



5 Decade of Syria war has killed nearly 500K people



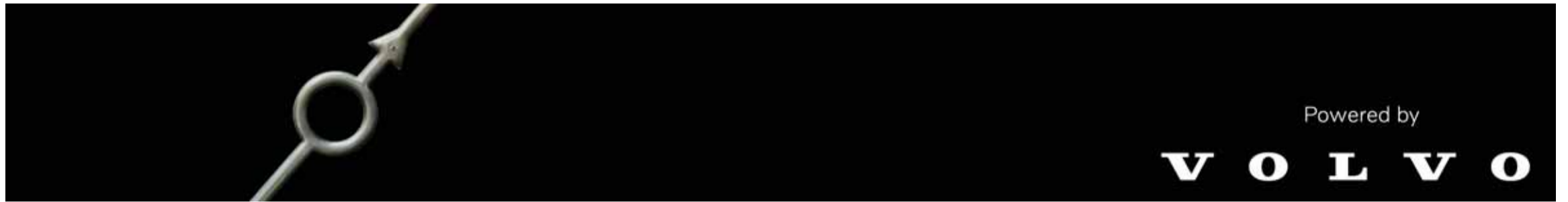
8 Fire on ship off Sri Lanka extinguished after 13 days



12 Traumatized Palestinians tend to shell-shocked pets in Gaza



15 Osaka crisis throws light on stars' mental health, media 'voyeurism'



Amir: Kuwait's support of just Palestinian cause 'unwavering'

Speaker: Assembly's position on Palestine 'extension' of official stance



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said yesterday that Kuwait remains unwavering in its stance and support of the just Palestinian cause. HH the Amir's statement came during his reception at Bayan Palace of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who was accompanied by his visiting Palestinian counterpart Mohammad Shtayyeh and his delegation.

HH the Amir reiterated that Kuwait will also be steadfast in its support of the Palestinian people until they achieve their dream of an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, saying that such lawful aspirations are in line with international resolutions on this matter and the Arab peace initiative. He affirmed that the Palestinian cause was, and still is, the central issue for Kuwait as well as the Arab and Muslim worlds, wishing the Palestinian government and people security, peace and triumph.

Shtayyeh expressed deep gratitude and appreciation to the efforts of Kuwait and its leadership and people in the support of Palestinians' aspirations. Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday said the "popular parliamen-

tary stance toward the Palestinian cause is an extension of Kuwait's principled official stand" regarding the issue.

Al-Dustour news network quoted Ghanem as affirming this stance during a reception of Shtayyeh. Ghanem has also affirmed that Kuwait maintains its solid support of the steadfastness and struggle of the Palestinian people and their just cause, noting that their solidarity and steadfastness "have contributed to divulging practices of the occupation to the world".

The Palestinian prime minister lauded Kuwait's backing at the official and popular levels toward the Palestinian people's cause. Talks between the two sides, held at Ghanem's office, touched on latest developments in the Palestinian territories in the aftermath of the recent "criminal attacks" carried by the occupation forces.

Shtayyeh also held talks with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The two exchanged views on regional issues, noting the mutual desire for boosting continuous consultations and coordination in support of diplomatic efforts for achieving peace and stability in the region. — KUNA

News in brief

UK reports zero COVID deaths

LONDON: Britain yesterday reported zero daily deaths from COVID-19 for the first time since last July, despite a recent rise in cases linked to the Delta variant. Yesterday's zero daily deaths came after the government reported just one COVID death across the UK on Monday, a public holiday. — AFP

Anceletti named Real Madrid coach

MADRID: Carlo Ancelotti will return to Real Madrid as coach for the next three seasons, the Spanish club said yesterday following last week's resignation of Zinedine Zidane. The 61-year-old Italian, who won the Champions League for Real Madrid during his first spell at the club between 2013 and 2015, will sign his new deal and be presented to the media today. — AFP

Human case of bird flu strain

BEIJING: China reported the world's first human infection of the H10N3 bird flu strain yesterday but said the risk of it spreading widely among people was low. A 41-year-old man was admitted to hospital with fever symptoms in the eastern city of Zhenjiang on April 28 and was diagnosed with H10N3 a month later. — AFP

Saudi defends azan volume limit

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Islamic affairs minister on Monday defended an order restricting the volume of mosque loudspeakers to no more than one-third of their maximum volume and limiting them mainly to issue the call to prayer rather than broadcasting full sermons. Abdullah Al-Sheikh said the order was in response to citizens' complaints that the loud volume was causing disturbance to children as well as the elderly. — AFP

WHO approves Sinovac jab

GENEVA: The World Health Organization yesterday approved the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use - the second Chinese jab to receive the WHO's green light after Sinopharm. The UN health agency signed off on the Beijing-based firm Sinovac's two-dose vaccine CoronaVac, which is already being deployed in several countries around the world. — AFP

Amir invites Saudi King to visit Kuwait

RIYADH: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday delivered a written letter from HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. The letter included an official invitation by HH the Amir to the Saudi King to visit Kuwait.

The letter, which was received by Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-

Saud, also highlighted bilateral relations and ways to bolster them, along with a number of issues of mutual concern in the regional and international arenas.

HH Sheikh Mishal earlier held a meeting with Prince Mohammed at the Yamama Palace in Riyadh. They discussed long-standing historical and fraternal relations between the two countries and the two brotherly peoples and ways to strengthen and develop them in various fields and at all levels, issues of common concern and the latest developments in the regional and international arenas. Prince Mohammed later hosted a dinner banquet in honor of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal and his accompanying delegation before they departed for Kuwait. — KUNA

OPEC+ agrees to continue crude output increases

LONDON: The OPEC group of oil-producing countries and its allies agreed yesterday to maintain planned production increases, as pandemic-hit demand for crude recovers. The 23-nation OPEC+ alliance implemented sharp output cuts to support prices after the coronavirus pandemic crushed the global economy last year. But since early May the

cartel has started implementing more generous production increases as oil prices have recovered and the health situation improves in developed economies.

At the end of a short meeting yesterday which lasted barely half an hour, the group agreed to continue rises up until July adding up to 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd), to which will be added a further million bpd which had been voluntarily withdrawn by Saudi Arabia. However, the alliance took no decision on what policy to follow from August onwards, and did not discuss the possibility of Iranian oil returning to the market in the coming months.

Among OPEC's allies, Russia has in recent times pushed for faster rises in output with traditional

OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia supporting a much more cautious approach. However, ahead of yesterday's meeting even Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman pointed out that though there were "still clouds on the horizon", "demand has improved in some of the world's bigger markets, like the USA and China" and praised the global vaccine rollout. For his part Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said: "We see that demand has increased, that prices have stabilized," and spoke of a "normalization" of the global economy. OPEC has remained optimistic in its predictions for 2021, expecting demand to reach 96.5 million bpd, an increase of six million on 2020 levels.

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Lebanon crisis world's worst since 1850s

BEIRUT: Lebanon's economic collapse is likely to rank among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century, the World Bank said in a damning report released yesterday. The report predicts that Lebanon's economy will shrink by close to 10 percent in 2021 and stresses there is "no clear turning point in the horizon".

Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year, the currency lost around 85 percent of its value and poverty is devastat-

ing a country once seen as a beacon of prosperity in the region. "The economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century," the report said.

The latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor report, entitled "Lebanon Sinking: To the Top 3", said such brutal economic collapses are usually the result of war. The complete meltdown of Lebanon's economy during the past 18 months is widely blamed on corruption and mismanagement by the country's hereditary political elite.

"Policy responses by Lebanon's leadership to these challenges have been highly inadequate," the report says.

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RIYADH: HH the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers a letter — from HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz — to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Yamama Palace yesterday. — KUNA



BEIRUT: An aerial view shows Beirut port on May 27, 2021, damaged in a massive explosion on Aug 4 last year, which killed more than 200 people and injured scores of others. — AFP

Local

Kuwaiti, Saudi officials' reciprocal visits prove pivotal for strengthening ties



KUWAIT: The late Saudi king Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud is seen during a visit to Kuwait in 1910 in which he held talks with the late Amir Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah started yesterday an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, his first official overseas visit since his assumption to post in October 2020. The choice of the Saudi Kingdom to be the first country to visit while in office, once again mirrors the peculiarity of relations between the two neighboring Arabian Gulf allies. Through 130 years of relations, leaders of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were reciprocating visits to keep in touch, coordinate stances of all issues and give impetus to efforts to ameliorate relations and mutual cooperation in all domains.

In 1910, late Saudi king and founder of the Saudi Kingdom Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud visited

Kuwait and held his milestone talks with the then Amir Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah. Since then, visits of leaders and officials of the two sisterly countries did not stop. Last January, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the Saudi Kingdom to partake in the 41st Gulf Cooperation Council summit. Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz made an official visit to Kuwait in December 2016. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud also paid two visits to Kuwait in May 2015 and September 2018.

Since the creation of the GCC in 1981, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have been working hand in hand to strengthen unity among Arabian Gulf nations and achieve political, economic, security and development goals of the pan-Gulf organization. For more



This archive photo shows His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah leaving Saudi Arabia after he presided over the Kuwaiti delegation at the 41st Gulf Summit in January 2021.

than three years from 2017 to 2020, Kuwait exerted strenuous diplomatic efforts, which proved successful to heal the Gulf rift. Kuwait's mediation had been admired and appreciated by the whole world. Saudi Arabia's reception of Kuwaiti leaders and many of its people following the Iraqi occupation of the country in August 1990. Saudi's political and military role in the war to liberate the country will always be remembered by all Kuwaitis. The Saudi stance in this delicate time reflected the strong bonds linking the two countries and their peoples.

Kuwait also has never spared any effort or chance to defend and stand by the Saudi Kingdom in all the circumstances. The latest in this aspect is Kuwait's active participation in the Saudi-led coalition to sup-

port the legitimate Yemeni government against the Iran-backed Houthi militia, and its firm condemnations of the Houthi attacks on the Saudi territories. Kuwait has also reiterated backing to the Saudi measures to stop these assaults in line with the international law.

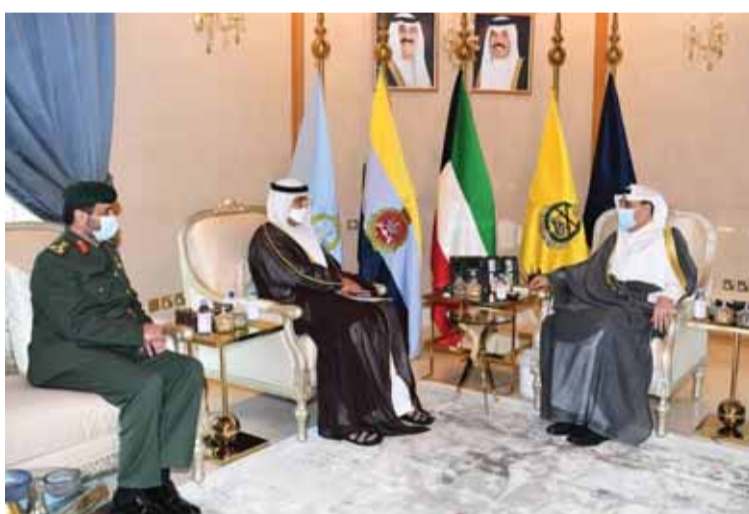
Bilateral cooperation have been steadily improving thanks to a slew of agreements and memoranda of understanding for cooperation in a wide array of realms including, energy, media, culture, economy, transport, education and religious affairs. Several agreements were also linked to facilitate the movement of people and cargo between the two countries. The Kingdom was the top importer of Kuwaiti products in the fourth quarter of 2020, after growing by 11.3 percent. — KUNA



RIYADH: HH the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a visit to Saudi Arabia yesterday. — KUNA



Defense Minister discusses common topics with envoys



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the UAE to Kuwait Matar Al-Neyadi. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah on Monday discussed common topics separately with ambassadors of the UAE, Canada and India: Matar Al-Neyadi, Louis-Pierre Emond and Sibi George

respectively. This came during the separate meetings held between the minister and the envoys to discuss the most important topics and matters of common concern, and means of boosting cooperation and action between Kuwait, and the sisterly and

friendly states, the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces said in a statement. The gatherings also focused on the latest developments on both regional and international arenas, it added. The Indian ambassador expressed appreciation to

Kuwait for its big efforts and medical aid provided to help combat the spread of the coronavirus in India, according to the statement. This mirrors the depth of friendly relations and cooperation between the two friendly countries, it added. — KUNA

OPEC+ agrees to continue crude...

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Ann-Louise Hittle, vice president Macro Oils, at Wood Mackenzie, said of yesterday's decision: "The outcome is one we expected". "Sticking to increases planned... is what the market needs," said Hittle, adding: "Demand growth is outpacing supply gains even with the agreed month-by-month OPEC+ production increases taken into account."

This has been reflected in recent movements in crude prices. World oil prices continued their recent upward trend on news of the OPEC+ decision, with the European Brent and US WTI benchmark contracts rising by around two percent at 1600 GMT yesterday, with WTI reaching levels unseen since Oct 2018.

Aside from demand, the other factor OPEC and its allies must take into account are the actions of

other oil-rich states such as the world's leading producer, the United States. Changes are also underfoot among the alliance's members themselves. After facilities in war-torn Libya began producing again from the end of 2020, eventually adding one million bpd to the market, all eyes will be on Iran.

If negotiations in Vienna on the full revival of the 2015 nuclear deal are successful, it could lead to many economic sanctions on the Islamic republic being lifted, including the US embargo on Iranian oil exports. If Iran were able to get back to its level of exports three years ago - when then US president Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions - it could mean an extra 1.5 million bpd coming to the market.

"We anticipate that Iran's production levels will be a contentious topic at future meetings," said Samuel Burman from Capital Economics. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh on Monday told his ministry's Shana news agency that the country's "priority" would be to nearly triple its current output level. — AFP

Lebanon crisis world's worst...

Continued from Page 1

Lebanon's ruling class has failed to act on the country's worst emergency in a generation, which was compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and a devastating explosion at Beirut port last August. "The increasingly dire socioeconomic conditions risk systemic national failings with regional and potentially global effects," the World Bank said.

The International Monetary Fund has offered assistance but the country's political barons have failed to even form a government that could deliver the reforms on which foreign aid is conditioned. "Subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty, real GDP is projected to contract by a further 9.5 percent in 2021," said the World Bank, dashing any hopes of a quick recovery.

According to the monetary institution, the economy contracted by 6.7 percent in 2019 and 20.3

percent in 2020. The solutions the Lebanese authorities have so far opted for to ease the financial crisis have placed much of the burden on small depositors. The report warned of "potential triggers to social unrest" in a country with a history of conflict and instability. "The increasingly dire socioeconomic conditions risk systemic national failings with regional and potentially global effects," it said.

The bankrupt state is unable to settle many of its bills and Lebanon's own energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, has warned that electricity supply was becoming critical and that the country could be plunged into total darkness by June's end. "The sharp deterioration in basic services would have long-term implications: mass migration, loss of learning, poor health outcomes, lack of adequate safety nets, among others," the report said.

"Permanent damage to human capital would be very hard to recover," said the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor, whose previous report was entitled "The Deliberate Depression". "Perhaps this dimension of the Lebanese crisis makes the Lebanon episode unique compared to other global crises," it said. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Prime Minister holds official talks with Palestinian counterpart

Kuwait, Palestine foreign ministers discuss plans to improve ties



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. — KUNA photos



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Palestinian counterpart Riad Al-Maliki.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held official talks with the visiting Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh at Bayan Palace yesterday. The discussions were held in a cordial atmosphere depicting depth of the historic bilateral relations and the solid brotherly bonds between the Kuwaiti and Palestinian peoples. The two sides exchanged views on regional issues, noting the mutual desire for boosting continuous consultations and coordination in support of diplomatic efforts for achieving peace and stability in the region.

In a statement after the session, His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed the State of Kuwait's principled and unwavering commitment toward the Palestinian cause, backing for the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people for establishing the independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, according to the international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. He stressed on necessity of intensifying Arab and international efforts to resume the Middle East peace process, ensure non-recurrence of breaches by the occupation Zionist authorities, halting violence against the brotherly Palestinian people

toward realizing the aspired peace and stability. After the talks, His Highness the prime minister hosted the guests at a luncheon.

Senior Kuwaiti officials attended the meeting including Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Integrity (Nazaha) Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Prime Minister Diwan and Head of the accompanying Honorary Mission Abdulaziz Al-Dekheel and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Arab World Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi. It was also attended by the delegation accompanying the Palestinian prime minister.

Palestinian resistance

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem had met Shtayyeh in his office earlier yesterday. The two officials discussed during the meeting the latest developments in the Palestinian territories after the recent attacks by the Zionist

forces, Al-Dustour news network said in a press statement. Ghanem praised the resistance of the Palestinian people in face of the brutal Zionist occupiers, affirming the Kuwaiti's parliament strong position in support of the Palestine cause. Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tabboub and the assembly's secretary general Adel Al-Loughani attended the meeting.

Separately, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah held talks with his Palestinian counterpart Riad Al-Maliki, focusing on efforts to push bilateral relations to new highs. Kuwait's support for the Palestinians in the face of an "onslaught of Zionist attacks" will remain unflinching, Sheikh Dr Ahmad told the Palestinian top diplomat amid the talks. These "acts of destruction" on the part of the Zionists violate international humanitarian laws and conventions, the Kuwaiti minister emphasized, saying that a two-state solution that guarantees an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital is the only way forward. The Palestinian minister said he was appreciative of Kuwait's support, which has been largely instrumental in keeping regional peace and security intact. — KUNA

Cabinet examines invitation to int'l vaccines' summit

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held its weekly session at Seif Palace on Monday under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Following the session, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah stated that the ministers kicked off the session, examining a common message from Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Jose Barroso, Chairperson of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and Dr Seth Berkley, GAVI'S Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The joint message invites His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the virtual GAVI Global Vaccine Summit due on June 2, 2021 — themed "One World Protected." It will be co-hosted by Japan and GAVI. The forthcoming summit, among various objectives, is designed to address the issue of inequality in distribution of vaccines against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to nations of the globe.

The ministers were informed that His Highness the Amir designated the foreign minister to par-

ticipate in the summit on his behalf. They were also informed about the visit to Saudi Arabia by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which started yesterday. They took note that His Highness the Crown Prince delegation would include Oil Minister, Minister of Higher Education, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Interior Minister, Advisor at the Crown Prince Diwan Dhari Abdullah Al-Othman and senior officials.

Then, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah addressed the executives about the latest status of the pandemic around the world as well as at the local level, shedding light on casualties and his department's vaccination efforts. The Cabinet renewed appreciation for the teams partaking in the fight against the virus, namely personnel of the health sector and the ministry of interior. The ministers examined minutes of the latest meeting of the supreme cyber security committee, approved a recommendation to establish "the national cyber security center," and tasked the foreign minister to coordinate with the relevant departments to prepare the required draft decree in this respect.

The ministers turned to an interpellation motion from the MPs Thamer Al-Dhafiri, Khaled Al-Otaibi and Abdulkarim Al-Kandari. The motion is addressed to the interior minister. It will be included in the agenda of the next parliamentary session. The ministers have re-affirmed that the inquiry is a constitutional right for all mem-

bers of the parliament and renewed confidence in the interior minister. Moreover, the government expressed anew condemnation of the attacks targeting Saudi Arabia by the Houthi militia-latest of which was the attack on the city of Khamis Mshait and deployment of booby-trapped boats in the Red Sea threatening navigation and global trade as well as energy supplies. Continuation of such terrorist attacks constitute a threat to security and stability of the kingdom and blatant challenge to international laws and conventions, the ministers stressed, reaffirming that the State of Kuwait would continue to stand alongside the kingdom and support any measure to safeguard its security and stability.

Moreover, the Cabinet condemned the fatal attack on a bus boarding teachers in the Afghan capital Kabul on Saturday. Such criminal attacks contradict various humanitarian tenets, humane values and heavenly laws, the Cabinet statement stressed. The ministers re-affirmed the State of Kuwait unwavering stance against terrorism and all forms of violence regardless of motives and causes. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti Cabinet condemned shooting spree incidents that happened in several cities and towns in the United States of America where a number of people were killed and many were wounded. The Cabinet expressed deep condolences to the friendly US, namely president and people as well as families of the victims, affirming rejection of such criminal acts that target the innocent. —KUNA

Foreign Minister receives phone call from USAID Chief

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received on Monday a phone call from the Director of the US Agency for International Development Samantha Power. During the call, the two discussed ways for enhancing joint bilateral cooperation in various development sectors between the State of Kuwait and United States of America, and following up on the development cooperation strategy between the two countries within the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed between Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the US Agency in November 2020. They also discussed prospects for enhancing technical cooperation and joint work between the two sides in the areas of financing sustainable economic and social development to various developing countries and bilateral coordination to respond to crises and natural disasters. — KUNA



USAID Director Samantha Power (left) and Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah

In my view

World No Tobacco Day



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

I am sure my good friends out there are now aware that I am highly passionate when it comes to the issue of smoking. I have to say that I lost my father at a relatively young age of 67 due to complications from smoking. He was a heavy smoker for almost 25 years.

World No Tobacco Day was celebrated two days ago and many organizations campaigning against this heinous habit held virtual seminars and panel discussions on how to combat this highly addictive practice. Even the tobacco industry with its major manufacturers are starting to admit that regular tobacco smoking is harmful, as they are trying to go ahead of the anti-smoking campaigns by introducing new devices after the vaping trend became very popular.

This is very scary, because I have started to see younger and younger individuals of both genders picking up "vapes", and many of those I met told me they were not smokers before! OMG! Is it not science that tells us that nicotine is the addictive substance that hooks one to a cigarette? Experts who already did some research said that it is possible some of those vaping may pick up a cigarette!

Now other companies are coming up with devices using different technologies that do away with combustion and are employing heat to bring nicotine out of real tobacco and not an aerosol. Ha! It is Mr Nicotine again! Addiction is in the air!

My personal belief is that no matter how you look at it or go around it, there's nothing good in it. The harm is there whether we reduce the amount of chemicals that accompany the puff or even reduce them to just nicotine - still the harm is there.

Please, if you are blessed for being a nonsmoker, keep it up. Stay away from smokers when a cigarette is lit in their hands. Ask anyone who vapes near you to stop or move away from them, and do not become a passive smoker. Lung cancer, cancer of the nose and its cavities, mouth cancer, esophagus cancer, stomach cancer, throat cancer and pharynx cancer are a few of the diseases you risk getting when you "enjoy" a cancer stick.

May Almighty Allah relieve you from this lesion and keep you healthy!

Ambassador releases statement on Italy's national day

KUWAIT: Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci released the following statement on the occasion of the National Day of the Italian Republic:

"On the occasion of the National Day of the Italian Republic, I would like to extend sincere expressions of my respect to the highest Kuwaiti authorities, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as to the friendly Kuwaiti people.

"I also send my heartfelt greetings to all my compatriots who are present here in Kuwait or are waiting to return to it. A special thought goes to the men and women of the Italian military contingent present here in mission: today it is a significant and extraordinarily important part of the collaboration between our country and Kuwait.

"We went through sixteen and more extremely difficult months, due to the pandemic in Italy, Kuwait and around the world. My thoughts go first to the families who suffered mourning and were most severely hit

by COVID-19 and its consequences. I also refer to families here in Kuwait.

"In this difficult situation, relations between Italy and Kuwait have continued in the name of friendship and close collaboration in all sectors, inevitably in large part remotely, but not only when this was possible.

"The strategic relationship between the two Countries has developed in all the ways in which it is articulated: those of an alliance government-to-government, business-to-business and last but not least, people-to-people.

"It is on these three strands that we will continue to build the future of our varied relationship. The foundations are extremely solid and allow us to really look with extreme optimism at the positive evolution of our bilateral collaboration.

"Hoping to be able to return soon, even beyond the digital - the so-called new normal of this phase - to resume the full course of our activities, I would like to wish everyone, once again remotely for this year, a Happy 2nd of June!"



Carlo Baldocci

KIB attracts young Kuwaiti talents at virtual career fairs

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently took part in the virtual career fairs that were held at the American University of the Middle East (AUM) and the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK); interactive events that were held via a dedicated digital platform that was accessible via the university websites or their social media accounts.

Speaking about the bank's participation in these events, Feras Al-Darmi, Deputy General Manager at the Human Resources Department, said "Our participation in the fairs is reaffirmation of our efforts to continue attracting and retaining talented young Kuwaitis, as we continue to seek to nationalize our workforce and drive the younger generation towards careers in the Islamic banking sector. Our goal as an organization is to get the best talents on our team and then continue to foster and develop these talents with ongoing training and personal and professional development programs."

Darmi noted that the idea for these two events comes very much in line with KIB's push towards

becoming more digital in everything that it does. "Taking part in these fairs allowed our human resources team to actively and directly engage with a slew of potential young talents and recruits, walking them through the application, interview, evaluation and hiring process. In addition to live interviews on-site, our team was on hand to answer all inquiries and questions about the work culture at KIB and the various career opportunities the bank has to offer. Our human capital strategies at the moment are keenly focused on finding the right talents with the advanced skillsets and technological savvy needed to be able to deliver on a next-level customer experience," added Darmi.

Darmi concluded his statement by noting that KIB currently has a clear strategy in place to nationalize its workforce and invest in the development of young Kuwaiti talents. He noted that the bank is always looking to up its national workforce quota, which rose to 73.14 percent in 2020 - in line with the regulations and directives of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).



Feras Al-Darmi

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

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News in brief

Drugs found in fish shipment

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry said an Arab national was arrested after bringing 16 kg of shabu into the country via air cargo. Tips were received about the suspect smuggling drugs in a fish shipment, so a warrant was obtained and he was arrested at Sharq fish market with the drugs. Separately, Kuwait Fire Force said firemen put out a blaze in three makeshift cabins at Sabah Al-Salem University City in Shadadiya and prevented it from spreading. No injuries were reported.



Kuwait Mosafer 'simplified'

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation said that they have begun "simplifying" some of the required information to register in the Kuwait Mosafer platform after receiving some complaints from travelers. It reiterated that travelers must register 24 hours before their flights.

'Abide by health requirements'

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior called on the public to comply with the decisions made by the Cabinet, abide by health requirements and avoid gatherings at the public places. This aims to maintain the societal health in light of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the ministry's security media and public relations department said in a press statement. The ministry pointed to the latest statistics issued by the Ministry of Health that show a noticeable rise in coronavirus infections, it added, noting that "the rise poses a danger to the safety of all".

'Recombination' creates more dangerous COVID-19 strains: Kuwaiti institute

'Superinfection viruses' can spread faster, worsen symptoms

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti research center warned that different strains of the COVID-19 virus could combine their genomes in one patients thus creating multiple mutations that can result in more dangerous viral strains that can spread faster and worsen COVID-19 symptoms. Following their recent research's findings, the Dasman Diabetes Institute has urged policy makers around the world to speed up the vaccination process in order to limit that risk.

"COVID-19 does not need to be introduced anymore," the institute said in a statement to the press. "It has been part of our lives for more than a year. Everybody knows by now that SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus causes COVID-19. All families are familiar with the elevated number of infections worldwide and every single person heard of someone they knew that gave their life to this ravaging disease. What we are still struggling to understand is the spectrum of disease severity among infected patients ranging from asymptomatic infection to intensive care unit admission and death."

Speculations focused on the differences in ethnicities, blood type, gen-

der, medical history, etc. "However, the team at Dasman Diabetes Institute, founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, led by their Chief Scientific Officer Prof Fahd Al-Mulla had a different theory," the Institute said. "They believed that the secret was in fact in the virus and this is why they started to look at the beginning of the pandemic spread back in early 2020. They analyzed the viral sequences from Kuwait and other sequences uploaded by many research groups from different parts of the world. Researchers at the Institute identified novel processes that allow dif-

ferent corona clades to recombine together and generate superinfection viruses."

Genomics and Bioinformatics Department members were able to prove that different strains or variants of SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus are co-infecting and combining their genomes in one patient, the Institute explained. "This means that instead of one mutation in the virus, you have multiple mutations combined," it said. This "recombination" process can result in more dangerous viral strains



KUWAIT: The Dasman Diabetes Institute.

that can spread faster and worsen COVID-19 symptoms, it warned.

"Recombination events are detected only in the samples from patients in Europe and North America, but not in the rest of the continents," the Institute pointed out. "This work was done on the sequences that were available in April 2020 but making

these observations, the team knew that it was only a matter of time before more strains start emerging from different countries. And unfortunately, they were right, new recombined strains emerged later in South Africa, Brazil and now wrecking through India. This study has been accepted in PLOS ONE journal."

Nursery staff vaccination underway

KUWAIT: The health ministry began vaccinating nursery employees against COVID-19 yesterday, in cooperation with the social affairs ministry. Around 2,500 were expected to be vaccinated by the end of the day.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Ugandan transport minister hurt in assassination bid

Indian doctors protest against 'yoga beats COVID' guru

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Trudeau pledges 'action' after graves found

Official records showed only 50 students died at the school

OTTAWA: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday expressed Canada's grief while pledging "concrete action" in support of indigenous communities after remains of 215 indigenous children were discovered at an old boarding school.

"As a dad, I can't imagine what it would feel like to have my kids taken away from me," Trudeau told a news conference. "And as prime minister, I am appalled by the shameful policy that stole indigenous children from their communities."

"Think of their communities that never saw them again. Think of their hopes, their dreams, their potential, of all they would have accomplished, all they would have become," he said. "All of that was taken away."

Trudeau, who has made reconciliation with Canada's nearly 1.7 million indigenous people a priority of his government since coming to power in 2015, said he would speak with his ministers to shore up "next and further things we need to do to support (residential school) survivors and the community."

Excavating school burial sites across Canada, as many have urged, he also said, "is an important part of discovering the truth."

"Canada will be there to support indigenous communities as we discover the extent of this trauma and trying to give opportunities for families and communities to heal."

The Tk'emlups to Secwepemc tribe said last week it had used ground-penetrating radar to confirm the remains of the students who attended a school near Kamloops, British Columbia.

The Kamloops Indian Residential School was the largest of 139 boarding schools set up in the late 19th century to assimilate Canada's indigenous peoples, with up to 500 students registered and attending at any one time.

It was operated by the Catholic church on behalf of the Canadian government from 1890 to 1969, before Ottawa took over its administration and closed it a decade later.

Official records showed only 50 deaths at the school, where a principal once pleaded for more funds to properly feed students.



People bring stuffed animals and children's shoes to a vigil in Victoria, British Columbia, on May 31, 2021, in memory of the 215 children's bodies found on a residential school site in Kamloops, British Columbia. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on May 31, 2021 expressed Canada's grief while pledging "concrete action" in support of indigenous communities after remains of 215 indigenous children were discovered at an old boarding school.

Children shoes tiny tributes

As the nation mourned, flags atop government buildings were lowered to half-mast over the weekend. Row upon row of children's shoes were left in front of parliament in Ottawa and on steps outside government offices and churches in several cities, forming makeshift memorials.

About 100 people, several in ceremonial attire, also marched Sunday in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, near Montreal.

National chief of the Assembly of First Nations Perry Bellegarde was quoted by the Globe and Mail as saying former students and families "deserve to know the truth."

"A thorough investigation into all former residential school sites could lead to more truths of the

genocide against our people," he added.

The British Columbia coroner is helping the Tk'emlups to Secwepemc tribe establish the causes and timings of the student deaths in Kamloops.

On Monday, opposition parties asked for-and Trudeau agreed to-an emergency debate in parliament on the "heart-breaking" discovery.

Some 150,000 Indian, Inuit and Metis youngsters in total were forcibly enrolled in these schools, where students were physically and sexually abused by headmasters and teachers who stripped them of their culture and language.

Today those experiences are blamed for a high incidence of poverty, alcoholism and domestic violence, as well as high suicide rates, in indigenous communities.

A truth and reconciliation commission has identified the names of, or information about, at least 4,100 children who died from abuse or neglect while attending a residential school. It estimates the actual toll is much higher.

The commission concluded in a 2015 report that more than a century of abuses at the schools amounted to "cultural genocide."

Seven years earlier, Ottawa had formally apologized as part of a Can\$1.9 billion (US\$1.5 billion) settlement with former students.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, meanwhile, set up an online registry with the names of the thousands of children who never came home from the boarding schools, along with old class photos. — AFP

Decade of Syria war killed nearly 500,000

BEIRUT: A decade of war in Syria has left nearly half a million people dead, a war monitor said yesterday, in a new toll that includes 100,000 recently confirmed deaths. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the conflict has claimed 494,438 lives since it erupted in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

The previous tally, issued by the Observatory in March this year, stood at more than 388,000 dead. The war monitor has since confirmed an additional 105,015 deaths following months of documentation efforts supported by its network of sources on the ground.

"The overwhelming majority of these deaths occurred between the end of 2012 and November 2015," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP, referring to the latest additions. Of the recently confirmed fatalities, more than 42,000 are civilians, most of them killed under torture in Syrian regime prisons, according to the monitor.

Abdel Rahman said that a lull in the fighting allowed his organisation to investigate reports of deaths that had not been included in the overall tally for lack of documentation.

"It provided us with a window to document tens of thousands of cases for which we lacked evidence," he said. With government forces having reconquered large swathes of Syria and a ceasefire

still holding along the main front line in Idlib region in the northwest, violence levels are at their lowest since the start of the conflict.

Prison deaths

The new figures published by the Observatory bring the total civilian death toll to 159,774, with attacks by Syrian government forces and allied militia accounting for the majority of deaths. The Observatory also documented a total of at least 57,567 deaths in government prisons and detention centres since 2011, up from the 16,000 confirmed deaths it reported in March.

It also reported 168,326 deaths among Syrian soldiers and allied militia, with troops accounting for more than half of the tally. The conflict has killed 68,393 jihadists, most members of the Islamic State group or of organisations linked to Al-Qaeda, as well as 79,844 other rebels.

A deal brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 froze a government offensive on the rebel-controlled Idlib enclave which many feared would have caused human suffering on a scale yet unseen in the conflict.

The attention on both sides has since turned to battling the Covid-19 pandemic and 2020 saw the lowest number of conflict-related deaths since the start of the war with 10,000, according to the Observatory.

Today the Damascus government controls more than two thirds of the country after a string of Russia-backed victories since 2015. President Bashar Al-Assad, in power since 2000, was re-elected in May for a fourth seven-year term. The war has forced more than half the country's pre-war population to flee their homes. — AFP

World leaders issue joint call for vaccine equality

WASHINGTON: World leaders must make a "new commitment" to a more equal distribution of coronavirus vaccines to bring the pandemic under control, the heads of four major global organizations said yesterday.

Their joint rallying cry comes as concerns rise that vaccine inequality between wealthy and poor nations is further complicating and prolonging a pandemic that has killed more than 3.5 million people globally. Writing in the Washington Post yesterday, the heads of the World Health Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization blamed the gap in vaccination programs for the emergence of virus variants that have fueled fresh outbreaks in the developing world.

"It has become abundantly clear that there will be no broad-based recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic without an end to the health crisis. Access to vaccination is key to both," they said.

"Ending the pandemic is possible-and requires global action now." The joint op-ed was penned by IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva, WHO

director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Bank president David Malpas, and WTO director general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

They called on the Group of Seven wealthy democracies to agree on a "stepped-up coordinated strategy, backed by new financing, to vaccinate the world" at their next meeting in the United Kingdom later this month.

The officials recommended the G7 agrees to fund a \$50 billion plan already put forward by the IMF to accelerate the end of the pandemic.

The WHO had already decried vaccine inequality as "grotesque" in March and its chief Tedros last month asked vaccine-wealthy nations to refrain from giving shots to children and adolescents and instead donate those doses to other nations.

UN-backed program Covax is meant to share vaccines with the poorest nations. But wealthy countries effectively elbowed out Covax in the early stages of procurement, striking their own deals with drug manufacturers and taking the overwhelming share of the more than 1.8 billion doses of vaccine that have already been injected worldwide.

The G7 member countries, which met in central London under tight coronavirus restrictions last month, committed to financially support Covax. But there was no immediate announcement on fresh funding to improve access to vaccines, despite repeated calls for the group to do more to help poorer countries. — AFP

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International

Defying warnings, inhabitants return to DR Congo's volcano city

Scientists fear a possibly catastrophic eruption

GOMA: Streets in the eastern DR Congo city of Goma returned to life yesterday, five days after residents fled following warnings that the nearby Nyiragongo volcano could erupt again.

Even as emergency officials insisted it was still not safe to return, streets in the city centre were clogged with traffic, the flow of pedestrians seemed close to normal and some shops had reopened.

In front of the city's main hospital, traffic navigated around large cracks that had emerged after the volcano first erupted last month, an AFP journalist saw.

Nyiragongo suddenly erupted on May 22, spewing out two rivers of lava before stopping the following day. But powerful aftershocks ensued, causing several buildings to collapse and triggering panic among the population.

Scientists fear a possibly catastrophic eruption under the floor of nearby Lake Kivu. In their worst projection, a "limnic eruption" would heat carbon dioxide dissolved in the depths of the lake, sending the gas to the surface.

Forming a vast, invisible cloud, the gas could settle at ground level on the lakeshore city, asphyxiating its inhabitants, according to this scenario.

In response, the North Kivu provincial authorities last Thursday ordered the evacuation of most of the city's districts. Around 400,000 people, out of a population of 600,000, were uprooted.

Around 120,000 arrived in the town of Sake, about 25 kilometres (15 miles) away to the west, while thousands more fled to the Rwandan town of

Gisenyi, just across the border to the east.

According to the UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, 350,000 evacuees are in need of emergency help. Many have found refuge in schools, churches and host families. Access to potable water is the major problem. The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) is distributing food in Sake and Rutshuru, as well as in Minova, in the neighbouring province of South Kivu.

'Danger is full-time'

People have begun trickling back to Goma, the North Kivu capital, in the absence of large tremors, even though the volcano's monitors insist it is not safe to return.

According to an official with the Congolese Directorate for Migration (DGM), 705 displaced people returned from Rwanda on Friday, 729 on Saturday and 111 on Monday morning.

One of those who had left was Francoise Habimana, who fled to the Rwandan capital of Kigali with her children, where they stayed with a host family.

Yesterday, she was among dozens of families queuing at the border crossing to return home. Another was Beatrice Wakandwa. "It was a bit hard to be on my own in Rwanda, even though the people were hospitable," she said.

"I don't have a choice. Whatever happens, I prefer to be back in Goma with my family." However, a crisis management cell set up by the North Kivu authorities said Tuesday that alert status "is still red," meaning that people were advised not to return home.



KINSHASA: First Lady of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, (C) holds a candle while attending a vigil in Kinshasa, in solidarity with the people of Goma affected by the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano located in the Virunga National Park, on May 22, 2021. —AFP

"Today, the scientific data have recorded 71 earth tremors, the majority of which have not been felt by the population," the emergency body said.

Despite a "comparatively small fall in seismicity, the danger is full-time," it added. "We therefore

recommend that people stay vigilant, listen to the news and strictly observe the measures set down by the provincial authorities."

Rwanda said late Monday that there was no "imminent risk" of a limnic eruption. —AFP

Zimbabwe president entrenches power

HARARE: In office since the military-led ouster of Robert Mugabe three-and-a-half years ago, Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa is consolidating his grip on power with moves reminiscent of his predecessor's style, analysts say.

Tweaks to the constitution and criminalising anti-government speech mark a change from Mugabe's street-fighting and abductions, but observers see the same motives at work-making political opposition all but impossible.

The president-who arrived in office promising a "new and unfolding democracy" and a departure from Mugabe's authoritarian rule-is in fact developing "an imperial executive whose power is not adequately checked and balanced," said Kudaca Phulu, legal affairs chief of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Mnangagwa claimed the presidency in November 2017 after a military coup put paid to Mugabe's 37-year rule.

He was confirmed in elections eight months later the results of which were hotly contested by the opposition, and will be up for re-election in 2023.

Weeks ago, a constitutional amendment granted the president power to handpick judges and extend the tenure of senior members of the judiciary, even past their retirement age.

The constitutional change "is manifestly conspicuous in its intention to consolidate and solidify the president's position ahead of 2023 elections," the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum said in a statement.

Mnangagwa almost immediately extended by five years the tenure of 70-year-old Chief Justice Luke Malaba-seen as the president's ally after he threw out opposition claims of election-rigging in 2018.

Earlier this month, Zimbabwe's High Court ruled that Malaba's extension was illegal after a challenge by a lawyers' association, but the government vowed to appeal.

Justice Minister Ziyambi Ziyambi threatened to "poke the enemy in the eye", claiming the courts had been captured by foreign forces.

Even with the High Court ruling, the change to the basic law marks "the single deadliest blow to constitutionalism", said Dzikamai Bere, director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association.

'Authoritarian impulses'

Critics see little difference between Mnangagwa-Mugabe's former deputy-and his ex-boss, accusing him of seeking to create a one-party state under the ruling Zanu-PF.

"Beating up people is no longer sustainable," independent analyst Alexander Rusero told AFP. "Whereas in the past Zanu-PF used violence and abductions to intimidate and cow its opponents in order to maintain its hold on power, this time they have decided to use subtle ways."

The government now hopes to pass a so-called Patriotic Bill, which prohibits any Zimbabwean from "willfully communicating messages intended to harm the image and reputation of the country on international platforms".

Seen as seeking to muzzle Mnangagwa's opponents, it will allow the government to pry into private communications between citizens and foreign government officials if passed into law.

Combined with the constitutional amendment, the bill shows "it's all about consolidation of power and a game plan in favour of Mnangagwa," Rusero said.

"We are on a roller-coaster of rule by law as opposed to the rule of law... the path has been cleared and come 2023 (elections) it's as good as a done deal," he added. —AFP

Colombian soldiers given mixed reception in protest center Cali

CALI: Inhabitants of Colombia's third largest city reacted with fear and suspicion to the sight of soldiers patrolling the streets of Cali, but others have been cheering them. Cali has been the epicenter of civil unrest since protests sprang up around the country on April 28, initially against a tax hike that would have mostly affected the middle classes, amid economic pain caused by the pandemic.

According to the NGO Indepaz, at least 44 of 71 deaths recorded during the month-old protests were in Cali, where the mayor's office said there have been 550 people injured.

Last Friday, before night fell, Cali's 2.2 million inhabitants-accustomed to the trauma of violent drug cartels operating in their city-faced a new nightmare scenario. Civilians wearing bullet-proof vests and carrying weapons fired at protesters as the police watched.

That day Colombia was marking one month of protests, and 13 people in the city were killed. According to authorities, eight of those had been shot.

President Ivan Duque announced that same day he would deploy the military in Cali to help police, who were widely criticized internationally for the repression of demonstrators.

During a tour of the city, an AFP team found rubble, piles of rubbish, destroyed road signs, broken windows and even a bullet casing.

Since then, soldiers have been deployed to pro-

Pope updates canon law to address paedophilia by priests

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis updated the Catholic Church's criminal code yesterday by adding details on punishing sexual abuse crimes of minors by priests, measures long sought by activists against paedophilia.

Revision of the penal sanctions within the Code of Canon Law followed a years-long process involving input from canonist and criminal law experts and came after repeated complaints by victims of sexual abuse

Ugandan transport minister hurt in assassination bid

KAMPALA: Uganda's transport minister, who used to lead the armed forces, was shot yesterday in an attack which left his daughter and bodyguard dead, a government spokesman said.

The minister, General Edward Katumba Wamala, who was chief of the defense forces between 2013 and 2017, came under fire while driving in Kampala, said government spokesman Chris Baryomunsi.

"There was an attempt on his (Wamala's) life this morning ... His daughter and bodyguard were shot and they died at the scene," Baryomunsi told AFP yesterday.

"General Katumba has been rushed to hospital with bullet wounds and he is receiving treatment, the crime scene has been taken over by the investigators," he added.

"This could be a case of assassination by criminal elements but the investigations will establish the motive and those behind" the attack. Witnesses to the attack told local television stations that four masked men riding two motorbikes fired scores of bullets at Wamala's vehicle.

Images from the scene showed Wamala's car-an official army vehicle easily identified by its distinctive military green number plates-riddled with about a dozen bullet holes in the rear and driver side of the vehicle.

Yesterday's shooting is the latest in a series of attempted killings of high-profile targets by motorcycle-riding assassins in Uganda's capital. In June 2018 Ibrahim Abiriga, a leading politician from the ruling National Resistance Movement party, led by President Yoweri Museveni, was gunned down alongside his bodyguard in similar circumstances.

In March 2017 witnesses described four masked assailants riding two motorbikes firing a hail of bullets at Uganda police spokesman, Andrew Kawessi,



KAMPALA: The wife of Uganda's transport minister General Katumba Wamala (C) arrives at the crime scene where the minister was shot in his car in Kampala, Uganda, yesterday. —AFP

who was killed near the site of Wamala's murder.

In March 2015, Joan Kagezi, a prosecutor in charge of investigating a jihadist

attack in Kampala in 2010, was shot dead by men on motorbikes as she returned home. No one has been convicted of any of those killings. —AFP

tect government buildings and shops, many of which had already been looted.

As they pass, drivers honk their horns in support of the troops.

"Unfortunately the army didn't arrive in time. They totally vandalized the Torre Empresarial building, and many businesses that lost everything," said Angela Sguerra, a 42-year-old doctor from the exclusive Ciudad Jardin neighborhood. But she added that the soldiers "make us feel more protected."

'Get out!'

The mood is different in the working class Siloe neighborhood, which has been through some bloody days since the protests began. "So far we've had no problems," Juliana Bonilla, 28, told AFP.

Siloe is one of several parts of the city where protesters are nervously waiting for the arrival of the soldiers.

"There have been clashes and friction with police so we're more cautious than ever," said Bonilla. Siloe also shows the signs of violence, including a torched shop from which firefighters pulled the charred remains of a man.

Elizabeth Serna, 40, says the government "militarized" the city without listening to young people left destitute by the coronavirus pandemic and weary of the lockdowns.

They are the ones who have taken to the streets to demand solidarity from the government, as well as job and educational opportunities.

Duque visited the city on Saturday and while he was applauded in some parts, others shouted: "Get out!"

One youngster yelled in his face: "You're killing us. We don't forgive you." Despite the deployment



FACATATIVA: Demonstrators take cover behind a mattress during clashes with riot police which erupted during a protest against the government of Colombian President Ivan Duque, in Facatativa, Colombia. —AFP

of troops, neither they nor police have approached the road blocks set up around the city by some protesters. One such demonstrator stands guard on top of a communal bin, surveying with binoculars who was entering or leaving the neighborhood.

Nearby a man comes out of a tent and fires a gun in the air.

Julian Rojas, 23, with his face painted in the colors of Colombia's flag, ties himself to an electricity pole and says he's beginning a hunger strike to support demonstrators.

"We haven't had a military presence" in the streets, he says, but adds that he's seen helicopters and planes circling over the barricades.

Businesswoman Lilibeth Tejada, 41, says she's happy the military has arrived. She wants them to reestablish order so she won't have to "defend my business when they come to loot it." —AFP

hibits adultery. Under the new heading of "Offenses against human life, dignity and liberty," the code specifies that a priest is to be stripped of his office and punished "with other just penalties" if he commits offences against the sixth commandment with a minor. Similarly, a priest who grooms or induces a minor "to expose himself or herself pornographically or to take part in pornographic exhibitions" will be similarly punished.

One aim of the revision, wrote Francis, was to reduce the number of penalties left to the discretion of judges, especially in the most serious cases. "The new text introduces various modifications to the law in force and sanctions some new criminal offences, which respond to the increasingly widespread need in the various communities to see justice and order reestablished that the crime has shattered," he wrote. —AFP

International

School's out for Myanmar students defying junta threats

Those killed in the junta's crackdown were of primary school age

YANGON: Schools in Myanmar opened yesterday for the first time since the military seized power, but teachers and students are set to defy the junta's calls for full classrooms in a show of resistance.

Four months of national turmoil have followed the February ouster of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with more than 800 people killed by security forces and a nationwide strike crippling the economy.

Public school teachers—dressed in the green and white uniforms mandated by the education ministry—were prominent in the early mass protests, joining railway workers, doctors and civil servants on the streets.

The junta has insisted schools open after a year's absence due to COVID-19, but many educators had already decided they could not return to a job they love.

"I'm not afraid of their arrest and torture," Shwe Nadi, a teacher from the commercial capital Yangon told AFP. Her name has been changed for her safety.

"I'm afraid of becoming a teacher who teaches the students propaganda." The 28-year-old was fired for supporting the civil disobedience movement—one of the thousands of teachers and academics the junta has sacked.

"Of course, I feel bad losing my job because I loved being a teacher. Although it is not well paid, we have our pride for being teachers as others respect us," she said.

Nu May—not her real name—in southern Mon state will also stay away, she told AFP. The primary school teacher lost months of her salary after joining the nationwide boycott, but said "my soul is pure" because she participated in the strike. "When I see how they have killed a lot of people, I feel I don't want to be their teacher any more," she added. Some of those killed in



SITTWE: A school official checks temperature of students in Sittwe, capital of western Rakhine State yesterday, 2021. Schools in Myanmar opened yesterday for the first time since the military seized power, but teachers and students are set to defy the junta's calls for full classrooms in a show of resistance.—AFP

the junta's crackdown were of primary school age, and charity group Save the Children said the dead include 15 children under the age of 16.

'We don't want traitors'

Junta-run media has in recent days carried pictures of functionaries watching school registrations and

promising that parents will be "satisfied" with the return of classes. Students at a school near the capital Naypyidaw opened a setpiece ceremony to mark the new term by performing a "National Enrolment Week" song in front of the regime's education minister, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar state newspaper.

Falcone's sister, Maria, told the paper she was distressed by the news but "it's the law, a law moreover wanted by my brother and that should be respected."

Dissolved in acid

Brusca—who went by the nickname 'the Pig' and who was arrested in 1996 — was one of the most loyal operators of the head of Cosa Nostra, Salvatore "Toto" Riina, and as a collaborator admitted to carrying out hundreds of murders, Italian news media reported. One of the most grisly was the killing of 12-year-old Giuseppe Di Matteo, the son of a mafia turncoat, who was kidnapped in 1993 in retaliation for his father collaborating with authorities.

After being held in a house for over two years in squalid conditions, the boy was strangled and his body thrown into acid in what police have called "one of the most heinous crimes in the history of the Cosa Nostra".

Protest about Brusca's release also came from both sides of Italy's political divide. The leader of the centre-left Democratic Party, Enrico Letta, called it a "punch in the stomach that leaves one speechless," while far-right leader Matteo Salvini called Brusca a "wild beast" who "cannot get out of prison."

Meanwhile, Claudio Fava, the president of Sicily's anti-mafia commission, doubted the value of Brusca's information provided to authorities about the 1992 attack on Falcone.

"Certainly Brusca could have said much more than he did, he could have contributed much more to get to the truth of that period," said Fava. "Certainly now he won't do it anymore." — AFP

Italians aghast as notorious mafia killer released

ROME: Italians were outraged yesterday at the release from prison of a ruthless mafia boss who assassinated Italy's most famous prosecutor and dissolved a boy's body in acid, among other crimes. Giovanni Brusca, 64, was released Monday from Rome's Rebibbia prison after serving a 25-year sentence, during which he became a state's witness.

He will now serve four years of probation. "Brusca freed—the cruelest boss," wrote La Repubblica daily. Brusca was a key figure within the Cosa Nostra, the Sicilian mafia group. He detonated the bomb that killed Giovanni Falcone, Italy's legendary prosecuting magistrate who dedicated his career to overthrowing the mafia, in 1992.

Falcone's wife and three bodyguards were also killed in the attack after their car drove over a section of highway outside Palermo packed with 400 kilos (882 pounds) of explosives, detonated by Brusca nearby. The wife of one of the bodyguards killed, Tina Montinaro, told Repubblica she was "indignant" at Brusca's release. "The state is against us—after 29 years we still don't know the truth about the massacre and Giovanni Brusca, the man who destroyed my family, is free," Montinaro said.



SILIGURI: A doctor (C) checks on a COVID-19 patient at an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Nightingale Hospital, on the outskirts of Siliguri yesterday. — AFP

Indian doctors protest against 'yoga beats COVID' guru

NEW DELHI: Thousands of doctors across India wore black armbands yesterday calling for the arrest of a hugely popular guru who has claimed yoga can prevent COVID-19 and that conventional medicine has killed thousands of coronavirus patients.

Baba Ramdev, the creator of a successful traditional medicine empire, said last month the pandemic showed modern pharmaceuticals to be "stupid and failed science" and claimed hundreds of thousands "have died because they had allopathy (conventional) medicines".

Yesterday's "Black Day" of protests, photos on social media showed doctors with banners demanding the arrest of "Quack Ramdev" while others wore PPE suits with #ArrestRamdev written on the back.

The doctors' association at the All India Institute of

Medical Sciences (AIIMS), one of Delhi's biggest government hospitals, called Ramdev's comments "disgraceful". Ramdev, a keen supporter of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, retracted his comments after an appeal by India's health minister and the guru said he had been merely reading out other people's WhatsApp messages.

But he then caused further outcry by saying that he did not need a coronavirus vaccine because he was protected by yoga and traditional medicine, or Ayurveda. Ramdev's company Patanjali Ayurved is worth several hundred million dollars, selling everything from toothpaste to jeans at its ubiquitous stores.

Earlier this year it launched a herbal remedy called Coronil that Ramdev, who also has a TV channel, had said would cure coronavirus. The launch event was attended by the health minister.

The company — India's 13th most trusted brand according to rankings published last year — has previously claimed it had cancer remedies, while Ramdev has also said he can "cure" homosexuality and AIDS.

Coronavirus has left at least 330,000 people dead in India, including more than 1,200 doctors, according to the Indian Medical Association. — AFP

News in brief

China rejects allegations

BEIJING: China yesterday denied an Australian academic's claims that he had been tortured in custody during his two-year detention on espionage charges. The trial of Chinese-born Australian Yang Jun began behind closed doors Thursday, but the court decided to delay a verdict and a sentence. The 56-year-old, who also goes by his pen name Yang Hengjun, has told supporters he was tortured while at a secret detention site and fears forced confessions may be used against him. "The first six months... was a really bad period. They tortured me," Yang said in a message seen by AFP. But China denied the claim, saying his trial was handled in accordance with Chinese laws and that Yang's legal rights were protected.—AFP

Capital confusion

SEOUL: A climate change summit hosted by South Korea has drawn ridicule for kicking off with a promotional video suggesting it was taking place in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. The opening ceremony for the P4G, or Partnering for Green Growth, summit at the weekend featured speeches from world leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. First, though, came the lavishly produced video. At one point it centered on the Taedong river in North Korea's capital, pulling back to reveal the giant May Day Stadium—the world's largest with a 150,000-seat official capacity—zooming out rapidly to take in the rest of the city, the Korean peninsula, Asia and the world. "Leaders from around the world gather here today," read a caption.—AFP

Philippine journalist's libel case dismissed

MANILA: Veteran Philippine journalist Maria Ressa has had a cyber libel charge against her dismissed, lawyers involved in the case said yesterday, in a rare legal win for the key critic of the country's President Rodrigo Duterte.

Ressa, the chief executive of news website Rappler, was earlier convicted in another cyber libel case last year, but remains free on bail pending an appeal in a case that could see her handed six years in jail.

"I'm glad to hear good news. I look forward to seeing the rest of the cases against me and Rappler dropped in the future," Ressa, a former CNN correspondent and 2018 Time magazine Person of the Year, said in a statement. The earlier libel case stemmed from a complaint made by Manila businessman Wilfredo Keng in 2017 over a Rappler story five years earlier about his alleged ties to a judge on the nation's top court. A formal complaint by Keng over a 2019 Ressa tweet sharing a screenshot of a 2002 story published by another Manila newspaper about him led to the second cyber libel charge. Lawyers for both camps told AFP Tuesday a Manila court dismissed the second cyber libel charge after Keng said he was no longer interested in pursuing the case and in taking the witness stand.

"The private complainant has decided not to prosecute the civil aspect of the instant case, and is categorically waiving, and renouncing any claim for damages that may have arisen from the Twitter post," Keng said in a letter to the court last week. "There was no compromise (with Ressa's camp)," Keng lawyer Ryan Jan Cruz told AFP, confirming his client had dropped his complaint after winning the first case.—AFP

But at one high school in central Sagaing region, a slogan daubed in red paint across the front of the building urges staff members to stay away. "We do not want the military slavery teachers," showed pictures carried by local media. "We do not want the teachers who are traitors." University students were key drivers of political activism under nearly five decades of earlier military rulers, who violently suppressed any signs of public dissent. Many students back then were killed, jailed or expelled, and universities were shuttered for several years.

'Not one of my friends is going'

Some university classes are already back in session, but boycotts have seen widespread absences on both sides of the teaching lectern. "Not one of my friends is going," said an English major at a university in Mawlamyine, a city that saw brutal crackdowns by security forces against protesters.

Her class of 100 is now empty, despite students being summoned by the few remaining professors on campus. Protesters have discouraged parents and teachers from sending children to schools that still have teachers willing to work, saying it amounted to backing the military regime. "Do not be sad when you cannot enrol your child at school when some parents have no children to enrol," read a banner in Bago region, south of the capital.

Teacher Shwe Nadi said she will remain committed to the civil disobedience movement, despite fears of being detained or worse. "I won't run because I have not committed any crimes," she said. "If they want to arrest me, I am prepared." — AFP

Malaysia imposes lockdown as Asia battles virus surge

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia imposed a tough nationwide lockdown yesterday to battle a worsening coronavirus outbreak, as countries across Southeast Asia struggled with a resurgence in cases driven by infectious variants. Much of the region escaped the pandemic's first wave last year relatively unscathed by rapidly closing borders and introducing curbs.

But countries from Thailand to Vietnam are being hammered by fresh surges, with efforts to quell outbreaks hampered by slow vaccine rollouts and populations weary of restrictions. Malaysia is among the worst hit. Of almost 2,800 deaths from COVID-19 recorded in the country of 32 million since the start of the pandemic, over 40 percent were in May alone.

More than 570,000 infections have been reported, with a string of new daily records last week. As well as variants, the outbreak has been fanned by gatherings in the Muslim-majority country during the holy month of Ramadan and the Eid al-Fitr holiday, often in defiance of coronavirus rules.

Under what authorities have termed a "total lockdown" in force from yesterday, only essential businesses—such as supermarkets and medical clinics—can operate, people can only go outside for necessities, and most schools are closed. Travel between most parts of the country had already been banned for months.

While there had been growing calls for tougher action, the two-week lockdown will deal a fresh blow to many businesses that have struggled to stay afloat over the past year. "The impact of the coronavirus on small businesses like mine is devastating," said Lilian Chua, whose hair salon outside the capital Kuala Lumpur will have to close.

"The government imposes a lockdown but the virus is in the air—they need to speed up vaccinations," the 42-year-old told AFP. Fewer than six percent of Malaysia's population have so far received at least one vaccine dose.

Slow vaccine rollouts

Vietnam was praised for keeping infections low last year, but its cases have more than doubled in the past month, prompting officials to suspend foreign arrivals at some airports and implement social distancing in Ho Chi Minh City. State media also reported that authorities are appealing to private companies to procure jabs for their own workers.

The health minister has reportedly had meetings with South Korea's Samsung and LG, as well as various embassies and chambers of commerce, to discuss vaccine supply. Overcrowded prisons have been at the centre of an escalating outbreak in Thailand, which is recording more than 4,000 infections a day.

Affluent Singapore—which had barely seen any local transmission for months—tightened curbs in May following an uptick in cases, with authorities citing concerns about variants. And the Philippines imposed a fresh lockdown in and around Manila in March as hospitals struggled to cope, although the restrictions have been eased as infections fall. Infection rates have been relatively stable recently in Indonesia, however, which was hit hard last year at the start of the pandemic. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021

China tutoring groups fined millions

Government scrutiny grows of private education businesses

BEIJING: Fifteen tutoring firms have been hammered with millions of dollars of fines over alleged fraud, Chinese state media said yesterday, as the government's chastening of the tech sector seeps into the private education businesses.

The groups, including major brands like Zuoyebang, which counts Alibaba as an investor, and Tencent-backed Yuanfudao, were hit with fines amounting to 36.5 million yuan (\$5.7 million).

After issuing fines and warnings to tech companies spanning e-commerce, gaming, video streaming and food deliveries, Beijing has in recent days turned its attention towards tutoring start-ups, many of them online. The penalties follow a warning by President Xi Jinping in March of problems in the education sector, including excessive pressure on young students.

A number of potential initial public offerings for companies running learning apps have since ground to a halt, reported Bloomberg News on Monday, naming both Zuoyebang and Yuanfudao among those that were holding off preparations. The education ministry also plans

to create a division overseeing private education platforms, the report added.

Yesterday, China's market watchdog said an investigation into the 15 institutions - which include online apps - alleged they had engaged in "false advertising", with many also found to have conducted "price fraud". For example, Bond Education is accused of inflating a package of trial classes to 420 yuan and offering it at an apparent discount of 12 yuan, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Among other wrongdoings were "fabricating teacher qualifications, exaggerating the effects of training... and fabricating user reviews", according to the State Administration for Market Regulation. The services aimed to induce parents to fork over money, said regulators.

This follows similar practices by Zuoyebang and Yuanfudao that authorities flagged in May, including a false claim by Zuoyebang of a collaboration with the United Nations. Intense competition starting from a young age has amped up the pressure on China's parents to pay extra to get their children ahead in the congested education system. —AFP



HANDAN, China: Elementary school students draw a picture on International Children's Day in Handan in northern Hebei province yesterday. —AFP

South Africa jobless rate hits new high

PRETORIA: South Africa's unemployment rate climbed to its highest level on record in the first quarter, official data showed yesterday, as the country reels from the coronavirus pandemic. The jobless rate rose to 32.6 percent in the first three months of the year, compared to 32.5 percent in the previous quarter.

It is the highest figure on record since the start of South Africa's quarterly labor force survey in 2008, said statistician-general Risenga Maluleke. The number of jobless people rose by 8,000 to 7.2 million from the fourth quarter of 2020. The job losses were largely registered in the construction and agricultural sectors.

The expanded definition of unemployment - people who are employable but have given up looking for work - rose by 0.6 percentage points to 43.2 percent. Young people have been particularly badly hit, with the unemployment rate among those aged 15 to 34 years old exceeding 46 percent. South Africa's economy, which contracted by seven percent in 2020, is still reeling from the knock-on effects of rolling restrictions to stem the spread of COVID-19.

The stifled economic activity bled hundreds of thousands of jobs. The African continent's most industrialised economy was already in recession when the coronavirus hit last March. It is Africa's hardest hit by COVID-19, with over 1.6 million infections, including more than 56,000 fatalities. The unemployment rate in South Africa has remained above 20 percent for at least two decades. —AFP

Nestle eyes new strategy

ZURICH: Global food giant Nestle said Monday it was developing a new nutrition strategy after the Financial Times reported on an internal document showing that most of its food and drinks were unhealthy. An internal presentation circulated among top executives earlier this year had revealed that more than 60 percent of Nestle's mainstream food and drinks portfolio did not meet "recognized definition of health", the British business daily reported.

The presentation, seen by the FT, revealed that only 37 percent of Nestle's food and beverages by revenues (not including products like pet food, baby food and specialized medical nutrition) achieved a rating of over 3.5 under Australia's five-star health rating system. Nestle, owner of everything from chocolate to coffee and baby food brands, has for several years been reorganizing its activities to focus more on health and wellness as consumers increasingly snub frozen pizzas and sugary drinks.

The Swiss company has among other things been making a major push in vegetarian and vegan products. "We have made significant improvements to our products," the Nestle presentation said, according to the FT. But, it added, "our portfolio still underperforms against external definitions of health in a landscape where regulatory pressure and consumer demands are skyrocketing."

A Nestle spokeswoman told AFP the company was currently "working on a company-wide project to update its pioneering nutrition and health strategy". "We are looking at our entire portfolio across the different phases of people's lives to ensure our products are helping meet their nutritional needs and supporting a balanced diet," she said. The initial focus, she added, would be on "assessing the part (of) our food and beverage portfolio that can be measured against external nutrition profiling systems," like the Australian system. —AFP

Sri Lanka ship fire extinguished after 13 days

COLOMBO: A fire aboard a cargo ship off Sri Lanka carrying hundreds of tons of chemicals, plastics and cosmetics was finally extinguished yesterday after a 13-day international operation, the navy said. In Sri Lanka's worst marine ecological disaster, huge volumes of microplastic granules from the ship's containers have inundated beaches, forcing a fishing ban and a major clean-up involving thousands of troops.

Experts from Dutch salvage company SMIT boarded the MV X-Press Pearl and reported massive flooding of the engine rooms. The Singapore-registered vessel caught fire on May 20 when it was about to enter the Colombo port. Navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva said the stern of the 186-metre (610-foot) long container carrier had gone down by about a metre because of the flooding.

"It is not unusual for the vessel to trim by aft (tilt to the rear) when water sprayed on deck settles in the engine room," Silva told AFP. He said the spraying of water was stopped to pre-

vent further flooding, but some areas of the ship were still too hot to carry out a complete examination of the vessel.

However, navy divers were carrying out examinations under the water line to ensure that there were no cracks in the hull to undermine the integrity of the ship, which is also carrying 278 tons of bunker oil and 50 tons of gasoil. Sri Lanka's navy was joined by India's coastguard and tugs brought in by SMIT to battle the flames which destroyed most of the nearly 1,500 containers the vessel was carrying.

The three-month-old ship had 25 tons of nitric acid and other chemicals as well as 28 containers of plastic raw material, much of which fell into the sea. Marine Environment Protection Authority chief Dharshani Lahandapura said they were still assessing the ecological damage, but believed it was the "worst ever in my lifetime".

The MEPA chief said the crew apparently knew of a nitric acid leak on May 11, long before the vessel entered Sri Lankan water en route to Malaysia and Singapore. Sri Lanka began a criminal investigation Monday into the fire and the marine pollution.

Police spokesman Ajith Rohana said the captain and chief engineer, both Russian nationals, had been questioned for 14 hours since Monday. The third officer, an Indian national, was also



SMOKE billows from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl in the sea off Colombo Harbor in this May 30, 2021 photo. —AFP

questioned at length, he said. "We are seeking advice from the attorney general on the next steps," Rohana said, adding that the 25-member crew who were evacuated from the vessel on May 25 were still in quarantine.

The ship was heading to Colombo from Gujarat, India. It had previously visited Qatar and Dubai from where the containers of nitric acid had been loaded. Sri Lankan authorities suspect the acid leak triggered the fire. A Sri Lankan court yesterday ordered the passports to be impounded of the three senior crewmen pending further investigations. —AFP

Canada economy grew 5.6% in Q1

OTTAWA: Canada's economy grew at an annualized rate of 5.6 percent in the first three months of 2021, the government statistical agency said yesterday. Its strength was in part due to low mortgage rates fueling strong demand for housing, continued government COVID aid to households and businesses, and an improved jobs market, Statistics Canada said in a release.

The figure, however, was about a percentage point lower than analysts had forecast, following a revised 9.3 percent uptick in GDP in the previous quarter. "Canada's economy managed to shrug off a case of COVID in the winter, only to succumb to a harsher wave of the same disease in the spring," CIBC Economics analyst Avery Shenfeld said in a research note.

Still, growth was "healthy" in the quarter, he said.

Doubts raised about COVID patent waiver

GENEVA: The EU, Britain and Japan continued to voice doubts at the WTO on Monday about a proposed intellectual property waiver on COVID-19 products such as vaccines, a Geneva trade official said. Proposals to initiate text-based discussions on an IP waiver, rather than more general talks, gained traction at an informal meeting of the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of IP Rights (TRIPS) council, the official said.

The United States, China, Ukraine and New Zealand have thrown their weight behind the bid to waive certain TRIPS provisions relating to the medical prevention, containment or treatment tools needed to battle COVID-19, said the official. However, some members "continued to express doubts about the convenience of starting negotiations and asked for more time" to analyze the proposal, the official said.

They included the European Union, Australia, Brazil, Britain, Japan, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland and Taiwan. Agreements at the

pointing to strong price gains, and Canadians staying in the country with reduced winter travel abroad helping to give a boost to "mediocre consumer spending". According to Statistics Canada, the economy got a boost from a sharp increase in prices for construction materials and energy used in Canada and exported, as well as increased wages - notably in construction and information and cultural industries.

Housing investments continued to rise for a third consecutive quarter, leading the recovery, but adding tens of billions of dollars in Canadians' residential mortgage debts. Outlays for new vehicles, computers, games, toys and hobbies, as well as sports and camping equipment rose, but declined for clothing and footwear.

As consumers spent more time at home during the pandemic, spending on food and alcoholic beverages also increased. Shenfeld noted that Canadians amassed significant savings during the pandemic, up 13 percent in the first quarter, but "that money won't be spent just yet," he said, as public health restrictions were still in place in much of the country heading into the second quarter.

WTO require the consensus backing of all 164 member states. India and South Africa came forward with the original idea in October. They have submitted a revised proposal, which currently has the express support of 63 WTO members.

The new text which they and other backers have circulated says the waiver should apply not only to vaccines, but to treatments, diagnostics, medical devices and protective equipment, along with the material and components needed to produce them. It also says the waiver should last for "at least three years" from the date it takes effect, following which the WTO's General Council should determine whether it should be prolonged.

Differences on IP importance

The trade official said differences continued on the question of whether, and to what extent, IP protection was holding up the goal of beating the pandemic, and about the use and potential improvement of existing flexibilities within the TRIPS terms. Questions were also raised on the duration and termination of the proposed waiver, the official said.

The United States said it was open to text-based talks on any proposal that could address the immediate need for increased vaccine production and distribution, the official said. China said that as the initial proposal had been laid down in October, it was time to move to the next stage, the official



FORT MCMURRAY, Canada: In this file photo, houses under construction are seen at a property development in this oil sands-rich boomtown in Alberta on Oct 24, 2009. —AFP

"Investors will already be looking past Q2, with hopes that vaccinations will pave the way for much stronger growth again in the second half of the year," Shenfeld said, after lockdowns were a drag on April growth. —AFP

added. Pakistan, Argentina, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia and Kenya were among the countries that expressed the need to start negotiations, said the official.

Meanwhile the EU said the immediate goal should be ramping up production alongside measures such as lifting export restrictions for vaccine ingredients. Switzerland, also home to major pharmaceutical firms, said WTO members should explore ways to use the flexibilities within TRIPS rather than waiving them altogether, the trade official said. The TRIPS Council will hold a formal meeting on June 8-9.

More than 1.9 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been injected in at least 213 territories around the world, according to an AFP count. Just 0.3 percent have been administered in the 29 lowest-income countries, home to nine percent of the world's population. Proponents argue the temporary removal of IP rights will boost production in developing countries and address the dramatic inequity in access.

That notion has long met with fierce opposition from pharmaceutical giants and their host countries, which insisted patents were not the main roadblocks to scaling up production and warned the move could hamper innovation. The positions appeared to shift earlier this month, when Washington came out in support of a global patent waiver for vaccines, with other long-time opponents voicing openness to discuss the matter. —AFP

Business

Australia's Cormann takes over as head of OECD

Appointment dismays environmental campaigners

PARIS: Former Australian finance minister Mathias Cormann became head of the influential Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) yesterday, kicking off the job with a pledge to keep the global body focused on the fight against climate change. Cormann, whose nomination in March was celebrated as a diplomatic triumph in Australia, served as finance minister for seven years until late 2020 in rightwing governments.

But his campaign for the position faced fierce resistance from top environmental groups who criticized his record in successive climate-sceptic Australian cabinets, notably under former prime minister Tony Abbott. Cormann told reporters at his first news conference in the role that "we need to continue of course to promote global leadership to tackle climate change and achieve global net zero emissions by 2050".

He singled out the OECD's International Program for Action on Climate, a new tool to evaluate members' efforts to reduce emissions, as a key part of the organization's contributions. Cormann promised that the program would share its key findings in time for the UN's COP 26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, in November. "We have got to explore every opportunity to maximize our emis-

sion reductions efforts," he said.

Global tax

The 50-year-old conservative took over as secretary general from longstanding chief Angel Gurría, a vocal defender of action to confront the global climate crisis during his 15 years at the helm. The OECD counts 38 states as members and acts as a sort of global think-tank on economic and policy questions, producing reports and recommendations that are influential in national capitals.

It also serves as a forum to discuss policy and has recently spearheaded talks on a new global plan to tax multinational tech groups that has become a tense issue between European countries and the United States. "We need a tax deal as soon as possible," Cormann told Le Figaro newspaper in France last month.

When asked yesterday about the chances of a deal by year-end, he acknowledged that "some work still needs to be done" but that "we are in a much better position than we were towards the end of last year". Spearheaded by US President Joe Biden, the proposal for a 15-per cent minimum tax rate is to be discussed and approved by finance ministers from the Group of Seven wealthy nations at a meeting on London on Friday.

'Fair and equitable'

Cormann called on participants in the tax talks to remember that governments needed to raise revenue, and multinationals had to pay their share in a "fair and equitable" way. The head of the OECD is often invited to major international meetings alongside the heads of other multilateral institutions such as the United Nations or the World Bank.

In March, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called Cormann's nomination "the most senior appointment of an Australian candidate to an international body for decades". He grew up in the small town of Raeren in eastern Belgium and speaks in strong German-accented English, which has seen him likened to "Terminator" star Arnold Schwarzenegger in his adopted homeland.

While campaigning for the OECD position, he emphasized his multilingual background - he speaks four languages - as well as his experience in Asia which was decisive in landing him the job. "You can count on me to give it my absolute best as we work towards a better future, together," Cormann said at a handover ceremony at the Paris headquarters of the organisation, according to a statement.

More than two dozen environmental groups said Cormann shouldn't have been considered for the role, citing former statements on climate change.



PARIS: Former Australian Finance Minister Mathias Cormann speaks during a handover ceremony during which he took on the role of Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) at the OECD headquarters yesterday. — AFP

They pointed out that he helped campaign against a carbon pricing system designed to curb emissions in Australia's carbon-intensive economy, and was a senior member of the government that repealed the scheme in 2014. Greenpeace expressed "deep dismay and anger" at the time of his appointment while the head of E3G campaign group Nick Mabey said it sent a "dangerous signal". — AFP

US subsidiary of meatpacking giant JBS hit by cyberattack

WASHINGTON: The American subsidiary of the world's largest meat processing companies said Monday it had been hacked, paralyzing some of its operations and impacting thousands of workers in Australia. The intrusion was detected Sunday, forcing one of the leading producers of beef and pork in the United States to suspend affected systems, and call in its IT staff and third-party experts to deal with the breach.

"JBS USA determined that it was the target of an organized cybersecurity attack, affecting some of the servers supporting its North American and Australian IT systems," the unit said in a statement. The hack comes less than a month after a major cyberattack shut down the Colonial Pipeline network, which transports about 45 percent of fuel consumed on the east coast of the United States.

Brazil-based JBS is a sprawling meat supplier with operations in the United States, Australia, Canada,

Europe, Mexico, New Zealand and Britain. The company's Australian facilities were said to have been paralyzed by the attack, with up to 10,000 meat workers being sent home without pay, according to a union representative.

"It's affecting JBS processing facilities around (Australia)," AMIEU Queensland branch secretary Matt Journeaux told AFP. "They have stood down workers across JBS operations." Journeaux said there was no word yet from the company on when operations will resume.

JBS Foods is one of Australia's largest meat and food processing companies and plays a key role in the country's agriculture sector, making \$2.4 billion in livestock purchases each year. In a statement to AFP, Australian Agriculture Minister David Littleproud said he was "aware of reports" of the attack but declined to comment "until further details are available."

JBS USA said it was "not aware of any evidence at this time that any customer, supplier or employee data has been compromised or misused," but the attack may cause delays for customers and suppliers. It said its backup servers were not affected.

Cybersecurity vulnerabilities
Colonial's multi-day shutdown in



DINMORE, Australia: The northern Australian offices of JBS Foods is seen during sunset west of Brisbane yesterday after the US subsidiary of the world's largest meat processing companies said it had been hacked. — AFP

May sparked panic buying in some eastern states, and ended when the company paid \$4.4 million in ransom to the hackers. The demonstrated online vulnerabilities of US pipelines led the federal government last week to impose cybersecurity requirements on petroleum pipelines for the first time.

The new rules, imposed by the Department of Homeland Security, require pipeline operators to designate a cybersecurity coordinator who must be available at all times, and

report confirmed incidences to the agency's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Pipeline owners will also be required to review their procedures and identify cybersecurity gaps and ways to fix them, with the results reported to the department within 30 days. "The cybersecurity landscape is constantly evolving and we must adapt to address new and emerging threats," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement Thursday. — AFP

Italy's first quarter growth revised upwards

ROME: Italy's economy grew by more than previously estimated in the first quarter, official data showed yesterday, amid growing optimism about the country's recovery. Gross domestic product (GDP) was up by 0.1 percent compared with the previous quarter, national statistics office Istat said in a statement. The Rome-based agency corrected its previous estimate, issued in late April, of a quarter-on-quarter contraction of 0.4 per cent.

Year-on-year, however, GDP was still down by 0.8 percent. Agriculture and industry contributed to the economic recovery in the first quarter, with quarterly growth of 3.9

percent and 1.8 percent, respectively. Istat also said that employment in April rose by 0.1 percent from March, with 22.34 million people reported to be in work.

However, the labor market is still depressed compared to pre-pandemic levels - in February 2020, employment figures were higher by 800,000. Italy is emerging from its worst recession since World War II. Last year, GDP plunged by 8.9 percent, one of the most severe slumps in Europe. However, things have recently started to look up, with falling COVID death tolls, progress with vaccinations and gradual reopenings of the economy.

Yesterday marked the first day in months in which cafes and restaurants were allowed to serve customers indoors and sport stadiums reopened to the public. "Italy is strong, alive and is yearning to restart. The pandemic months have been very tough, for workers and businesses," Prime Minister Mario Draghi said during a



ROME: Tourists visit the Foro Traiano yesterday. — AFP

visit in the northern Emilia Romagna region.

"But thanks to sacrifices made by Italians and the strong acceleration of the vaccination campaign, we are facing a new phase," he added. Italy is

pinning much of its longer-term recovery hopes on a 222.1-billion-euro (\$271-billion) investment plan mostly funded by European Union loans and grants, covering the 2021-2026 period. — AFP

Russian lawmakers pass bill to make web giants go local

MOSCOW: Russian lawmakers yesterday backed a bill that would force foreign internet companies to set up local offices or face harsh penalties, including an outright ban. The bill was passed on the first of its three required readings, parliament's lower house said in a statement. The legislation concerns online companies whose daily users in Russia tops 500,000. Failure to comply will result in penalties, including a ban on advertising their services, a ban on collecting payments, or partial or full blockage in the country.

Russia has in recent months stepped up efforts to impose more control on online platforms, including

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with President Vladimir Putin saying large tech companies have become so influential they are "competing" with sovereign states. The country holds parliamentary elections in September.

Restrictive measures have raised concerns among Kremlin critics, who fear the clampdown is aimed at silencing opposition voices. In January, Russian authorities accused foreign social media platforms of interfering in the country's domestic affairs by not deleting calls to protest in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The state telecommunications watchdog in March slowed down the speed at which Twitter operates - a process known as throttling. It accused the microblogging site of failing to remove content related to child pornography, drug use and calls for minors to commit suicide. Twitter said at the time it was "deeply concerned by increased attempts to block and throttle online public conversation". — AFP

W African fishmeal exports 'undermine food security'

DAKAR: Rising exports of fishmeal and fish oil from West Africa to Europe and Asia are depriving millions of Africans of food, Greenpeace said yesterday. In a report, the environmental group said that over half a million tons of fish used to produce fishmeal and fish oil in the poor region could feed some 33 million people instead.

Fishmeal is made in factories dotted along the West African coast, and is predominantly sold as feed for fish farms in the developed world. Fish oil serves a similar purpose. Much of West Africa's fishing grounds are already overexploited and illegal fishing is a persistent problem. Greenpeace said West Africa's trade in fishmeal and fish

oil had grown tenfold between 2010 and 2019 - from about 13,000 tons to over 170,000 tons. Most fish oil and meal is exported to Europe and Asia.

The report cited "severe consequences for local populations", explaining that the industry undermined food security across Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Mali and Burkina Faso. The main species used in the industry are small fish such as sardinella and bonga, which Greenpeace said constitute a vital source of animal protein for many in the region. The group recommended that governments phase out fish oil and meal production from fish fit for human consumption, among other measures. — AFP

New OECD chief: Powerbroker facing climate questions

SYDNEY: The new head of the OECD is an Australian former minister born in Belgium known as a formidable backstage operator but also shadowed by a controversial record on climate change. Australia's longest-serving finance minister, 50-year-old Mathias Cormann was appointed head of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in March and took over yesterday.

He is the first person from the Asia-Pacific region to take the helm of the Paris-based, 38-nation organization, and takes the role after one of the worst global recessions on record due to the coronavirus pandemic. But it is his climate record that grabbed headlines ahead of his appointment, with environmentalists slamming Cormann as the wrong choice for a job which will require putting the fight against global warming at the forefront of economic planning.

More than two dozen environmental groups said Cormann shouldn't have been considered for the role, citing former statements they said opposed climate change. But Cormann has defended his climate record, saying that "action on climate change to be effective, requires an ambitious, globally coordinated approach".

According to the OECD, his priorities include promoting "global leadership on ambitious and effective action on climate change to achieve global net-zero emissions by 2050". As well as seeking to strengthen the global economy post-pandemic, Cormann also inherits from his Mexican predecessor Angel Gurría the mammoth task of finalizing multilateral approach to digital taxation in a dispute that divided the US and Europe.

Canberra powerbroker

A powerbroker in the ruling center-right Liberal party and a qualified pilot, Cormann quit parliament late last year to seek the top job. He emerged as a surprise frontrunner, and beat out fellow top contender, Sweden's Cecilia Malmstrom, a former EU trade commissioner. Another eight candidates were whittled out of contention.

The OECD works to boost economic growth and world trade, and its 38 member nations account for 60 percent of global economic output. Cormann said climate change was among the group's key challenges when he announced his candidacy last year, along with education, skills and "narrowing differences on taxation policy". He helped campaign against a carbon pricing system designed to curb emissions in Australia's carbon-intensive economy, and was a senior member of the government that repealed the scheme in 2014. Cormann focused his pitch for the role on the perspective he would bring to the OECD after having "shared my life in equal measure between Europe and the Asia-Pacific".

Jet diplomacy

Born and raised in the eastern German-speaking part of Belgium, Cormann speaks German, French and Flemish as well as English. He studied law in Belgium before migrating to Australia in the 1990s and working his way up the ranks of the Liberal party. Despite spending more than a decade in parliament - and serving as finance minister for a record seven years - he is not well-known to the Australian public.

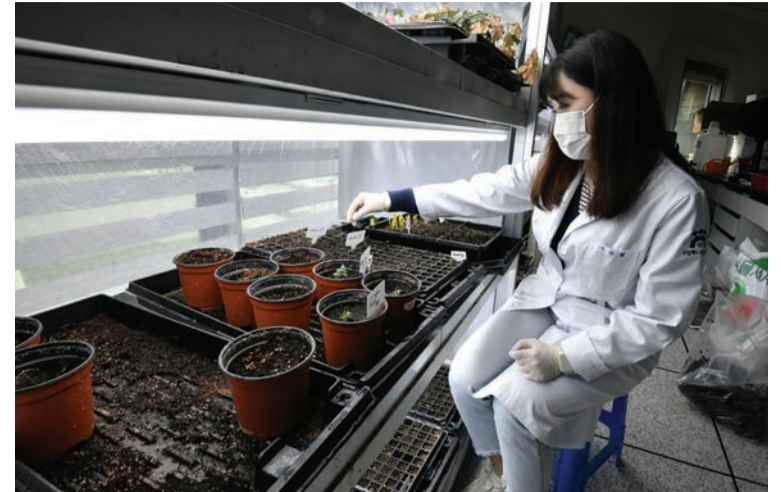
But he was an influential party operator, and was instrumental in the elevation of Prime Minister Scott Morrison by helping oust the country's previous leader. Morrison told the National Press Club in early February he nominated Cormann in part because "cooperation between like-minded liberal democracies... has never been more important than it is today". — AFP



Researchers preparing seed samples at the wild plant seeds research division.



This picture shows a researcher checking seed stored in a long-term storage room at the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum Seed Vault Centre in the southeastern mountainous county of Bonghwa.



A researcher checking trial plantations at the wild plant seeds research division.

LAST RESORT: THE SEEDS KEPT SAFE IN A SOUTH KOREAN MOUNTAIN

Hidden in a South Korean mountain tunnel designed to withstand a nuclear blast, the seeds of nearly 5,000 wild plant species are stored for safe-keeping against climate change, natural disaster and war. Plant extinction is progressing at an alarming rate, researchers warn, driven by increasing human population, pollution and deforestation, even before many species are catalogued. The Baekdudaegan National Arboretum Seed Vault Centre preserves nearly 100,000 seeds from 4,751 different wild plant species to ensure they are not lost to "apocalyptic events", says its head Lee Sang-yong. It is one of only two such facilities in the world, he told AFP: unlike more commonplace seed banks, where samples are stored and regularly withdrawn for various purposes, deposits in seed vaults are meant to be permanent, with use intended only as a last resort to prevent extinction. The vault is designated as a security installation by South Korea's National Intelligence Service, surrounded by wire fences and dozens of cameras, with restrictions on filming in place and police patrolling on a regular basis.

Inside, a lift leads about eight floors down to a cavernous concrete tunnel, where two heavy steel doors guard the storage room and its hand-cranked shelving racks, kept at minus 20 degrees Celsius to preserve the seeds and 40 percent humidity to keep them viable. The vault's samples are largely of flora from the Korean peninsula, but with a capacity of two million seeds, the South makes its space available to other countries, with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan among those to have taken up the offer. Depositors retain ownership of their samples and control over withdrawals.

But Lee pointed out: "The seed vault stores seeds to prevent their extinction, so the best scenario would be that the seeds never have to be taken out." Despite its doomsday-defying role, it was built by a country that in 1950 was invaded by the neighboring North, and Pyongyang has since developed a nuclear and missile arsenal.

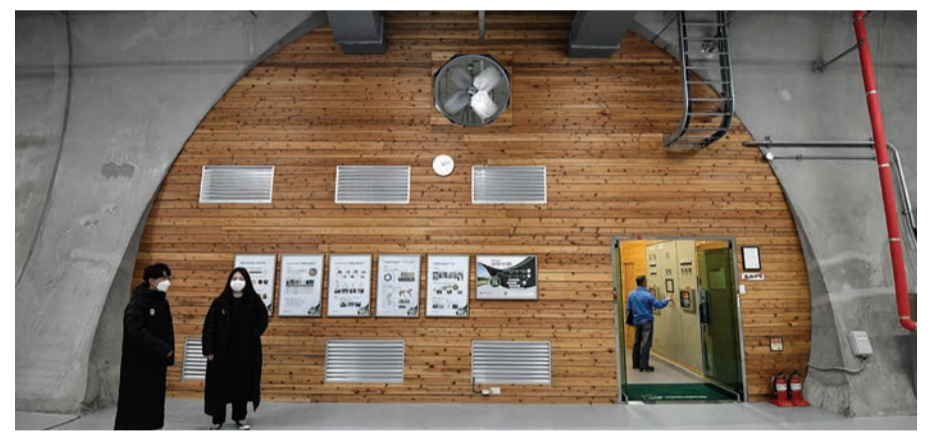


This picture shows a researcher preparing seed samples at the wild plant seeds research division of the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum in the southeastern mountainous county of Bonghwa.

The facility was built in the "safest spot" in South Korea, Lee said, designed to withstand a 6.9-magnitude earthquake and even an atomic strike. "It's geographically very safe," Lee said. "And we paved a 46 metre-deep underground tunnel to ensure it's safe from war and nuclear threats."

'Race against time'

The world's biggest and best-known seed vault is buried deep inside a former coal mine on Svalbard, a remote Arctic Norwegian archipelago around 1,300 kilometers (about 800 miles) from the North Pole. Dubbed the "Noah's Ark" of food crops, the Global Seed Vault focuses on



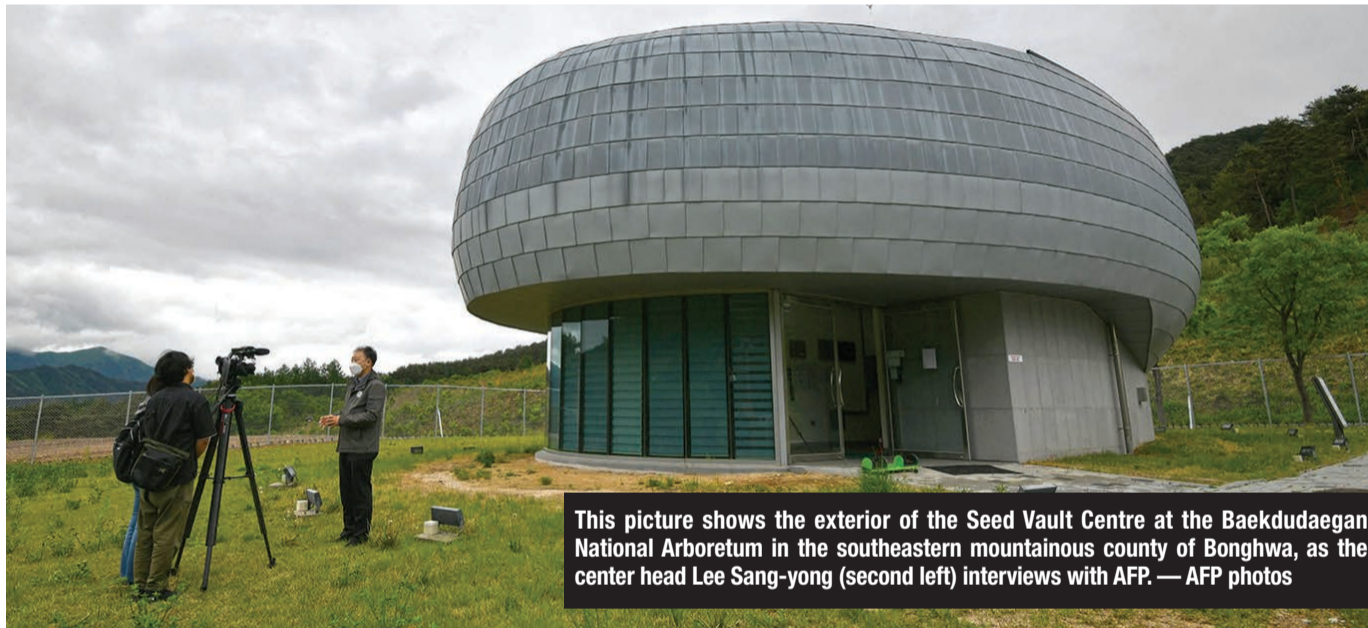
Officials preparing to enter a storage room in a tunnel at the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum Seed Vault Centre in the southeastern mountainous county of Bonghwa.

agricultural and related plants, storing more than one million seed samples from nearly every country on the planet. But researchers say preserving the seeds of wild plants—the original source of the crops we eat today—should not be overlooked.

Many crop relatives in the wild that could provide genetic diversity to help long-term food security "lack effective protec-

tion", according to a recent UN report. It warned that farming was likely to be less resilient against climate change, pests and pathogens as a result, adding: "The biosphere, upon which humanity as a whole depends... is declining faster than at any time in human history." Wild plants hold promise as future medicines, fuels and food, said the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in a report last year, but around two-fifths of them are threatened with extinction, largely due to habitat destruction and climate change.

It was a "race against time" to identify them before they disappeared, it added. Research on wild plant seeds is "lacking tremendously", said Na Chae-sun, a senior researcher at the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum. She and her team collect samples and carry out a meticulous and extensive process including X-ray tests and trial plantations before seeds are catalogued and stored in the seed vault. "One might ask why is that wild flower on the kerbside important?" she said. "Our job is to identify these one by one and letting people know how important they are," she went on. "The crops that we eat today may have come from that nameless flower on the kerbside." — AFP



This picture shows the exterior of the Seed Vault Centre at the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum in the southeastern mountainous county of Bonghwa, as the center head Lee Sang-yong (second left) interviews with AFP. — AFP photos

183 million watched Eurovision Song Contest

Some 183 million people tuned in to watch this year's Eurovision Song Contest, organizers said Monday, with young online fans driving up viewing figures for the pop extravaganza. Across 36 countries, the May 22 grand final in Rotterdam saw an average of 40.5 percent of television viewers tuning into the world's biggest live music event-up four percent from the last contest in 2019, the European Broadcasting Union said.

The Geneva-based EBU puts together the kitsch annual competition, which was cancelled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. It said viewing figures among 15-24-year-olds were up seven percent on 2019, at 52.8 percent. Meanwhile during the Eurovision week-

which includes the semi-finals-50.6 million unique viewers across 234 countries watched the official YouTube channel, a figure up 28 percent on 2019. The 18-34 age bracket made up 71 percent of those who viewed Eurovision's live online content.

Italian rockers Maneskin won the contest with their song "Zitti e Buoni", fighting off stiff competition from France and Switzerland to finish with 524 points. "We're thrilled to see that audiences welcomed back the Eurovision Song Contest in such huge numbers and very proud to have brought millions together at a time when so many are still apart," said executive supervisor Martin Osterdahl. "The huge success of

Maneskin and so many of this year's songs demonstrates that, even in its 65th year, the Eurovision Song Contest's impact is bigger than ever."

Drugs furore

This year's final was swiftly engulfed in a social media storm over speculation that Maneskin's flamboyant singer Damiano David snorted cocaine at the final. Footage of the lederhosen-clad vocalist leaning over a table in the hospitality area of the competition went viral. David insisted he had not taken drugs, and cleared his name by voluntarily taking a drugs test. In victorious Italy, 4.3 million watched the grand final—the highest number since the country returned to Eurovision in 2011 after 13 years out. Host nation the Netherlands saw their biggest audience since records began in 2003, with 5.4 million tuning in — up 21 percent on 2019. A whopping 78.5 percent of Dutch TV viewers were watching.

However, Eurovision-loving Iceland once again had the largest viewing share of any market, at an extraordinary 99.9 percent. Germany delivered the biggest audience for the 11th consecutive year, with 7.8 million viewers. In Britain, 7.4 million tuned in — the highest number since 2014 — despite the UK finishing in last place with Eurovision's dreaded "nul points". Founded in 1950, the EBU is the world's biggest public service media alliance. It has 115 member organizations in 56 countries, plus 31 associates in Asia, Africa and the Americas. — AFP



Italy's Maneskin pose for pictures on stage with the trophy after winning the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021, at the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam.

Dissident Cuban artist to 'continue the struggle' after hospital release

Dissident Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara vowed Monday to "continue the struggle" after spending almost a month in hospital following a hunger strike. Otero Alcantara, 33, was released earlier in the day from the General Calixto Garcia university hospital, which announced "his complete recovery." Associates had claimed he was forcibly taken to hospital after starting a hunger strike that lasted eight days. "After a month in the hands of the beast, we'll see how things go in the streets to continue the struggle," Otero Alcantara said in a video published by opposition media Cubanet.

He said state security forces had taken his mobile telephone and left him "literally a month without communication and with little access to my family," adding that he would soon "recount everything that happened to me." Otero Alcantara is the leader of the San Isidro protest movement (MSI) of artists and intellectuals pressing for free speech and other rights in the communist nation. The Cuban government accuses Otero Alcantara of being financed by the United States, which has had sanctions in place against Cuba for decades.

He went on hunger strike last month to protest against authorities seizing several of his works when he was arrested during a demonstration. He was admitted to hospital on May 2. His release was announced by the Havana public health authority. Otero Alcantara "reiterated his gratitude to the personnel that looked after him at every opportunity," said the hospital. In the early days of his hospital

stay, authorities released videos of him appearing in good health but those close to Otero Alcantara said they had been unable to communicate with him.

Amnesty International described him as a "prisoner of conscience" while the US demanded his immediate release. After his arrest last month, he was freed but rearrested several times for trying to leave his home, which had been surrounded by police. During his hunger strike, his internet service was cut off and police prevented people, including two priests, from visiting Otero Alcantara. The MSI claimed he'd been taken to hospital by force and that official medical reports on his condition were "confusing and contradictory."



In this grab from an AFTV video Cuban artist and dissident Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara gestures in front of one of his paintings in Havana. — AFP

In a sign of solidarity, last week around 20 Cuban artists asked that their works in Havana's Fine Arts Museum be hidden from public view. The museum rejected the request, saying it wasn't in "the public interest." Painter Tomas Sanchez, 73, wrote on Facebook: "Cuban art is going through dark times ... the criminalization of difference is not-and never will be-a path towards coexistence." — AFP

In Gaza, traumatized Palestinians tend to shell-shocked pets

A smashed goldfish bowl, panicked birds in a cage, scores of animals needing treatment. The loss or injury of treasured pets has added to the grief and trauma of Gaza residents after last month's deadly conflict. Neriman, a nine-year-old Palestinian girl, clutched a glass jar holding her goldfish Hoor, delighted it had survived after her other one, Hooriya, died in a Zionist air strike in Gaza City. In the latest war, Zionist strikes on Gaza killed 254 Palestinians, including 66 children, as well as some fighters, authorities there say.

Fire by Palestinian militants claimed 12 lives in Zionist entity, including one child, a teenager and a Zionist soldier. Pets also suffered, as well as the children who owned them. "I was so sad that Hooriya died and I cried when I buried her in the field," said Neriman, of her first fish, whose name meant "Mermaid" in Arabic. "But I was so happy that Hoor had survived," she added of her second fish. At an animal clinic in Gaza City, Amani Abu Shaaban held a fluffy cat to her chest as they waited to see a vet. "My cat has been very scared since the war. She refuses to eat, and her hair is falling out," she said. "Even the sound of a mobile phone ringing freaks her out."

Nearby, vet Mutasem Qaddoura examined two cats, one after the other. One needed an operation for a broken leg, the other was dehydrated and malnourished. Dozens of pets owners have flocked to his clinic since Gaza's May 21 ceasefire though supplies to treat them are scarce. "The state of veterinary medicine is disastrous in Gaza," Qaddoura said. "We use X-ray machines intended for humans and platinum screws meant to fix children's bones to treat the animals."

Pets left behind

Neriman and her family had been forced to flee their home on May 13, after a Zionist officer warned neighbors of an imminent strike on a nearby bank.



This picture shows a general view of the Sulala dog shelter in Gaza City, which has received several wounded animals due to the 11-day conflict between Zionist entity and the Islamist Hamas movement currently in control of the Palestinian Gaza Strip enclave. — AFP photos

In the panic she left behind her fish, as well as two parakeets, Alloosh and Malloosh, given to her by her father for her sixth birthday. But soon after, she started worrying. "I just had to go home with my father to get them," she said.

When they returned, she found a special outfit she had laid out on her bed for the Eid holidays covered in rubble, the bed collapsed and the windows blown in. "I heard Alloosh and Malloosh chirp-

ing under the rubble, and I found the fish bowl broken," she said. Hooriya had died, but they saved Hoor, a scene shown in a video which has since gone viral on social media.

Desperate dogs

South of Gaza city, 30-year-old Adel Al-Wadia said he had tried to feed some of the dogs at the coastal strip's main dog shelter during the bombing. "They

were howling with fear and hunger and it made me sad, so I risked trying to get as close as possible to give them food," he said. The shelter's founder, Saeed El-Aer, said he returned after the ceasefire to find many of his canine wards scared and famished.

Dozens had panicked and escaped during the 11-day war, and several were wounded, he said. "At least three dogs need an operation, including one who

needs a paw amputated," he said. Other animals were even less lucky. Aer pointed to an area beyond the shelter's fence. "Over there, we buried the donkey and the horse after we found they had died from shrapnel wounds," he said. — AFP



A worker tends to a dog at the Sulala dog shelter in Gaza City which has received several wounded animals.



Palestinian dog owner Mahmud Abu Edda holds his canine companion as he arrives at a veterinary clinic in Gaza City.



Palestinian veterinarian Mutasem Qaddoura examines a cat at a clinic in Gaza City.

Kafka letters, drawings made publicly available online

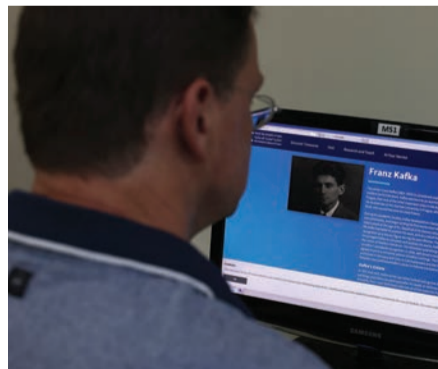
An unpublished collection of letters, manuscripts and drawings by Franz Kafka are now available online, which recovered the documents after years of legal wrangling. Some 120 drawings and more than 200 letters to his friend Max Brod are among the archives now available for public viewing, the project's curator Stefan Litt told AFP. The documents exist thanks to Brod's decision to break a pact with his friend Kafka, the acclaimed Czech Jewish author of "The Trial" and "The

Metamorphosis", who as he suffered from tuberculosis asked his writings be destroyed.

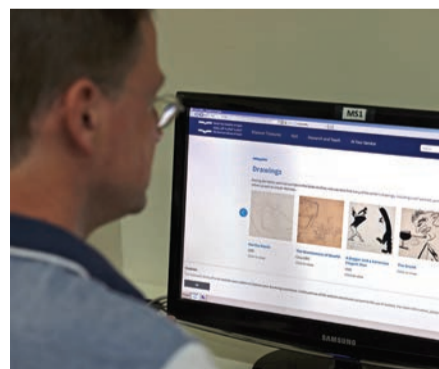
But after the author died in 1924, Brod decided to keep the papers and in 1939 fled Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia for Tel Aviv with them in tow. The Prague-born Brod, also Jewish, published many of the works, playing a pivotal role in establishing Kafka as one of the 20th

century's key literary figures. Following Brod's death in 1968, a multi-country legal soap opera—some might even call it "Kafkaesque"—entangled rights holders and academics for years. After years of court proceedings and searches, the fifth and final cache was located in a vault at the Zurich headquarters of UBS, Switzerland's largest bank, and released after a Swiss court ruling.

Most of the recovered material had already been published by Brod—but two surprises were in store for archivists in Jerusalem. "We discovered unpublished drawings, neither signed nor dated, but that Brod had kept," said Litt, who showed drawings of characters on small pieces of paper, including drawings of Kafka's mother and a self-portrait. "The big surprise we received when we opened these documents was his blue notebook, in which Kafka wrote in Hebrew, signing 'K', his usual signature," Litt said. In one of the entries in his notebook, dated to 1920, he asks a teacher in Hebrew not to get angry for mistakes in his homework—"because I am already angry for both of us." But for Litt, there's only one regret: the "treasure" from Switzerland included German leaflets written by Kafka, but none of them unpublished. — AFP



Dr. Stefan Litt shows on a computer the online site for the works by Jewish German-speaking novelist and story writer Franz Kafka.—AFP photos



Common French bird species face 'unrelenting' decline

From city centers to rural fields, human activity has decimated populations of France's most common bird species, scientists warned on Monday, citing data collected over 30 years by volunteer ornithologists. Between 1989 and 2019 over 2,000 French bird lovers participated in monitoring the nation's 123 most common bird species through the Tracking Common Birds Over Time (STOC) program. The effort is sponsored by the French National Museum of Natural History, whose president Bruno David called the findings "unrelenting".

Over a third of common French bird species are in decline, including the European goldfinch, the European turtle dove, the common house martin and 40 others, the museum reported. The sharpest drops in populations were on farmlands, where numbers dropped 30 percent in 30 years, followed by urban areas, which saw declines of about 28 percent. Forest birds have fared somewhat better, with their numbers falling by 10 percent over the last three decades.

Conservation biologist Benoit Fontaine, a researcher at the National Museum, in a press conference Monday described the loss of birds in agricultural territories as a "massacre". In 2018 Fontaine published a study detailing the decline. "Our countryside is in the process of becoming a veritable desert," he said at the time. — AFP



An original drawing by Jewish German-speaking novelist and story writer Franz Kafka is displayed.



Original manuscripts written in German by Jewish German-speaking novelist and story writer Franz Kafka are displayed in Jerusalem.



An original drawing by Jewish German-speaking novelist and story writer Franz Kafka is displayed.

Sports

UEFA betting on Euro 2020 success despite challenge of pandemic

PARIS: The pan-European format has been derided, the tournament postponed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, host cities have been dropped and matches moved, but Euro 2020 finally gets underway next week when Italy face Turkey in Rome on Friday, June 11.

Following the unprecedented decision to postpone the competition in March last year at the start of the pandemic, the health crisis is not over and COVID-19 will continue to cast a shadow over this European Championship. However, five years after Portugal overcame an injury to Cristiano Ronaldo to defeat France and win Euro 2016 in Paris, and three years after the French won the World Cup in Russia, anticipation in Europe is now building towards another major tournament summer.

There is no shortage of candidates among the 24 nations, not least France as they look to repeat their feat of two decades ago, when they followed winning the 1998 World Cup with victory at Euro 2000. That this Euro is taking place in 11 cities across 11 different countries is down to a Frenchman — it was the idea of Michel Platini during his time as president of UEFA.

Venue changes, crowd limits

There were initially 13 host cities before Brussels was sidelined and before the pandemic intervened. In April Dublin and Bilbao were dropped too. Neither the Irish government nor authorities in the Basque Country were

able to assure UEFA that fans could attend. Seville replaced Bilbao while Dublin's games went to London and Saint-Petersburg.

The remaining venues — Amsterdam, Baku, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow, London, Munich, Rome, Saint-Petersburg and Seville — have all confirmed fans will be allowed to fill between 25 and 100 percent of capacity, with the exception of Munich, which said it aims to host at least 14,500 fans at the Allianz Arena.

UEFA has insisted on having spectators despite ongoing challenges for governments, the different health situation from one country to the next and the threat of more contagious variants. That is why Munich's mayor Dieter Reiter said in April there had been "no promises, of any kind, to guarantee spectators".

Despite it all, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has been bullish, insisting Euro 2020 will be safe. "It will be the perfect opportunity to show the world that Europe is adapting. Europe is alive and celebrating life. Europe is back," he said recently.

However, no travel exemptions are necessarily being made for ticket-holders, meaning those entering countries from abroad could have to quarantine on arrival. They may simply not be allowed in at all. Fans who are able to get in will be assigned time slots to arrive at stadiums. Croatia and the Czech Republic have abandoned plans to base themselves in Scotland because the



ROME: In this file photo taken on April 20, 2021 the trophy of the UEFA Euro 2020 football competition is pictured on Sant'Angelo bridge in Rome. — AFP

Scottish government's coronavirus quarantine rules meant their entire squad risked having to isolate if one player tested positive.

Concerns over possible virus clusters led to UEFA

allowing nations to name expanded squads of 26 players. Fatigue after a long season may also impact on the quality of football, but competition for the title will be fierce.

The contenders

France have Karim Benzema back after a long international exile and they look a fearsome proposition as they target a tournament double. "There are obviously big expectations after the success we have had and that is the aim of this squad, of this generation," coach Didier Deschamps told AFP recently.

An England side who have the carrot of knowing both semi-finals and the final will be played at home are a genuine threat, and then there are the usual contenders like Spain, Italy, Germany and Belgium, as well as a revitalized Netherlands. There is also the holders. "For a long time now we have gone into tournaments not just to compete but to win." Portugal coach Fernando Santos told A Bola. They won't be going into many more tournaments with Ronaldo, who is 36 now. Portugal's group, also containing France and Germany as well as Hungary, will focus much attention in the first round, along with England's clash with Scotland at Wembley. Scotland are just delighted to be at a major tournament for the first time in 23 years. England, meanwhile, are yet again going into a summer dreaming of a first title since winning the 1966 World Cup at Wembley, where this year's final will take place on Sunday, July 11. — AFP

Roberto Mancini, artisan of Italy's renaissance

MILAN: From the dark days of Italy's 2018 World Cup qualifying fiasco to the eve of the European championships, Roberto Mancini has transformed the fortunes of fallen footballing giants Italy. A flawless Euro 2020 qualifying campaign has positioned the four-time World Cup winners as among the favorites in a tournament which they kick off at home on June 11 against Turkey in Rome.

Former Inter Milan and Manchester City boss Mancini was appointed in May 2018 after an ageing and lacklustre Italy missed out a World Cup finals for the first time since 1958, failing to score in a play-off against Sweden. Since then Italy have lost just twice under Mancini, reaching the final phase of the Nations League and winning all three of their 2022 World Cup qualifying games.

"I feel very proud, because it was not a good situation when I arrived," said Mancini, with Italy now sitting seventh in the FIFA rankings after having previously slipped to an all-time low of 21st. "I tried to make the players believe in themselves, when everyone else said Italy didn't have good quality players."

Decline had followed Italy's 2006 World Cup victory, with group stage exits at the 2010 and 2014 editions. They fared better at the European Championship, a tournament they have won just once in 1968, reaching the final in 2012 and the quarter-finals in 2016.

Mancini's side are on a run of 26 unbeaten matches since September 2018. An all-time record 11 consecutive victories was ended with a draw against Bosnia last September. "My idea was originally to target success in the 2022 World Cup, but now we can challenge for Euro 2020," declared Mancini, who in May extended his contract until 2026. "We want to continue a work that has borne fruit."

Mancini brought in a new crop of promising players while keeping faith with some of the old stalwarts such as Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini, Jorginho and Marco Verratti. Roma midfielder Nicolò Zaniolo was called up in September 2018, before he had even made his Serie A debut, with Moise Kean, Federico Chiesa, and Inter Milan midfielder pair Nicolò Barella and Stefano Sensi also joining the national setup.

Although missing a star forward of the calibre of Cristiano Ronaldo, Harry Kane, Antoine Griezmann or Kylian Mbappe, Italy's strike options include young Juve pair Chiesa and Federico Bernardeschi, Lazio's Ciro Immobile and Napoli's Lorenzo Insigne.



CAGLIARI: Italy's coach Roberto Mancini gestures as he gives instructions from the touch line during a friendly football match between Italy and San Marino at the Sardegna Arena in Cagliari on May 28, 2021, in preparation for the UEFA Euro 2020 European Football Championship. — AFP

'Young, modern game'

For 'Azzurri' legend Luigi Riva, a member of Italy's only European championship winning team 53 years ago, Mancini remains the star of the current national team. "I am convinced that the real secret of this team is Roberto," Italy's all-time leading goalscorer with 35 goals in 42 appearances told Gazzetta Dello Sport. "Mancini has given the team a young, modern game, stamped his mark. It is his national team."

Riva, 76, added: "(Mancini) has based his management primarily on familiarity. He is a coach who follows the players, supports them, stimulates them by talking to them. And then he has experience, he has so many things to say, the players feel it."

In Mancini, Italy have a coach with a solid track record as a title-winner with 13 trophies in club football, both as a player and as a manager. He led Manchester City to their first English league title in 44 years in 2012, and won three Serie A titles with Inter Milan. He also won Italian Cups with Inter, Fiorentina and Lazio.

Since leaving England in 2013, Mancini managed Galatasaray, who he led to a Turkish Cup, and Inter before joining Zenit Saint Petersburg in June 2017, leaving the Russian club the following year to pursue his "dream job" of coaching Italy.

A former Bologna, Lazio and Sampdoria forward, Mancini never became a regular with Italy over a 10-year international career, during which he won 36 caps and scored four goals. The love-hate relationship ended following a dispute with coach Arrigo Sacchi in the run-up to the 1994 World Cup, which brought the curtain down on Mancini's national career. — AFP

Kahn to replace Rummenigge as Bayern chairman

BERLIN: After 30 years in charge of Bayern Munich, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge will step down as chairman at the end of the month and be replaced by former Germany captain Oliver Kahn, the Bundesliga giants confirmed yesterday. Rummenigge had been due to see out his contract which expires at the end of 2021, but is leaving six months early to meet the end of the financial year on June 30. Rummenigge's departure represents the start of a new era at Bayern with Julian Nagelsmann, 33, also replacing Hansi Flick as head coach going into next season.

"It is strategically the most sensible and logical point in time," said Rummenigge, 65, with Kahn, 51, to be Bayern's chairman when the new season starts in August. "We are reaching the end of the financial year, and at the same time a new phase with a new coaching team is beginning." "It is a farewell with satisfaction and pride. That was important to me," he added. Rummenigge joined the club's management in 1991 as vice-president and then became chairman in 2002, overseeing an incredible period of success.



Oliver Kahn

With Rummenigge on board, Bayern won the Bundesliga 19 times and lifted the Champions League trophy in 2001, 2013 and 2020. Bayern president Herbert Hainer praised Rummenigge for his work alongside former club supremo Uli Hoeness which "shaped FC Bayern into one of the top names international football — both in sporting and economic terms."

Since Rummenigge became chairman, Bayern Munich's annual turnover has increased from 176 (\$215 million) to 679 million euros, according to club figures. A former striker who made 95 appearances for West Germany, Rummenigge played for Bayern from 1974 to 1984. He was part of the team which won the European Cup twice and was voted the Ballon d'Or winner in both 1980 and 1981. — AFP



LEUVEN: In this file photograph taken on March 24, 2021, Wales's forward Harry Wilson (left) celebrates with Wales' forward Gareth Bale (center) and Wales' defender Connor Roberts after scoring a goal during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification football match between Belgium and Wales at the Den Dreef Stadium in Leuven. — AFP

Giggs' absence puts pressure on Bale to deliver for Wales

LONDON: Wales will go into Euro 2020 without their beleaguered boss Ryan Giggs, putting the spotlight on Gareth Bale's bid to silence critics who say he has lost his appetite for success. Giggs' absence following his arrest on charges of assaulting two women last year will cast a shadow over Wales during the Euro.

The former Manchester United star faces a trial in 2022 after being accused of butting his ex-girlfriend Kate Greville and controlling her throughout their relationship. Giggs is also charged with the common assault of Greville's sister Emma in the same incident.

The 47-year-old had taken charge of Wales in 2018 and made a positive impression as he led them to the European Championship, just their second major tournament appearance since the 1958 World Cup. But Giggs, who denies the charges, has been on leave since November last year, with caretaker boss Robert Page stepping into the breach.

Page has won four of his six games since replacing Giggs, with Wales' only loss in that time coming against the world's top-ranked side, Belgium. If Wales are to thrive in Giggs' absence, the onus is on Bale to prove his erratic loan spell with Tottenham Hotspur this season was not further evidence that his love for the game is dwindling.

Although he scored 16 goals, Bale was unable to make a consistent impact on his return to Tottenham despite the hope that escaping his miserable time at Real Madrid would reinvigorate the Wales captain. Hampered by fitness issues and a frosty relationship with Jose Mourinho before his sacking, Bale hardly disproved the theory he no longer has the drive required to dominate at the highest level. Having celebrated Wales' Euro qualification by waving a flag that read 'Wales. Golf. Madrid. In that order', Bale has an opportunity to show that swipe at Real was more than hollow patriotism.

Bale burden

Despite the exit of his Real nemesis, coach Zinedine Zidane, Bale is reportedly considering negotiating a pay-off to avoid returning to Madrid. It was also suggested the four-time Champions League winner could quit football altogether and try his hand at professional golf, a claim rejected by his agent, Jonathan Barnett.

Bale fuelled speculation over a potential bombshell announcement when he was asked about his future following his brace in Tottenham's final Premier League game of the season at Leicester City. "I know what I'm doing, but it'll just cause chaos if I say anything. It will have to happen after the Euro," Bale said. "I'm not thinking about anything else other than Wales."

After their fairytale run to the Euro 2016 semi-finals, Wales will need Bale at his best to get anywhere near repeating that success. "We'd love to replicate what we did at Euro 2016 but we are realistic. It's a different team, a different tournament," Bale said. Page's side kick off against Switzerland in Baku on June 12, with games against Turkey and Italy rounding off their group schedule. The bulk of Page's squad ply their trade in England's second tier, with 19-year-old midfielder Ruben Colwill a surprise inclusion after only making his Cardiff City debut in February. "He blew us all away with how he was and how he conducted himself. He's a top professional already," Page said of Colwill. — AFP

Canadiens stun Maple Leafs in Stanley Cup playoffs game seven

LOS ANGELES: Carey Price stopped 30 shots as the Montreal Canadiens beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 3-1 in game seven of the Stanley Cup playoffs first round on Monday, storming back to engineer one of the biggest comebacks in recent NHL history.

Corey Perry's power play goal off a deflection in the second period proved to be the winner as the Canadiens won largely thanks to Price's brilliant netminding. "This is the best team game that we've played this season," Price said. "I thought we had a pretty good chance all series, and obviously when we won game five to get our second win we started gathering momentum, and we just kept at it and tried to keep that momentum going tonight."

Price made a clutch save off Toronto's Zach Hyman with 2:46 left in the third to preserve the two-goal lead. Just one minute later, Tyler Toffoli scored into an empty Toronto net to make it 3-0 and seal the win for the Habs, who set up game seven with successive overtime wins in games five and six. The Canadiens advance to the second round to face the Winnipeg Jets. There were no fans for game seven at Toronto's Scotiabank Arena because of pandemic restrictions still in effect in Canada.

Brendan Gallagher opened the scoring for visiting Montreal early in the second period, firing a shot through the legs of Maple Leaf netminder Jack Campbell. "It's just tough," Campbell said. "I just think



MONTREAL: Tyler Toffoli #73 of the Montreal Canadiens celebrates his goal after scoring on Jack Campbell #36 of the Toronto Maple Leafs during the third period in Game Six of the First Round of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs at the Bell Centre on Monday in Montreal, Canada. — AFP

of how hard our team battled and for it to end on the worst goal of my career, it happened in a game seven. It's not acceptable. The team counts on me to be better, and I know I can be a lot better than that."

The Leafs finally got on the scoreboard when William Nylander scored with 1:36 left in the third, but it was too little, too late for Toronto. The Leafs were the heavy favorites coming into the series, which was the first between the two storied Original

Six rivals since 1979. This marked just the second game seven between Montreal and Toronto, with the only other taking place in 1964. All the pressure was on the Maple Leafs, who finished first in the North Division compared to the Habs, who placed fourth. This latest playoff collapse is going to lead to plenty of soul searching in Toronto, who have not won a Stanley Cup since 1967, the longest drought of any NHL team. — AFP

Sports

Copa America taken from Argentina due to COVID, moved to Brazil

ASUNCION: South America's largest football tournament, the Copa America, was shifted Monday from Argentina, battling a coronavirus surge, to even harder-hit Brazil, bracing for a third pandemic wave. With two weeks to kick-off, South America's football federation tweeted Monday that "The CONMEBOL Copa America 2021 will be played in Brazil!" and the June 13-July 10 date maintained. The move was met with consternation in many quarters.

Brazil is one of the countries in the world worst affected by the coronavirus outbreak, with the second-highest death toll of over 460,000 so far among its 212 million people, and more than 16.5 million cases. But Brazil's vice president Hamilton Mourao said hosting the tournament in his country posed "less risk" than in Argentina, which is enduring its worst moment in the epidemic.

"The advantage is the size of our country and the number of stadiums. They can distribute" the matches throughout Brazil, he said, thus limiting contagion risk. The tournament will be played without fans. CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez said "the government of Brazil has demonstrated agility and a capacity for decision-making in a crucial moment for South American football."

Argentines didn't want it

"Brazil is experiencing a moment of stability, has proven infrastructure and accumulated and recent experience to host a competition of this magnitude," he said. Brazil hosted the 2014 Football World Cup and the last Copa America, in 2019.

Argentina was to have co-hosted the 2021 South American football spectacle, already postponed from last year due to the pandemic, with Colombia. But it was left on its own after CONMEBOL disqualified its partner nation over deadly social unrest that has now entered its fifth week and claimed dozens of lives in Colombia. On Sunday, CONMEBOL also scrapped Argentina's hosting duties as the country battles a record epidemic surge that has seen a daily death toll of about 500 on average, and between 21,000 and 40,000 new cases per day.

The country of 45 million people has recorded more than 77,000 deaths in the pandemic to date and nearly 3.8 million infections. On May 22, Argentina entered a nine-day lockdown in the hopes of flattening the infection curve ahead of the massive sports event.

The country had presented a "strict protocol" to CONMEBOL for hosting the tournament, which



CARTAGENA: In this file photo taken on December 3, 2019, the Copa America trophy and the official ball are seen during the draw of the Copa America 2020 football tournament, at the Convention Centre in Cartagena, Colombia. — AFP

involved preparing additional stadiums and reducing the size of each team's delegation. But a poll last week found that 70 percent of Argentinians believed the country should withdraw, and CONMEBOL agreed. "CONMEBOL informs that in view of the current circumstances it has decided to suspend the organization of the Copa America in Argentina," the governing body tweeted.

Epidemic 'alert'

Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez said Monday the country was "on epidemiological alert." His chief of staff, Santiago Cafiero, added that "with so many cases we could not carry out an organization of these characteristics. Argentina had a commitment that we tried at all times to meet, but the epidemiological reality prevented it."

In Brazil, infectious diseases expert Jose David Urbazec said the tournament should have been can-

celled. "An event of this magnitude mobilizes countless people even if the matches are without an audience. And mobility increases the transmission of the virus. This will be a very significant component in... the resurgence of the pandemic," he told AFP.

Brazil's Fiocruz research institute has warned of a new surge in the pandemic in the country already hard hit by a more infectious new strain. Opposition congressman Marcelo Freixo was among the first to denounce the latest move.

"Argentina refused the Copa America because of the worsening pandemic. There, the average of deaths in the last seven days was 470 people... Here, it's 1,844. FOUR TIMES MORE. This is a picture of a murderous government." Uruguay's team, through captain Diego Godin, said it would need "guarantees and peace of mind" to participate in the Copa in Brazil. CONMEBOL is expected to announce venues and dates for the matches soon. — AFP

Another opposition lawmaker, Congressman Julio Delgado, vowed to go to the Supreme Court to block the tournament. At least three governors in states tipped as likely hosts of matches have already said they would refuse because of the health situation. But Vice President Hamilton Mourao argued there would be less risk holding the tournament in Brazil than Argentina.

Mascot: 'Little COVID'
Football-mad Brazil has mostly been holding matches without fans, though several hundred were allowed in for the Copa Libertadores final in Rio de Janeiro in January. The Copa America was due to be held in empty stadiums if Argentina and Colombia had hosted. But speculation swirled that Conmebol would try to hold at least the final with fans present in Brazil.

The COVID-19 curve in Brazil has declined recently, from a weekly average of more than 3,000 deaths a day in April to about 1,800 last week. But the country remains one of those hit hardest. Experts say state and local officials lifted restrictions too soon, with just 11 percent of Brazil's 212 million people fully vaccinated.

They warn rising infections and hospital occupancy rates indicate a new surge is coming. Hosting the Copa America now is "reckless," said epidemiologist Pedro Hallal of the Federal University of Pelotas. "Many other countries... have the pandemic much more under control. It's hard to understand where this decision came from," he said.—AFP



BARCELONA: Argentine forward Sergio Aguero (right) poses with FC Barcelona president Joan Laporta during his official presentation as new player of FC Barcelona at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Monday. — AFP

"The signing of Aguero is for Aguero. We want to build a competitive team and obviously we also want Leo to stay, we have already told him this," Laporta said. Aguero's signing for Barca comes two days after he missed out on winning the Champions League with City, Pep Guardiola's side losing this season's final to Chelsea at the end of a season disrupted by injury.

His final appearance for City was as a substitute for Raheem Sterling late in the final in Porto as the newly-crowned Premier League champions tried in vain to win Europe's top prize for the first time. He leaves City as their all-time record goalscorer with 260 goals, and with the most goals scored for a single club in Premier League history — 184 goals in

275 appearances. "Leaving aside last season, I had nine very good years at City," said Aguero. "A knee issue kept me out for a few months, I recovered, I got COVID ... but in the last four months I've felt very good physically." His move to Barcelona had been long in the offing, with Guardiola saying a week ago that he was close to a deal with the Catalan giants.

He will participate in this year's Copa America, which on Monday was moved from Colombia and his home country Argentina to Brazil. "If they have made that decision it is because things are not going well in Argentina, there have been a lot of infections over the last few days and many deaths. I think it was a good decision," said Aguero. — AFP

News in brief

Messi negotiations 'going well'

BARCELONA: Barcelona president Joan Laporta repeated yesterday that negotiations with Lionel Messi "are going well", less than a month before the Argentine star's club contract expires. "We are in talks with Leo's representatives," Laporta said. "I said it the other day, it's going well and we hope they continue to make progress. We want to agree a new contract with Leo. It's going well, but it's not done." Messi's contract with Barcelona expires on June 30. Laporta said signing Messi to a new contract did not depend on the outcome of an audit the club is carrying out to find out the exact state of its finances. — AFP

Garcia returns to Barca

BARCELONA: Manchester City's Spain center-back Eric Garcia will join Barcelona on a five-year deal next month, the Catalan club said yesterday. Garcia, 20, who has been included in his country's squad for the upcoming Euro 2020, will leave the Premier League champions when his deal ends on July 1. "The player will sign a contract until the end of the 2025/26 season and his buyout clause is set at 400 million euros (\$489.5 million)," the La Liga side said in a statement. Garcia came through the academy at Camp Nou before joining City's youth set-up in 2017. — AFP

Greenwood withdraws

LONDON: Manchester United forward Mason Greenwood has pulled out of England's Euro 2020 squad due to injury, the club announced yesterday. The 19-year-old was named in Gareth Southgate's provisional 33-man pool, which is due to be cut to 26 later ahead of the tournament. Greenwood, who made his international debut last September, will not be selected after United said playing in the competition would not be "beneficial" for an ongoing injury problem. He scored 12 goals in 52 appearances for United this season, and played 100 minutes of the Europa League final defeat by Villarreal last week. — AFP

Vidal in hospital

SANTIAGO: Inter Milan's Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal is receiving hospital treatment after testing positive for coronavirus, his national team said Monday. The diagnosis means the 34-year-old will miss Thursday's World Cup qualifier between Chile and Argentina. Vidal was initially hospitalized with severe tonsillitis, but tested positive for coronavirus on Monday, the team said. The former Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Juventus star, who was vaccinated against the virus on Friday, will now miss the Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifier with Argentina and another qualifier against Bolivia next week in Santiago. — AFP

Khaka highlights Swiss squad

LAUSANNE: Arsenal's Granit Khaka and Liverpool's Xherdan Shaqiri headed up the final 26-man Euro 2020 squad announced by Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic on Monday. But there was no place in the squad for Brighton striker Andi Zeqiri, the goalkeeper Gregor Kobel who joined Dortmund on Monday and Nice midfielder Dan Ndoye, the trio that had been included in an extended first squad. Switzerland kick off their tournament against Wales in Baku on June 12 before taking on Italy four days later and rounding off pool play against Turkey on June 20. — AFP

Qualifiers moved to Sharjah

KUALA LUMPUR: Several World Cup football qualifying matches scheduled to be played in China will be moved to Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, after coronavirus infections in the Syria and Maldives teams, officials said yesterday. Seven Asian qualifying Group A fixtures involving China, Syria, Maldives, the Philippines and Guam are affected, playing further havoc with the already heavily disrupted Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifiers. The Chinese Football Association originally said on Monday the fixtures would be moved to Dubai, but the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) clarified yesterday they would take place in neighboring Sharjah. — AFP

Criticism, jokes as Copa America moved to Brazil over COVID

BRASILIA: When COVID-19 overwhelmed Argentina too badly to host the South American football championships, officials decided to move the tournament to pandemic-battered Brazil of all places, drawing criticism from epidemiologists and a flurry of jokes.

Already forced to delay the Copa America by a year, organizers are struggling to pull off the world's oldest running international football competition in a region still reeling from COVID-19 and in the case of original co-hosts Colombia-violent unrest.

With its huge economy and wealth of stadiums from the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, Brazil looked in some ways like a good last-minute fix after officials pulled the plug Sunday on would-be hosts Argentina two weeks from kickoff on June 13.

But there is one glaring problem with Monday's announcement that Brazil would step in: COVID-19 is devastating the country, where the death toll stands at more than 460,000, second only to the United States. And experts warn a third wave is coming.

"An event of that size moves countless people, even

Aguero hoping for Messi partnership after signing for Barca

BARCELONA: Sergio Aguero said Monday that he was hoping to have the "pleasure" of playing alongside Lionel Messi after signing a two-year deal with Barcelona. Aguero will become a Barca player once his contract with Manchester City expires at the end of June, bringing an end to a decade at the Premier League champions, and his new team have slapped a 100-million-euro (\$122 million) buy-out clause on the 32-year-old.

However he is still not sure that Messi will be his teammate next season as the club captain is yet to sign an extension to his current contract which expires next month. "Let's hope we play together ... what happens with Leo is down to decisions that he will make with the club," Aguero told reporters at the Camp Nou after he was unveiled on the famous pitch. "Obviously it will be a pleasure if we play together. If he continues here, which I think he will, we will try to do our best for the club as he always has done."

Barca will hope Aguero's arrival in Catalonia helps to convince his friend and fellow Argentine Messi to stay, as the club faces up to declining performances on the pitch and a worrying financial situation. Ronald Koeman's side finished third in La Liga this past season and have debts of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.46 billion).

They were knocked out of the Champions League at the last-16 stage by Paris Saint-Germain, and could yet face sanctions from UEFA for refusing to back out of the short-lived European Super League project. Last week club president Joan Laporta said that talks for Messi's new contract were "going well", and on Monday insisted that Aguero's signing was part of a broader Barca rebuild.

Sports

Osaka crisis throws light on stars' mental health and media 'voyeurism'

PARIS: Naomi Osaka's decision to withdraw from the French Open, after revealing her battle with depression and anxiety, has thrown the tournament into turmoil and cast a harsh light on the mental health of the sport's superstars.

The 23-year-old world number two, and four-time major winner, said she will now take a break from the sport, putting her participation at Wimbledon and even her home Olympics at risk. Osaka was fined \$15,000 and threatened with disqualification from Roland Garros after she refused to honor mandatory media commitments.

She claims they are detrimental to her mental health and likened the traditional post-match news conference to "kicking people when they're down". "There's a sense of voyeurism around how it presently works," wrote Peter Terry, a professor of psychology at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia on theconversation.com, yesterday.

"Perhaps some want to see athletes crumble and break down into tears, having put them on a pedestal. Osaka is a young, introverted, anxious person. We should by now understand that sports stars are not super human, that they have the same doubts and mental health issues as everyone else."

Terry worked with the WTA for over a decade and sat on a commission which drew up guidelines to help players avoid burn-out and deal with pressure when in their mid-teens. One of the outcomes was ruling how many tournaments a player could enter before a certain age.

Osaka said her mental health struggles began in 2018 when she won the first of her four majors at the US Open in a controversial final against Serena

Williams. She was just 20, stood awkwardly court-side, covering her face with her visor.

'Hard time coping'

"The truth is I have suffered bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018 and I have had a really hard time coping with that." She added: "In Paris, I was already feeling vulnerable and anxious so I thought it was better to exercise self-care and skip the press conferences."

Williams, a veteran of press conferences in a career which is now in its fourth decade, believes all players should have access to counseling. "I think that's so important to have a sounding board, whether it's someone at the WTA or whether it's someone in your life," said the American star.

Terry believes Osaka is right to avoid the spotlight when she is suffering from depression. Key is a family support group and, if needed, professional help. "The media don't meet those criteria. So trying to deal with serious mental health issues in the glare of publicity is next to impossible," he wrote. "There are considerable forces pushing her toward even greater levels of anxiety. Could you imagine the level of expectations on her at the Tokyo Olympics?"

If Osaka wanted advice on her next step, she could talk to fellow professional Rebecca Marino. The Canadian, a former top 40 player, quit the sport in 2013, citing crippling depression and online abuse. "Some people wrote to me that I had to die, others insulted me in a vulgar way," said Marino who left tennis for four years to pursue other interests. "I was too sensitive to everything that was said and written about me. Instead of avoiding com-



PARIS: Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after winning against Romania's Patricia Maria Tig during their women's singles first round tennis match on Day 1 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris on Sunday. —AFP

ments, I was constantly looking for them on social networks and on the internet."

When Marino returned to Grand Slam tennis in Australia this year, she offered advice which could

now be crucial for Osaka. "My message is, 'Just start the communication, just start talking to someone about what's going on in your life; reach out, get help.'" —AFP

Serena 'feels for' Osaka, has also experienced 'very difficult' press conferences

PARIS: Serena Williams said she "feels for" Naomi Osaka and has also experienced "very difficult" press conferences in her career after her rival's shock withdrawal from the French Open on Monday. Japanese star Osaka pulled out of the tournament after being threatened with disqualification for declining to speak to the media, saying she suffers from "bouts of depression".

Williams, who famously lost to Osaka in the controversial 2018 US Open final, said she sympathises with Osaka. "The only thing I feel is that I feel for Naomi. I feel like I wish I could give her a hug because I know what it's like," said the 39-year-old, after her first-round 7-6 (8/6), 6-2 win over Irina-Camelia Begu in the first ever night match at Roland Garros.

"We have different personalities, and people are different. Not everyone is the same. I'm thick. Other people are thin. Everyone is different and everyone handles things differently. You just have to let her handle it the way she wants to... I've been where I've been very difficult to walk in (to press conferences) in those moments. But, you know, it made me stronger."

Williams, seeded seventh this year, saved two

set points in a first-set tie-break as she started her latest bid for a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam singles title. Williams, who has lost four major finals since her last Slam success at the 2017 Australian Open, will take on Begu's compatriot Mihaela Buzarnescu in the second round. "It wasn't easy in that first set.

I was up and I felt like I had some opportunities. She's a really good player, she's had some really good wins so I was really happy I was able to get that first set and the match," said the three-time Roland Garros champion.

The first official night match under the lights on Court Philippe Chatrier was played behind closed doors due to a 9pm curfew imposed by the French government due to COVID-19. Williams, who had suffered early defeats in both Roma and Parma earlier this month, improved as the match progressed.

Begu fought back from 5-2 down in the opening set, but failed to serve it out when leading 6-5 and then saw two set points come and go when leading the breaker 6-4. Williams needed only one opportunity, driving a forehand volley into the corner to take control.

The former world number one strengthened her



PARIS: Serena Williams of the US reacts at the end of the women's singles first round tennis match against Romania's Irina Begu at the court Philippe Chatrier on Day 2 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris on Monday. —AFP

grip on the tie by breaking 74th-ranked Begu in the first game of the second set. She moved through the gears on her own serve from there and broke again in the seventh game before wrapping up victory after an hour and 42 minutes. —AFP

depression in the aftermath of losing her undefeated record to Holly Holm in 2015, even considering suicide. Rousey, now 34, retired from the sport after suffering a second straight UFC loss the following year. "I did a whole lot of crying, isolating myself," she told The Guardian in 2018. The American, a 2008 Olympic judo bronze medalist, has also enjoyed success as an actor.

Marcus Trescothick (cricket)

The former England opening batsman has been open about his mental health issues since pulling out of the 2006-07 Ashes tour. Since then, his former international teammates Steve Harmison and Andrew Flintoff have been among a large number of cricketers to speak about how they struggled with depression during their careers.

"Thankfully mental well-being is increasingly taken more seriously and along with that comes a decreasing stigma for sufferers," Trescothick said when launching a new campaign to help players tackle depression and addictive behavior in 2012.

Christophe Dominici (rugby union)

The France wing, who scored one of rugby's most famous tries against New Zealand at the 1999 World Cup, suffered from depression. In his 2007 autobiography, he admitted a personal loss had triggered depression and that he had been abused as a child. Dominici was found dead, aged just 48, in November last year, with police saying he was seen by a witness jumping from the roof of a disused building in Paris. —AFP

Other sports stars to suffer with depression

PARIS: Four-time Grand Slam tennis champion Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open, saying she has suffered from "bouts of depression" for almost three years, raising questions about how mental health issues are dealt with in professional sport. Here, AFP Sport looks at six other sportspeople who also struggled with depression:

Michael Phelps (swimming)

The record-breaking 23-time Olympic champion has often opened up about his battles with depression, saying he struggled after each Games in which he competed. "I was able to do some pretty incredible things in the swimming pool and I struggled outside as well," Phelps said in 2018. "There was part of my life I didn't want to be alive."

Phelps said he stayed in one room after the 2012 London Olympics for days. "If you are in a spot where you need help, to reach out and ask for help," said Phelps on athletes potentially struggling with the delay of the Tokyo Olympics last year due to COVID-19. "It was something that was very difficult for me to do."

Andres Iniesta (football)

Barcelona's former midfield maestro opened up about his struggle with depression in a TV documentary last year. Iniesta, who won two European Championship titles and the 2010 World Cup with Spain, said he was badly affected by the death of his friend Dani Jarque in 2009. The 26-year-old Espanyol defender died of a heart attack. "That was like a body blow, something powerful that knocked me down again and I was pretty low, clearly because I wasn't very well," said Iniesta, who suffered from depression shortly after Barcelona's 2009 Champions League success. "The days pass and you realize you're not improving, you don't feel good, you're not yourself. Everything clouds over and goes dark."

Robert Enke (football)

Hanover goalkeeper Robert Enke took his own life on November 10, 2009, aged only 32, after suffering with depression. He was expected to be Germany's number one goalkeeper at the 2010 World Cup. The Robert Enke Foundation was set up in his memory to help educate the public about depression in children. "I won't get over his death, I just learn to live with it," his wife Teresa said on the third anniversary of his death. A study by world footballers' union FIFPro in 2015 said that depression and anxiety affect over a third of professional players.

Ronda Rousey (MMA)

Mixed martial arts star Rousey said she was hit by

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Maternity Hospital	24843100		
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Clinics	
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaizen center	25716707
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Rawda	22517733
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Wizards stave off elimination vs 76ers, Jazz hold off Grizzlies

LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook and Bradley Beal proved to be too much to handle Monday as the Washington Wizards stayed alive in the NBA playoffs by beating the Philadelphia 76ers 122-114 in game four at Washington.

Westbrook finished with 19 points, 21 rebounds and 14 assists, while Beal delivered a game-high 27 points for the Wizards, who avoided being swept in four straight in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series.

Beal scored the 1,000th postseason point of his career early in the game, while Westbrook recorded the 12th career triple-double in the playoffs, to move into third place on the all-time list. "I have never been down 3-0 so I be damned if I get out of here without a win," said Beal.

The Sixers lost four-time all-star Joel Embiid with an injury in the first quarter. Embiid hurt his knee after falling on a drive to the basket, leaving him with just eight points on the night after scoring 36 in a game three victory.

Philadelphia still holds a 3-1 lead with game five on Wednesday at home. It is an uphill battle for the eighth-seeded Wizards. While it has happened in the NHL and Major League Baseball, no NBA team has ever rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win a playoff series.

Rui Hachimura, of Japan, finished with 20 points and 13 rebounds, and Robin Lopez came off the bench to score 16 for the Wizards. Davis

Bertans scored 12 of his 15 points in the first quarter. "We got stops when we needed to," said Westbrook. "They made some big shots but we rebounded well when we needed to."

Tobias Harris recorded 21 points and 13 rebounds for the 76ers, who were bidding for their first sweep of a best-of-seven series since eliminating Milwaukee in 1985. "Each guy thought they had to win the game for us," 76ers coach Doc Rivers said. "You've still got to play right. Tonight we didn't play right, on either end."

Hachimura helped the Wizards rediscover their scoring touch on Monday, especially from three-point range. After making just two of 22 threes in game two, and eight of 35 on Saturday, the Wizards hit nine-of-24 on Monday.

Embiid hurt

Philadelphia led by three, 31-28, at the end of the first and by just one, 61-60, at the half. The Wizards dynamic duo helped them grab the lead in the third and then it was a matter of holding off the Sixers down the stretch. Hachimura drained a clutch 24-foot three pointer with 45 seconds left to make it 118-112 and put the game out of reach.

Elsewhere, Donovan Mitchell had 30 points and Rudy Gobert scored 13 of his 17 in the third quarter as the Utah Jazz beat the Memphis Grizzlies 120-113 to take a stranglehold 3-1 lead in their Western



WASHINGTON: Russell Westbrook #4 of the Washington Wizards gives his shoes to a fan after defeating the Philadelphia 76ers during Game Four of the Eastern Conference first round series at Capital One Arena on Monday in Washington, DC. — AFP

Conference series.

Jordan Clarkson scored 24 points, Bojan Bogdanovic added 13 and Mike Conley had 11 in the win. Ja Morant

finished with 23 points and 12 assists, Dillon Brooks and Jaren Jackson each added 21, and Jonas Valanciunas finished with 14 points and 12 rebounds

for Memphis. The top-seeded Jazz can close out the first round, best-of-seven series Wednesday in game five in Salt Lake City. — AFP



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