Y-o-Y. Burgan's Asset Quality also improved in Q2 2021, with the nonperforming loan ratio declining by 30 Basis Points Y-o-Y to reach 4.5 percent. The NPL Coverage Ratio improved from 186 percent in Q2 2020 to 193 percent in Q2 2021.

Burgan's Capital Ratios for Q2 2021 remained well above the required regulatory ratios. The Bank's

Capital Adequacy Ratio stood at 16.5 percent, as compared to the regulatory minimum ratio of 11.5 percent. Burgan's liquidity position remained extremely strong as reflected by 133.4 percent of Liquidity Coverage ratio (vs the regulatory minimum of 80 percent) and 102.4 percent of the Net Stable Funding ratio (vs the regulatory minimum of 80 percent).

Burgan's H1 2021 results were also robust compared to the first half of last year. H1 2021 Revenue increased by 4 percent Y-o-Y to KD 112.0 million compared to 107.6 million in H1'20. Burgan's Operating Expenses decreased by 4 percent Y-o-Y to KD 44.9 million in H1 2021, driven by strong cost optimization efforts across Burgan Bank Group. Provision levels were higher at KD 38.8mn in H1'21 vs KD 32.7 million in H1 2020. As a result, the bank's Net Income increased by 6 percent Y-o-Y to KD 24.0 million vs KD 22.7 million in H1 2020.

Commenting on the results, Majed Essa Al-Ajeel, Chairman of Burgan Bank Group, said "We remain very optimistic to reach community immunity as the vaccination campaign accelerates, which should lead to more opportunities to improve performance and enhance customer satisfaction. Maintaining growth



Majed Essa Al-Ajeel

Masoud M J Hayat

while ensuring sustainability across our financial operations is imperative to consolidate our position as a major player in Kuwait. Our performance in Q2 2021 was driven by stronger business momentum, leading to increased profits. This was achieved due to the support of our shareholders, the loyalty of our customers, and the dedication of the management team and our employees to deliver outstanding results."

Masoud M J Hayat, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of Burgan Bank Group, noted "Burgan Bank continued

to drive its digitization strategy by adding market-leading features to its online platform, further strengthened its cyber threat mitigation mechanisms, as well as launched Burgani App, the HR mobile application designed to automate HR processes. The Bank continues to invest in developing its employees and held the Design Thinking and Innovation Workshop in collaboration with The American University of Kuwait as well as launched the Virtual Holistic Banker Program aimed at preparing the bank's professionals for future senior roles. Additionally, Burgan Bank continued to support Diraya campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait to increase public awareness of banking and credit operations."

The consolidated financials encompass the results of the Group's operations in Kuwait, and its share of results from its subsidiaries, Burgan Bank Turkey, Gulf Bank Algeria, Bank of Baghdad and Tunis International Bank. Through this regional reach, Burgan Bank has one of the largest regional branch networks with 162 branches across Kuwait, Turkey, Algeria, Iraq, Tunisia, Lebanon and a representative office in the United Arab Emirates.



Jason Jiang with the media persons

Huawei hosts Kuwait media to introduce latest products

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group organized a press conference on Tuesday at its headquarters in Al-Hamra Tower, to announce and introduce the latest products that it will offer to the Kuwaiti market. Many prints, visual and audio media in Kuwait participated in the conference, in the presence of Jason Jiang, General Manager of "Huawei" Consumer Business Group in Kuwait.

During this occasion Jason Jiang, General Manager of Huawei Consumer Business Group in Kuwait, said: "Today marks the most important launch event this year as we are about to unveil a new range of "Super Device & Smart Office" Experience Products in Kuwait." He added: "Through this new range of Super Device & Smart Office products, Huawei is giving consumers in the Kuwait access to a seamless and truly intelligent experience across multiple devices in all different types of scenarios. The Super Device new products range is just another step in our efforts to deliver the best possible future oriented user experience with a forward-looking approach."

Super Device products - which bring futuristic ways to seamlessly connect multiple devices and takes how you work and get entertained to a whole new level, it includes the all-new Huawei MateBook D15 laptop, the company's first standalone Huawei MateView display and the new Huawei MatePad II tablet, which will be launched in the Kuwaiti market on August 02, 2021, and the pre order on 27 July 2021.

A new "Smart Office" experience brings a productivity hub that breaks through boundaries for maximum creativity and efficiency. Super device connectivity with and without wires, along with Huawei MateView, Huawei MateBook D15 and Huawei MateBook exemplifies full integration suitable for our busy lifestyles.

Supported by the distributed data management and task scheduling capabilities of HarmonyOS, the tablet, laptop and smart monitor can work together seamlessly to double our productivity and creativity in different scenarios, whether you are in the office or working from home. This is done by Huawei MateView's wireless projection capability along with Mouse and keyboard control. The advantage of the new "Smart Office" experience is the easy swapping

of wireless and wired connections sharing the screen, cross-device file dragging and dropping, delivering a more efficient and collaborative multi-device experience. This allows us easily to switch between work mode, and personal mode.



Huawei honored Kuwait Times for its support during the event

Also, Huawei offers 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 cancellation and device management. Mr. Jason Jiang, General Manager of Huawei Consumer Business Group in Kuwait, added: "We at Huawei promise to continue providing everything new and the best for consumers, starting from smart technology to smart products to provide new communication methods with a deeper understanding of consumers' needs."

Jason concluded the conference by saying: "I would like to thank all the media present today that have supported us over the past years and continue to support us, your support for us is a constant wheel and we look forward to continued cooperation in the coming years." Huawei Consumer Business Group also presented awards to all the media members in recognition of their continuous efforts to support Huawei over the previous years and the current year 2021.



KUWAIT: Jason Jiang holds a press conference on Tuesday at Huawei Consumer Business Group headquarters in Al-Hamra Tower, to announce and introduce the latest products that it will offer to the Kuwaiti market.

Sophos acquires Braintrace

MUSCAT: Sophos, a global leader in next-generation cybersecurity, yesterday announced that it has acquired Braintrace, further enhancing Sophos' Adaptive Cybersecurity Ecosystem with Braintrace's proprietary Network Detection and Response (NDR) technology. Braintrace's NDR provides deep visibility into network traffic patterns, including encrypted traffic, without the need for Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) decryption. Located in Salt Lake City, Utah, Braintrace launched in 2016 and is privately held.

As part of the acquisition, Braintrace's developers, data scientists and security analysts have joined Sophos' global Managed Threat Response (MTR) and Rapid Response teams. Sophos' MTR and Rapid Response services business has expanded rapidly, establishing Sophos as one of the largest and fastest-growing MDR providers in the world, with more than 5,000 active customers.

Braintrace's NDR technology will support Sophos' MTR and Rapid Response analysts and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) customers through integration into the Adaptive Cybersecurity Ecosystem, which underpins all Sophos products and services. The Braintrace technology will also serve as the launchpad to collect and forward third-party event data from firewalls, proxies, virtual private networks (VPNs), and other sources. These additional layers of visibility and event ingestion will significantly improve threat detection, threat hunting and response to suspicious activity.

"You can't protect what you don't know is there, and businesses of all sizes often miscalculate their assets and attack surface, both on-premises and in the cloud. Attackers take advantage of this, often going after weakly protected assets as a means of initial access. Defenders benefit from an 'air traffic control system' that sees all network activity, reveals unknown and unprotected assets, and exposes evasive malware more reliably than Intrusion Protection Systems (IPS)," said Joe Levy, chief technology officer, Sophos. "We're particularly excited that Braintrace built this technology specifically to provide better security outcomes to their Managed Detection and Response (MDR) customers. It's hard to beat the effectiveness of solutions built by teams of skilled practitioners and developers to solve real world cybersecurity problems."

Sophos will deploy Braintrace's NDR technology as a virtual machine, fed from traditional observability points



Joe Levy

such as a Switched Port Analyzer (SPAN) port or a network Test Access Point (TAP) to inspect both north-south traffic at boundaries or east-west traffic within networks. These deployments help discover threats inside any type of network, including those that remain encrypted, serving as a complement to the decryption capabilities of Sophos Firewall. The technology's

packet and flow engine feeds a variety of machine learning models trained to detect suspicious or malicious network patterns, such as connections to Command and Control (C2) servers, lateral movement and communications with suspicious domains. Since Braintrace built its NDR technology specifically for predictive, passive monitoring, its engine also provides intelligent network packet capture that IT security administrators and threat hunters can use as supporting evidence during investigations. The novel NDR analysis and prediction technique is patent pending.

According to Gartner, "compared with traditional approaches, where malicious behavior is defined ahead of time in the form of prebuilt signatures and detection engines inspecting traffic looking for matches, NDR takes a different approach. Instead of only inspecting traffic against a list of known bad payloads or behaviors, NDR also focuses on looking for unknown patterns in the network traffic, calculating a probability as to whether that anomaly is malicious." Gartner further notes that, "the machine learning algorithms that are at the core of many NDR products help to detect anomalous traffic that is often missed by other detection techniques. The optional automated response capabilities help to offload some of the workload for incident responders. The threat hunting functionality provides valuable tools for incident responders."

"NDR is critical to successful threat hunting. Braintrace's competitive differentiation is its unique NDR technology that our MDR analysts leveraged for finding, interrupting and remediating cyberattacks," said Bret Laughlin, CEO and co-founder of Braintrace. "With our own NDR technology, the team responds faster and more accurately because of the real-time, automated visibility and threat verification they have into encrypted traffic. We built Braintrace's NDR technology from the ground up for detection and now, with Sophos, it will fit into a complete system to provide cross-product detection and response across a multi-vendor ecosystem."



DULLES, US: In this file photo, a United Airlines Boeing 737 plane is seen at the gate at Washington's Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Virginia. — AFP

Boeing reports surprise profit, to cut fewer jobs

NEW YORK: Boeing landed its first quarterly profit since 2019 due to a recovering commercial aviation market that will enable the company to cut fewer jobs than initially planned, according to results released yesterday. The aviation giant reported a second-quarter profit of \$587 million, compared with a loss of \$2.4 billion in the same three months of 2020 at the height of the pandemic, sending Boeing's shares surging. The results, which surprised analysts who had projected another loss, marked the company's first positive earnings since the third quarter of 2019 before coronavirus shuttered the economy. It comes as commercial airlines are pivoting to meet surging travel demand as COVID-19 vaccines have become available.

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said the company will keep its workforce at the current

140,000, rather than cutting to 130,000 as announced earlier in the pandemic. He cited "encouraging" industry recovery trends in a letter to employees.

"We're now seeing more stability in our staffing levels, as the commercial market recovery accelerates, our defense and government services business targets growth opportunities and we increase investments to further strengthen engineering, and drive quality and stability in our production system," Calhoun said. Boeing's revenues rose to \$17 billion, up 44 percent from a year earlier, and the company saw higher operating earnings in defense, space and security. It also saw a much smaller quarterly loss in its commercial plane division, thanks largely to the resumption of deliveries of the 737 MAX that were suspended after the 20-month grounding following two fatal crashes. Boeing also swung to a profit in its global services business after the division had a loss last year as a result of COVID-19 costs.

Despite the strong results, Boeing still faces questions over its operations, most recently with the 787 Dreamliner plane. Boeing has halted deliveries of the jets and lowered production levels while it does additional reworking on the plane. Shares jumped 5.4 percent to \$234.30 in pre-market trading. —AFP

Business

Al-Sagar: We are more confident of gradual recovery seen year-to-date

NBK Group CEO on the sidelines of analyst conference for 1H 2021

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sagar, the CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Group, said: "Our profitability in 1H 2021 was mainly driven by increased business volumes, growth in core banking fees as well as an improvement in cost of risk."

On the sidelines of the Analyst Conference for the results of 1H 2021, Al-Sagar added: "NBK posted a net

profit of KD 160.8 million during the first half of 2021, growing by almost 45 percent year-on-year. For the three months ending 30 June 2021, we reported a net profit of KD 76.5 million; a year-on-year increase of 129 percent."

operations in various markets. In recent years, we have expanded our sustainability disclosures and have been issuing a detailed sustainability report since 2017. We are more committed than ever before to integrating impactful ESG strategies across all aspects of our business, Al-Sagar noted. The bank expects to announce initiatives being taken to better measure ESG impacts, with the highest priorities focused on assessing direct and indirect environmental impact, as climate change risks continue to emerge.

Sustainability

NBK Group CEO mentioned that ESG generally is becoming a top priority across the Group and for its



Isam Al-Sagar

- We are committed to embed ESG strategies in the heart of our business
- S&P's affirmation of our ratings despite the downgrade of Kuwait's ratings proves our strong banking franchise
- We are making rapid steps in strengthening our digital excellence and leadership in digital banking
- NBK has an unwavering commitment to support the Kuwaiti economy and the business sector for rapid recovery from the pandemic
- We proved resilient in defending and growing our margins by efficiently managing cost of funds
- The mortgage law will help meet the growing residential housing demand in Kuwait
- We are working on initiatives to measure and assess the environmental impact as climate change risks continue to emerge

profit of KD 160.8 million during the first half of 2021, growing by almost 45 percent year-on-year. For the three months ending 30 June 2021, we reported a net profit of KD 76.5 million; a year-on-year increase of 129 percent."

Although the low interest rate environment continues to post some challenges, the bank proved resilient in defending and growing its margins through efficiently managing cost of funds, Al-Sagar noted. Al-Sagar emphasized that NBK Group's strategy remains focused on the diversity of its operations, with various business segments making solid contributions to bottom line. Our scope to increase digitalization has achieved further success in delivering efficiencies within the organization and improving the convenience and quality of our products and services to customers.

"We continue to focus on accelerating our drive towards digital excellence as we look forward to becoming the leader in digital banking," he added. Al-Sagar pointed out that NBK remains committed to supporting the economy of Kuwait, its businesses, citi-

zens, and residents. By delivering on our social as well as economic responsibilities to the country, we are helping to build a stronger future for all.

Credit ratings

On the recent S&P Kuwait's sovereign rating and its impact on the bank's operations, Al-Sagar said that we know that Kuwait's ratings have been on a negative outlook by S&P for some time and for the same obvious reasons that we all know, most importantly the lack of reforms and lack of funding strategy for politically driven reasons. Usually, there is a direct impact on the bank's ratings from any sovereign rating action. However, Al-Sagar noted that all rating agencies have

clearly stated in their comments, the banking sector in Kuwait is very strong and enjoys very comforting levels of profitability, liquidity, capitalization and asset quality. Although our rating outlook was changed to negative following the action taken on Kuwait's ratings but the ratings themselves were affirmed confirming our solid fundamentals and accordingly we do not expect any impact on our operations, he added.

Mortgage law

On the latest updates about mortgage law, Al-Sagar mentioned that there is a pressing need for this law, as the existing housing finance mechanism by Kuwait Credit Bank will hinder the efforts to resolve the growing residential housing demand, especially considering the young population of Kuwait.

If a mortgage law is passed, the banks will benefit, as they will offer a new product that is expected to have large demand in the Kuwaiti market similar to what we have seen in other GCC countries, he added. Regarding the increase in NPLs in the second quarter, Al-Sagar highlighted that this increase is the result of the bank's decision to take legal proceedings against a group of clients. This is a normal activity that the bank undertakes to maintain the strength of its legal and financial position against different exposures.

On his part, Sujit Ronghe, Acting Group CFO said that the increase of the bank's net profit by 44.7 percent reflects a solid recovery by the Group, demonstrated by continued growth in business volumes, increased operating surplus and lower impairment losses and credit provisions.

Ronghe added that the first half of 2021 saw continued recovery and gradual improvement in underlying operating drivers, as well as a healthy balance sheet, comfortable liquidity levels and a solid capital base.

Loan growth

Ronghe pointed out that loan growth during the first half was very strong at 5.7 percent, almost a KD 1 billion on Dec-2020, mainly driven by consumer lending and corporate in Kuwait, international banking which contributed significantly to the growth and of

course Boubyan Bank, which continued its pattern of strong growth quarter-on-quarter and year-on-year.

We expect the growth to continue in the coming 6 months, supported by a large pipeline of loans within international locations and at Boubyan, as well as on the consumer side. We may also witness growth on the consumer side as well. We are quite bullish with on the continuation of growth in loans at mid to high single digit for the full year 2021, he added.



On the funding cost side, Ronghe indicated that NBK had a major benefit since 1Q 2021, as the funding cost was at 0.79 percent, expecting funding cost to remain more or less stable or there could be small improvement. A large part of improvement is dependent on the continuation of CASA deposits and how long the benefit from these deposits would continue.

Ronghe noted that the cost of risk in 1H 2021 was lower than the first half of last year and also for the full year of 2020, and it is seeing a gradual reduction.

"We expect the cost of risk for 2021 to be lower than that of 2020. At the same time, the bank continues to prudently keep provisions as necessary to reflect current uncertainties given that we are not out of the COVID pandemic. That said, we expect cost of risk for 2021 to be lower than last year, but it is difficult to quantify at this point of time," he added.



LONDON: Pedestrians walk past a branch of British bank Barclays in central London yesterday. — AFP

Barclays reports surging profit in first half

LONDON: British bank Barclays said yesterday that first-half net profits surged on lower-than-expected credit losses, as the global economy shows signs of recovery from the pandemic.

Profit after tax soared to £3.8 billion (\$5.3 billion, 4.5 billion euros) in the six months to the end of June, compared with £695 million for the same period of 2020, Barclays said in a results statement.

The lender's performance was boosted after it released credit loss provisions of £700 million. That compared with a vast impairment charge of £3.7 billion, made last time around to deal with anticipated COVID fallout. The move was "driven by an improved macroeconomic outlook, lower unsecured lending balances and a benign credit environment", the financial giant said.

Pre-tax profit almost quadrupled to £5.0 billion, but revenues slipped 3.0 percent to £11.3 billion.

The lender will pay an interim dividend of 2.0 pence per share and also outlined plans for a £500-million share buyback. "Barclays has had a strong first half of the year," said chief executive Jes Staley in comments accompanying the earnings. "We are... seeing signs that the global economy is recovering."

"We have reported robust revenues and profitability and I am optimistic about our prospects to grow our business further." The outlook also improved after the full reopening of England's economy on July 19.

'Heavy lifting'

Staley added Barclays was "starting to see the resurgence of activity across our businesses". The bank however remains cautious amid ongoing global fears over the fast-spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus. "Whilst the macroeconomic environment has improved, the outlook remains uncertain and subject to change depending on the evolution and persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic," it added.

In reaction to the earnings, the company's shares rallied 4.0 percent to 176.22 pence in morning deals on London's flat stock market. "These look a decent set of numbers, with the investment bank doing most of the heavy lifting, while... UK businesses and consumers come across as somewhat cautious in their spending patterns," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.

Barclays again stressed its commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions across its investments by 2050. "We continue to drive hard on our ambition to be a net zero bank," said Staley.—AFP

AUB launches online 'Document Verification'

KUWAIT: Within its efforts to provide the latest banking services that meet the needs of its customers, Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced the launch of the online "Document Verification" service using QR ("Quick response") code. This new service provides an added feature to easily verify the authenticity of documents, by scanning the QR code. This innovated services covers a large variety of documents, including clearance certificate, No objection letter to transfer salary and the certificate of indebtedness for early repayment, in addition to many other certificates that will be added through this service successfully.

QR Code technology can store lots of data in a small space of few square centimeters, which reduces the use of paper and ink, and makes QR code technology eco-friendly. Moreover, QR Code technology provides instant access to the original documents.

Commenting on this new service, Amirah Al-Baijan

Sr Manager - Branch Internal Control & Operation Support at AUB, said: This service complements the several banking services that AUB launches to provide its customers with added value that enhances their successful banking experience. Al-Baijan asserts that this service adds more flexibility and resilience to banking transactions, and it helps to avoid manual errors and risks associated with traditional operations, which provides more protection to customer documents, by preventing any manipulation or forgery. This service also makes storing, archiving and restoring documents much easier, which also saves employees time and increases their productivity and ability to serve customers. Al-Baijan added: We always strive to keep abreast of new trends in completing banking operations, within our continuous endeavor to provide the best banking services that meet the aspirations of our customers.

Al-Baijan emphasized that AUB has achieved excellent results in the provision of services that gain the satisfaction of its customers and has provided an innovative and advanced banking experience to customers, at the highest level of efficiency and quality in accordance with the latest international standards, and the Bank is still continuing its steps towards providing more services to become a model for others to follow in implementing the latest banking systems.



Emirates Motor unveils new EQS in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: The latest edition to the Mercedes-EQ model range, the new EQS, was unveiled at a private event in Abu Dhabi at the Emirates Motor Company showroom. Ahead of the official market introduction in the final quarter of the year, the event saw VIPs and customers witness the EQS and its progressive luxury features for the first time in the capital, giving them the chance to experience the new EQS' technology, design, functionality and connectivity.

"We were delighted to introduce the new EQS to our customers in Abu Dhabi who had the opportunity to see a pre-production model. We are expecting to see the car in our showrooms in the latter part of the final quarter of the year, but we are excited for what the future holds for Mercedes-Benz and also for EMC as we look to offer a carbon neutral fleet. The development of the EQS is in line with global trends to reduce CO2 emissions as well as with the UAE's Vision 2021 to create a sustainable environment and infrastructure. As the latest addition to the Mercedes-EQ range, the EQS is one of a number of vehicles that will be arriving to our showrooms that cater to different customer



needs," said Mohammad Al-Momani, Acting General Manager at Emirates Motor Company.

The new EQS is the first all-electric luxury sedan and symbolizes the pinnacle of progressive luxury and technology in the electric vehicle category. Designed to be sleek and curvaceous, the interior of the EQS looks like the cockpit of a futuristic spacecraft. The flagship of the Mercedes-EQ fleet, the EQS combines technology, design and functionality to create a fun and engaging driving experience for both driver and passengers.

With a range up to 770 kilometers and an output of up to 516 hp, the powertrain of the EQS meets every expectation of a progressive saloon in the S-Class segment and marks the launch of a new generation of batteries with significantly higher energy density.

KFH offers over 100 'Self Service' terminals for instant card issuance

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) offers over 100 "Self Service" terminals for complete and instant Self Service issuance of banking cards. Customers at their convenient time can print their own banking cards 24x7 using a "Self Service" Solution or through KFH online using QR code or while visiting the branch where KFH Customer Support Representative can initiate the card printing using a tablet during the account opening process or card replacement request.

This confirms KFH's ongoing keenness to adopt the latest financial technology while delivering superior customer's banking experience. KFH introduced, as the first bank in the world, banking card issuance using a Hybrid Solution powered by NCR's solution. KFH customers can now initiate and complete the whole card issuance process using over 100 "Self Service" terminals installed in branches and shopping malls within three minutes. With this innovative solution, KFH demonstrates its commitment to transforming branches using self-service and assisted services technology to improve customer experience.

KFH succeeded in making significant strides with its digital transformation journey, drawing attention to its advanced and innovative financial services and products. The bank successfully launched the digital service "opening bank account online" for new customers; citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch. KFH rolled out various innovative financial solutions such as: Live FX service, which provides live dynamic foreign exchange prices with favorable margins 24 hours a day, every weekday, instant cross-border payments service to at KFH-Turkey using Ripple's technology, the free of charge "SWIFT GPI" service to track local and international banking transfers electronically for individuals and corporate via KFHonline, Kuwait Clearing Company KCC dividend subscription, transfer to KFH Trade, deposit of cheques via mobile, cardless cash withdrawal by (QR Code, Civil ID & Mobile Number), and a complete update of KYC request "Know your customer".

In addition, KFH offers digital services of opening a gold account with options of selling, buying and trading online, Skiplino to book appointments electronically in the banking branches, KFH Pay electronic payment service through which the customer can pay through the KFHonline mobile application or via the K-Net page, Chatbot, Push Notification service, Instant Cheque Printing and receiving gold biscuits instantly through XTMs available at the smart branches; KFH Go, in addition to many other highly efficient digital services.

KFH launched the Digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches. The service provides the most modern and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin. KFH is keen on constantly innovating unique digital banking solutions, confirming the ongoing efforts in utilizing AI and teaming up with Fintech for the best interest of customers, while moving forward in its digital transformation strategy.



Men perform a traditional ceremony under the 'Third Bridge', next to the Niger river, in Bamako. — AFP photos



A man cuts out the skin of a slaughtered sheep during a sacrifice on the bank of the Niger river, under the 'Third Bridge', in Bamako.

IN MALI CAPITAL, ANIMIST SACRIFICES UNDER 'CHINESE BRIDGE'

There are evil spirits down there. They take people and their motorbikes and suck them into the river." Boucary Sagara is quite definite. He would prefer to make a lengthy detour rather than cross one of the three bridges that span the Niger River at Bamako. In Mali, the structure is known as the "third bridge" or the "Chinese bridge"—it is the capital's third and most recent crossing of the great river, built and financed by a Chinese company 11 years ago. An old popular and animist belief holds that water djinns-supernatural creatures who can be benevolent or malicious—have always gathered at this precise spot, Souta Dounou, one of the holy places that line the river.

For worshippers, the djinns are still there, lurking beneath the imposing concrete span, 1,600 meters (5,250 feet) long. While the place is sacred to believers, to others it is a place of malevolence. Like many Bamako inhabitants, Sagara prefers to go half an hour out of his way and take another bridge rather than approach this "non-Muslim place." However, the banks under the "Chinese bridge" are far from deserted.

In the dry season, black sandstone rocks smoothed by strong currents poke up above the water level. They are turned red almost every day by the blood of ani-



This aerial view taken in Bamako shows the Niger river and the 'Third Bridge' connecting the districts of Sotuba and Missabougou.

mals sacrificed there: goats, chickens, sheep and sometimes oxen. Snagged plastic bags dot the few shrubs. The annual rains, which began in early June, will wash all this away.

'Bad spells'

Many people find good reason to come to Souta Dounou, asking the djinns for

help solving family, work or relationship problems. Some simply need a morale boost. For more than 20 years, Assa Camara, in her 50s, has performed a ritual. "I had a dream, I saw the djinn, he told me to come and make the sacrifices," she told AFP, sitting on a stone under the bridge and wearing an immaculate dress adorned with a talisman. That same

morning, a woman came to give her offerings including two chickens, three eggs, two cigarettes and milk. She asked Camara to intercede with the spirits.

Many leave with the meat of the animal they have sacrificed. Thiam Diarra said he had come because he was the victim of a curse. From a small stone bridge dating to French colonial times that survives under the Chinese bridge, Diarra emptied a bag of medicines into the water as a gift to the river and the djinns. "This is to ward off bad spells that a marabout (witch doctor) has cast on me at someone's request," he says. Diarra, wearing a smart shirt and tight trousers, left quickly on his scooter to pursue his trade as a shopkeeper with a long working day. "If the third bridge is one of those sacred places where (people believe) djinns might live, drownings at this part of the river have certainly amplified the phenomenon," says anthropologist Saliya Male.

'A classic phenomenon'

Believers present these drownings, as well as suicides - which are generally rare in Malian society - as "proof" of the existence of the djinns, together with traffic accidents in the immediate vicinity of the bridge. Some claim to have seen a siren, others speak of a submerged village, or the immense hand of a djinn that snatch-

es motorbike riders down under the water to their doom. "This is just a myth. The reality was brought to light when the Chinese built the bridge," says Belco Ouologuem, director of the Confucius Institute in Bamako, who also served as translator for Chinese company CGGC during construction.

"The company made studies in the river with a robot device. They discovered the presence of a large hole leading down to a water table. The hole makes a whirlpool and sucks down what falls into it," he adds. "It is a classic phenomenon." Large signs were displayed during the construction of the bridge to explain the geology of the site. Chinese engineers "have built bridges over the sea—it's not Malian djinns who are going to stop them," Ouologuem quips. "The Chinese are like everyone else, they made sacrifices in order to build their bridge!" counters Aliou Diarra, a spare-parts trader who comes every two weeks to make a sacrifice. "It cannot be explained, that's how it is," he said. "We must not stir things up too much, otherwise the djinns will get angry." — AFP



People sit on the bank of the Niger river.



People sacrifice a sheep during a traditional ceremony next to the 'Third Bridge' in Bamako.



This picture shows swallows flying under the 'Third Bridge', over the Niger river.

British Museum to restore objects damaged in Beirut blast

The British Museum will restore eight ancient glass artefacts damaged in last year's Beirut port explosion, the London cultural institution announced on Tuesday. The glass vessels were shattered after 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate stored in Beirut's port caused a blast that devastated the city on August 4, 2020. Workers will piece together hundreds of glass fragments at the British Museum's conservation laboratories in London with funding from The European Fine Art Foundation (TEFAF).

"These objects hold immense historical, artistic and cultural significance. Their return to their rightful form is a powerful symbol of healing and resilience after dis-

aster," said TEFAF chairman Hidde van Seggelen. The artefacts were held in a case displaying 74 Roman, Byzantine and Islamic-era glass vessels in the American University of Beirut's Archaeological Museum, located 3.2 kilometers (two miles) from the blast. The explosion caused them to shatter into hundreds of pieces, which were mixed with broken glass from cabinets and windows.

Only 15 vessels were deemed salvageable and eight safe to travel to London for restoration. Sandra Smith, head of collection care at the British Museum, explained that glass reconstruction is a "delicate process" as shards move out of shape and have to be drawn back under tension. The vessels, dating back to the first century BC, document the evolution of glass-production technology in Lebanon, with two thought to have been imported from Syria or Egypt.

The works will temporarily go on display at the British Museum before returning to Beirut. Director Hartwig Fischer said the British Museum's "expertise and resources" would allow the artefacts to be saved and "enjoyed in Lebanon for many more years to come". —AFP



Completing "puzzle-work" of a smashed glass beaker at the Archaeological Museum.

In Spain, Iberian lynx claws back from brink of extinction

At a nature reserve in southern Spain, four baby Iberian lynxes sleep peacefully beside their mother, part of a captive breeding program that has brought the species back from the brink of extinction. The El Acebuche breeding centre at the Donana National Park, home to one of Europe's largest wetlands, is one of five breeding sites set up in the 2000s to boost their numbers in the wild. Four are in Spain and one in Portugal. Slightly larger than a red fox, the Iberian lynx is distinguished by a white-and-black beard and black ear tufts.

There were around 100,000 of them in the two nations at start of the 20th century, but urban development, hunting and road kill all took their toll. Most damaging of all however was a dramatic decline in the numbers of wild rabbits, their main prey, due to disease. By 2002, the wild cat's numbers had plummeted to fewer than 100. That prompted warnings from the WWF that the Iberian lynx—found only in Spain and Portugal—risked becoming the first big cat to fall into extinction since the sabre-tooth tiger died out 10,000 years ago.

The authorities and conservation groups have managed to reverse the trend by fighting poaching, reintroducing rabbits into the wild and-most important of all-through the breeding program. By the end of last year there were just over 1,100 Iberian lynxes living in the two countries,

most of them in Spain's southern region of Andalusia. The conservation program has also reintroduced captive-bred animals across southern and central Spain in the regions of Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and Murcia—as well as in Portugal.

Lynx 'factories'

"We are very pleased and surprised by the results," the coordinator of the El Acebuche breeding centre, Antonio Rivas, told AFP. The five breeding centres have managed to become "lynx-producing factories", he said. The lynxes live and breed in a large, enclosed park that recreates their natural habitat. Their caretakers try to disturb them as little as possible to prevent the animals from getting used to the presence of humans. These days, the main cause of death for wild lynxes is related to human activities such as poaching, said Rivas: "So the less interaction they have with humans, the better it will be."

The lynxes live off a diet of live rabbits, which staff place in a box that only opens several hours later. That delay prevents the lynx from associating the presence of the rabbits with humans, said caretaker Antonio Pardo. He and all the other staff members wear face masks at all times because the lynxes, like other feline species, can catch COVID-19. A system of cameras and microphones help staff

monitor the animals around the clock to study their behavior. Sitting in front of a wall of screens, Blanca Rodriguez points to one showing Nota and her litter: Sismo, Sicilia, Senegal and Susurro. "It's nap time, we're going to see them rest," she said.

'Freedom!'

In March 2005, El Acebuche recorded its first births of Iberian lynxes in captivity—three cubs, two of which survived. The first litters remained in captivity for several years until they reached breeding age, so as to avoid having to capture more felines in the wild. But since 2011 the breeding centers have released just over 300 lynxes. When they are about one year old the lynxes are tagged with a GPS tracker and taken to their natural habitat "where we open the cage and... freedom!" said Rivas. Eighty-five percent of Iberian lynxes born in captivity are released into the wild.

About 70 percent of them survive and each female lynx has up to six kittens per year. Despite these encouraging results however, the International Union for Conservation of Nature still lists the animal as "endangered". The WWF estimates the species will be out of danger only when its population surpasses 3,000, including 750 breeding females. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Olympic athletes inspire robotic zen garden in Tokyo

At a serene zen garden in a Tokyo park, abstract lines inspired by the movements of Olympic athletes are carefully traced in the gravel-not by monks, but by robots. The newly installed artwork, titled "The Constant Gardeners", features four large industrial robotic arms that work together to sculpt a traditional Japanese rock garden. Their drawings are generated by a bespoke AI computer program that analyses video footage from past Olympic Games, tracking the position of athletes' limbs to create unique designs.

"They're acting as performers to create this cultural intervention next to the backdrop of the Games," the installation's creator, British artist Jason Bruges, told AFP. The robotic "gardeners", each about two meters (6.6 foot) tall, have been given a new lease on life in Tokyo's Ueno Park following 10 years of use by a car manufacturer.

They will create around 150 different illustrations throughout the virus-post-



A large-scale outdoor robotic art installation inspired by the Olympic and Paralympic Games "The Constant Gardeners" by Jason Bruges is seen making the patterns referring to the movement of the Olympic flame torch runners, at Ueno park of Tokyo.

poned Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics, which end on September 5. Bruges said he wants to make people look at technology in different ways and was "inspired by the athletes preparing for and taking part in the Games". Data

gleaned from clips of the athletes in action is used to "form or make lines" that mirror the movement of their limb joints, said the team's creative technologist Joel Luther-Braun.

A 25-year-old Tokyo resident who stopped by to see the artwork said he was intrigued by the robots' "human-like" movements, unlike regular machines designed to work at high speed. "I don't get bored by looking at them. They look almost human and I find them cute," Masato Ito told AFP. Bruges said he was surprised that people who came to see the installation wanted to know the robots' names. "It's fantastic being in the culture where there's a lot of exposure to technology," he said. "There's definitely a culture (that means) people here are attaching human characteristics to these machines," he said, adding that there may be an opportunity for viewers to name the robots. — AFP



A man takes pictures of the robotic art installation inspired by the Olympic and Paralympic Games "The Constant Gardeners" by Jason Bruges at Ueno park of Tokyo, as part of "Tokyo Tokyo FESTIVAL Special 13". — AFP photos



Mumbai Police's Crime Branch team escort Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty's husband Raj Kundra (left) for allegedly producing and broadcasting pornographic films online, in Mumbai. — AFP

India court denies bail to Bollywood star's husband in porn case

Mumbai court yesterday denied bail to Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty's husband Raj Kundra, who has been accused of producing pornographic films, police said. The arrest is the latest scandal to hit Kundra who was embroiled in cricket match-fixing charges six years ago. Mumbai police said the 45-year-old was "the key conspirator" in the creation and publication of adult films using internet apps. Police spokesman S. Chaitanya told AFP the businessman would remain in judicial custody following the latest hearing, adding: "His bail was denied". Media reports say Kundra is accused of telling aspiring actresses they could break into Bollywood through his company, Viaan Industries, which allegedly produced pornographic content for Hotshots, an adults-only mobile app. The women were then pressured into shooting sex scenes on the pretext of

securing a foothold in the Hindi film industry.

US-based YouTube and TikTok influencer Puneet Kaur said the businessman contacted her on Instagram this year asking her to enter a contest on Hotshots. "This man was really luring people—we literally thought it was spam when he sent that DM to me! Jesus Christ man rot in jail," Kaur posted on Instagram last week. Shetty, the 2007 winner of British reality show "Celebrity Big Brother", has not commented publicly since the arrest of her husband but reportedly told police he was producing "erotica, not porn" and was innocent. In 2015, Kundra was banned for life from all cricket-related activities, following an investigation into match-fixing when he was co-owner with Shetty of the Rajasthan Royals, a team in the hugely successful Indian Premier League.

India has stringent laws against publishing and transmitting "obscene material", but watching pornography in private is legal. According to the adult site Pornhub, the nation of 1.3 billion people was its third-largest source of traffic in 2018, behind the United States and Britain. — AFP

US returns to Iraq treasure trove of antiquities: Baghdad

The United States will return to Iraq some 17,000 archaeological treasures dating back 4,000 years and looted in recent decades, an "unprecedented" restitution, the culture minister in Baghdad said yesterday. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi was set to take back the artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia on his aircraft, when he returns today from Washington where he met US President Joe Biden. "This is the largest return of antiquities to Iraq," said Iraqi Culture Minister Hassan Nazim, hailing it as "the result of months of efforts by the Iraqi authorities in conjunction with their embassy in Washington".

Most of the ancient pieces document "the commercial exchanges during the Sumerian period", his ministry said in a statement. Iraq's antiquities have been extensively looted during decades of war and insurgency, often by organized crime groups, since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

"It is impossible to quantify the number of pieces that have been stolen from archaeological sites," Qahtan Al-Obaid, director of antiquities and heritage at the Basra Museum, told AFP. Archaeological sites across the country have been severely damaged and neglected, and museums looted, with some 15,000 pieces stolen from Iraq's only national museum in Baghdad. "I hope that in the near future we will be able to recover the rest of our goods, especially in Europe," said Nazim in his statement.

'Looted artifacts'

Among the pieces to be returned to Iraq is a 3,500-year-old clay tablet with a sequence from the epic of Gilgamesh, which once sat in Washington's Museum of the Bible, the US Department of Justice said separately in Washington. It was not

immediately clear whether the "Gilgamesh Dream Tablet" would be among the 17,000 pieces to be returned this week. The rare fragment, which recounts a dream sequence from the epic in Akkadian cuneiform script, is one of many ancient artifacts from the Middle East collected by David Green, the billionaire owner of the Hobby Lobby chain of arts and crafts stores.

It was seized by the US Justice Department in 2019, two years after Green opened the museum dedicated to ancient Christian history in downtown Washington. The tablet was just one of thousands of Iraqi-origin artifacts, mostly 3,000- to 4,000-year-old cuneiform tablets and seals, that have been seized from Hobby Lobby and the Bible Museum for repatriation to Iraq.

The Justice Department said they were plundered in Iraq, and traded illegally by dealers in Israel and the United Arab Emirates. According to the Justice Department, Hobby Lobby bought the six-by-five-inch (15.2 by 12.7 centimeter) tablet from a prominent auction house in 2014 for \$1.67 million. It had originally been brought illegally to the United States in 2003 by a dealer, who purchased it in London from a well-known Jordanian trader of ancient Middle Eastern antiquities.

It was then traded several times with false letters of provenance to assure buyers that it was legally obtained, rather than a product of the underground antiquities trade. In 2014, Hobby Lobby arranged to buy the tablet in New York, but carried out the transaction in Oklahoma to avoid sales taxes, according to the Justice Department. The company then donated it to the collection of the Museum of the Bible. Since the tablet was seized in 2019, the Justice Department has pursued formal ownership through forfeiture laws to be able to return it to the rightful owners.

"This forfeiture represents an important milestone on the path to returning this rare and ancient masterpiece of world literature to its country of origin," said acting US attorney Jacquelyn Kasulis of the eastern district of New York. "This office is committed to combating the black market sale of cultural property and the smuggling of looted artifacts," she said in a statement. — AFP



In this file photo actor Bob Odenkirk attends The Disaster Artist Centerpiece Gala Presentation during AFI Film Festival in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Bob Odenkirk in hospital after collapsing on 'Better Call Saul' set

Actor Bob Odenkirk was rushed to hospital after collapsing on the set of popular television drama "Better Call Saul" in New Mexico, US media reported. Odenkirk, 58, was filming the final season of the show in which he plays luckless protagonist Jimmy McGill, a small-time lawyer and conman who transitions to an eventually prominent defense attorney under the name Saul Goodman. The show is a spin-off of critically acclaimed "Breaking Bad", widely regarded as one of the greatest television series ever made. In that show, Odenkirk plays the lawyer for schoolteacher-turned-drug dealer Walter White. Entertainment publication TMZ said Odenkirk "went down" on set Tuesday and was "immediately surrounded by crew members who called an ambulance".

Variety magazine reported that the actor was receiving medical care and the reason for his collapse had not yet been disclosed. Odenkirk has received four Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for best actor for "Better Call Saul" and has previously won two Emmys for writing on other productions. "Better Call Saul's" sixth season is expected to premiere early next year. Social media was abuzz with concern for the actor who has a huge cult following and has also appeared in dozens of films including the recently-released action thriller "Nobody". — AFP

Slipknot co-founder Joey Jordison dies at 46

Joey Jordison, the co-founder of Slipknot and one of the most influential metal drummers of his generation, has died at the age of 46, his family announced. "We are heartbroken to share the news that Joey Jordison, prolific drummer, musician and artist passed away peacefully in his sleep," his family said Tuesday in a statement carried by Rolling Stone and multiple US media outlets. Iowa-born Jordison was one of Slipknot's three original members and helped power the US nine-piece to global stardom in the early 2000s during an era when rock and metal acts routinely jostled with popstars at the top of the commercial charts.

Renowned for their horror-themed facemasks and boiler suits, they burst onto the scene in the mid-1990s with a louder, bleaker and more aggressive incarnation of metal that became both a commercial success and a major influence on later generations. Behind all the stage pantomime and shock antics was a technically proficient band propelled by Jordison's tight high speed drumming and relentless blast beats as well as his song writing skills for some of the band's best known tracks.

The band worked with legendary producer Rick Rubin for their third album and won their first Grammy in 2006. But Jordison maintained his proudest personal moment was being voted the greatest drummer of the previous 25 years by readers of drumming magazine Rhythm in 2010. Jordison left Slipknot in 2013 in acrimonious circumstances, saying he had been effectively forced out. He later revealed he been diagnosed with transverse myelitis, a nerve disease that affected his ability to play. In recent interviews he said he managed to get

back in drumming shape through intense physical therapy.

His side projects included Murderdolls, Scar the Martyr, Vivic and Sinsaenum and he also played live drums for a host of major metal acts like Metallica, Korn and Rob Zombie. Metallica paid tribute to Jordison, posting a photo of the drummer on their Facebook page with the caption "R.I.P. brother." Other prominent metal musicians posted tributes praising Jordison's technique and the influence he had on their own bands. "Joey's contributions to music changed the face of heavy music on the planet as we know it," wrote Trivium frontman Matt Heafy. "An absolute legend who changed the game not only for drums, but metal music as a whole," added popular metal YouTuber Nik Nocturnal. Former Slipknot bandmates Corey Taylor and Shawn Crahan both posted black squares on their Twitter accounts after news of Jordison's death was announced. — AFP



Joey Jordison

For Russian prisoners, letters provide rare 'moment of joy'

In a cottage outside Moscow, Konstantin Kotov goes through a handful of the hundreds of letters he received when he spent more than a year behind bars for violating Russian protest rules. The opposition activist served his sentence in Penal Colony No. 2 in Pokrov-a notorious prison 100 kilometers (60 miles) outside Moscow where opposition leader Alexei Navalny is currently held. Kotov, who was released last December, says he endured a "wall of silence" after prison authorities banned other inmates from speaking to him. Now a free man, the 36-year-old says the letters—most of them hand-written—stopped him from "breaking down".

Phone calls and visits are limited in the Russian prison system and contact with the outside world is particularly restricted for political prisoners, who are often subjected to greater isolation than ordinary inmates. With letters being the only effective means to communicate, activists have taken to social media to encourage Russians to write to those they consider to be political prisoners.

'Letters from Hogwarts'

Kotov recalls having an hour a day under strict surveillance to read the letters. "It was always a moment of joy," he says. "It allowed me to preserve the freedom inside me that they tried to take away," Kotov, who was jailed for partici-



Human rights activist Konstantin Kotov sorts letters out in a cottage outside Moscow.

pating in multiple protests during anti-Kremlin demonstrations in the summer of 2019, says he would often receive letters several months late, as they had to go through prison censors first. Critical references to President Vladimir Putin were blotted out from the letters, he says.

Tired of reading and censoring his flow of letters, prison authorities offered Kotov better conditions if he stopped replying to them. Kotov refused. Navalny—who has compared the Pokrov prison to a concentration camp—also complained about the censors in a satirical message published by his team on Instagram earlier this year. "I'm like Harry Potter in the first book, remember the letters from Hogwarts?" he said, referring to the fantasy series' hero having his letters taken away from him. "It's the same for me but without the owls and wizards." In the post, he called on his supporters to write to other political prisoners in Russia so they "do not feel alone". AFP asked Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service for comment on the censoring of prisoners' letters but did not receive a reply.

Protection from violence

Irina Vladimirova, a 50-year-old former university lecturer, is one of many volunteers writing to the country's grow-

ing list of political prisoners. She gets their addresses from social media, where activists share a database of who they consider to be political prisoners and where they are serving their sentences. Writing in her small Moscow kitchen, Vladimirova estimates she wrote around 600 letters to prisoners in six years, calling it her personal act of protest. When AFP visited her apartment, she was writing to five inmates recognized as political prisoners by local rights group Memorial, including a retired Ukrainian captain, a historian and a student arrested over protests. "I hope a star shines bright for you," she wrote in one of the letters. She puts extra stamps and paper inside each envelope so the prisoners have a chance to write back.

Yuri Dmitriyev is one of those who does. A historian who uncovers Stalinist crimes, Dmitriyev was sentenced to 13 years in prison on controversial paedophilia charges that rights groups deem political. "He tells me not to worry," Vladimirova says. Olga Romanova, who runs the Rus Sidyashchaya (Russia Behind Bars) group providing legal help for prisoners, says the letters can help protect from physical violence. "The more letters a political prisoner receives, the more he is protected," she says, adding that guards are afraid to "touch" inmates who receive attention from the outside world. "Letters are a very important (support) instrument," the 55-year-old says. In her kitchen, Irina Vladimirova sticks a stamp featuring the double-headed Russian eagle on an envelope. "I do what I can," she says. "I write letters." — AFP



Djokovic rolls at Olympics as Medvedev suffers in extreme heat

TOKYO: Novak Djokovic set up a quarter-final with Japan's Kei Nishikori at the Tokyo Olympics yesterday as gold medal rival Daniil Medvedev struggled with the heat, even asking the chair umpire who would be responsible if he died. World number one Djokovic continued his bid for a calendar Golden Slam by defeating 34th-ranked Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain 6-3, 6-1 to extend his winning run to 21 matches. Djokovic then returned to court a couple hours later to partner Nina Stojanovic in the mixed doubles. The Serbian duo won their opening match 6-3, 6-4 against Brazil's Marcelo Melo and Luisa Stefani. After lobbying organizers to push back the 11am start time to avoid the worst of the punishing heat and humidity, Djokovic said he was pleased today's matches would begin at 3pm.

"I think it's great. In my opinion it should have been done a few days earlier, but it is what it is and I think it's better than starting at 11," said Djokovic. "The combination between the high humidity and high heat... I've played tennis now professionally for 20 years and I've never faced these kind of conditions in my entire life on a consecutive, daily basis."

Medvedev stayed on course to meet Djokovic in the men's final as the Russian second seed overcame Italy's Fabio Fognini 6-2, 3-6, 6-2. But the two-time Grand

Slam runner-up again found the temperatures testing as the extreme weather policy was implemented, with the heat index topping out at 37 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit). "Even from the first set I didn't feel good enough with my breathing. I felt like my diaphragm was blocked, I couldn't breathe properly," said Medvedev, who took a medical timeout and received two visits from the trainer. Asked by the umpire if he was OK during the second set, the Russian replied: "I can finish the match, but I can die. If I die, are you going to be responsible?"

"I think it was the most humid day we had so far, maybe the hottest," added Medvedev. "The sun was pretty hot. At the end of the second set I just had darkness in my eyes. I was bending over, and I couldn't get my breathing together. I was ready to just fall down on the court."

Following a 10-minute interval between the second and third sets, Medvedev broke Fognini and won the first three games of the decider. He saved three break points at 4-2 before clinching victory, going through to a last-eight clash with Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta.

Tsitsipas sent packing

Stefanos Tsitsipas bowed out after the Greek third seed lost 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 to Frenchman Ugo

Humbert. Tsitsipas required a medical timeout for an injury to his right leg at the end of the second set as Humbert advanced to face Russia's Karen Khachanov.

"It's fine, it was nothing. It was pretty painful at the instant, but nothing serious, major," said Tsitsipas. Nishikori, the 2016 bronze medalist, beat Ilya Ivashka of Belarus 7-6 (9/7), 6-0, while fourth seed Alexander Zverev and Frenchman Jeremy Chardy also progressed.

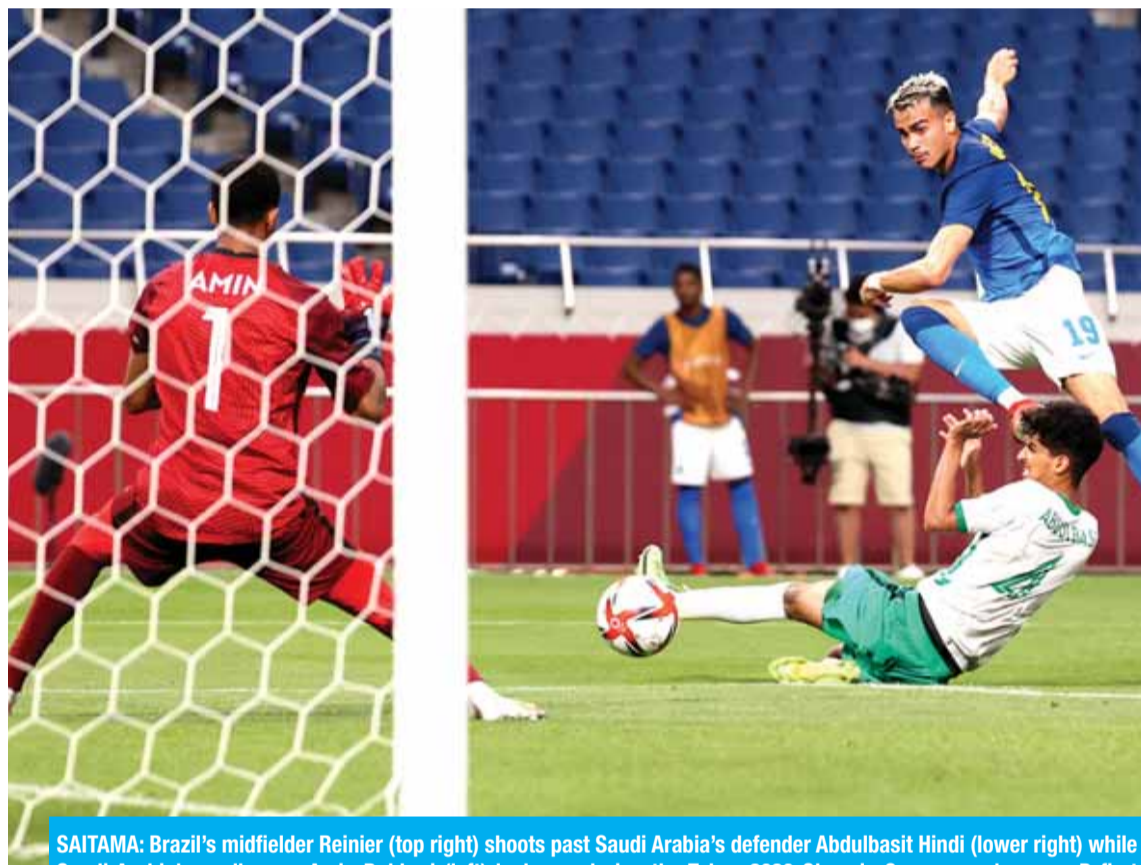
Ukraine's Elina Svitolina, the highest-ranked player left in the women's draw, reached the semi-finals with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Camila Giorgi of Italy. "You know when you are higher ranked everyone wants to beat you and everyone is extremely motivated to beat you," said Svitolina. "The Olympics is a very special event. In Ukraine, it's very big, even bigger than a Grand Slam."

The fourth seed will play Marketa Vondrousova, the conqueror of home favourite Naomi Osaka, for a place in the final in Tokyo. Spain's Paula Badosa retired due to heatstroke after losing the first set 6-3 to Vondrousova, leaving the court in a wheelchair.

Swiss ninth seed Belinda Bencic beat French Open runner-up Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in three sets. She will play Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina, who dumped out two-time Grand Slam winner Garbine Muguruza 7-5, 6-1. — AFP



TOKYO: Russia's Daniil Medvedev is assisted by a physio during Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games men's singles third round tennis match against Italy's Fabio Fognini at the Ariake Tennis Park in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP



SAITAMA: Brazil's midfielder Reinier (top right) shoots past Saudi Arabia's defender Abdulbasit Hindi (lower right) while Saudi Arabia's goalkeeper Amin Bukhari (left) looks on during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games men's group D first round football match between Saudi Arabia and Brazil at the Saitama Stadium in Saitama yesterday. — AFP

Richarlison fires Brazil into Olympics quarters, Germany out

TOKYO: Richarlison continued his fine form at the Olympics with a double as Brazil eased into the quarter-finals after a 3-1 win over Saudi Arabia yesterday, as Germany exited the men's tournament and hosts Japan progressed with a thrashing of France.

Reigning champions Brazil, who won gold for the first time on home soil in Rio de Janeiro five years ago, finished top of Group D and will face Egypt in the last eight on Saturday. Matheus Cunha put them ahead in Saitama yesterday, but Abdullelah Al-Amri's goal brought the Saudis level before the half-hour mark.

A draw would have been enough for Brazil to go through as group winners, but Richarlison netted in the 76th minute and again in injury time. The Everton forward is now the leading scorer in the tournament with five goals after his hat-trick against Germany.

The Germans, runners-up to Brazil in 2016, bowed out after a 1-1 draw with the Ivory Coast. Germany had to win to progress, but Benjamin Henrichs' own goal midway through the second half proved costly.

Eduard Lowen's equalizer shortly afterwards set up a tense finale, but the Ivorians held on to seal second spot in the group and a quarter-final against Spain. The Spaniards are one of the gold medal favorites after naming a strong squad featuring six members of the team that reached the Euro 2020 semi-finals. But

they scored only twice in the group stage, with a 1-1 draw against Argentina enough to edge them through.

Real Sociedad midfielder Mikel Merino put Spain in front in the 66th minute. Tomas Belmonte netted a late equalizer for Argentina but the point sealed 1992 champions Spain first place in Group C. Egypt set up a dream clash with Brazil by seeing off Australia 2-0 with goals from Ahmed Yasser Rayan and Ammar Hamdy.

France humbled by Japan

France had given themselves hope of progressing from Group A when Andre-Pierre Gignac scored a hat-trick in a 4-3 win over South Africa. But they crashed out as their defense proved fragile again in a 4-0 loss to Japan.

The home side, who reached the semi-finals in London in 2012, made it three wins from three and booked a match against New Zealand. Real Madrid youngster Takefusa Kubo netted for the third straight match before former Marseille defender Hiroki Sakai's tap-in doubled the lead.

Substitutes Koji Miyoshi and Daizen Maeda added to France's blushes as youngster Randal Kolo Muani was sent off on a miserable evening for Les Bleus. South Africa's slim hopes of reaching the quarters were ended by a 3-0 loss to Mexico in a game which ended with both teams a man down.

The Mexicans will take on South Korea on Saturday, in the same half of the draw as Brazil and Egypt. South Korea finished top of Group B after a 6-0 thrashing of 10-man Honduras and were joined in the knock-out stage by the Kiwis, who played out a goalless draw with Romania to finish above their opponents on goal difference. — AFP

USA thrash Iran to get Olympic basketball challenge back on track

TOKYO: The USA easily beat Iran 120-66 in the Olympic men's basketball tournament yesterday to bounce back from their shock opening defeat-and players and coaches from the geopolitical rivals chatted afterwards.

The Americans had their 25-game Olympic winning streak snapped by France in their first game but Damian Lillard scored 21 points and Devin Booker had 16 points in a straightforward win against the Iranians.

Kevin Durant had another low-key game with 10 points but he was one of six Americans in double figures in Saitama. Hamed Haddadi and Mohammadsamad Nik Khahbahrani each scored 14 points for Iran, against the team of NBA stars.

US coach Gregg Popovich spoke with his Iranian opposite number Mehran Shahintab after the game and said: "People generally get along and appreciate each other, no matter what country you are talking about. I really believe that. This is a time where sport transcends all of the petty crap you get from governments. There is no surprise that coaches would enjoy meeting each other and the players would show sportsmanship."

France wrapped up top spot in Group A with a game to spare thanks to a comfortable 97-77 win over the Czech Republic, who the Americans must beat in their last pool game to qualify for the quarter-finals. Boston Celtics guard Evan Fournier backed up his virtuoso display against the USA with 21 points for the French.

Australia also reached the last eight with a dramatic 86-83 victory against Italy, for whom Simone Fontecchio and Golden State Warriors' Nico Mannion both scored over 20 points in a losing cause. Nigeria's hopes of reaching the quarters are hanging by a thread, though, following a 99-92 defeat by Germany. — AFP



TOKYO: Kevin Durant #7 of the USA Men's National Team dunks the ball against the Iran Men's National Team during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics yesterday at Saitama Super Arena in Tokyo, Japan. — AFP

USA women take first Olympic 3x3 basketball gold

TOKYO: The USA women's team won the first Olympic 3x3 basketball title yesterday as they beat the Russian Olympic Committee team 18-15 in the final in Tokyo. Stefanie Dolson of WNBA team Chicago Sky was the Americans' top scorer with seven points and Kelsey Plum contributed five points in the game that is played into just one basket. Anastasiia Logunova's six points for the Russians were in vain. The Americans were congratulated by IOC president Thomas Bach at Aomi Urban Sports Park. China won the bronze medal after a 16-14 win over France. Latvia took the men's title with a 21-18 win over the Russians as pre-tournament favorites Serbia had to settle for the bronze medal after beating Belgium 21-10 in the medal playoff. The downsized form of basketball was added to the Olympic program in Tokyo in a bid to attract a younger audience. — AFP



TOKYO: USA's teammates celebrate after winning at the end of the women's gold medal 3x3 basketball final match between US and Russia at the Aomi Urban Sports Park in Tokyo yesterday during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

News in brief

Momota out in first round

TOKYO: Japan's badminton world number one Kento Momota lost in the first round at the Tokyo Olympics yesterday, a day after Japanese tennis superstar Naomi Osaka also crashed out. Unseeded South Korean Heo Kwang-hee beat Momota 21-15, 21-19, ending the favorite's bid for the gold medal after just two games. Momota was appearing in his first Olympics, having been banned for gambling in an illegal casino just months before the 2016 Rio Games. He was almost forced to retire last year after a car crash that left him with career-threatening injuries. Momota won a record 11 titles in 2019, losing just six of the 73 matches he played that year. — AFP

Murray Olympic future doubtful

TOKYO: Andy Murray said he was unsure if he would play at another Olympics after his bid for a third gold medal ended with a quarter-final defeat in the men's doubles yesterday. Murray, a two-time Olympic singles champion, and partner Joe Salisbury lost 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 10-7 to Croatia's Marin Cilic and Ivan Dodig. The British pair led Cilic and Dodig by a set and a break but suffered a late collapse as the Croatians prevailed in a deciding tie-break. Murray pulled out of the singles in Tokyo due to a muscle strain. The three-time Grand Slam winner won gold in the event at London 2012 and Rio 2016. — AFP

'Slapping' pre-fight ritual

TOKYO: German judoka Martyna Trajdos said being shaken and slapped by her coach was all part of her pre-fight ritual after footage from the Tokyo Olympics was widely shared on social media. Film of the incident, where the coach shakes Trajdos roughly by her judo uniform and slaps her across each cheek, drew bemusement and concern. But Trajdos explained on Instagram: "That's the ritual which I chose pre-competition! My coach is just doing what I want him to do to fire me up!" The former world championships bronze medalist, 32, lost the women's -63kg round-of-32 elimination bout to Hungary's Szofi Ozbas. — AFP

Sprinter fails doping test

TOKYO: Swiss sprinter Alex Wilson has been suspended from the Olympic Games after failing a drugs test, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said yesterday. The 30-year-old Jamaica-born sprinter tested positive for the banned steroid trenbolone in an out-of-competition test on March 15. Wilson had initially challenged the test result, arguing that the drug was contained in contaminated beef he ate at a Jamaican restaurant in the United States. He was provisionally suspended in March. However a Swiss Olympic disciplinary panel lifted his suspension in early July. The World Anti-Doping Agency and Athletics Integrity Unit appealed that decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which on Wednesday upheld the initial suspension. — AFP

Ingebrigtsen targets 1500m

TOKYO: Two-time European champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen will only run the 1,500m at the Tokyo Olympics after scrapping plans to double up in the 5,000m, the Norwegian Athletics Federation said yesterday. A statement said the 20-year-old middle distance runner, the 2018 European champion over the 1,500m and 5,000m, was dropping the longer distance for scheduling reasons. Ingebrigtsen has the fastest time in the world this year over 5,000m, clocking 12min 48.45 at a meeting in Rome on June 21. He is only the third fastest this year over the 1,500. To double up in Tokyo, Ingebrigtsen would have needed to run the 1,500m heats on August 3, a few hours before the 5,000m heats. — AFP

Biles in second pull-out as mental struggles laid bare at Tokyo Olympics

TOPKYO: Superstar gymnast Simone Biles pulled out of a second event to protect her mental health yesterday, putting the spotlight on athletes' wellbeing at a Tokyo Olympics held under strict rules to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Biles, who caused shockwaves with her withdrawal during the team event on Tuesday, also ditched the all-around, raising doubts about her further participation in Tokyo. The 24-year-old American's struggles follow those of Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka, another face of the Games who lost in the third round on her return from a mental health break.

They overshadowed another busy day at the delayed 2020 Games, where US swimming great Katie Ledecky bounced back from her second defeat by Australia's Ariarne Titmus to win her first gold in Tokyo.

Biles, unbeaten in all-around competition since 2013 and widely touted as the 'G.O.A.T.' (Greatest Of All Time), arrived seeking five Olympic titles to equal Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina's career record of nine.

But this week she complained she had "the weight of the world on my shoulders" and withdrew after a single, shaky vault in the team competition. Attention will now focus on whether she will compete in her four remaining individual events.

Biles is not alone in suffering mental

problems, and several athletes have complained of difficulties during coronavirus lockdowns. Australian basketball star Liz Cambage was one who skipped Tokyo fearing its "terrifying" living conditions.

Yesterday, Dutch athletes in quarantine in Tokyo after testing positive revealed they staged a sit-in strike over the harsh conditions, eventually earning the concession of being able to stand at an open window for 15 minutes a day. "Not having any outside air is so inhuman, and it is mentally super-draining," said street skateboarder Candy Jacobs, while taekwondo fighter Reshmie Oogink called it "Olympic jail".

International Olympic Committee spokesman Mark Adams said support measures included psychologists in the Athletes' Village and phone helplines. "That became more urgent obviously with the COVID pandemic, so we've been working on that quite a lot," he said.

'Terminator' Titmus

Elsewhere Ledecky, who won four gold medals at the Rio 2016 Games, lost her 200m freestyle crown to Titmus, two days after also ceding her 400m title to the Australian. But Ledecky regrouped to annihilate the field in the first women's 1500m held at an Olympics, finishing more than four seconds clear of US teammate Erica Sullivan.

Ledecky, 24, is just the fourth female

swimmer to claim six Olympic gold medals. However Titmus, nicknamed "Terminator", is emerging as one of the stars at the Tokyo Aquatics Center. Japan's Yui Ohashi completed a medley double, winning the 200m event to go with the 400m gold she secured on Sunday, while world record-holder Kristof Milak powered to the men's 200m butterfly gold.

Britain's freestyle swimmers brought the morning session to a thrilling climax, narrowly missing out on a world record in the 4x200m freestyle as they beat the Russian team by more than three seconds. In baking conditions, Spanish tennis player Paula Badosa retired and left the court in a wheelchair after suffering heatstroke, and Russia's Daniil Medvedev had breathing problems during his third-round win over Fabio Fognini. In response to the incidents, organizers said from today matches would not start until 3:00pm to avoid the worst of the Tokyo heat.

Elsewhere, Dutch rider Annemiek van Vleuten won the women's cycling time trial, and Fiji retained their men's rugby sevens title with a typically free-flowing 27-12 win over New Zealand. In men's basketball, the United States bounced back to hammer Iran 120-66 after they fell to a strong French team for their first Olympic defeat in 17 years.

Shi Zhiyong won the men's 73kg



TOKYO: Japan's Daiki Hashimoto competes in the floor event of the artistic gymnastics men's all-around final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Ariake Gymnastics Center in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

weightlifting with a world-record total of 364kg, giving China their fourth gold of the competition. Japanese gymnast Daiki Hashimoto won the coveted men's all-around title at the age of 19, edging China's Xiao Ruoteng with a superb final horizontal bar routine. But in a disappointment for the hosts, Japanese top seed Kento Momota fell at the first hurdle in the men's singles badminton, losing in just 52 minutes to unseeded

South Korean Heo Kwang-hee.

The United States made history as the first 3x3 basketball Olympic champions when their women beat the Russian Olympic Committee 18-15. Latvia took the men's title. Reigning champions Brazil cruised into the men's football quarter-finals as Richarlison scored twice in a 3-1 win against Saudi Arabia but France crashed out after they were beaten 4-0 by Japan. —AFP

Kuwaiti trap shooters end qualification Day 1

TOKYO: Kuwaiti shooters Abdurrahman Al-Faihan finished the first day of the Tokyo Olympics men's trap shooting qualification at top position with 74 targets out of 75 yesterday. Meanwhile, Talal Al-Rashidi was 18th, hitting 72 targets. At Asaka Shooting Range, Faihan posted scores of 24, 25 and 25, and Rashidi marked 24, 24 and 24 in the three rounds of the qualification Day 1, in which 29 shooters competed. The remaining two series of the qualification will start at 9:50 am (00:50 GMT), followed by finals at 3:30 pm (06:30 GMT) today.

Faihan and Rashidi are two out of three Kuwaiti athletes who will participate in events at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games today. Kuwaiti swimmer Abbas Qali will compete in 100m Butterfly race at 1:00 pm local time as part of his participation on Tokyo Olympics 2020, in the Olympic Complex in Tokyo. Member of the Board of Directors at Kuwait Olympic Committee participating in the Tokyo Olympics 2020 Fatima Hayat confirmed.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti athletes Yaqoub Al-Yoha and Madhawi Al-Shammari continued their practice and trainings at the Olympic Stadium, in preparation for their competition on July 30th, she indicated.



TOKYO: Kuwait's Talal Al-Rashidi competes in the men's trap qualification during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Asaka Shooting Range in the Nerima district of Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Hayat stressed the keenness of the Committee to provide all means of comfort to the players to help them achieve the desired goals. After they arrived to the Japanese Capital Tokyo, Head of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and members of the Board of Directors visited the players Yaqoub Al-Yoha and

Madhawi Al-Shammari during their training session. As part of encouraging and supporting the players during the training, Sheikh Fahad was keen to meet the players and their coach Bader Abbas, where he urged them to be ready to reach the highest technical levels and to represent Kuwait in the best image and achieve the best results. — KUNA

Rare fans at Japan's Olympic events admit COVID doubts

SHIZUOKA: Coronavirus restrictions mean fans are banned from almost all Olympic venues in Japan. And even among the lucky few with a golden ticket, some are less than keen to attend. Michio Miura and his wife Mayumi wavered right up until the last minute on whether they should take advantage of having some of the few seats available for cycling in Shizuoka, southwest of Tokyo.

Like many, they were worried about virus risks at a time when parts of Japan are under emergency measures to curb rising case numbers. "If we caught coronavirus, it would cast a real shadow over the Games," said Mayumi, who — unlike many in Japan — favored the Olympics going ahead despite the pandemic.

"In the end, we decided to come because it seemed that there wouldn't be many people and there wouldn't be much risk, given it's held outdoors," she added. At the Fuji International Speedway venue, around 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Tokyo, the rules today allowed for 10,000 spectators, less than half the venue's capacity of 22,000. But only 2,600 showed up.

And it's a pattern seen elsewhere. After the decision was made to ban fans from most venues — with strict limits on the remaining sites — just 70,000 tickets remained out of 3.63 million sold before the Games were postponed.

But of those, 30,000 requests for refunds have been submitted. And at another venue allowing fans, in northeastern Japan's Miyagi region, only around 2,000 people have showed up to watch recent football matches — well below the 10,000 cap.

'Our only chance'

Daisuke Ono, 37, came to watch the cycling today with his wife and four children, but admitted he'd "hesitated" over the decision. "But since



OYAMA: Fans attend the men's cycling road individual time trial during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Fuji International Speedway in Oyama, Japan, yesterday. — AFP

Shizuoka is practically the only place where you can see the Games, it was our only chance," he said.

And not everyone is so hesitant. Some people have been showing up to events held on public roads in Tokyo, hoping for a chance to glimpse competition despite requests from authorities to stay away. Naoto Sugiyama, 52, said he'd decided to come to the cycling because it was "an occasion not to be missed". And the 52-year-old said he was disappointed that there was not a "crowd of supporters to encourage the riders".

Tomoe Kogo, wearing a kimono printed with Olympic rings, said she had decided to come

specifically because she did not think the venue would be full. "I heard that a lot of people asked for refunds, so to be honest I figured there probably wouldn't be crowds," she said.

Venue manager Sarah Barton Smith told AFP she felt people were starting to warm to the Games. "I think people are realizing that after all the negativity, this is their only chance to watch the Games," she said. "That did bring some people out." For some though, the lack of crowds was actually a plus, with Satoru Onishi saying it was "really nice that there weren't many people". "It would have been awful if we were packed in like sardines." — AFP



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

	G	S	B	T
Japan	13	4	5	22
China	12	6	9	27
United States	11	11	9	31
Russian Olympic Committee	7	10	6	23
Australia	6	1	9	16
Great Britain	5	6	5	16
South Korea	4	2	5	11
Germany	3	2	5	10
France	3	2	3	8
Netherlands	2	6	3	11
Canada	2	3	4	9
Hungary	2	1	2	5
Slovenia	2	1	1	4
Kosovo	2	0	0	2
Italy	1	6	8	15
Switzerland	1	3	2	6
Taiwan	1	2	3	6
Brazil	1	2	2	5
Georgia	1	2	0	3
Romania	1	2	0	3
Serbia	1	1	2	4
Austria	1	1	1	3
Hong Kong	1	1	0	2
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Croatia	1	0	1	2
Estonia	1	0	1	2
Uzbekistan	1	0	1	2
Bermuda	1	0	0	1
Ecuador	1	0	0	1
Fiji	1	0	0	1
Iran	1	0	0	1
Latvia	1	0	0	1
Norway	1	0	0	1
Philippines	1	0	0	1
Thailand	1	0	0	1
New Zealand	0	2	1	3
Spain	0	2	1	3
South Africa	0	2	0	2
Indonesia	0	1	2	3
Mongolia	0	1	2	3
Belgium	0	1	1	2
Czech Republic	0	1	1	2
Bulgaria	0	1	0	1
Colombia	0	1	0	1
Denmark	0	1	0	1
India	0	1	0	1
Jordan	0	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	0	1
Poland	0	1	0	1
Turkmenistan	0	1	0	1
Venezuela	0	1	0	1
Kazakhstan	0	0	3	3
Ukraine	0	0	3	3
Egypt	0	0	2	2
Mexico	0	0	2	2
Turkey	0	0	2	2
Argentina	0	0	1	1
Cuba	0	0	1	1
Ireland	0	0	1	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Zionist entity	0	0	1	1