



4 Readers speak out on impact of travel restrictions on expats



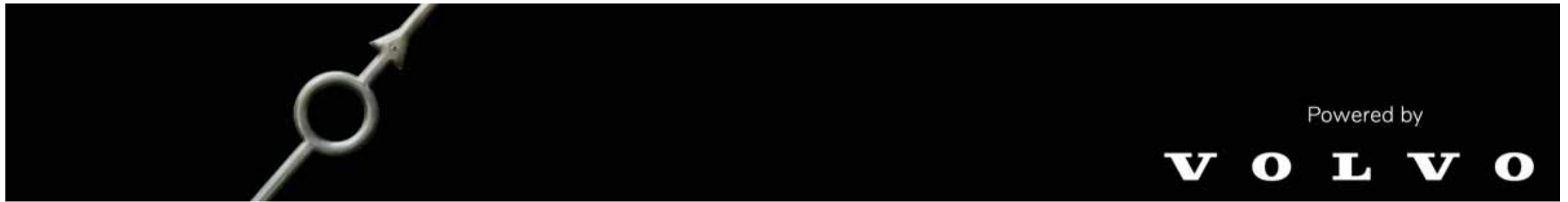
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Iranian naval vessel sinks after fire in Gulf of Oman

Explosion triggers massive blaze at Tehran refinery



(Left) Image grab taken yesterday shows smoke billowing from the Iranian Kharg supply navy ship in the Gulf of Oman. (Right) Smoke billows from the site of a refinery fire in Tehran yesterday. —AFP

TEHRAN: One of Iran's largest naval ships sank yesterday after catching fire while on a "training mission" off a strategic port near the head of the Gulf, the navy said. Later yesterday, a fierce blaze broke out at a refinery in southern Tehran after a liquefied gas line leaked and exploded, the head of the capital's crisis team said on state television. More than an hour after the blaze started, leaping flames and thick clouds of black smoke could be seen reaching high into the sky from far across Tehran.

The British-built fleet replenishment vessel Kharg, which was more than 200 m long, caught fire on Tuesday off the port of Jask on the Gulf of Oman, the navy said. Footage aired by state television showed a massive column of smoke rising from what it said was the burning vessel. The fire broke out in "one of the systems" of the ship, a navy statement said without elaborating. Firefighting efforts continued "for 20 hours" before the ship went down.

"Considering the spread of the fire, the mission to save the Kharg failed and it sank in waters off Jask," the navy said. The ship caught fire at 11 am on Tuesday as it was in "domestic waters" during "a

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UN: Pandemic plunges 100m more into poverty

GENEVA: The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed more than 100 million more workers into poverty, the UN said yesterday, after working hours plummeted and access to good-quality jobs evaporated. And the labor market crisis created by the pandemic was far from over, the UN's International Labor Organization warned in a report. Employment was not expected to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 at the earliest, it said.

The ILO's annual World Employment and Social Outlook report indicated that the planet would be 75 million jobs short at the end of this year compared to if the pandemic had not occurred. And it would still have 23 million fewer jobs by the end of next year than would otherwise have been the case. COVID-19 "has not just been a public health crisis, it's also been an employment and human crisis", ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters.

"Without a deliberate effort to accelerate the creation of decent jobs, and support the most vulnerable members of society and the recovery of the hardest-hit economic sectors, the lingering effects of the pandemic could be with us for years in the form of lost human and economic potential, and higher poverty and inequality."

The report showed that global unemployment was expected to stand at 205 million people in 2022 - far higher than the 187 million in 2019. But the situation is worse than official unemployment figures indicate. Many people have held onto their jobs but have seen their working hours cut dramatically. In 2020, 8.8 percent of global working hours were lost compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 - the equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs.

While the situation has improved, global working hours are far from having bounced back, and the world will still be short the equivalent of 100 million full-time jobs by the end of this year, the report found. Global employment is expected to recover more quickly in the second half of 2021 - provided the overall pandemic situation does not worsen. But that recovery would be highly uneven, the ILO warned, due to inequitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. So far, more than 75 percent of all the jobs have gone to just 10 countries.

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Kuwait vows \$40m for Covax, approves sotrovimab drug

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday said it would pledge \$40 million to a coronavirus vaccination program for poorer countries known as Covax, as part of efforts to push for fairer and more equitable access to the shots. Highlighting the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf

Assembly to debate allowing courts to rule on citizenship

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds a special meeting today to discuss amendments to the nationality law to allow courts to tackle issues related to Kuwaiti citizenship, currently prohibited by law. The session was requested by 35 lawmakers who want to allow the administrative court to study and rule on issues related to Kuwaiti citizenship.

MPs want to study a number of laws calling to

Transgender woman battles for 'dignity'

CAIRO: Farida Ramadan, a transgender woman, overcame major hurdles to transition in conservative Egypt, but she is still fighting for her rights in a country where LGBTQ+ people face acute stigma. Wearing a colorful headscarf, Kohl eyeliner and crimson red lipstick, Ramadan, now in her fifties, told AFP that when she was growing up in Damietta, a city in northeastern Egypt, she "was not into boys' things".

As a teenager, she told some of her family about her gender dysphoria, or conflict between a person's assigned gender and their identity. "I was met with disdain and unimaginable mockery," she said. She left home in her twenties and in 2000, started the "long, drawn out procedures to get approval from the authorities" for Gender Confirmation

Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's representative to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) summit, Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, said it would behoove the international community to work closer together to defeat the virus.

The pandemic continues to be a grave challenge thrust upon the entire world, Sheikh Ahmad, who is also the State Minister for Cabinet Affairs, said during talks co-hosted by GAVI and Japan via video link, citing a sum of \$287.4 million Kuwait had previously provided to help lessen the strain on global healthcare systems.

Meanwhile, the health ministry announced yes-

reform the nationality law to allow courts to look into issues of revoking and withdrawing Kuwaiti citizenship and other disputes related to citizenship. The lawmakers had submitted a number of bills to amend the nationality law to achieve those goals, but the legal and legislative committee has not completed its report on the issues, and as such the Assembly may not be able to finalize the matter in today's session.

Under the current nationality law, granting and revoking citizenship is considered a sovereign issue and courts are not competent to look into its disputes. A few years ago, the government revoked the citizenship of dozens of Kuwaiti opposition activists and their family members in what was seen as punishment for opposing the government. Opposition lawmakers have been pushing to make the legislative amendment to allow courts to look into all issues related to citizenship and take this issue out

Surgery (GCS).

But it would take more than 15 years before she could go under the knife. Egyptian law "does not recognize transgender people", said one of the founding members of rights group Bedayaa, which advocates for the LGBTQ+ community. The Egyptian Medical Syndicate allows for sex reassignment surgeries only with the "approval of a special committee" comprised of medical doctors and clergy from Al-Azhar - Sunni Islam's leading seat of learning, based in Cairo.

The committee relies on a fatwa, or religious edict, that stipulates sex reassignment surgery must be justified by a "biological" issue and "not a mental one", explained the activist. The syndicate's bylaws demand "blood and hormone tests, chromosome analysis and minimum of two years of psychotherapy and hormonal treatment", requirements that exclude many transgender people wanting GCS, though there are no official statistics available on the community in Egypt.

The committee only meets sporadically, and there has not been a designated Al-Azhar sheikh for at least two years, said the activist, who asked to

terday it will issue licenses for the emergency use of the drug sotrovimab (7831-VIR) for treating light and medium coronavirus cases. Dr Abdullah Al-Badr, the assistant undersecretary for medicines and nutrition supervision, told KUNA the drug is used in cases among adults and children aged 12 and above.

He indicated that the medicine is also used for persons aged 65 and above, but not for hospitalized patients who need oxygen due to infection with COVID-19. Clinical studies have shown that sotrovimab treatment has lowered hospital admissions and deaths by 85 percent. It also prevents the virus from entering human cells.

of the hands of the government.

In a related development, a pro-government MP yesterday proposed amendments to the nationality law to make it harder for foreign wives of Kuwaitis to obtain citizenship. MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji proposed that foreign wives of Kuwaiti husbands must wait as long as 25 years to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship, provided the couple has at least five children.

The amendment stipulates that the citizenship will be revoked if the couple divorces, but the woman has the right to legal residency in Kuwait. If the husband dies before 25 years have elapsed, the woman can get legal residency from her children, who are Kuwaiti by birth. At present, foreign wives of Kuwaiti husbands have to wait for at least five years before they can apply for citizenship, and the interior minister has the right to grant or deny it.

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CAIRO: Farida Ramadan Ali, a 50-year-old Egyptian transgender woman, speaks during an interview on March 17, 2021. — AFP

remain anonymous. "No operation can be carried out without the agreement of Al-Azhar." Al-Azhar did not reply to requests for comment.

Ramadan scrimped and saved for years for GCS, a process made even more difficult when she was fired from her job of 13 years in 2006 due to taking time off for treatment. "I had no money. I worked, I saved and then I made an appointment," she said, finally undergoing GCS in 2016. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince briefs Amir on Saudi visit's results

Sheikh Mishal thanks Saudi King, Crown Prince for hospitality



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



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



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince briefed His Highness the Amir on the results of his latest visit to Saudi Arabia, which reflected the historical deep-rooted bilateral relations. His Highness the Amir also received the Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His

Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince sent cables of thanks to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Saudi Arabia Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. In the cables, His Highness Sheikh Mishal expressed sincere thanks and appreciations for the hospitality and warm reception he and his accompanying del-

egation received during the official visit to the kingdom. His Highness the Crown Prince extolled the deep-rooted and distinguished fraternal relations between the two countries. He wished the Saudi King and Crown Prince permanent good health, and Saudi Arabia further progress and prosperity under King Salman's wise leadership.

In the meantime, the Saudi cabinet praised the strong and deeply-rooted ties with Kuwait. The cabinet also commended the efforts of Saudi King Salman bin

Abdulaziz and His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad to strengthen sisterly bonds and expand cooperation between the two Arabian Gulf countries, reported the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) quoting a cabinet statement following its weekly meeting on Tuesday. It noted that King Salman has briefed the cabinet about the content of a letter he received from His Highness Sheikh Nawaf. The cabinet discussed the talks held between Prince Mohammad bin Salman and His Highness Sheikh Mishal. — KUNA

Kuwait FM holds talks with GCC chief



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf, currently on an official visit to the country. The two sides explored forthcoming tasks for the council, latest developments on the regional and international arenas. The GCC was established in 1981 during a major war between Iran and Iraq. It comprises Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. — KUNA

Kuwait reiterates commitment to help Yemen overcome crisis

BRUSSELS: Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to help Yemen on all humanitarian, developmental, and political levels to bring peace and security in the country. "Kuwait will always remain faithful to its commitment, until our brothers and sisters in Yemen overcome their suffering and enjoy security and stability," Kuwait's ambassador to Belgium, EU and NATO, Jasem Al-Budaiwi, told an online conference. The Ambassador took part in the third Humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen Tuesday via videoconference. The meeting was co-hosted by the European Commission and Sweden.

In his speech, he listed the recent efforts Kuwait has undertaken to provide humanitarian assistance to the Yemeni people in hopes of easing some of their suffering. The efforts include Kuwait's pledge of \$20 million for humanitarian assistance to Yemen made at the margins of the 75th General Assembly last September. In March 2, 2021, Kuwaiti, during an international virtual conference hosted by the Switzerland and

Sweden, also provided a sum of \$20 million to help improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen. Moreover, during the last fasting month of Ramadan, many Kuwaiti NGOs stepped up efforts to provide the Yemeni people with necessities. "This is a spiritual and special time for Muslims all around the world and I am honored to inform you all that these Kuwaiti NGOs managed to reach out to thousands of Yemenis during this period," noted Al-Budaiwi.

At the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwait, along with the World Health Organization (WHO) facilitated hundreds of thousands of medical consultations in order to ensure the health security of Yemen during the global crisis, he said. On a political level, Kuwait has always stressed the importance of the following pillars in achieving a political solution, GCC Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue, Security Council Resolution 2216 and the Stockholm Agreement. Kuwait also welcomes the initiative presented by Saudi Arabia for Yemen, which provides all the necessary elements in order to reach a longstanding peace in the country.

Further, Kuwait applauds the decision by the government of Yemen to accept the initiative and



Jasem Al-Budaiwi

calls call upon the Houthis to do so as well so that the process to end this conflict can begin and to permanently put an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people. Kuwait also believes that the ministerial meeting on Yemen, which Germany hosted recently, was an excellent occasion where participants discussed the recent situation in Yemen and ways to increase cooperation and coordination in order to help Yemen overcome this crisis. Budaiwi thanked the European Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden for their tireless efforts in gathering the international community to improve the situation in Yemen.

EU Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarci told the meeting "Yemen remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with an unprecedented famine looming. The EU is committed to supporting the people in need."

During the meeting, donors, United Nations agencies and other international organizations as well as international and Yemeni non-governmental organizations reaffirmed their commitment to supporting people in need, and to upholding humanitarian principles and global accountability standards. Participants reiterated that a sustainable solution in Yemen requires an urgent, nationwide ceasefire and a comprehensive peace agreement reached through an inclusive political process, said a European Commission press release. — AFP

AUB contributes to changing people's lives

KUWAIT: As part of its CSR program and in support of its charitable and humanitarian role, Ahli United Bank (AUB) sponsored 100 cataract surgeries in Somalia in partnership with the humanitarian excellence association. This initiative will help patients restore their vision and enable them to live a normal life. AUB took a step further and will also cover the post-surgery medical care expenses.

Commenting on this humanitarian initiative, Sahar Dashti, General Manager Customer Protection, and the Head of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Team at AUB said in a press release, "this is a noble initiative that would change the lives of 100 persons in Somalia by restoring

their vision, and to help them live a better life and bring them joy that would extend to their families."

Dashti stressed that AUB, through its CSR program, exerts all its effort to help needy people wherever they are, based on its belief that the community development responsibility has no geographical boundaries, pointing out that satisfying people's needs and being kind to them is one of the greatest acts of charity and good deeds.

Dashti pointed out that AUB has been briefed on the cataract surgeries project adopted by the Humanitarian Excellence Association in Somalia, and after adequate study, the bank decided to provide this support due to its importance in reviving hope in the life of dozens of needy families in the Somali society, many of whose members face living difficulties and multiple health issues. In conclusion, Dashti said that AUB has a solid partnership relations with many charitable organizations, some of which are active in Kuwait among needy families and other groups, while others are specialized in various developments of relief and treatment projects abroad.



KUWAIT: Easa Karm from AUB'S CSR team (center) with Khalil Al-Hamadi and Ahmed Al-Bayah from the Humanitarian Excellence Association in Somalia.

Iranian naval vessel sinks...

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training mission", Iran's Tasnim news agency quoted the navy's head of public relations Behzad Jahanian as saying.

It sank at around 8:30 am (0400 GMT) yesterday. All 400 cadets and crew disembarked safely, with 20 sustaining light injuries or burns. Jahanian said the cause of the fire was "still not clear". The vessel was ordered from Britain in 1976 when the pro-Western shah was still in power. It was not delivered until 1984 after years of wrangling between Britain and the government that took power after the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Jeremy Binnie of open-source defense intelligence provider Janes said the Kharg was important to Iran as its only dedicated vessel able to resupply warships at sea. "The Iranians often describe it as a 'helicopter carrier' but it is actually a replenishment ship - a useful asset nonetheless as it was the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy's only dedicated ship serving this role," Binnie said. "It is not the IRIN's largest vessel any more after they commissioned Makran, a converted oil tanker, in January," he added.

Iran's ISNA news agency said the vessel had left for a mission focused on "training, intelligence and combat" alongside the destroyer Alborz on May 19. The port city of Jask, near which the Kharg went down, lies close to the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic chokepoint at the head of the Gulf through which a fifth of world oil output passes.

Jask is strategically important to Iran as the government plans to make it the site of the country's sec-

ond-largest oil export terminal. An approximately 1,000-km pipeline from Bushehr province on the Gulf to Jask was put into service a few days ago, the government said. It provides a new bypass route for Iranian oil exports that avoids the Strait of Hormuz.

Last year, an Iranian warship was hit by friendly fire during a naval exercise off Jask, killing the 19 sailors onboard. Logistical support vessel Konarak was hit after "moving a practice target to its destination and not creating enough distance between itself and the target," state television said at the time.

In recent months, there have also been reported attacks on Iran's shipping fleet that have been linked to its arch foe, the Zionist entity. In April, Tehran said its freighter Saviz was hit by an "explosion" in the Red Sea, after media reports said the Zionist entity had struck the ship. The New York Times reported at the time that the Saviz had been targeted in a Zionist "retaliatory" attack after "Iran's earlier strikes on (Zionist) ships". It came at a time of heightened tensions between the foes, with reports of a series of tit-for-tat attacks on shipping since early March.

Meanwhile, the refinery "accident was caused by a leak from an emergency liquefied gas line," triggering "an explosion which caused the start of the fire that we can observe," Tehran crisis team chief Mansour Darajati told state television. Darajati said that the fire had begun at around 7:30 pm local time (1500 GMT) and that there were "fortunately no deaths at this stage".

According to state news agency IRNA, the stricken refinery has been operational since 1968, has a capacity of 250,000 barrels per day and is owned by the Tehran Oil Refining Company. A spokesman for the company dismissed "all speculation centering on sabotage at the refinery", according to state television's Telegram channel. "The accident was caused by a technical problem and we are currently in the process of controlling the fire," he added. — AFP

Assembly to debate allowing courts to...

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Meanwhile, two opposition lawmakers - Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Thamer Al-Suwait - said yesterday they have been summoned by the public prosecution to testify in events that took place during the Assembly's opening session in December last year. The opening session witnessed chaotic scenes and a section of the public hurled insults on opposition MPs. These actions were

allegedly carried out by supporters of Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, including his brother.

Opposition MPs have repeatedly demanded an investigation into the events and how those people got invitations to attend the opening session in violation of procedures. The speaker has refused to allow the Assembly to debate the issue, and instead the Assembly office sent a complaint to the public prosecution asking for a probe.

But Kandari said the complaint was sent in violation of the constitution and did not include any details of the events during the opening session. He said the Assembly office sent a motion by MPs to investigate the events by the Assembly, which is a clear violation of the constitution.

UN: Pandemic plunges 100m...

Continued from Page 1

The limited capacity of most developing and emerging economies to support strong fiscal stimulus measures will also take its toll, the ILO said. In those countries, it said, the quality of newly created jobs would likely deteriorate. The fall in employment and hours worked has meanwhile translated into a sharp drop in labour income and a rise in poverty.

Compared to 2019, 108 million more workers around the world were categorized as poor or extremely poor, meaning they and their families live on less than \$3.20 per person per day, the study showed. "For many millions of people, the working hour losses combined with a lack or absence of social protection" had sparked an "absolutely dramatic" increase in

working poverty, Ryder said. Five years of progress towards eradicating working poverty had been undone. Tragically, he said, the crisis also appeared to have reversed decades of progress battling child labor and forced labor. The report highlighted how the COVID-19 crisis had worsened pre-existing inequalities by hitting vulnerable workers harder.

For many of the two billion people who work in the informal sector, where social protections are generally lacking, the disruption has had catastrophic consequences for family incomes and livelihoods. The crisis has also disproportionately hit women, who have fallen out of the labor market at a greater rate than men, even as they have taken on more of the additional burden of caring for out-of-school children and others.

This, the report warned, had created the risk of a "re-traditionalization" of gender roles. Youth employment meanwhile fell 8.7 percent last year - more than double the 3.7 percent for older workers. "The consequences of this delay and disruption to the early labor market experience of young people could last for years," the ILO said. — AFP

Local

Ambassadors visit Kuwait's renewable energy complex

Site includes solar station, photoelectric unit, wind farm

KUWAIT: The US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait along with envoys of European countries based in the country yesterday visited Al-Shagaya Renewable Energy Park, run by Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), in Jahra, north of Kuwait City. KISR said in a statement the delegation grouped the US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski, German Ambassador Stefan Mobs, French envoy Anne-Claire Legendre, the ambassador of Italy Carlo Baldocci, the ambassador of Austria Marian Alexander WRBA, the ambassador of Belgium Leo Peeters and the ambassador of the EU Dr Christian Tudor.

The American Ambassador, as cited by KISR's statement, said she was elated to examine the complex, thanked KISR's Acting Director Dr Manea Al-Sdirawi for the gesture and affirmed necessity of cooperation between her nation and

partners around the world to stem climatic change and the atmosphere overheating. Renewable energy is quite necessary for coping with such perils, for achieving objectives of the Paris Agreement on climatic change (aimed at substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions), lauding Kuwait for taking such a gigantic move, building the renewable energy complex.

Meanwhile, ambassador Mobs said the Kuwaiti-German partnership achieves goals of the sustainable development, noting that German establishments and companies were ready to cooperate with Kuwait at this level because protecting the environment has become very much pending more than any other time ever. The EU envoy for his part expressed readiness to cooperate with Kuwait as part of an approach to manage resources in Kuwait and the EU countries.



KUWAIT: A group photo of diplomats during their visit to Al-Shagaya Renewable Energy Park yesterday. — KUNA

The complex's director, Dr Ayman Al-Gattan, said the site included in the first phase three stations, the thermal solar station (50 MW), the photoelectric unit (10 MW) and the wind farm (10 MW). Overall annual energy output from the park

is in the range of 245 MW per hour; sufficient to supply energy to some 2,000 residential units. He has affirmed the strategy to secure 15 percent of the electric power from the complex for Kuwait by 2030. —KUNA

Kuwait punishes wrongdoers on Qaruh island

KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority (EPA) recorded harmful acts on Qaruh island and examined status of surrounding coral reefs. Some persons were found using prohibited fishing tools and were penalized according to the environment protection law, EPA said in a press release yesterday. An EPA team, in coordination with the Coast Guards, surveyed the island and divers checked the nearby coral reefs that showed no symptoms of bleaching. The personnel reminded visi-



Qaruh Island

tors of the relevant laws for protecting the environment, namely the islands, keeping the island clean and the reefs in healthy condition. EPA has repeatedly urged sea goers to abstain from acts that harm the

reefs, like random dropping of anchors that damage them. Qaruh is one of Kuwait's southern islands. Surrounded by crystal clear waters, it is a favorite spot for local scuba divers. — KUNA

EU envoy awards Kuwaiti civil society initiative

KUWAIT: The EU Ambassador to the State of Kuwait and the State of Qatar, Cristian Tudor, has presented the 2020 Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the GCC region to its recipient, "Gray Area", a Kuwaiti civil society initiative that aims to raise awareness of the social stigmas and legal inequalities experienced by children of Kuwaiti mothers and non-Kuwaiti fathers.

In his speech, during a small ceremony at the EU residence (adhering to the precautionary health measures in order to limit the spread of coronavirus in the State of Kuwait), Ambassador Tudor said: "As a way of constructively promoting Human Rights in the GCC, the European Union Delegations in the region, together with the Embassies of the Member States, award the Chaillot Prize to a civil society organization (CSO) or individuals, for their efforts in the promotion of human rights in the GCC, every year. We are very proud to award this prize to Gray Area as their efforts in advocating for the non-citizen children of Kuwaiti mothers and raising awareness of the ambiguity of some of the laws pertaining to them, have been very noteworthy and ought to be highlighted."

"For us in the EU, promoting and defending human rights is at the heart of our external policy as they are among the EU's founding values of human dignity, freedom and



KUWAIT: The EU Ambassador to Kuwait and Qatar Cristian Tudor presents the 2020 Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the GCC region to Gray Area representatives.

respect for human rights. We do that with the hope of creating a better, more just world."

A spokesperson from Gray Area said: "We would like to thank the delegation of the European Union to the State of Kuwait for this award as it highlights our efforts towards the need for urgency of gender equality in nationality laws not only in Kuwait, but in the region. We would also like to thank our community for its endless support, and we hope this is the mark of many more milestones to come as we continue to advocate for the naturalization of children of Kuwaiti mothers."

The Chaillot Prize is awarded to civil society organizations and public or private institutions for actions, campaigns and projects, which support human rights awareness, promotion and protection in the GCC region. The Prize is named after the Palais de Chaillot in Paris where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. The announcement of the 2020

Chaillot Prize winner took place on 10 December 2020 to mark the 72nd anniversary of the adoption of the declaration.

Throughout the past three years, Gray Area has been raising awareness about the various inequalities surrounding the legal rights of children of Kuwaiti mothers. Only 25 of 197 countries around the world currently do not grant women gender equality in nationality laws, and 12 of those countries are in the Middle East and North Africa region.

While organizations in the past have advocated the topic of naturalization of children of Kuwaiti women from a women's rights perspective, Gray Area is amplifying the voices of the children while challenging society's view of women who marry non-nationals. Their "Gray Stories" campaign is a collection of short stories told by children of Kuwaiti mothers that highlight their struggles. By taking a storytelling approach, Gray Area is extending a platform for children of Kuwaiti mothers to tell their stories in their own way.

KFH renews strategic partnership with College of Business Administration

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) renewed its strategic partnership with the Management and Marketing Club at the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University. This comes within the framework of the continuing support provided by the bank to support the club's activities and events, and in a new affirmation of the pioneering role by KFH in sponsoring the students' activities and events in various fields.

KFH participates in sponsoring and supporting the basic activities of the Management and Marketing Club at the College of Business Administration, which include student activities, graduation projects, seminars and many relevant events.

It is noteworthy that KFH is a pioneer in supporting students and youth, and is one of the biggest supporters for them at the private sector level through many contributions, including support for student clubs, graduation projects for students, participation in seminars and research seminars, workshops, and lectures that contribute to the

development of scientific and professional performance. KFH also participates in student unions conferences, graduation ceremonies for students, honoring outstanding students, and supporting high school students and school students of all grades.

Throughout its journey, KFH seeks to make youth and education a top priority by supporting many initiatives and projects that have been launched to empower youth. The bank has spared no effort in sponsoring their activities and offering congratulations to students and their families on such important occasions and great accomplishments.

On his behalf, Head of the Management and Marketing Club at the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University Abdul Rahman Al-Ibrahim praised the great role that KFH plays in supporting students and the college's activities and hailed the bank's efforts in shouldering the social responsibility towards youth and the educational process.



solutions by stc builds network infrastructure at vaccination center

KUWAIT: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced that it has provided a wide range of modern solutions and services to build the integrated network infrastructure that will be serving the drive-in vaccination center on the South Island of Jaber Causeway. The initiative was carried out in line with the highest international standards.

In this regard, solutions by stc indicated that it collaborated with the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), an affiliate of the Kuwait Petroleum Company (KPC), to develop a modern and digitally enabled network infrastructure for the vaccination center located on the South Island of Jaber Causeway. The collaborative efforts showcased by the two companies through the initiative aimed to support the tremendous activities carried out by the country to contain the spread of the coronavirus during these unprecedented times.

solutions by stc issued a statement mentioning that its cooperation with KIPIC throughout this process stems from the commitment it upholds to supporting the nation in the ongoing crisis. The actions taken by the company positively portray the role played by the private sector in backing the oil sector, while seeking the country's best interests. solutions by stc also expressed that it is essential for institutions to stand together in solidarity, reflecting the strength of the Kuwaiti society against any threat that may compromise the country's safety or stability.

solutions by stc highlighted that the Jaber Causeway drive-in vaccination center is a first-of-its-kind concept in Kuwait. Additionally, the company pointed out that the system implemented within the center is in direct connection with that of the Ministry of Health. Data is transferred through the integrated system using solutions by stc's high-speed network, which comes supported by



KUWAIT: Mohammad Al-Nusif, CEO of solutions by stc, and Mishari Al-Hamad, General Manager of Sales and Account Management of solutions by stc, in a group photo with KIPIC's team.

fiber optics and 5G connectivity.

Diligent efforts

Mohammad N. Al-Nusif, Chief Executive Officer of solutions by stc, said, "We are proud of the hard work and diligent efforts made by both teams in making this partnership a success. The project was implemented in a short period of time, despite the exceptional circumstances we are currently going through. This initiative affirms our keenness and determination to provide citizens visiting the Jaber Causeway drive-in vaccination center with pioneering solutions and telecom services in line with global standards."

Nusif added, "Our primary focus was to implement this project with great accuracy and speed, ensuring that we covered all the digital and technical requirements requested by the medical and administrative staff working at the center. Throughout the execution phase, we were driven by our will to serve our beloved country and duty to preserve the health of our community."

He expressed, "At solutions by stc, we possess an in-depth understanding of our customers' needs, which positions us as the preferred telecommunication and IT solutions provider in the region. Having said that, we will spare no effort in developing effective solutions that maintain the highest levels of online and data security for our customers with the support of international players who specialize in data breach and prevention management."

Nusif concluded, "solutions by stc also provides a breadth of B2B offerings that can greatly enhance the operational efficiency of the day-to-day activities run by businesses of all sizes, across multiple industries. In our mission to aid businesses succeed within their industries and sectors, we will continue to introduce new offerings, and enhance existing ones, to achieve optimal outcomes for our customers."

Vaccination center

It is worth mentioning that the drive-in vaccination center at Jaber Causeway provides swab testing services for patients and features specialized cabins for the Ministry of Health on-site staff. The setup also includes clinics, emergency rooms, a mosque, as well as cabins dedicated for the Kuwait Fire Department, in addition to other services.

The center consists of 10 lanes for drive-in vaccinations, with two vaccination booths at each point. With a total of 20 booths, the center can administer vaccines to a total of 80 people at once in a matter of 3-4 minutes.

The inauguration of the Kuwait Center for Anti-COVID Vaccination, located on the South Island of Jaber Causeway, builds on the government's initiative to accelerate the vaccination process to achieve herd immunity, allowing the return to normalcy. It is also worth noting that the vaccination center can serve up to 5,000 residents per day.

Experts hope for rebound in Kuwait's real estate sector

KUWAIT: Real estate experts hoped yesterday the real estate sector would rebound following devastating impacts caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which contributed to numerous vacancies after many expatriates were forced to leave Kuwait. They said demand started to pick up during the first five months of this year, and the housing sector was the most lucrative despite high prices, which ranged between KD 800 and 1,200 (\$2,400-3,600) for every square meter.

Emad Haidar, vice-chairman of brokers' union, said it was hard for prices to exceed a ceiling but even if they do, they would eventually re-adjust. Mansour Al-Osaimi, a real estate expert, said selling and purchasing activities in the housing, commercial and investment sectors were "good" in the first five months. However, he added, "We cannot ignore the fact that the investment sector was the hardest hit because of the coronavirus pandemic." The vacancies in the investment sector will affect prices in the first half 2021, he said, and may extend until end of the year.

Meanwhile Faisal Al-Loughani, a broker, said prices of houses in what he called old areas were on the rise because of few supply and high demand. Fawzi Hamada, a real estate expert, said housing sector has been experiencing an unprecedented inflation since mid-2020. He said the real estate sector was facing many challenges including slow-pace distribution of housing lots and construction licenses coupled with high cost of construction materials, which contributed to high prices. — KUNA



Readers Speak Out

Impact of Kuwait's 'travel restrictions' devastating for country's expatriate community

Since February 2021, Kuwait has barred foreigners, including legal residents, from returning to Kuwait. Foreigners may leave but cannot return until further notice. The second lengthy period of the airport's closure to foreigners has had a devastating impact on expatriates, many of whom have family abroad or are stuck abroad. Kuwait Times invited expatriates who have been affected by the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 to share their stories. For the second week, Kuwait Times continued to receive hundreds of responses via comments, direct messages and emails. Kuwait Times shared in print and online a selection of these responses (names withheld) to illustrate the breadth and depth of the impact the travel restrictions have had on Kuwait's 3.4 million+ expatriate community. This is the third installment of these responses (you can read more on our social media @KuwaitTimes).

Travel restrictions, ie the ban on expats, have not only affected me emotionally, but mentally as well, and I think I speak for many when I say this. I came to India in November with my 3-month-old son, thinking that I will meet my parents and return by February, as I hadn't seen my parents for a year. But they banned us (expats) from traveling. I've already taken the first dose of one of the approved vaccines and I am taking all precautions. I and my son have valid residencies and we hope and pray that the government lifts the ban on expats so we can be with our families.

“
My wedding was set for Dec 2020, for which me and my family planned to travel outside Kuwait. But because of the travel ban, my father could not go with us, otherwise he would have lost his job. Now my mother is stuck outside Kuwait and my dad is alone in Kuwait. My father could not attend my wedding, I am his only child.

head back to Kuwait afterwards. It's been four months since then. We are stranded somewhere we don't know anyone, away from family and friends. I've spent more than a year's savings on flight cancellations and hotel/apartment reservations alone. But I'm at a much worse state mentally. My father is 60+ and due to the new rules, he might be forced to leave Kuwait soon and I'm not there to support my parents during these difficult times. How is it fair that three generations of my family have served their entire lives to build Kuwait, but we have to go through all this pain and agony?

I delivered my baby in the US and I am not able to return since then. The only option I had was to leave him and return alone, as there were no visas upon arrival at that time. I took the decision not to go and leave my newborn. His dad hasn't met him yet, and my other 6-year-old son is having trauma. He wants to go back home to see

his dad and friends. I wish this black cloud will vanish soon!

We have four kids - two of them are studying in the US and they don't have Kuwait residency. We haven't seen them for 1.5 years. We really miss our

family but haven't been able to visit them due to the travel ban on expats. We are afraid of traveling and not being able to come back. We want to get the vaccine too; if not here, we will get it in the US. But we can't leave Kuwait until they lift the travel ban.

Both my grandparents migrated to Kuwait in the early '50s. Both my parents were born here, and me and my siblings as well. Kuwait is the only home we know. Me and my sister traveled to see our brother abroad, whom we hadn't seen for two years. Since the country we traveled to is on the list of "banned" countries, we went to a "transit" country in late January to

I am Brazilian, married with three children, with my entire family living in Brazil. I have not seen my country and family for a year and six months. I cannot resolve my problems in Brazil. This situation is very complicated. We do not have the freedom to go. This whole situation makes my heart sad and only increases my desire to leave Kuwait at once.



Local



When I got to know both my parents had COVID, all I did was watch them on my phone. I couldn't travel to be with them and provide support. I watched as my mom recovered, and continued to watch as my dad deteriorated. I watched how he was strapped into the ventilator and cuffed to the bed, I watched as his heart stopped. I watched my mom grieve for her loving husband and companion of 43 years. I watched as he was taken on a stretcher to be cremated. I watched as my

My husband is an expat who was born and brought up in Kuwait. We got married in December 2019. I got my dependent visa in February 2020 and all the visa formalities and medical tests were done. Only the visa stamping was pending, which would've been completed in a couple of days. We were excited to start our lives together. However, the travel ban was announced all of a sudden in mid-March and there was nothing that could've been done. I had resigned

single mum of three kids. Been in Kuwait for 11 years. Loved every minute of being here. Kuwait was a home to me until last summer when I went back to London and took my kids there. I was urgently called back for

ance and everything ran out. Alhamdulillah one of the teachers couldn't take the job and I was offered the job back at the same school. My kids still couldn't come back to Kuwait. I went to the UK in December to bring

as I didn't know when I was going to see them literally broke me. Since then I have been in depression, which finally pushed me to leave Kuwait and go back home. Because I don't know when I am going to be able to bring



KUWAIT: Several archive photos showing activity at Kuwait International Airport with heavy health precautionary measures taken. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh

“ I'm an expat who has been hugely negatively affected by the travel ban. I go to university here, so I can't risk being banned from Kuwait. But I haven't been able to go see my family back home for many years. I have multiple friends in the same situation as me. Thank you for reporting on this and trying to make a change. ”

poor mom was alone. I just watched. Twelve months later, I am left with the option of continuing to do the same. I can't travel to wrap my arms around my grieving mother. I couldn't hold her and care for her in her loneliness. I pray no one should go through this alone. If only I could travel to see her or bring her here; I would be forever grateful for a right I have but cannot exercise.

from my job as well to relocate with my husband. We tried by emailing the authorities, but there was nothing that they could've done either. Every day I check for any positive news, but in vain. It's almost been one and a half year since we've seen each other. Please help us in any way possible.

I would like to share my story about how as an expat the whole COVID situation has affected me. I am a British

work and had to leave my kids behind. Two weeks after I came back to Kuwait I was told I couldn't work for the school because of the whole COVID situation. I am the only breadwinner to support my three children. During that time I got very sick with kidney stones and my medical insur-

them back. Two days into my trip, I found the airport had shut down. After the airport opened, we were told that UK is on the red list and we cannot take a direct flight from the UK. So I had to come through Bahrain, which financially I couldn't afford. Leaving my kids behind and giving them a last hug

them back. Inshallah maybe in a year or two, the situation will be stable. But this whole situation really messed me up mentally and emotionally.



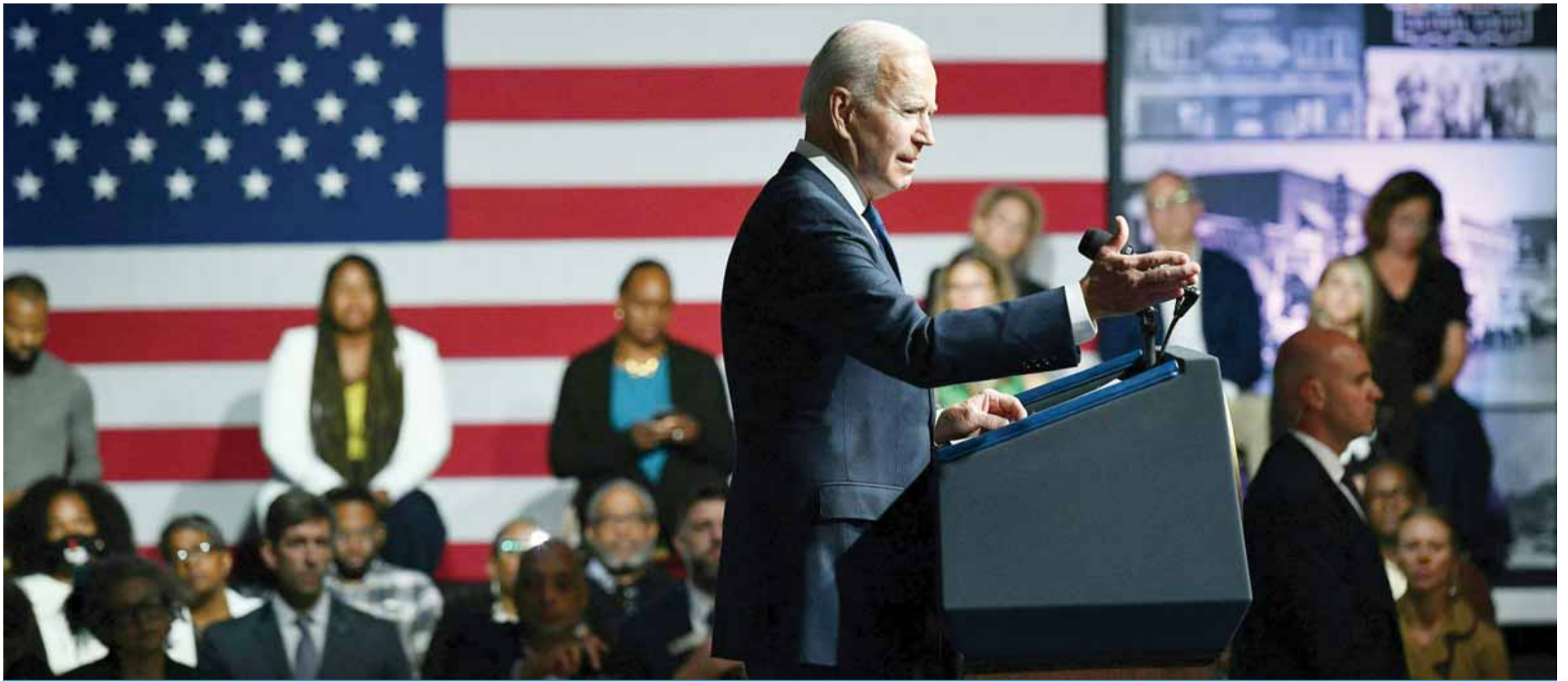


African Union suspends Mali after second coup in nine months

Burnt-out container ship sinking off Sri Lanka

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US President Joe Biden delivers remarks to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre at the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma on June 1, 2021. US President Joe Biden traveled Tuesday to Oklahoma to honor the victims of a 1921 racial massacre in the city of Tulsa, where African American residents are hoping he will hear their call for financial reparations 100 years on. —AFP

Biden honors victims of Tulsa race massacre

Brutal acts of violence were not taught in schools

TULSA: As they gathered to witness US President Joe Biden's historic visit to the site of a racist massacre that devastated a thriving community, Black Tulsans said they hoped his presence means the long-ignored injustice will finally receive recognition. The Tulsa district of Greenwood-nicknamed "Black Wall Street"—was devastated in 1921 by a mob of armed white people. Hundreds are thought to have died in the violence sparked by a false accusation against a young Black man. Biden is the first sitting president to attend the annual commemorations. Now, locals say, he needs to give economic help to a community that 100 years later has still not recovered its prosperity.

"It's a wound," said Betty Anderson. "It still hurts." But the 70-year-old welcomed Biden, calling

his visit "phenomenal" and expressing hope that his presence would help educate white Americans about events in Oklahoma state that have lain hidden for too long.

So-called 'riots'

Up to 300 people were killed in the attack, and some 10,000 were left homeless when the district was set ablaze, leaving a vibrant economy in ruins. No one was ever convicted for the destruction, and insurance companies, claiming that the unrest was the result of riots, refused to reimburse Black victims. "Twenty years ago, nobody said it was a massacre, people said it was a riot," a woman in the crowd cried out, as people clapped in support.

Never discussed even in parts of Tulsa's Black

community, for years the brutal acts of violence were not taught in schools. But on Tuesday Biden said he wanted to "fill the silence," and went on to recognize that "there was a clear effort to erase" the event from the nation's memory. The president told the audience, among them three survivors of the massacre, "we will shine a light on your history." The Greenwood district never managed to recover. "It even affected the way us Black people look at white people," said 13-year-old Colece, who was born in Tulsa.

'He knew how things had been'

Her 63-year-old grandmother Celestine Polk nods, and described how her family struggled in the aftermath. "My father especially," she said, "because he

knew how things have been." "But it's not as if we could go back and change what happened, we have to live with it," the teenager said, adding that "maybe people will feel better if they feel the government cares about what happened." A bit further away, near a booth offering t-shirts to commemorate the massacre and under a "Black Lives Matter flag," Anthony Hutton thinks it will take a lot to heal the pain.

Biden's visit is "a kind gesture," said the 46-year-old, but it wasn't enough. As an engineer Hutton said he can not find work in the area, and said that Black Tulsans still face racial discrimination. "We're looking for economic opportunities, the same opportunities they have elsewhere, all around town," he said. "We're tired of talking, marching, we want results." —AFP

US to hand Bagram base to Afghan forces in 20 days

KABUL: The US military will hand over its main Bagram Air Base to Afghan forces in about 20 days, an official said Tuesday, as Washington carries out its final withdrawal after nearly two decades of war. The vast base, built by the Soviets in the 1980s, is the biggest military facility used by US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, with tens of thousands of troops stationed there during the peak of America's military involvement in the violence-racked country. "I can confirm we will hand over Bagram Air Base," a US defence official told AFP without specifying when the transfer would take place.

An Afghan security official said the handover was expected in about 20 days, and the defence ministry had set up special committees to manage it. In Washington, the Pentagon indicated that the pace of the withdrawal was picking up. As of Monday, US Central Command estimated it had completed 30-44 percent of the so-called "retrograde" process. It has shipped the equivalent of 300 loaded C-17 transport planes out of the country. In April, President Joe Biden set a target of September to remove all the 2,500 US troops and some 16,000 civilian contractors out of the country, aiming to end the US military's two-decade-old presence.

Handing over bases

Bagram base was the centre for nationwide com-



NANGARHAR: In this file photo a US soldier from 4th Infantry Division 4 Brigade Alpha Company presents a gift to an Afghan child during a patrol at Khogyani in Nangarhar. The US pullout from Afghanistan is at least 16 percent and as much as a quarter complete, the Pentagon's Central Command said. —AFP

mand and air operations for the past two decades. It also houses a prison that held thousands of Taliban and jihadist inmates over the years. Washington had already handed over six military bases to Afghan forces before May 1, when it began accelerating the final withdrawal of troops. Last month it completed the withdrawal from Kandahar Airfield in southern Afghanistan, once the second-largest foreign military base in the country.

The US withdrawal comes despite bloody clashes across the country between the Taliban and Afghan forces. In the latest violence to rock the capital Kabul, at least 10 civilians were killed and 12 wounded in two separate blasts targeting passenger

buses in the city late on Tuesday, police said. In a separate incident, an explosion caused a power outage leaving several parts of Kabul in darkness.

Peace talks were launched in September in Qatar between the Taliban and Afghan government, but so far have failed to strike any deal to end a war that has killed tens of thousands of people over nearly two decades. On Tuesday, a group of Afghan government negotiators reached Doha in the hope of resuming stalled talks. "Our team is ready for serious negotiations. There is no military solution to this conflict," Najia Anwari, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Peace, told AFP, adding that no date had been fixed for resuming the talks. —AFP

testers have been killed in the past 48 hours from live rounds fired by internal security forces", known as the Asayish, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Demonstrators initially took to the street to demand an end to forced military conscription.

But the protests swelled after one of their number was shot dead on Monday. Protesters blocked roads and attacked an Asayish checkpoint outside Manbij on Tuesday, the Observatory said, prompting security forces to respond with live fire. The Manbij Military Council, a governing body linked to the Kurdish administration, blamed the violence on "criminal cells receiving their orders from external and domestic forces", a likely reference to the Syrian government and Turkey.

It accused instigators of using the issue of military conscription—which has been in place for seven years—as a pretext to spark strife. Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman said that after reaching 18,

young men were required to perform around one year of military service. Representatives of the Asayish and the Kurdish administration held talks with Arab tribal leaders yesterday in an attempt to restore calm, the Observatory said. They agreed to stop military conscription in Manbij and surrounding areas until further study and discussion, according to a joint statement released after the meeting.

Last month, two people died in clashes that broke out in parts of northeastern Syria over a decision by the Kurdish administration to raise fuel prices. Authorities reversed the price hike in response to the unrest. "The Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria (AANES) is in economic collapse," Nicholas Heras of the Newlines Institute think-tank warned on Twitter.

"It'll give Turkey and (Syrian President Bashar al-) Assad and allies opportunities to pick the AANES apart. It will accelerate unrest. Many Manbij on the horizon." —AFP

Arab-Kurd unrest in Syria's Manbij leave six dead

BEIRUT: Kurdish forces have shot dead six Arab protesters in the northern Syrian region of Manbij, a war monitor said yesterday. The violence broke out at a demonstration against military conscription and against a backdrop of growing anger over a deepening economic crisis which the area's Kurdish leadership is struggling to contain. The latest unrest comes weeks after similar riots gripped other parts of the autonomous zone Kurdish forces have carved out in northeastern Syria since civil war broke out in 2011.

In the Arab-majority region of Manbij, which was captured by Kurdish forces five years ago, "six pro-

Russian senators adopt 'extremist' bill that bars critics from polls

MOSCOW: Russia's upper house yesterday overwhelmingly backed legislation expected to be used to ban allies of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny from running in elections, the latest move in a crackdown on the opposition. The bill, overwhelmingly approved by the Federation Council, would make it impossible to run in parliamentary elections for leaders, sponsors and rank-and-file members of "extremist" groups. A Russian court is considering whether to designate Navalny's political network an extremist organisation and could make a decision as early as next week.

Critics of President Vladimir Putin say Russian authorities are widening a campaign against the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections in September. After Navalny was jailed and many of his allies arrested, two more political activists, Dmitry Gudkov and Andrei Pivovarov, were detained over the past two days. Pivovarov, the former executive director of Open Russia, a just disbanded pro-democracy group, was pulled off his Warsaw-bound flight on Monday.

The 39-year-old faces up to six years in prison for his involvement in an "undesirable" organisation. A court was expected to decide whether to remand him later. On Tuesday, police detained Gudkov after conducting raids on homes of his allies and relatives. The 41-year-old former opposition lawmaker faces up to five years in prison for allegedly failing to pay a debt under an old lease agreement.

Gudkov is likely to be formally charged yesterday, said human rights association Agora whose lawyer represents him. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the detentions were a purely legal matter. "The charges put forward by law enforcement have nothing to do with politics," he told reporters. Russian authorities had for years tolerated opposition groups including Navalny's political movement but Kremlin critics say authorities are moving to remove any vestiges of dissent. —AFP

International

African Union suspends Mali after second coup in nine months

Council warns of imposing targeted sanctions, other punitive measures

NAIROBI: The African Union announced it was suspending Mali with immediate effect and threatened the impoverished country with sanctions, after a second military coup in nine months. The putsch has sparked deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region and warnings of economic penalties from across the international community. The AU "decides... to immediately suspend the Republic of Mali from participation in all activities of the African Union, its organs and institutions, until normal constitutional order has been restored in the country", the body's Peace and Security Council said in a statement late Tuesday.

The move follows a similar suspension on Sunday from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In its statement, the AU called for the military to "urgently and unconditionally return to the barracks, and to refrain from further interference in the political processes in Mali". It warned that if the military did not hand back power to civilian transitional leaders, "the Council will not hesitate to impose targeted sanctions and other punitive measures".

Condemning the coup "in the strongest terms possible", it added it was "deeply concerned about the evolving situation in Mali and its negative impact on the gains made thus far in the transition process in the country". Strongman Colonel Assimi Goita was at the ECOWAS crisis summit in Ghana on Sunday to argue the military's case but has now returned to Mali. Goita last August led army offi-

cers who overthrew elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, following mass protests over perceived corruption and a bloody jihadist insurgency. After the takeover, the military agreed to appoint civilians as interim president and prime minister under the pressure of ECOWAS trade and financial sanctions.

Elections pledge

But in a move that provoked diplomatic uproar, soldiers last week detained transitional president Bah N'daw and prime minister Moctar Ouane, releasing them on Thursday while saying that they had resigned. Mali's constitutional court completed Goita's rise to full power on Friday by naming him transitional president. With the junta going back on its previous commitment to civilian political leaders, doubts have been raised about its other pledges, including a promise to hold elections in early 2022.

The junta said this week it would continue to respect that timetable, but added that it could be subject to change. The United States and Mali's former colonial master France had both threatened sanctions in response to the second coup. But ECOWAS, at a crisis summit in Ghana on Sunday, refrained from reimposing sanctions—a move it had adopted after the first coup.

The 15-nation bloc still pushed for Mali to transition to civilian rule under a previously agreed timetable. The bloc suspended Mali from ECOWAS until February 2022, "when they are supposed to



NAIROBI: A supporter shouts at the arrival of the new President of Mali's transitional government Assimi Goita as he returns from Accra after a meeting with the ECOWAS representatives. Malian strongman Colonel Assimi Goita returned home after West African leaders condemned a second coup. — AFP

hand over to a democratically elected government," Ghana's Foreign Minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey said after the meeting.

Mali is among the world's poorest countries, and the previous ECOWAS sanctions hit hard. It is also

batling a jihadist insurgency which first emerged in the north of the country in 2012 and has since spread to Burkina Faso and Niger, leaving swathes of the vast nation of 19 million people outside government control. — AFP

Drought-hit 'tinderbox' California braces for fires in months ahead

PARADISE: "Now, when there's smoke here, everybody panics," said Steve Crowder, mayor of the small town of Paradise that was almost wiped off the map by California's deadly 2018 wildfires. The former police officer still struggles to hold back tears when talking about the blaze that claimed dozens of lives and engulfed 95 percent of his community's buildings. "It's still hard to get over the 85 people that didn't get out," he told AFP. "It's the most horrific thing that I've ever experienced in my life... I think fire terrorizes everybody here."

Across California, deadly infernos have only expanded in size since that traumatic year — in 2020, some 4.3 million acres went up in smoke. Now, the western US state is bracing for the worst as yet another dry summer approaches. Already five times more vegetation has burned this year compared to the same time last year. "In the last 25 months, we've had 101 civilians perish in wildfires with over 21,000 structure destroyed within Butte County," said John Messina, fire chief of the county where Paradise is located.

"That supersedes anything that California has seen in modern times" and serves as a warning, or "ground zero," for what could lie ahead of the

rest of the state, according to Messina. "In the past, we may have had one fire in the summer that was notable," he said. "Now 50 percent of our fires are notable — and what I mean by notable is something that really, really exceeded our expectations on growth and intensity."

'No reset'

While fires are part of the natural cycle of California's forests, the fire season is starting earlier and ending later each year. Climate change is "is considered a key driver of this trend," state fire officials note in their 2021 forecast, with the fire season lengthened by an estimated 75 days in part of the state. For Messina, the concept of a summer and fall "fire season" is no longer meaningful. "Fire season's year round — we're busier during a specific time, but the potential for wildfire exists throughout the year," he said. "We work our employees extremely hard in the summer for four, five, six, seven months, under the expectation that we're going to give them a break in the wintertime and kind of reset. "There is no reset any more in California."

'Tinderbox'

Making matters worse is the chronic lack of rainfall affecting



PARADISE: In this file photo a Cal Fire firefighter maintains equipment at the Paradise Fire Department Station No. 1 during the California drought emergency in Paradise, California. — AFP

California, in particular its northern counties. "This year is another exceptional year when it comes to the potential — we are in a fairly significant drought," said Messina, noting that vegetation is already extremely dry for so early in the year. "All we need is the ignition now and then we have a problem. So we're on high alert," he said.

According to Crowder, vegetation around Paradise is like "a tinderbox," having dried out months earlier than usual. His town in northern California has taken several steps to avoid a repeat of the tragic 2018 "Camp Fire," with homeowners required to clear brush, particularly around buildings, and to keep grass lawns

cut to below four inches.

Firefighters are stepping up inspections to ensure the rules are being followed. But the effort is made more difficult because only a few thousand of the town's former 26,000 residents have moved back to Paradise since 2018's mass evacuations. Many landowners are hard or impossible to reach. "I've asked each one of them, if not for yourself, do it for your neighbor who's left behind... we're trying everything we can to make it a fire-safe town," said the mayor. While the area's levels of flammable vegetation are well below pre-2018, "if we do nothing for the next 10 years, we're going to be right back where we were," he added. — AFP

Former minister warns Libya not to delay vote

BRUSSELS: Libya's former interior minister—a probable presidential candidate—has warned Tripoli's transitional government not to delay elections as the strife-torn country seeks a return to peace and security. In an interview with AFP, Fathi Bashagha—who left the government in March but is still an influential figure—said only that he was "still thinking" about a possible presidential run.

But he added that, 10 years after the overthrow of dictator Moamer Gadhafi and with UN-sponsored peace talks underway, Libyans are "optimistic about the future" and ready to build "a strong state". And he stressed that, as a former interior minister, he has "statecraft-related experience, first and foremost in the field of security".

"We have to attach great importance to the stabilisation of the country and to our security," he told AFP, criticising Libya's current transitional government for failing to exert control over armed factions. Libya's transitional government under Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and a presidential council headed by Mohammad Younes Menfi is engaged in a UN-sponsored peace process and has promised to hold polls.

Germany will host a new set of talks in Berlin in three weeks' time, focused on preparations for a national vote on December 24 and the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country after a decade of violence. There has been a formal truce in the country since October, but the UN envoy for Libya, Jan Kubis, has warned that progress on pulling out foreign forces and uniting divided institutions has stalled. Bashagha, a 58-year-old former air force officer who joined the revolt against Gadhafi's regime as a member of the Islamist-led Misrata military council, placed the blame for the delay on the government.

"Now, it is clear that the present government

would prefer not to have elections. But this is a commitment which has to be brought to completion," he told AFP. "So as far as the elections are concerned, the parliamentary and the presidential elections will take place simultaneously and, for the first time, the president will be elected by direct vote."

Migrants bombed

Bashagha is on a tour of European capitals and was in Brussels to meet members of the European parliament and NGO leaders to talk about the future of his country—while discreetly pushing his own credentials. Brussels is most concerned about the problem of would-be migrants and refugees leaving Libya's shores—often on overloaded and unsafe smuggling ships—bound for European Union countries. The former Libyan minister stressed that he had taken this issue seriously when in office but warned that it was best dealt with by a unified Libyan government.

"We cooperated with the European Union in this field, despite the difficult conditions," he said, noting that migrant retention centres had been bombed during a rebel assault on Tripoli last year. The Berlin peace talks later this month will deal with the urgency of foreign forces—such as Russian mercenaries backing eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar—leaving the country.

But Bashagha defended the presence of the Turkish forces that he said had helped the authorities in Tripoli defend the capital from forces loyal to Haftar—who may himself become a rival presidential candidate. He noted that it was the former Libyan government under then prime minister Fayez al-Sarraj that had requested Turkish support "to help with the defence of Tripoli". "And indeed, owing to the Turkish help, it was possible and to defend the city and the attack failed," he said.

"And now, in Libya, we can notice that Libya is advancing towards peace, and it's putting an end to the war. This requires the absolute condition of organising elections. This will bring about security and peace." He warned the current government not to "put obstacles" in the way of elections, which he insisted would be supported by Libyans from across the country after a decade of chaos. — AFP

Lebanon special tribunal 'risks closure over funding'

THE HAGUE: The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which tries suspects over the 2005 Beirut bombing that killed former premier Rafic Hariri and 21 others, risks closure over severe funding shortfalls, it warned yesterday. "Without immediate funding, the Tribunal will not be able to operate beyond July 2021," the Netherlands-based court said in a statement, describing its current financial crisis as "unprecedented".

The shutdown would affect the court's ability to conclude the two cases currently before it, the STL said. The tribunal, which draws 51 percent of its budget from donor countries and the rest from Lebanon, said that "the challenging circumstances generated by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the concerning situation in Lebanon" had already forced it to slash its 2021 budget by 37 percent compared to previous years.

Lebanon is in the grip of a severe economic crisis, with the World Bank saying Tuesday that it was likely to rank among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century. Born out of a UN Security Council resolution, the court last year sentenced Hezbollah suspect Salim Ayyash in absentia to life imprisonment over the huge 2005 truck bombing. The 57-year-old remains on the run, with Hassan Nasrallah, the head of the Shiite Hezbollah movement, refusing to hand him over or to recognise the court's authority.

The court said in April that Ayyash cannot appeal his life sentence unless he hands himself in. Prosecutors have appealed against the acquittal of three other suspects, also in absentia. Sunni billionaire Hariri, who had stepped down as Lebanon's prime minister in October 2004, was killed in the February 2005 suicide blast targeting his armoured convoy. The attack killed 22 people, injuring 226. —AFP

News in brief

23 migrants missing

ZARZIS: At least 23 migrants were missing and two bodies recovered from the sea off Tunisia, the Red Crescent reported yesterday, after the military said more than 100 migrants were intercepted. The Tunisian navy said a boat headed for Europe from Zuwara in Libya was intercepted on Tuesday near Miskar oil platform, some 67 kilometres (52 miles) off the coast. The migrants — 37 Eritreans, 32 Sudanese and an Egyptian, aged between 15 and 40 — were handed over to the Red Crescent and International Organization for Migration in the southern port of Zarzis. — AFP

IC in talks over Gbagbo return

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast's government was to meet with the party of former president Laurent Gbagbo yesterday for talks on what his supporters have announced as his impending return. In an apparent sign of discord, Communications Minister Amadou Coulibaly said the date of June 17, announced by the party on Monday, had not been previously agreed by the government. "The date was to be discussed consensually" between the government and Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), he said, adding: "It was not." Gbagbo is a highly controversial figure in Ivory Coast, where he was forced out a decade ago after a civil war that claimed several thousand lives. — AFP

DR Congo unrest

KINSHASA: DR Congo's government has vowed to speed up a security campaign in its troubled east, where hundreds of people have been massacred by armed groups since the start of the year. Speaking after new attacks that left at least 55 people dead, Defence Minister Gilbert Kabanda said a "state of siege"—an initiative in which civilian officials in the east have been replaced by army officers—would go into higher gear. "As in every process, there's the start-up phase, there's the acceleration phase and then there's the point where we reach the final goal," he said Tuesday. "Right now, we are in acceleration phase, because all the preparations are now in place, it's like a plane taking off," he said after talks with Prime Minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde. — AFP

Sinkhole threatens to swallow home

PUEBLA: A giant sinkhole that was expanding by dozens of meters each day has alarmed residents in a rural area of central Mexico where it was threatening to swallow a house. When the Sanchez family heard a loud crash on Saturday they first thought that it was a lightning strike. But they soon discovered that the ground had collapsed just meters from their home in a field in Santa Maria Zacatepec in the state of Puebla. The hole, which is full of water, was about 30 meters (nearly 100 feet) wide by Sunday. It rapidly grew to 60 meters on Monday and around 80 meters on Tuesday, the authorities said, coming perilously close to the house of the Sanchez family, who fear they will be left homeless. "We have nothing. We're not from here. We have no relatives. We're alone," Heriberto Sanchez, originally from the southeastern state of Veracruz, told the media. Scientists and the authorities were considering hypotheses including a geological fault or variations in the soil's water content as the possible causes. —AFP

International

Burnt-out container ship sinking off Sri Lanka

'Bow is still afloat, but stern is submerged and resting on the sea bed'

COLOMBO: A burnt-out container ship that has already caused Sri Lanka's worst maritime environmental disaster was sinking yesterday with nearly 350 tonnes of oil in its fuel tanks. The MV X-Press Pearl, carrying hundreds of containers of chemicals and plastics, burned for 13 days just outside Colombo's harbour before rescue workers finally extinguished the blaze on Tuesday. Dutch salvage firm SMIT attempted to pull the still-smoking wreckage of the 31,600-tonne vessel into deeper water yesterday but the effort stalled.

Navy spokesman Indika de Silva told AFP that the stern had sunk to the bottom at a depth of 22 meters (72 feet), near Pamunugama, just north of Colombo. "The bow is still afloat, but the stern is submerged and resting on the sea bed," de Silva said. The 186-metre ship was still tethered to a powerful tug as experts mulled whether to attempt to refloat it, an official source involved with the operation told AFP.

A huge amount of plastic debris has already inundated beaches, and authorities now fear an even greater disaster should the ship's 297 tonnes of heavy fuel oil and 51 tonnes of marine fuel oil leak into the Indian Ocean. An AFP photographer who reached the area by boat said he saw a narrow slick of oil coming from the stern of the Singapore-registered vessel.

Some oil was already visible near the beaches of Negombo, about 40 kilometres from Colombo, although it was not clear if it was from the stricken ship. International shipping expert and lawyer Dan Gunasekera said that divers could be used to pump out the bunker oil safely. "We can assume

that since the ship is only three months old, it had good systems to ensure there is no leak from fuel tanks in an eventuality like this," Gunasekera said. Navy spokesman de Silva said an Indian coast-guard vessel was in the area with specialised equipment to deal with any oil leak. Officials believe the blaze destroyed most of the 1,486 containers on board.

Eighty-one containers were carrying chemicals, including 25 tonnes of nitric acid which had been leaking since May 11, nine days before the fire broke out. The inundation of microplastic granules from the cargo has already forced a fishing ban and prompted concern for wildlife and the marine environment. Marine Environment Protection Authority chief Dharshani Lahandapura said the ecological damage was still being assessed but believed it was the "worst ever in my lifetime". President Gotabaya Rajapaksa asked Australia on Monday to help evaluate the ecological damage to the island, one of the most bio-diverse countries in South Asia.

Catholic fishermen hit

The head of Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic church, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, called for legal action against authorities for allowing the ship into local waters. He said the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen, most from the country's Catholic minority, were now under threat. Sri Lanka has already launched a criminal investigation.

Authorities suspect the crew knew about the acid leak from May 11. Police said three officers



COLOMBO: Smoke billows from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl which carried hundreds of containers of chemicals and plastics, as it's towed away from the coast of Colombo, following Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's order to move the ship to deeper water to prevent a bigger environmental disaster. —AFP

from the ship, two Russians and an Indian, had been questioned and their passports impounded. The ship was heading to Colombo from Gujarat in India when the blaze started, having previously

visited Qatar and Dubai where the containers of 25 tonnes of nitric acid were loaded. The 25-strong crew was evacuated last week. One was admitted to hospital with minor injuries. —AFP

Indonesia halts deep-sea salvage of sunken sub

JAKARTA: Indonesia has called off its bid to salvage a military submarine that sank off the coast of Bali, killing all 53 crew aboard, the navy said yesterday. The KRI Nanggala 402 disappeared in April while it was scheduled to take part in live torpedo training exercises. An underwater rescue vehicle later spotted the German-built sub lying on the sea floor more than 800 metres (2,600 feet) deep, broken in several parts and confirming there was no hope of finding survivors.

Chinese salvage ships were sent to help with efforts to haul up the vessel. But Indonesia's military said yesterday that it was ending the operation after a meeting with Chinese naval counterparts. In a brief statement, the Indonesian navy said the salvage was "not an easy task" and "very risky", without elaborating.

A month-long effort had already hauled up "important materials" from the cracked submarine, it added, but the decision to halt the operation meant there was no chance of retrieving the sailors' bodies. "Our family is hoping they can lift it," Sudarmaji, the father of one crew member, told AFP yesterday before the announcement.

"It doesn't matter if it takes a while or we have to ask for more help from other countries," added the man, who goes by one name. Earlier, the military had said high-powered magnets and air balloons were among the options to lift the submarine. It was unclear when, or if, a report on the cause of the accident would be made public.

After the vessel disappeared, search teams spotted an oil spill where it was thought to have submerged, pointing to possible fuel tank damage. The military has yet to offer an official explanation for the sinking of the decades-old submarine, which was delivered to Indonesia in 1981.

It has said, however, that the reconditioned vessel was seaworthy and discounted the possibility of an explosion. The submarine may have suffered a black-out that left the crew unable to perform emergency measures as it sank to depths far below what the KRI Nanggala's hull was built to withstand, the military has said. The vessel's former commander earlier told local media that a so-called internal solitary wave could have been to blame.

The natural phenomenon occurs when different sea depths come together, creating forces that could have dragged the vessel down. The disaster was among a string of fatal submarine accidents in the past few decades. Among the worst was the 2000 sinking of Russia's Kursk, which was on manoeuvres in the Barents Sea when it sank with the loss of all 118 aboard. An inquiry found a torpedo had exploded, detonating all the others. Most of its crew died instantly but some survived for several days before suffocating. —AFP

Melbourne extends lockdown as 'Kappa' variant spreads

MELBOURNE: Melbourne was ordered yesterday to remain in lockdown for another week, as Australian authorities try to stamp out a quick-spreading coronavirus strain they described as an "absolute beast". Five million city residents were hoping to exit a seven-day lockdown just before midnight today, but those plans have been

Exhaustion and fear for India's frontline doctors in COVID battle

NEW DELHI: Low pay, 24-hour shifts and severe shortages of staff and protective gear have left many doctors on the frontlines of India's brutal pandemic surge near breaking point and fearful for their lives. Coronavirus infections have killed at least 165,000 people in the vast South Asian nation-home to some of the world's most densely populated cities—since the start of April.

Although India's latest COVID-19 surge has eased recently, around 3,000 people are still dying every day and the chronically underfunded health care system remains under severe pressure. "We are overworked, stressed and very frightened," Radha Jain, a doctor in the capital New Delhi, told AFP. The Indian Medical Association said more than 1,200 doctors have died of COVID since the start of the pandemic—including over 500 in the last two months.

Deependra Garg, a doctor working in Delhi's outskirts, knows first-hand how dire the situation has become. His wife Anubha, 48, a physician herself, fell ill with COVID in April. They started treatment at home but as her condition worsened, he-like so many other families—struggled to get a hospital bed.

He eventually found one almost 200 kilometres (120 miles) from their home. But Anubha—who was fully vaccinated—died within two weeks, leaving

Malaysian schoolgirl using TikTok to challenge school abuse

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian teenager Ain Husniza Saiful Nizam's unexpected rise from anonymous pupil to national leader against school harassment began with a teacher allegedly joking about rape. When the 17-year-old called out the incident in a viral TikTok clip, thousands of fellow students responded by sharing their harrowing experiences of verbal and physical harassment.

The massive outpouring inspired Ain to create the #MakeSchoolASaferPlace online campaign—despite a vitriolic pushback on social media, a rape threat, and a warning she could face expulsion. "When I spoke out about it, (I got so much) hate towards me and I don't know why," she told AFP. "It's just making schools a safer place. What is there to debate about it?"

The reaction has only strengthened her resolve to combat what she believes is pervasive mistreatment of girls in Malaysia's education system. "We can't let this cycle of abuse continue in our schools," Ain recorded her TikTok—now watched over 1.8 million times—in April after being appalled by her male physical education teacher's joke during a class.

Standing in front of a mirror with her phone, she explained everything seemed normal as he discussed how to prevent harassment with male and female stu-

thwarted by the spread of the "Kappa" variant, which originated in India.

"We've got to run this thing to ground otherwise people will die," Victoria's acting state Premier James Merlino said, describing this strain of the virus as "quicker and more contagious than we have ever seen before". Australia is battling to stop a cluster of 60 cases from growing in its second-biggest city, and to remain one of the few countries in the world without endemic transmission.

The border remains closed to most travellers — with the exception of New Zealand — and authorities are quick to impose restrictions when COVID-19 cases are detected. But outbreaks in Taiwan and Japan have underscored how initial success containing the virus can quickly be eroded

behind their 12-year-old daughter. "We are on the frontlines 24/7. We are exposed to a high virus load but we have to continue working against all odds as we have chosen this profession," Garg said. "We do not have a choice."

Underfunded and overstretched

The pandemic has exposed structural weaknesses in India's healthcare system, particularly in the ill-equipped state-run hospitals. As the latest outbreak spread, reports emerged from short-staffed hospitals of patients lying on floors and sharing beds in packed wards, as family members protected with only cotton masks took care of their stricken loved ones. The government spends less than two percent of GDP on healthcare, one of the lowest rates in the world.

India had just 0.8 doctors per 1,000 people in 2017 — around the same level as Iraq, according to the World Bank. The two other countries worst-hit by the coronavirus, Brazil and the US, had 2.2 and 2.6 respectively. A report from before the pandemic by the US-based Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy estimated that India needed 600,000 more doctors and two million extra nurses to meet its healthcare needs.

Doctor Shekhar Kumar, working with a private hospital in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, said junior staff and final-year medical students sometimes had to work 24-hour shifts. "Compared to last year, this time patients are needing longer hospital stays which is increasing the burden on the staff," Kumar said. He added that they were further stretched when their colleagues fell ill with the virus.

But he then pointed out there were laws protecting minors from sexual abuse—so if the boys wanted to commit rape, they should target women above 18. "He really said that, and the girls were quiet," she says in the clip. "But the boys, oh they were laughing like it was so funny to joke about, about raping someone."

'Toxic culture'

The response to Ain's video was swift, as people online shared similar experiences and activists commended her for speaking out. The clip touched a nerve, she believes, because abuse "is happening to students all around Malaysia". "This proves it is not just about one teacher, it is about the whole education system."

Civil society groups say abuse in schools is a longstanding problem, with complaints ranging from physical and verbal harassment to invasive "period spot checks"—which are used to see whether Muslim girls are menstruating. Female pupils at Islamic schools in the Muslim-majority country are allowed to skip daily prayer sessions if they are on their periods. Rights group the All Women's Action Society (Awam) said Ain's video came at a time concern was already growing about school abuse, and proved the spark needed to ignite a national debate.

The incident "was outrageous enough to make people take notice... at the same time bringing attention to the normalisation of rape culture in schools," said the group's executive director, Nisha Sabanayagam.

She called for urgent reforms to "address the toxic culture of sexual harassment in schools". But as well as support, Ain has endured negative social media responses, many of them lewd, while critics say the official

without widespread vaccination, and only about two percent of Australians have been fully jabbed to date.

Merlino said stay-at-home orders would likely be lifted for Victorians living outside Melbourne today, though a swathe of restrictions would remain, including caps on wedding guests and mourners at funerals. Melbourne residents would largely be stopped from travelling outside the city, but senior school students will return to classrooms and some outdoor workers can return to their jobs, he added.

Brett Sutton, Victoria's chief health officer, said the Kappa variant was an "absolute beast" and said the extended lockdown would limit each person's contacts from about 100 others to just a handful. "There are a dozen countries that had no community transmission going into



MUMBAI: A health worker inoculates a disabled woman with a dose of the Covishield vaccine against the COVID-19 at a vaccination centre in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

'We could not save many lives'

Doctors said they had been traumatised by being forced to choose which patients to save first as they grappled with insufficient supplies of medicine and oxygen. Ravikant Singh, the founder of a charity group helping to set up COVID field hospitals, said he struggled to sleep some nights. "It's been a life-changing situation for doctors," Singh told AFP. "The worst part was... we could not save many lives because of the lack of oxygen."

Even after completing their punishing shifts, doctors said they worried about infecting their families at home. Kumar said he would constantly think about how the virus was "lurking anywhere and everywhere". "If doctors can't save their (own) lives, how will they save the lives of others?" he said. —AFP

response has been disappointing. "We who speak out, we get punished," she said. Following her TikTok video, she stopped attending her school in Puncak Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, out of fear for her safety—only to be threatened with expulsion.

'They don't care'

"There are a lot of kids my age and activists spreading more awareness about these kinds of issues," said Ain. But "it really shocked me that the actual officials, people in power... they don't care about it". The education ministry has defended a letter threatening to kick her out of school, saying it was automatically generated after she failed to turn up for a set period. Some action has been taken.

Police have launched an investigation and the teacher—who has not been named, or commented publicly—has been transferred from the school while the probe is ongoing. In an earlier statement about the incident, the ministry insisted that it "prioritises the safety and welfare of students, as well as the entire school community".

Ain believes her experience, while traumatising at times, may encourage others to speak out and lead to greater change. "What I really want to happen now is for adults to listen to my story and set it right for us children." —AFP



Ain Husniza Saiful Nizam

2021 that have now lost control, that have community transmission and will probably not bring it back to a point where they've got no community transmission again," he said.

Thousands of close contacts have been identified and the list of exposure sites has grown to about 350. It is believed to be the 17th time in six months that the virus has leaked out of Australia's makeshift hotel quarantine facilities, which are now facing tough scrutiny. Merlino urged the federal government to pay for a proposed purpose-built quarantine facility in Victoria and offer financial support for workers and businesses impacted by the state's fourth lockdown. "Victorian businesses are absolutely devastated by this lockdown, as are our families and communities," he said. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2021

Zain signs partnership with PASS

Customers can exclusively enjoy smart ticketless parking

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the signing of a partnership agreement with PASS, a Kuwait-based app and the first smart parking management system in the Middle East. The partnership enables Zain's postpaid customers to exclusively enjoy cashless and ticketless parking and pre-booking services without the need to continuously top up within the app.

Zain's partnership with this unique platform comes under the umbrella of its strategy that closely focuses on enriching its digital partnerships ecosystem. The company aims at expanding the portfolio of innovative services and solutions it offers - including smartphone applications and unique online services - to meet the needs and aspirations of its customer base, the largest in the Kuwaiti market.

Zain postpaid customers can now easily enjoy the services PASS offers, including ticketless

parking and pre-booking parking spots, when linking their PASS account with their Zain line, without the need to continuously top up within the app. Customers can simply choose Zain as their favorite payment option within the app and follow the instructions to link their PASS account with their Zain postpaid line. Afterwards, parking fees will be automatically added to the customer's monthly bill every time they use the app.

PASS, a Kuwait-based app, is the first smart parking management system in the Middle East, and was designed to make parking more efficient and hassle-free. The app uses

Automatic Number-Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology to allow cars to enter and exit parking lots with simplicity and ease without the need for tickets, cash, or coins. In addition, PASS offers a service for pre-booking parking spots in selected locations to allow users to guarantee a parking spot before their arrival.

First smart parking management system in the Middle East

PASS is currently available at Al-Hamra Tower, Kuwait Souq, Mubarakia, Yaal Mall, Wataniya Complex, Shuwaikh 125, and Baitak Tower. Pre-booking services are available at The Avenues and Murouj. A number of new locations are to be added soon, including Crystal Tower, Souk Al-



Maseel, Terrace Mall, Mazaya Clinic, and Sun City.

By signing such digital partnerships, Zain seeks to meet its customers' needs and aspirations through the offering of the latest innovative services and technologies. The company is always keen on offering the most advanced tools to enhance its customers' experience, and offer them an unmatched telecommunications experience on its largest network in Kuwait.

G7 finance talks to seek deal on corporate tax

LONDON: Group of Seven (G7) finance chiefs gather this week to hammer out an agreement on corporate tax harmonization aimed at raising revenues as economies recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Finance ministers descend on London Friday and Saturday, before a leaders' summit the following week that is to include US President Joe Biden. Washington wants a minimum 15 percent rate of corporate tax to prevent multinationals like tech giants from gaming the system to boost profits. The G7 will also discuss the post-COVID recovery, climate change, and digital currency regulation.

Biden's tax proposal has so far won broad support and a "political agreement" could be unveiled this week, according to a European source. "We are very close to concluding an international agreement" which will lead to "a revolution in international corporate taxation", said German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz. France and Germany have backed the US initiative but Britain is on the fence, calling for a wider package of reforms to international taxation to target company incomes more broadly.

'Momentum hard to stop'

"If the G7 countries all support (a deal on corporate tax), momentum will be hard to stop," said economics professor Jonathan Portes at King's College London. He dismissed talk of opposition from low-tax nations such as Ireland, whose corporate tax rate at 12.5 percent is one of the lowest in the world, attracting a clutch of tech giants including Facebook and Google.

"It's unlikely to be a viable or sensible strategy for these countries to defy a broad-based international consensus that includes all the major economies/vast majority of the EU," Portes told AFP. Arun Advani, an assistant professor of economics at Warwick University, said a G7 deal would also curb the damaging international rush to slash taxes.

"This agreement ... removes pointless competition based on 'tax arbitrage': attracting companies purely by reducing tax rates," Advani said. Diego Iscaro, a senior European economist at economic data group IHS Markit, warned however that there was a "decent chance" that proposals made at the meeting "will be watered down in the future".

G7 host Britain wants multinationals to pay taxes that reflect their operations. The UK government however plans to raise its own corporation tax rate to 25 percent from 19 percent to rebuild the nation's virus-battered finances.

'Be brave'

Gabriel Zucman, an associate professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, called Tuesday for a corporate rate of at least 25 percent. Zucman calculates that a 25 percent rate would collect an extra 170 billion euros (\$208 billion) this year - or half of Europe's total current corporate tax revenue. "My message is: go ahead, be brave," the French academic told AFP, adding that 15 percent was "ridiculously low" by historical standards.

"Countries that want to be ambitious must agree among themselves on a high rate," he said. Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, has praised Biden's 15 percent proposal however, arguing that it would unlock more resources for governments to invest in areas like education, health or infrastructure. This week's London meeting, taking place in person owing to easing COVID-19 restrictions, comes before the G7 Cornwall summit in southwest England that is to start on June 11. British finance minister Rishi Sunak has urged the G7 to foster a "green and global economic recovery" from the pandemic, ahead of the COP26 UN climate summit in November in Glasgow. —AFP

IMF and World Bank prioritize vaccine access

WASHINGTON: After kicking their massive lending powers into overdrive to help the nations hardest hit by COVID-19 last year, the IMF and the World Bank are now focusing on getting vaccines to poor countries to keep the pandemic from derailing the global economic recovery.

Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva is spearheading a \$50 billion joint effort with the World Health Organization to expand vaccine access, particularly for impoverished nations that have struggled to get the crucial jabs. Georgieva will tomorrow present the proposal, which was unveiled late last month and backed by the World Bank and World Trade Organization, to finance ministers from the G7 wealthiest nations during a meeting in London.

Early in the COVID-19 crisis, the IMF and World Bank warned the pandemic would set back poor countries' progress, causing increased inequality and a resurgence of poverty. Now the Washington-based lenders are sounding the alarm that unequal access to vaccines will prolong a pandemic that has already killed more than 3.5 million people worldwide.

Low-income countries have received less than one percent of the doses administered to date, resulting in a "dangerous divergence" in economic fortunes, Georgieva warned. As a result, it will take years for some countries to claw their way back to pre-pandemic levels. Economies in Latin America and the Caribbean will not regain their previous per-capita income until 2024, the IMF projected.

Oil prices extend rally as economic recovery picks up

LONDON: Oil prices extended their rally yesterday on growing expectations for demand as the global economy recovers, though equity investors tread more cautiously amid lingering inflation fears.

While some countries are struggling in their battle with the coronavirus, the general mood among dealers is upbeat with the global economy rebounding sufficiently strongly as vaccines are rolled out and parts of the planet slowly return to a semblance of normality. And one of the biggest beneficiaries of that is the crude market, with demand for the commodity picking up as people begin travelling again and factories restart.

Both main contracts have rocketed from the dark days of April last year - when they crashed in reaction to the imposition of lockdowns around the world - helped by top producers slashing output. But with the world recovery now on track, the 23 nations of the so-called OPEC+ oil producers' group are confident that demand will increase enough for them to

'All the firepower'

The IMF and the World Bank "early on understood that the crisis and the economic recession... would be very broad and very deep," said Homi Kharas, an economist at the Brookings Institution. They pushed the G20 and private creditors to suspend debt payments for dozens of low-income countries.

"That was the first major step in ensuring that the pandemic didn't trigger a debt crisis that could have longer term consequences," Kharas said in an interview. The IMF itself extended direct debt relief to 29 of its "poorest and most vulnerable members," doubled its emergency funding limits and tripled its concessional resources.

"The IMF stepped up as never before, lending some \$110 billion to 84 countries since the start of the pandemic," fund spokesman Gerry Rice told AFP. "Lending to sub-Saharan Africa in the first year of the pandemic was 13 times the annual average."

Meanwhile, the World Bank has committed over \$108 billion during the pandemic in more than 100 countries to respond to "the fastest and largest crisis" in the institution's history, the bank's chief of operations Axel van Trotsenburg said. "We are using all the firepower we have," he said in an email.

However, critics note that help for middle-income countries has lagged. "These countries, including many in Latin America, had really been almost left to themselves, to their own devices," since they are not eligible for the debt service suspension initiative nor the low-cost loans available to the poorest countries, Kharas said.

On the table

Georgieva herself recently recognized the need to review lending criteria to reach these economies, but the priority now has moved to the effort to immunize at least 40 percent of the world's population by the end of the year and at least 60 percent by the end of 2022. In the bid to ramp up vaccination programs,

open the taps further.

On Tuesday, OPEC+ agreed to continue lifting output in July, having started slowly doing so in early May. "The demand picture has shown clear signs of improvement," said Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman.

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. That came after the International Energy Agency said the second half of the year could see a gap between demand and supplies, which could push prices even higher. However, the group gave little away about plans for August and its views on the possibility of Iranian oil coming back to the market if Tehran seals a nuclear deal with world powers that will lift sanctions on the country. WTI on Tuesday rose to \$68.87 — its highest level since October 2018 — while Brent peaked at \$71.34, before they pared gains. They continued to climb yesterday and observers suggest they could break even higher.

US jobs in view

The bump in oil has given a fillip to energy firms, though broader markets in Asia struggled to build on recent gains. Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei and Jakarta all rose, with Manila surging more than three

to kick in later this year.

"A bleak winter is giving way to a bright spring for the European economy," EU economic affairs commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said.

'Telling the truth'

Known as the Stability and Growth Pact, the EU's spending rules limit deficit spending at three percent of the overall economy and debt at 60 percent. The rules are often violated but, while countries in theory risk penalties for ignoring them, no government has ever been sanctioned.

The limit on debt is often overshoot even in normal times and 13 countries are currently above the limit including Italy, Spain and France where debt is



In this file photo, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva speaks during a joint press conference at the end of the Summit on the financing of African Economies in Paris. —AFP

"The World Bank has made \$12 billion available... and expects to have projects for around \$4 billion in 50 countries by mid-year," van Trotsenburg said. But observers are pressing the institutions to do more, faster. "The issue with the World Bank is their rate of execution," said Adnan Mazarei of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, who added the financing to date is "still a small amount."

Since the start of the pandemic, the IMF "did a very, very good job of quickly putting out some money" with few conditions, he said. But now the fund needs "greater strategic clarity" on the vaccination goal. Still, the \$50 billion plan is a good sign, and the IMF and other organizations should push to "make sure it is on the table" at the two-day G7 meeting concluding Saturday, Mazarei said.

He notes US President Joe Biden's administration already has shown more support for the multilateral initiatives than his predecessor, including one to boost the IMF's allocation of its reserve currency-Special Drawing Rights-by \$650 billion. That proposal is expected to be approved in coming weeks. —AFP



PUERTO LA CRUZ: An oil tanker is seen during sunset in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela. —AFP

percent on reports the government plans to ease some containment measures. However, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Mumbai, Bangkok and Wellington dipped.

But in Europe, London, Paris and Frankfurt edged upwards. The mixed performance followed a tepid lead from Wall Street, with analysts saying a slow rebound in US employment take-up dampened spirits. Investors will be keeping a close eye on the release of May jobs creation data this week, having been massively disappointed by April's reading. —AFP

over 100 percent of GDP. The pact mainly empowers the EU executive and fellow member states to keep a careful eye on how national governments run their budgets.

The commission, with the backing of the member states, also signals what reforms need to be carried out in order to get a thumbs up from the EU. The fiscal rules are however quite controversial, with several member states complaining that they are ineffective and outdated.

There is also an argument over the actual danger of running a high debt when the financial markets seem to be unbothered by the public debt piles in countries like Italy, France or Belgium. —AFP

EU deficit rules to remain suspended in 2022

BRUSSELS: Rules against overspending by EU governments will remain suspended through 2022, leaving more time for stimulus plans to boost the economy to pre-crisis levels, the European Commission said yesterday. "The recovery remains uneven and uncertainty is still high, so economic policy must remain supportive in both 2021 and 2022," EU Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said.

The EU executive suspended the public spending rules for national governments in March 2020 as the European Union sank into its deepest recession since World War II, thanks to COVID-19 restrictions.

Based on current forecasts, "the general escape clause will stay activated in 2022 but no longer so as of 2023." Trailing the strong recoveries in the US and China, the economy in Europe fell into a second recession early this year and is not expected to regain its pre-crisis form until later in 2022. The EU has been criticized for doing less to boost its economy than other powers, but has pinned its hopes on a 750 billion euro recovery program, whose effects should begin

Business

Global oil giants vow energy transition, at their own pace

Lawsuits, shareholders and IEA turn up heat on firms

PARIS: Oil majors are under growing pressure to stop drilling for crude to help curb climate change, but companies say they will wean themselves off fossil fuels at their own pace. The demand for change is coming from many sides: lawsuits, shareholders and the International Energy Agency have all turned up the heat on firms recently.

Last week alone, a Dutch court ordered Shell to slash its greenhouse gas emissions, and investors used shareholder meetings to install activist board members at US oil giant ExxonMobil and demand deeper emissions cuts at rival Chevron. The IEA sent shockwaves through the industry last month when it declared that no fossil fuel exploration or new oil and natural gas fields are needed, thanks to the "rapid drop" in demand.

The intergovernmental organization made the suggestion in a report warning that all future fossil fuel projects must be scrapped if the world is to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The agency, which advises developed countries, has been criticized by environmentalists in the past for being too timid while calling for oil investments to ensure supply. BP chief executive Bernard Looney told the Columbia Global Energy Summit that the report was "very much in line" with the British energy company's strategy.

But Looney also noted that while the report sees much lower investment in fossil fuels, it is "still investment in oil and gas". "At the end of the day," he said, the report "is a scenario on a piece of paper and what the world needs more than anything is maybe less scenarios and maybe less debate... and more action." BP plans to reduce oil and gas production by 40 percent within the next decade, Looney said.

'Lagging behind'

"It's really a question of rhythm," said Nicolas Berghmans, an energy research fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations think tank in Paris. Companies "are not going as fast as the IEA thinks is needed" and they "are lagging behind" in their transition, he said.

Last year, investments in clean energy accounted for just one percent of capital spending by the oil and gas industry, according to a new IEA report published yesterday. But this could rise to four percent this year for the entire industry—and even higher, to 10 percent, among leading European firms, the IEA said. "There are signs in the latest data that spending by some global oil and gas companies is starting to diversify," the report said.

Oil and gas exploration has recently slowed down but this is due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Huge fields were discovered last year in Russia, Turkey and Suriname.

A report by the consultancy Westwood Global Energy Group found "no evidence of a systematic change in industry exploration strategy" with regards to energy transition. The group expects dozens of exploration drilling operations this year, including in Mexico, Brazil, Suriname and Guyana.

'Prices will rise'

The chief executive of TotalEnergies, the French energy group which changed its name last week, has bluntly said that the company is not going to give up oil overnight. "In energy transition there is the word 'transition' and I would like to remind everyone that today... our economy functions on 80 percent fossil fuel energies," CEO



PARIS: Oil majors are under growing pressure to stop drilling for crude to help curb climate change, but companies say they will wean themselves off fossil fuels at their own pace.

Patrick Pouyanne said last week, warning against "radicalism".

He said it will take time to switch to other sources of energy for transport or heating while oil demand rises in countries such as China and India. "It's nice to say that we need to stop producing oil, but if there are no longer enough projects or production, what will happen? Prices will rise,"

Pouyanne told Europe 1 radio. Following the IEA's recommendations would cause the prices of oil to surge to \$100 per barrel in the next few years, he said. Prices are currently under \$70.

BP, Shell and TotalEnergies are betting on gas in their transition, as it is cleaner than oil and coal. The IEA, however, has also called for a 55 percent reduction in gas consumption by 2050. —AFP

US manufacturing expansion hits one-year mark

WASHINGTON: The US manufacturing sector hit the one-year mark in its recovery from the slump brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, but factories struggled with snarled supply chains, an industry survey said Tuesday. The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) reported its manufacturing index in May rose to 61.2 percent from April, slightly more than expected and above the 50-percent mark indicating expansion for the 12th straight month.

Manufacturers responding to the survey were broadly optimistic, but complained of issues getting inputs and employees-concerns shared by businesses across the US economy as vaccines help them bounce back from the worst of the pandemic disruptions. "Record backlog, customer inventories and raw material lead times are being reported. The manufacturing recovery has transitioned from first addressing demand headwinds, to now overcoming labor obstacles across the entire value chain," ISM survey chair Timothy Fiore said.

The supplier deliveries index rose nearly four percentage points to 78.8 percent, the highest since April 1974, indicating longer delivery times. Employment dropped to 50.9 percent as firms struggled to find workers to fill open positions, the survey showed. "Demand is strong, but what good is that if you cannot get the materials needed to produce your finished goods?" a nonmetallic mineral products company told the survey.

New orders jumped 2.7 points to 67 percent, but production fell four points to 58.5 percent. Prices have hovered for the past four months at their highest levels since July 2008, but in May ticked down slightly to 88 percent, ISM said. Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics predicted the supply and hiring troubles would be merely temporary obstacles for a sector that is poised to grow strongly this year.

"Positive fundamental drivers, including robust domestic demand, substantial fiscal stimulus and recuperating external demand, will keep factories churning out goods at a very solid pace," he said in an analysis. "Shipping and supply chain bottlenecks will constrain, but not spoil, the manufacturing sector's expansion." —AFP

French 'bug farm' thrives on demand for pest-free fruit

GUIPAVAS, France: Farmers in western France are doubling down on an unusual crop: breeding millions of tiny predatory bugs and wasps to protect tomato plants without resorting to the insecticides that consumers are shunning. "Here, we're in one of the greenhouses for a bug that's called the macrolophus," says Pierre-Yves Jestin, as clouds of the pale green insects swarm around his hands.

Jestin is president of Saveol, the Brittany cooperative that is France's largest tomato producer, cranking out 74,000 tons a year. For several years the cooperative has promoted "pesticide-free" harvests in response to growing concerns about the impact of harsh chemicals on humans and the environment.

It does so thanks to its own bug farm, launched in

NBK welcomes 8th batch of trainees in Moody's credit curriculum program

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) welcomed the eighth batch of trainees in the "Moody's Credit Curriculum Program", which was designed and organized in partnership with the international credit rating agency, Moody's Analytics, with a view to develop the skills of the bank's employees.

The welcoming ceremony was held in accordance to all precautionary health measures and social distancing regulations, and was attended by, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources, as well as other bank executives. The program will be provided over a period of two months, through virtual & E-Learning platforms, which will cover a variety of topics, such as introduction to banking, Financial Analysis, Corporate Credit Risk Analysis, Structure Risk, Relationship Management Fundamentals and Accounting for Credit Professionals.

The program also highlights the basics of managing relationships with customers and ways to develop communication skills with them to reach balanced discussions with business owners to identify their needs and develop financial ideas. The program will host 20 trainees from Corporate Banking Group, Consumer Banking Group, Risk Management,

UK carbon market targets emissions post-Brexit

LONDON: Britain recently launched its own carbon trading market, more than five months after Brexit, as the government targets lower emissions before this year's vital UN climate change summit. The UK's Emissions Trading Scheme went live two weeks ago, replacing the country's involvement in the European Union's system after it left the bloc at the start of the year. Carbon trading, a key way to prevent climate change, involves companies buying the right to pollute from others who have a lower carbon footprint.

The UK scheme's initial price of about £50 (58 euros, \$71) per ton of carbon dioxide (CO2) was slightly higher

than the European price. By contrast, the average selling price was around \$20 (16.4 euros, £14) per ton in the Californian market, the world's third largest.

1983, that now stretches across 4,500 square metres (just over one acre) outside Brest, where the tip of Brittany juts out into the Atlantic.

Plans are in the works to add 1,200 square meters more this year, producing macrolophus as well as tiny wasps that feed on common tomato pests such as whiteflies and aphids.

Every week the insects are packed up in plastic boxes and shipped to the cooperative's 126 growers.

"This new extension will allow us to increase our breeding of macrolophus, which are increasingly in demand for the pesticide-free range," said Roselyne Souriau, head of the insect program at Saveol, whose name means 'sunrise' in the local Breton language.

"At the same time, it will let us develop a new range—at least we hope—better suited to strawberries, with parasitic micro-wasps that feed on aphids," she said.

'A third way'

Because the vast majority of Brittany's tomatoes are grown in greenhouses, they do not qualify for an



International Banking and other relevant divisions.

Moody's is one of the best and oldest financial corporations specializing in economic research, financial analysis and evaluation of private and government institutions in terms of strength, financial position and creditworthiness. The training partnership extending for 5 years with Moody's Analytics reflects NBK's strategy to upgrade its human assets, being the cornerstone of all leading institutions, by providing the best training programs. It also translates the Bank's endeavors in establishing a growing path in the career of its employees by providing

them with training programs organized in partnership with leading universities and international institutions, in addition to training them to bring solutions to challenges in the banking sector.

It is worth mentioning that NBK consistently supports its employees in building their careers within the bank, believing that its sustained successful transformation depends on the diversity and quality of talents. In recent challenging times, efficient workforce proved to make a difference, acting as a strategic pillar of the Bank's strategy and ambitious plans for the future.

'On front foot'

The higher prices in Britain and Europe show they are "on the front foot when it comes to climate action", said Adam Berman, European Policy Director at the International Emissions Trading Association. "If you look at the EU and the UK, the emissions trading scheme—in both cases—is the single most important mechanism" to cut carbon, he told AFP.

The UK carbon trading market is however just a tenth of the size of the EU-wide equivalent. Britain, which also hosts the G7 summit this month, is urging the world's richest nations to nurture a green and global economic recovery from the pandemic. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's administration, which targets zero net carbon emissions by 2050 to help meet commitments under the Paris accord, will also host the next climate summit,

organic label, which requires plants to be grown under natural conditions in the ground. That prompted Saveol to team up with two other Brittany cooperatives, Sica and Solarenn, two years ago to promote their pesticide-free offerings. "In 2020, we didn't use any chemical treatments at all," said Francois Pouliquen, whose eight hectares at the Saver d'Iroise farm are part of the Saveol network.

"Consumers are now looking to eat healthily," he said. "Organic produce exists of course, but it isn't always within reach for people on a budget."

"Pesticide-free is an alternative, a third way, for mass production that is still healthy," he said. Overall, use of predatory insects by French farmers has soared, with regulators approving 330 species as plant pest treatments in the first quarter of this year, up from 257 in 2015, according to the agriculture ministry.

At Saveol's insect farm, the predatory bugs feast on moth eggs spread over hundreds of tobacco plants, which are in the same family as tomatoes and eggplants.

The broad leaves make it easy when workers cut

COP26 in Glasgow in November. The government has stated that the new carbon trading scheme will make a "significant contribution" to meeting the 2050 goal. In Britain, the supply of available carbon credits is diminishing to meet state policy targets; prices are therefore set to grow. Johnson also plans to reduce polluting emissions by 78 percent from 1990 levels by 2035.

Carbon trading is one of the cornerstones of policy on climate change, according to Tim Atkinson, director of sales and brokerage at CF Partners. "It is the most important tool to cut emissions in power and heavy industries" as well as in aviation, Atkinson told AFP.

For example, the UK has almost ditched dirty coal, largely due to CO2 quotas making it too expensive to generate electricity this way, he said. Other tools such as subsidies have fuelled the boom in wind farms. "The only way to fix the problem of climate change is to harness the capitalist system that got us in this situation," added Louis Redshaw, director of Redshaw Advisors, which advises companies on carbon markets. —AFP



A Macrolophus - a predatory bug that eats larvae - on a tobacco leaf at the Saveol vegetable farm in Guipavas, western France. —AFP

the tops off the plants and shake the insects into a giant metal funnel for packing. Some 10 million macrolophus and 130 million micro-wasps are produced each year, and Saveol claims it is the only growers' cooperative in Europe with its own insect-raising facility. —AFP

Business

KAMCO Monthly Markets Report

GCC markets continue to surge, backed by improving sentiments

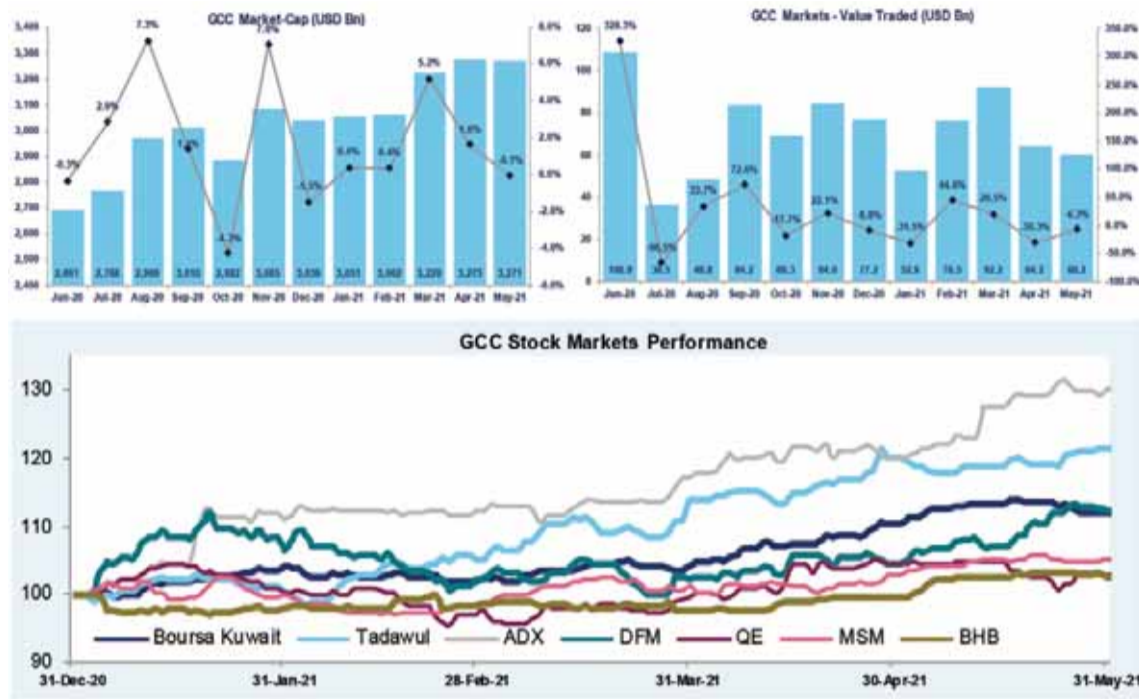
Boursa Kuwait benchmarks gain, trading activity picks up pace

KUWAIT: Equity markets in the GCC once again witnessed a broad-based rally during the May-2021 with only Qatar's benchmark reporting a decline during the month. The performance was broadly in line with global equity markets with almost all key global market ending the month in the green. The MSCI GCC Index was up 1.1 percent during the month bringing YTD-2021 gains to 19.1 percent, one of the highest regional growth globally. The ADX index reported the biggest monthly gain during May-2021 at 8.5 percent closely followed by Dubai's DFM General Index that surged 7.4 percent. Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabian markets continued to remain the top YTD-2021 performers in the region with gains of 30 percent and 21.4 percent, respectively.

Sector performance also showed a broad-based rally during the month with only three out of 17 sectors showing declines during the month. However, gains during May-2021 were relatively modest, at single digits (percent) as compared to last month where a number of sectors reported double digit (percent) gains. The Diversified Financials sector topped in May-2021 with a gain of 7.3 percent, closely followed by Consumer Durable & Apparel and Hotels, Rest. And Leisure indices with monthly gains of 7.2 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively. Large-cap sectors like Banks, Materials and Energy showed low-single digit gains during the month. The GCC Healthcare sector regained the top spot in terms of YTD-2021 performance with a surge of 32.0 percent, followed by Transportation and Materials benchmarks with gains of 26.8 percent and 26.2 percent, respectively. The Banking sector index also showed healthy gains of 22.9 percent since the start of the year.

Global equity markets reported gains in almost all major equity markets resulting in a 1.3 percent gain in the MSCI World Index. European markets outperformed North American indices during the month with the DJ Stoxx 600 index gaining 2.1 percent during the month vs. 0.5 percent gain for the S&P 500 Index. Crude oil also remained stable above the \$65/b mark with a monthly gain of 3.1 percent.

Kuwaiti benchmarks continued to show gains during May-2021, albeit marginal, after recording



the best monthly performance during April-2021. Main Market stocks once again dominated performance during the month with the Main 50 Index recording a gain of 2.0 percent outperforming the Premier Market index that recorded a gain of 1.8 percent. The broader Main Market index, however, reported a gain of 1.1 percent, resulting in a 1.6 percent monthly gain for the All Share Index. The relatively modest gains during May-2021 pushed Kuwait's YTD-2021 performance to the fourth position in the GCC with a gain of 12.0 percent for the All Share Index, whereas the Main 50 Index was up 16.7 percent in terms YTD-21 performance vs. 11.4 percent for the Premier Market Index.

Trading activity remained upbeat during the month despite the month of Ramadan mainly led by the reconstitution of the MSCI Emerging Market

index. Monthly value traded increased by 27.2 percent to KD 1.4 billion during May-2021, the highest since November-2020 when Kuwait was added to the MSCI EM Index. Monthly volume also gained but at a slightly slower pace of 21.0 percent to reach a 9.1 billion shares during May-2021 as compared to 7.5 billion shares in April-2021. Value traded during the monthly of Ramadan was the highest this year since at least the last ten years with an average daily value traded of KD 62 million during this year's Ramadan. Agility topped the monthly value traded chart with KD 114.3 million worth of shares traded during the month followed by KFJ and AUB Bahrain at KD 105.1 million and KD 103.3 million, respectively. On the monthly volume chart, AAN Digital Services topped with 738.9 million traded shares during the month followed by

Privatization Holding and AUB Bahrain at 568.0 million and 473.3 million, respectively.

The sector performance chart for the month was almost equally split between gainers and losers. The Oil & Gas index topped the month with a gain of 7.1 percent followed by Consumer Goods and Industrial indices with monthly gains of 6.1 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively. On the decliner's side, the Technology index topped with a decline of 19.8 percent followed by Basic Materials and Utilities indices with declines of 6.2 percent and 5.9 percent, respectively. The monthly stock performance chart was topped by Dar Al-Thuraya Real Estate with a gain of 61.2 percent followed by Kuwait Hotels and Jiyad Holding with gains of 58.4 percent and 47.0 percent, respectively. Gain in shares of Kuwait Hotels came after the company reported profits of KD 0.26 million during Q1-2021 as compared to a loss of KD 53,734 during Q1-2020. On the decliner's chart, Al-Bareeq Holding topped with a decline of 44.6 percent followed by Kuwait Reinsurance and Automated Systems Co with declines of 30.3 percent and 19.8 percent, respectively. In terms of performance of large cap stocks, Mabaneer was the only stock in the Premier market index that reported double digit monthly return of 14.6 percent mainly backed by stronger Q1-2021 net profits. Bourse Kuwait also showed strong gains of 8.1 percent during the month after Q1-21 results showed almost 100 percent y-o-y gain in operating revenues during the quarter.

Saudi Arabia (Tadawul)

Saudi Stock Exchange took a breather during May-2021 with marginal gains of 1.3 percent as compared to mid-single digit gains over the previous three months. The index traded comfortably above the 10,000 mark and closed the month at 10,551.2 points, the highest level since October-2014. The monthly gain pushed the YTD-2021 gains to 21.4 percent, the second-highest returns this year in the GCC. Gains during the month were led by gains in the bulk of the sectors on the exchange. However, almost all the large cap sectors on the exchange reported marginal declines during the month that were offset by the remaining sectors.

Connected worker is fundamental to post-COVID business resilience; here's why

KUWAIT: Connected Workers will harness the benefits of digitalization to provide business guidance for organizations across the economic spectrum, says Ravi Gopinath, Chief Cloud Officer and Chief Product Officer at AVEVA.



Ravi Gopinath

Human adaptability has been on display all through our year of lockdown. With digital transformation providing a workforce refresh, the post-COVID normal looks set to be a world where scattered teams are balanced by a strong emphasis on business continuity. Having experimented with working from home, more workers would like the arrangement to

continue - or at least, to have the flexibility to determine their own working hours. A Pew Research Center survey found that 71 percent of US workers would keep working remotely if they had the option. At the same time, an increasing number of organizations have switched to long-term remote work, including Google and Microsoft.

But what does this new location-agnostic workforce mean for organizations across the economic spectrum? How might hitherto location-dependent industrial manufacturers and energy companies, for example, prepare for such sweeping changes - even as they work to attract and retain new talent? And what does that mean for business continuity?

Bridges the geographical gap

As business has become digitalized, cloud, artificial intelligence (AI) and enhanced collaborative tools are helping create a new reality for industrial operations. Software leaders in the sector, like AVEVA, are driving this innovation by providing software, services, and digitized power and process infrastructure solutions that enable the transition to the world of virtually con-

trolled sustainable operations and empowered, Connected Workers.

The industrial enterprise that is being created in the wake of the pandemic will have an empowered, connected workforce. As the next-generation workforce - a category of workers who do not know a life without the internet - starts to assume their responsibilities, expertise based on years of experience will gradually be replaced by a new digital skillset.

Designers, engineers, operators, managers will all be equipped with the tools of information, analysis, automation, and guidance to ensure that they are able to accomplish their tasks efficiently and securely, in their individual capacities and as digitally linked teams. These Connected Workers comprise the beating heart of the resilient post-COVID organization.

Rebuilding the workforce ecosystem

As organizations build back better and stronger, then, technology will continue to play an enabling role for this new workforce. The normal workplace ecosystem to support them over the medium- and long-term is already being radically rebuilt with cloud and AI at its core. Digital solutions will become a valuable shop floor partner, providing remote access to the physical sites that workers once occupied while simultaneously deploying the tools required to collaborate with internal and external colleagues - whether human or robot.

Applications will need to interoperate seamlessly to address complex use cases and provide workflows without boundaries. No matter how complex or domain-intensive the underlying functionality, the relevant information needs to be abstracted, contextualized, and presented simply and clearly. Automated guidance and learning aids are needed to provide digital expert assistance, and the experience of industrial software must be as good as the intuitiveness and ease of use of consumer technology.

While this new enhanced digital collaboration will be delivered over cloud-based networks, it is the acceleration of AI, combined with big data, that will support teams in elevating performance. In tandem, the develop-

ment of cloud-based learning development tools will help workers align and develop skillsets specific to evolving roles and job requirements.

Two new personas: The Digital Twin and The Connected Worker

When addressing the business drivers that shape the new normal, two key personas emerge: the Digital Twin and the Connected Worker.

Simply defined, a Digital Twin is a data-led digital representation of a physical object. Such a digital duplicate provides the digital backbone across the key industrial disciplines of engineering, production, maintenance, and supply chain management, and provides performance-based analytical predictions to enable decision making and address business requirements.

The Connected Worker leverages these elements to give them context, providing the insight, guidance, and tools to ensure safe, effective, and consistent work output specific to each role. When workers all along the manufacturing value chain gain instant access to the same information, decision making is faster, more precise, and more profitable. An example of the two forces in action is the deployment with oil sands producer Suncor, and power provider Duke Energy. Both companies use Schneider Electric hardware combined with AVEVA's dynamic range modeling, prognostics tools and AI-infused analytics to optimize processes across their assets, combining data on everything from flow rates and volumes to shifts and operational planning. The result is that the leaders of both companies can detect unit failures early, identify potential production challenges or equipment failures before they occur and optimize performance by shifting automatically to different plant component to pre-empt and prevent the failure. These tools enabled Suncor to drive productivity and ensure higher production, optimizing the useful life of their portfolio. At Duke, meanwhile, the team saved \$34 million in a single AI-predicted operational catch.

As digital environments become the norm across the economic value chain, the benefits of using tools such as the Digital Twin enable Connected Workers to make more informed decisions, collaborate in real-time, improve safety and efficiency, and drive sustainability throughout the operation. The result is interconnected, resilient organizations that work together seamlessly - regardless of where they are located and which time zone they operate within. That is the true promise of digital transformation.

Amazon shifts policy on worker monitoring system

SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon shifted policy on a controversial employee productivity monitoring system Tuesday as a coalition of US labor unions took aim at the firm, saying a need for speed in warehouses led to injuries. Workers at Amazon warehouses are hurt more often and more severely than peers employed at retail rivals such as Walmart, the Strategic Organizing Center said in a report based on data provided to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

"The company's obsession with speed has come at a huge cost for Amazon's workforce," the center formed by labor unions said. Late Tuesday the firm announced

a shift in its Time Off Task policy - a heavily criticized system that uses algorithms to monitor workers' productivity, with employees made to explain their breaks.

If they cross a certain threshold, Bloomberg reported, they often face dismissal. "Starting today, we're now averaging Time off Task over a longer period," Dave Clark, CEO of Amazon's global retail and logistics business, said in a blog post. Amazon has invested heavily in workplace health and safety, implementing new technologies, processes and precautions to reduce the risk of injuries, spokesperson Kelly Nantel said earlier in reply to an AFP inquiry. "While any incident is one too many, we are continuously learning and seeing improvements through ergonomics programs, guided exercises at employees' workstations, mechanical assistance equipment, workstation setup and design, and forklift telematics and guardrails - to name a few," Nantel said.

There were about six serious injuries per 100 Amazon workers last year requiring the employees to take time off or be shifted to light duties, according to

OSHA data cited in the center's report. That compares to a warehouse industry serious injury average of slightly more than three per 100 workers, the report indicated.

Founder Jeff Bezos told investors in April that the e-commerce giant needs a better "vision" for its workers, after an effort to create the company's first labor union was defeated. Unions and political leaders have argued that Amazon employees face constant pressure and monitoring, with little job protection, highlighting the need for collective bargaining.

The news comes as the firm is poised to conduct Prime Day sales in late June that have become huge online shopping days due to deep discounts. Online shopping has soared during the pandemic, with Amazon making a priority of getting orders to customers in just one or two days.

The Seattle-based tech and e-commerce powerhouse hired 500,000 people last year and now directly employs some 1.3 million people globally, according to Bezos. — AFP



In this file photo an Amazon distribution center is seen in North Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Ancient traditional healing rituals go digital in virus-hit S Africa

Incense burned gently in the corner of a sunlit room as South African traditional healer Makhosi Malatji fixed her smartphone into a tripod and reached for a small bag of divination bones. A young female face on the screen watched Malatji shake the pouch and scatter its contents across the floor of her Johannesburg home. She angled the phone to make sure her client could follow and began interpreting the bone pattern, finding cues that prompted the woman to open up about a distressing family feud. Like traditional healers across the country, Malatji, 37, took an ancient practice online last year to continue offering consultations under strict coronavirus restrictions.

The shift has fired a budding pre-pandemic trend of younger traditional healers already engaging clients through social media and video calls. "Before COVID I had never used a phone or laptop to do a consultation," said Malatji, who trained over a decade ago. "It was a bit of an adjustment," she laughed, describing her first Skype session as "a mess". Skeptical at first, Malatji now has professional profiles on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. A ring light stood at the back of her brightly coloured consultation room lined with traditional printed fabric and carpeted in animal skin.

Despite the easing of coronavirus

restrictions, Malatji still sees half of her clients remotely. "I actually enjoy the online ones more now because it saves time," she admitted, noting that she also acquired new overseas customers in countries like Dubai, Italy and Sri Lanka.

New age sangomas

Known as "sangomas" in Zulu language, traditional healers are qualified herbalists, counselors and mediators as well as diviners. Many South Africans consult them for illnesses, dream interpretations and conflict resolution. Shrouded in misconception, sangomas were banned in 1957 under the "Witchcraft Suppression Act" and only legally recognized decades later as "traditional health practitioners".

Knowledge transmission skipped a generation as a result, with grandparents training millennial grandchildren more inclined to break with tradition. Five years after she became a traditional healer in 2012, Nomfundo Dhlamini branched out into the digital space as a self-proclaimed "new age sangoma". The 30-year-old uses social media platforms to "advocate for African spirituality", particularly among young people.

As lockdown boosted demand for impersonal healing, Dhlamini distilled traditional herbs into soaps and tea bags she sold online. A growing number



Traditional healer and spokesperson of the Traditional Healers Organization (THO), Janet Mmalaxaba, also known as Gogo Molahlegi, poses for a portrait in Brakpan, South Africa. — AFP

of ailing customers have started discussing symptoms and remedies with her via WhatsApp message. Previously, "the only way to speak to a traditional healer was to go to their place," Dhlamini explained. "Now there are new ways of doing things." But the digital presence of sangomas remains limited, she added, pointing to a backlash from traditionalists opposed to modernizing the practice. The generational gap can sometimes complicate dialogue. There

is "a little bit of tension", Dhlamini noted. "It's not really easy for an elderly healer to ask a younger healer for help (with technology)."

'Throwing bones cannot change'

Xhanti Madolo, 39, spotted an information gap about sangomas when he moved to Johannesburg from the Eastern Cape Province in 2002. "A lot of the people who move from rural to more urban areas... don't know where to con-

sult," he explained. Last year, Madolo and his former classmate Siphiso Lindi set up South Africa's first online directory, "Gogo Online" for traditional healers. "We went into a very traditional space where technology is frowned upon... thinking that people might be averse," Lindi said. But more than 200 healers have signed up to the platform since its launch last November.

Lockdown "has been a great help", said Madolo, as "traditional healers are starting to move" online. Yet after struggling with months of telephonic consultations, 66-year-old Gogo Molahlegi was somewhat relieved when authorities allowed traditional healers to resume face-to-face sessions. The great-grandmother still feels less constrained by face masks and hand sanitizer than a screen. "At my age... I prefer to see someone here," Molahlegi told AFP, removing her sandals before stepping into a small backyard room lined with jars of herbs and bottles of sacred river water. A younger trainee took notes as Molahlegi lit a candle and sniffed tobacco-rituals that mark the start of a traditional reading. "Throwing bones cannot change," she argued. "You cannot do that digitally... the person has to be here with you." — AFP



A cleaner mops the floor in front of a Nintendo's Super Mario game character decoration at Narita Airport in China prefecture. — AFP

Let's-a go! Nintendo announces plans for Japan museum

After opening its first-ever theme park this March, Nintendo is giving fans something else to get excited about: a planned "Nintendo Gallery" museum set to open by spring 2024. The Japanese gaming giant announced yesterday it plans to repurpose an old factory site in Kyoto, where the firm is based, to exhibit its history and beloved gaming products. "Nintendo has been discussing the possibility of building a gallery, as a way to share Nintendo's product development history and philosophy with the public," the company said in a statement.

The facility "where Nintendo's historical products will be showcased, and exhibits and experiences will be available" is expected to be completed by March 2024. There was little detail yet on what fans of the company behind legends such as Super Mario and Donkey Kong can expect from the museum. It will be built on the site of a plant located in Kyoto's Uji city, which was built in 1969 and made Western-style playing

cards as well as the Japanese playing cards called "hanafuda" that were Nintendo's original bread and butter.

The plant also served as a video game console repair center, but operations were transferred elsewhere in 2016, and Nintendo said it had been brainstorming ways to use the plant ever since. Nintendo began life in 1889 as a manufacturer of hanafuda cards and launched its first home video game machines, known as TV Game 15 and TV Game 6, in 1977.

The Super Mario Bros. games were launched in 1985, two years after the company began selling its Nintendo Entertainment System console. Super Nintendo World, the company's first theme park, opened in March after months of pandemic delays. It is part of the Universal Studios Japan complex in Osaka, and features a Mario Kart ride with a real-life Bowser's Castle. — AFP



Lopez 'wonders if lightning can strike twice' with Affleck

Jennifer Lopez is wondering if "lightning can strike" twice in her love life. The 51-year-old singer has recently reconnected with her ex-fiance Ben Affleck, and Jennifer is wondering whether they can form a lasting relationship this time around. A source explained: "She's 51 and has always put importance on chemistry. "She's wondering how many times lightning can strike. She feels like he has grown since they were together." Despite this, the 'Jenny from the Block' hitmaker is determined to ensure that her kids remain her number one priority. Jennifer - who has 13-year-old twins Emme and Maximilian with ex-husband Marc Anthony - won't allow herself to get distracted from her parental responsibilities.

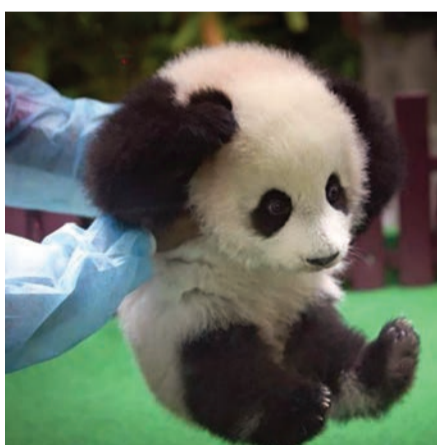
An insider told the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column: "She has to ensure that she is taking her children into account. "They are her priority." Ben, 48, and Jennifer previously dated in the early 2000s and a source has claimed that the rumored couple weren't "shy about being affectionate" with each other during a recent dinner date. The eyewitness shared: "Ben had his arm around Jennifer at dinner and they weren't shy about being affectionate. "He looked great and seemed very happy. She also looked happy and kept leaning into him. They looked very comfortable and relaxed together." The high-profile duo both appeared to be very happy together during their night out.

A source added: "He mixed in well with her friends and seemed very comfortable talking to them and making conversation. They all had a lot of laughs and a great time." Meanwhile, another source recently claimed that Jennifer is "smitten" with the Hollywood star. The insider explained: "Ben has been making the effort to make it work with their schedules. He's really making a huge effort. "J.Lo thinks Ben has really stepped up and loves this version of him. It's comforting to her and she is smitten." — Bang Showbiz

Third giant panda cub born in Malaysia

A giant panda loaned to Malaysia from China has given birth to a rare third cub during its stay in the Southeast Asian country, wildlife officials said yesterday. The cub was born Monday at Kuala Lumpur zoo to Liang Liang, who has been on loan to Malaysia since 2014 along with a male panda, Xing Xing, said the country's wildlife department. As it can be difficult to get pandas to breed in captivity, three cubs is a rare success. Officials have been unable to get a close look at the new cub, and do not yet know its sex as it is being closely cared for by its mother.

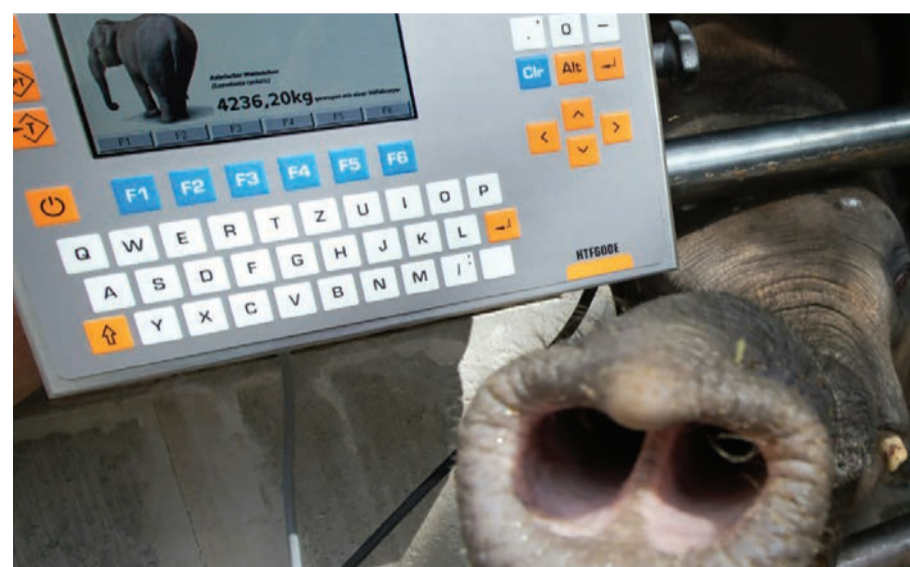
The first cub, Nuan Nuan, was born in August 2015 and was sent to China in 2017 as part of Beijing's agreement with Malaysia over cubs born in captivity. The second, Yi Yi, was born in January 2018, but has not yet been sent to China due to coronavirus restrictions, wildlife officials said. Liang Liang and Xing Xing came to Malaysia on a 10-year loan. Their arrival was held up by a month after the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 — carrying mostly Chinese passengers-caused tensions between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing. It's estimated that there are around 1,800 giant pandas left in the wild, living mainly in bamboo forests in the mountains of China, according to environmental group WWF. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies giant pandas as "vulnerable". — AFP



Elephants on tour in China guzzle crops and wreak havoc

A herd of 15 wandering elephants on an epic trek through south-western China have entered villages to gorge on crops, broken into barns and caused a million dollars of losses. Over the past week, the animals drained a water tank, helped themselves to a corn field, and guzzled supplies after crashing into a barn, state broadcaster CCTV said. It is unclear why the wild Asian elephants, a protected species in China, strayed from the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan province. Their destination so far is unknown as well.

But since April, the large animals have embarked on a 500km journey, closely monitored by residents and authorities, with hundreds of people mobilised to ensure public safety. On Tuesday, Yunnan authorities said the herd was in a city just 20km from its



Suck it up: Study probes elephants' suction powers

Elephants are known to use versatile trunks to grab objects big and small, drink great draughts, and sniff out water kilometers away. But a tusker's proboscis can also switch to vacuum mode to eat, with suction power ranging from faint to ferocious, researchers said yesterday. A team from the Georgia Institute of Technology observed the world's largest land mammal suck up rutabaga, draw chia seeds out of water, and pick up large tortilla chips without breaking them, the scientists reported in the Journal of the Royal Society Interface.

Up to now, it was thought that only fish exhibited this kind of suction prowess. Experiments were carried out with the help of a 34-year-old female African elephant from Zoo Atlanta, including tests to see how she would deal with rutabaga chunks of varying size and number. They observed that while the elephant used its sensitive prehensile tip to grab on to big chunks, she preferred suction to consume larger quantities of smaller pieces.

"A loud vacuuming sound accompanies the suction as food is quickly drawn onto the tip of the trunk," a team led by David Hu, Georgia Tech wrote. The elephant chose not to use vacuum power,

provincial capital where millions live. Experts believe the leader of the group might have led it astray, adding that it is rare for them to trek so far. Since mid-April, the elephants have wrecked around 56 hectares of crops, causing an estimated 6.8 million yuan (\$1.07 million) in losses, CCTV said. No casualties have been reported so far, with locals attempting to guide the animals with food and by blocking roads with trucks.

however, when offered grains of bran measuring about 1 millimeter, "presumably to avoid getting the grains lodged in its trunk," the study noted. "Instead, the trunk tip squeezed the bran together to pick them up."

Precision and power

The study found that elephants generate suction force not only by using their huge lungs, but also by increasing the diameter of their nasal passages. Using ultrasound imaging, the scientists watched the elephant use muscle contractions to dilate its nostrils up to 30 percent, increasing trunk capacity more than 60 percent.

By observing the elephant drinking water from a container with chia seeds at the bottom, they were able to calculate that she sucked in the fluid at a flow rate equivalent to 24 shower heads at once. The elephant inhaled at speeds nearly 30 times faster than a human sneeze. The suction ability displayed was not just powerful, but precise. In one test, researchers placed a tortilla chip on the flat surface of a force plate, which measures movement strength.

Weighing in at about 100 kilograms (220 pounds), the elephant's trunk could smash the chip with very little pressure. But instead of grabbing it, the elephant applied suction near to or directly on the chip to guide it into its sensitive prehensile "fingers". Despite the chip's hard-to-grab thinness and fragility, the elephant "could usually pick it up without breaking it". — AFP



Over the past week, the animals drained a water tank, helped themselves to a corn field, and guzzled supplies after crashing into a barn. —Xinhua

Lifestyle | Features



Dancers perform in a street of Havana. — AFP photos



Cuban dancers arrive to a rehearsal in Havana.



Dancers rehearse in Havana.

INTERNET PROPELS CUBAN HIP HOP TROUPE TO GLOBAL FAME

In the country of salsa and rumba, a troupe of sneaker-wearing Cuban youngsters have burst onto the dance scene with a style until recently all but unheard of on the isolated island nation: hip hop. Under US sanctions and with the Communist Party in charge of all aspects of daily life, including what people get to see on public television, Cubans have had little exposure to the American genre that has taken the rest of the world by storm. But this changed suddenly with internet arriving in the one-party state in 2015 — and mobile internet since 2018 — with some 4.2 million of Cuba's 11.2 million people now connected.

With no other platform on which to ply their trade, 16-member Cuban dance troupe Datway (a play on That Way) have taken to Facebook and Instagram to display their unique brand of hip hop moves, blended with more traditional, home-grown styles. It has launched them to international fame, even catching the eye of Daddy Yankee, dubbed the King of Reggaeton—a Latin American music style that borrows heavily from hip hop and rap. The Puerto Rican rapper, who co-starred on the hit single "Despacito", took to Instagram to comment: "Too good #Cuba" about a dance number the troupe performed to his latest hit "El Pony" and posted online.

In the video, the troupe jumps and gyrates to the reggaeton rhythm in sports clothes and sneakers, dyed hair and bandannas, and watched by a rag-tag of neighborhood kids in a poor dis-



Dancers rehearse in Havana.

trict of central Havana. The video has earned them 2.2 million views. "Hip hop videos from other countries are always (set) in these very beautiful places," Datway founder Dariel Lopez, aka Chaiky Dari, told AFP.

Much talent, little exposure

"We always look for places that are... well not ugly, because for us they are not ugly, but real—those balconies in need of a touch of paint, young people and children who are not very well dressed," said the 23-year-old with his wild mop of hair, parts of it bleached blonde. Chaiky Dari boasts 33,700 subscribers on Instagram, a high hit rate for a country with the third lowest fixed



Dancers perform in a street of Havana.

broadband speed, according to Speedtest, though it ranks 88th out of 134 for mobile speed.

Under a tin roof held up by walls covered in graffiti, the members of Datway train from Monday to Friday, shooting their videos on weekends. The troupe of 18- to 32-year-olds have backgrounds in contemporary and folk dance, some even worked in circuses. Sometimes they go out on the street, plugging in their sound system at the house of a neighbor—an old lady who sells fruit from her front steps. "Abroad, Cuba is still seen as the country of salsa," but "here there is also a lot of talent in hip-hop, with a lot of dancers from the street," said Liuvén Dopico, 28, who himself

learned to dance "in the street" and "by watching a lot of videos." Datway's idea, however, is not to abandon their Cuban dance roots.

"We often mix hip hop with traditional Cuban music, we mix it all and we create something truly beautiful," said Dopico, his hair tinted turquoise. "If it is a salsa we mix it with urban dance, if it is reggaeton, we add salsa steps to it," added Dari.

'The best!'

Fellow troupe member Paloma Duarte, 23, started off as a classical ballet dancer, then worked in a folk dance company. Now, "I feel complete as a dancer, I have all the styles!" she told

AFP. Duarte said the group receives frequent messages from amateur dancers, many of whom send in videos, as the hip hop phenomenon spreads. But to encourage more youngsters, "it would be really good if at the level of the state, of television, there was some urban dance and not only salsa and rumba," she added.

In recent weeks, the glowing comments of Latin stars such as Daddy Yankee and Ricky Martin ("The best!", he wrote on Instagram), have propelled Datway to new heights, even signing a contract with a record company in Florida to appear in dance videos. And when Puerto Rican-Cuban Reggaeton duo Ozuna and Ovi launched an online challenge, inviting dancers to choreograph a video for their new song "Envidioso", the winners were none other than Datway.

The group received a prize of \$10,000 — a fortune in a country where the minimum monthly salary is \$87. Half of the money will be used on "technology"—better internet connection and filming equipment, said Ernesto Rodríguez, 32, the group's technical director. "The rest was divided among the members, and I also gave money to the children" from the neighborhood, who appear in Datway's videos. — AFP



Dancers rehearse in Havana.



Dancers perform in a street of Havana.

Rag'n'Bone Man, Woodkid to top Montreux Jazz Festival

British singer-songwriter Rag'n'Bone Man and French neo-folk musician Woodkid are headlining this year's Montreux Jazz Festival, downsized and to be held mostly outdoors due to the pandemic, organizers said Tuesday. French-Lebanese trumpeter and composer Ibrahim Maalouf and British singer-songwriter Arlo Parks, who was named best breakthrough artist at this year's Brit Awards, are also in the line-up. "Small is beautiful," is the informal slogan for the 55th edition of the festival, which was cancelled last year due to the coronavirus crisis.

The festival has been scheduled for July 2-17, coinciding with the planned loosening of anti-COVID measures in

Switzerland. Around 20,000 spectators are expected to turn out — more than 10 times fewer than in 2019, when some 250,000 took part, according to organizers. For more than half a century, Montreux has been a magnet for big names of the music business and rising stars alike. It has retained its jazz label despite dramatically expanding its repertoire, with big names in rock, punk, R&B and hip-hop also on the bill this year.

The 2021 program has been condensed and the format adjusted to easily adapt to the COVID-19 situation in the idyllic Swiss town of Montreux, on the shores of Lake Geneva. The main stage has been built on the lake, 25 meters (80 feet) from the shore, opposite a grandstand that can hold up to 500 spectators. It will be one of only four stages used for the festival—two for ticket holders and two free of charge—to accommodate a total of up to 1,500 people a day. Tickets go on sale on June 8. Organizers also said they would livestream several of the concerts "in order to bring the festival to a larger audience". — AFP

NEW FRENCH EDITION OF 'MEIN KAMPF' PUBLISHED

A new French edition of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was published yesterday with the text reflecting the "abominably badly written" original, according to its translator. One of the world's most notorious books, first published in two tomes in 1924 and 1925, it laid out the ideological foundations for National Socialism including its embrace of violence and anti-Semitism. The only current French translation, first published in 1934 and still in print, improves the often repetitive and turgid prose of the original, which is difficult to read even in German, according to French translator Olivier Mannoni.

"The rule at the time was to write in good French and to smooth over the asperities of the text," said Mannoni, who spent five years on the new edition being published by Fayard, a major

French publishing house. Speaking at a press conference last month, Mannoni said his work was true to the "abominably badly written" original, half-written by Hitler during his time in jail, with all of its "dubious syntax" and "interminable and repetitive phrasing." The 1,000-page annotated translation includes around 300 pages of criticism and contextualization of Hitler's manifesto, which lays out his plans for expanding Germany's borders and eliminating Jews.

It has been titled "Historicizing Evil, A Critical Edition of Mein Kampf," and will be free for public libraries and sold for 100 euros (\$122), a deliberately high price intended to limit its distribution. Any profits will be given to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, which maintains Nazi concentration camps as memorials and reminders of the devastating conse-

quences of fascism. "Mein Kampf," which translates as "My Struggle," entered the public domain in 2016, when copyright lapsed on the book. That year a new critical German edition was published over two tomes that ran to 2,000 pages, which featured for weeks in best-seller lists. A new Polish edition came out earlier this year. The book is banned in some European countries including Austria and the Netherlands, but it can be found on the internet or as an e-book. Opinion is split on the new editions, particularly among Jewish groups, some of which favor a complete ban while others argue in favor of scholarly, critical versions being made available for educational purposes. — AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Max Verstappen of Netherlands and Red Bull Racing celebrates during F1 Grand Prix. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com



Novak Djokovic

Novak Djokovic hails 'bold, brave' Osaka

PARIS: World number one Novak Djokovic on Tuesday hailed Naomi Osaka as "brave and bold" for withdrawing from the French Open after revealing her struggles with depression and anxiety. "I support her. I think she was very brave to do that. I'm really sorry that she is going through painful times and suffering mentally, is what I have heard," said Djokovic after reaching the second round of the tournament. This was, I must say, a very bold decision from her side." Djokovic kicked off his campaign for a 19th Grand Slam title with a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 win over Tennyson Sandgren inside an empty stadium. Rafael Nadal, the 13-time champion and chasing a record-setting 21st major, defeated Alexei Popyrin of Australia 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3). The Spaniard now has 101 wins against just two losses at the tournament.

World number one Ashleigh Barty marked her return to Paris for the first time since her 2019 title triumph by beating American left-hander Bernarda Pera 6-4, 3-6, 6-2 but admitted she was fighting a hip problem. "I'm not going to hide behind the fact I'm not quite 100%," said the 25-year-old. Italian 37-year-old Andreas Seppi, playing in his 63rd successive Grand Slam, stunned 20th seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 7-6 (10/8), 4-6, 6-4. Venus Williams, playing the tournament for the 24th time and a runner-up 19 years ago, saw her 89th Grand Slam end as Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova eased to a 6-3, 6-1 win. Carla Suarez Navarro came close to winning her first match back after recovering from cancer, but bowed out 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 at the hands of Sloane Stephens. — AFP

Alcaraz, Musetti and latest 'NextGen' look to shake up old order at French Open

PARIS: The much-hyped 'Next Gen' have so far failed to break Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic's hold on tennis' biggest titles, but a new group of teenagers are hoping to show they can take over at the top of the game.

Carlos Alcaraz qualified for the Australian Open main draw aged just 17 earlier this season and at the French Open, now 18, won his first-round match this week. The progression of Italian Jannik Sinner is being closely followed by tennis fans, but his compatriot and fellow 19-year-old Lorenzo Musetti is also threatening to race up the rankings.

With Federer 39, Nadal turning 35 today and Djokovic 34, there is a clear opportunity for the youngest members of the ATP top 100 to make their presence felt in the coming years. But the same was previously said of the likes of Dominic Thiem, Alexander Zverev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Daniil Medvedev.

So far, though, the only one of that quartet to win a Grand Slam title was Thiem at last year's US Open, when the Austrian was already 27 and with Nadal and Federer both absent and Djokovic dramatically defaulted in the fourth round.

Spaniard Alcaraz was born in 2003, the same year Federer won his first major title at Wimbledon. He has already been tipped for greatness, and broke Nadal's record by becoming the youngest match winner in Madrid Open history last month.

He lost to his illustrious compatriot in the second round, but Nadal was upbeat about the teenager's future. "He already has a great level of tennis today, but I really believe that he's going to be a fantastic player in the near future," said the 20-time Grand Slam champion after beating the young pretender in straight sets.

Rising stars like Alcaraz and Musetti are being increasingly moulded into future champions from a very young age. Alcaraz, who warmed up for Roland Garros by winning a second-tier Challenger event in Portugal to break into the top 100, is trained at former world number one Juan Carlos Ferrero's academy. Today, he faces Georgia's 28th seed Nikoloz Basilashvili.

"From the moment he gets up to when he goes to sleep, we try to educate Carlos on all the recovery processes," his fitness coach Juanjo Moreno told atptour.com. While younger players have traditionally struggled in best-of-five-set matches, Alcaraz is confident he is ready for the highest level.

"I trust a lot in my physical (conditioning), yeah. I could play a really, really good game during the whole match," he said after beating Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-3, 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) in Paris to at least match his run to the Australian Open second round.

Musetti 'belongs' at top level

Musetti announced himself to the ATP Tour late last year by beating



PARIS: Italy's Jannik Sinner returns the ball to France's Pierre-Hugues Herbert during their men's singles first round tennis match on Day 2 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris on May 31, 2021. — AFP

Kei Nishikori and Stan Wawrinka en route to the Italian Open last 16 as a qualifier. He started this season in Challenger tournaments, but has since reached two ATP semi-finals, losing twice to Tsitsipas in Acapulco and Lyon.

His defeat of 13th seed David Goffin in the Roland Garros first round was barely a shock, with it his sixth win from just nine matches against top-20 players. "It demonstrates that I belong at this level, but there is still a long way to go," said world number 76 Musetti, who

trained with Nadal ahead of the tournament, after seeing off three-time Grand Slam quarter-finalist Goffin 6-0, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3).

"Certainly training with Nadal is an exceptional experience that I will carry within me forever, but I liked the victory against Goffin because I demonstrated the right mentality, the one that takes you far." Musetti will be the favourite against Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in the second round today, showing how fast his stock has climbed despite making his Grand Slam debut this week. — AFP

Let the bells ring out, spectators return to English Test cricket

LONDON: The family of the late Captain Tom Moore who became a global hero for his fundraising efforts during the coronavirus pandemic rang the five minute bell at Lord's prior to the first Test between England and New Zealand yesterday.

The World War II veteran died aged 100 on February 2 after raising nearly £33 million (\$45 million, 37.4 million euros) for healthcare charities by completing 100 lengths of his garden before his century birthday in April last year.

In a sign of how far England has recovered during a year that has cost over 127,000 lives in the United Kingdom, 6,500 spectators were on hand to see the family ring the historic bell. It is the first time since September 2019 that England have played in front of spectators at home.

The crowd are made up largely of Marylebone Cricket Club members, who were given priority for tickets. Priority for any tickets left after MCC members — in their famous bacon and egg coloured ties — were given their allocation was given to spectators attending with under 16-year-olds.

In a further sign of some sense of normality returning to sporting events there were even ticket touts outside the ground. Those queuing in orderly fashion under beaming blue skies were cock a hoop to be returning to watch live cricket.

'The end of cricket'

William Marks, 30, who works in the shipping industry, said it was the perfect storm — the weather combined with the opposition being "one of the best teams in the world" New Zealand. In keeping with the delightful conditions he was wearing long shorts.



LONDON: Spectators observe social distancing rules on the first day of the first Test cricket match between England and New Zealand at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. — AFP

"I'm so excited. It has been a long time, so I'm delighted to be back watching live sport," he told AFP. "It's a great day and feels like a long time in the making. Just being part of a crowd and watching live sport, you can't beat it, and seeing the players in the flesh again — you can't recreate that on TV. It won't be quite like normal but it's better than nothing."

Katie Banks, a 51-year-old solicitor, said she was ecstatic to be out and about after the ennui of being stuck at home through three lockdowns. "I feel quite safe enough. I miss having fun and talking to people and having something interesting happening in my life," she told AFP. "To share the experience of sport is really great. This is only the very beginning.

People will be happy to be there, there will be the normal crowd noise."

Wine merchant Edward Clarke, 56, was dressed more formally than Marks ensuring protection from the sun with a Panama hat, a dark blue blazer but eschewed a tie. "It's surreal and relieving," he said. "It's good for the cricketers mostly and to have something to play to. I'm double-jabbed (two doses of vaccine) so I suppose I feel quite reassured about the whole thing. I'm of the belief that you can't stay locked up forever. If this doesn't happen, it will be the end of cricket. It's a difficult balance. It will be interesting to see how the size of the crowd can make the noise, the dynamics of it." — AFP

News in brief

Kuwait matches without fans

KUWAIT: Kuwait's World Cup qualifying match against Australia will be held today without fans. Kuwait Football Association has confirmed. Kuwait's qualifying football home matches for both the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and the 2023 Asian Cup in China will continue to be held without spectators as the country follows strict health precautions against COVID-19, KFA explained.

Cycling team empowers

KUWAIT: Kuwait pro cycling team achieved good results from its participation in the Tour of Estonia championship, as one of the team members came third in the individual category, 1 second behind the runner-up and 5 seconds behind the winner. This is considered a major achievement in Europe, as a large number of cyclists participated. Teams from the US, Britain, Sweden, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Czechia and Kuwait participated, each with six riders.

Emerson back at Barcelona

MADRID: Barcelona have recalled the Brazilian defender Emerson from his loan at La Liga rivals Real Betis, adding to two new signings in the close season. The 22-year-old Emerson joins centre-back Eric Garcia and forward Sergio Aguero, who both switched to Barcelona from Manchester City. Barcelona said the defender was expected at the Nou Camp on July 1, but he may yet be called into the Brazil squad for the Copa America. — AFP

Hilal name new coach

RIYADH: Saudi giants Al-Hilal, the local league champions for the second consecutive season, have appointed Portuguese Leonardo Jardim as head coach. After winning local championships in Portugal and Greece, the 46-year-old Jardim coached Monaco, the French champions in 2017. Al-Hilal's season has been marked by instability with four successive coaches, all rapidly sacked due to poor results. — AFP

Van Bommel Wolfsburg coach

BERLIN: Former Bayern Munich and Netherlands star Mark van Bommel will coach Wolfsburg after agreeing a two-year deal, the Bundesliga club said yesterday. He will replace Oliver Glasner who has taken over Bundesliga rivals Eintracht Frankfurt. Van Bommel, 44, coached PSV Eindhoven for a brief tenure in 2019 and was previously assistant for Saudi Arabia and Australia alongside his father-in-law Bert van Marwijk. — AFP

Teen sends death threats

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean teenager admitted yesterday to sending death threats to English Premier League footballer Neal Maupay after becoming angry while watching a match. Derek Ng De Ren, 19, sent the messages to the Brighton & Hove Albion forward last year from the Southeast Asian city-state. He was angered after watching a match between Brighton and Arsenal in June last year, in which Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno was stretchered off in the first half after colliding with Maupay. The French forward later scored the winning goal in a crucial win for Brighton. — AFP

Sports

'Why not us?' Schmeichel dreams of Denmark 1992 Euro repeat

COPENHAGEN: Kasper Schmeichel has his boots planted firmly on the ground but the 34-year-old Denmark goalkeeper dreams of repeating his father's sensational Euro 1992 title. "You've got to dream big ... and the question we've got to ask ourselves is 'Why not us?'" the keeper recently told Danish TV2.

His father Peter was the hero of Denmark's unexpected European championship victory in Sweden almost 30 years ago. With his 129 caps from 1987 to 2001 and long career with Manchester United, Peter Schmeichel is a living legend.

Kasper Schmeichel — tall, blond and strapping like his father — has made a name for himself as well. Since 2011 he has played for Leicester, the surprise 2016 Premier League champions, and registered 60 caps for Denmark, including a brilliant performance at the 2018 World Cup.

As he approaches the end of his career, he hopes to fulfill his boyhood dream of winning the Euro, after Denmark, currently ranked 10th in the FIFA standings, failed to qualify in 2016. "When you're little and you play football, what do you dream of, playing or winning? Obviously you dream of winning!" he said with a smile.

"We've got a good team, I think. And we've racked up some good results and good showings in the past few years," he added. "When you look at the results that we can achieve when the pressure is on, we have every reason to be optimistic."

But apart from the fact that Denmark are not a favorite and that there will be a Schmeichel standing between the posts, there are not many similarities with 1992. Back then, Denmark — called up at the last minute after Yugoslavia were excluded over the war in the Balkans — were not at all prepared and managed to turn their relaxed approach to triumph.

Out of the shadows

There's no need for the squad to feel the shadow of 1992 hanging over them, Poul Ferdinand, sports reporter at daily Ekstra Bladet, told AFP. "Before the Euros in 1992, the team wasn't playing very well, there were conflicts with management. Today it's different, the team is strong and well organized," he said.

Schmeichel, who grew up and played his entire career in the shadow of his father's exploits, agreed, saying there's no reason to feel intimidated by the past. "The surname's definitely not been a help, that's for sure, but it's got no relevance to me at all," he told the BBC several years ago. "That's my name, I've always fielded those questions from the media, but I just get on with it."

"I think it would be easier to play a different sport." Denmark finished second in their qualifying group behind Switzerland but ahead of the Republic of Ireland, going undefeated while scoring 23 goals and conceding just six in eight games.

"The style has changed a bit" in recent years, said Ferdinand. While head coach Kasper Hjulmand has maintained the strong defensive game developed by former coach Aage Hareide, "he also attacks more".

At the 2018 World Cup, Denmark's play was lackluster but solid, enabling them to advance to the round of 16 where they fell to eventual runners-up Croatia on penalties despite Schmeichel's heroics. "It should be extremely difficult (for our opponents) to score ... but at the same time we have to increase our ball possession closer to our opponent's goal," Hjulmand said ahead of the Euro.

In addition to Schmeichel, Denmark will be counting on experienced defender and team captain Simon Kjaer as well as midfielders Christian Eriksen and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. Home fans will play their part too, as the Danes



BRIGHTON: In this file photo taken on March 6, 2021 Leicester City's Danish goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel warms up for the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Leicester City at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, southern England. —AFP

will stay in Copenhagen for their three Group B matches, meeting Finland on June 12, top-ranked Belgium on June 17 and Russia on June 21.

"Expectations are pretty high but ... we're realistic, to

make it to the semi-finals would be good," Ferdinand said. "The first objective is to qualify from the group stage in the best shape possible to continue our mission," Hjulmand said as he presented his squad. —AFP

Finland hope for a 'Pukki party' at Euro debut

HELSINKI: When Finland's players step onto the pitch at their first ever European Championship, the Nordic nation's hopes will be pinned on star striker Teemu Pukki repeating his recent goalscoring success. Pukki's 10 goals in qualifying propelled Finland to their first major tournament, while his attacking prowess this season was key as Norwich City secured promotion back to the English Premier League.

"Of course, Pukki plays a huge role in our squad," Finland manager Markku Kanerva said last week, adding that the side has "waited decades" to qualify for the finals of a major championship. In a country of 5.5 million where ice hockey reigns supreme, Finland's Euro debut has caused the popularity of football to skyrocket, with Pukki as the sport's new figurehead.

Celebratory "Pukki parties" erupted after the team qualified, while cans of "Norwich City craft beer" now line Finnish supermarket shelves, bearing Pukki's face on the yellow label. "But I'm always emphasizing the team effort," Kanerva is quick to add. "He'll need the other players to help him score goals."

For that, Kanerva will be able to call on the likes of midfielder Glen Kamara, formerly of Arsenal and now of Rangers, and Bundesliga-

based Joel Pohjanpalo, as well as Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky. New talents Marcus Forss of Brentford and Pafos' Onni Valakari also made the squad.

The 21-year-olds both scored on their international debut last November, inflicting a shock 2-0 defeat on world champions France. "We'll have to defend very well against the top teams, that's for sure," Kanerva said, adding that Finland's unity and level-headedness are among their strengths.

Icelandic inspiration

The "Eagle Owls", 54th in the FIFA rankings, will face Denmark, Russia and world number one Belgium in the group stage. "We're the underdogs in this tournament but I think that's something we like to be, it gives us power to show that we can really compete at that level," Pukki told a press conference in Helsinki last week.

The team will be looking for inspiration from Iceland, whose remarkable success during the last European Championship in France saw them knock out England on their way to the quarter-finals, roared on by huge support and their "Viking Thunder Clap".

Kanerva admitted that he recently invited Iceland's then manager, Lars Lagerback, to share with his squad the secrets of "the Icelandic miracle". With vastly reduced crowds this time round due to Covid-19, however, only a fraction of the 30,000 Finnish fans who originally bought tickets to Euro 2020 are expected to be able to attend.

Late bloomer

At 31, Teemu Pukki was something of a late



ST GALLEN: In this file photo taken on March 31, 2021 Finland's forward Teemu Pukki controls the ball next to Finland's midfielder Robert Taylor during a friendly football match between Switzerland and Finland at the Kybunpark Stadium in St Gallen, Switzerland. —AFP

bloomer: his career began in 2006 but his knack for notching up goals only truly came to light once he signed for Danish side Brondby in 2014. He moved to Norwich on a free transfer in 2018, promptly scoring 29 times in his first season. —AFP

Southgate eyes Euro 2020 semis as barometer of success

LONDON: Having reached two semi-finals during his tenure England manager Gareth Southgate says he and the team will have failed if they miss out on the last four of Euro 2020. Southgate's side defied expectations to reach the 2018 World Cup semi-finals.

They have been drawn with Croatia, who beat them in the semi-finals of the World Cup, the Czech Republic and old rivals Scotland. They will have home advantage in playing all their group games at Wembley.

"Yeah, it probably will," said Southgate when asked whether falling short of the last four would be a failure. "I think we're realistic about that, we have to live with that expectation. Are we ready to win? Well, we've been to two semi-finals so the next step is to try to go further."

Southgate — whose missed spot kick in the Euro 96 semi-final penalty shootout proved decisive against eventual champions Germany — said it pleased him there was such a buzz in the country surrounding the team. "We know the excitement around the team and it's great, we're now relevant," said Southgate.

'He is phenomenal'

Southgate included key players Manchester United skipper Harry Maguire and Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson in his 26-man squad despite both still recovering from injuries. He admitted both face a battle to be fit for the opening group game against Croatia on June 13 but their presence in a young squad was a bonus. With an average age of 25 years and three months, England will go into the tournament with one of the youngest squads.

"We know exactly where he is at," Southgate said regarding Maguire's availability. "Our medical team have been with him in Manchester and he hasn't travelled to join up with us. Maguire and Henderson both have a bit to do to be available but the possibility is that they can play a part and the fact is that they are such fantastic characters to have around the group. Henderson, with his leadership and presence, is having an effect on other people, especially the younger ones. Given we were able to pick 26, the opportunity to have those two with us was a straightforward one."

One of those youngsters that could benefit from the advice of 30-year-old Henderson and Maguire, 28, is 17-year-old Jude Bellingham. The twice-capped Borussia Dortmund midfielder will be the second-youngest England player to go to a major tournament after Theo Walcott in 2006. —AFP

tournament was a go. "Brazil will host the Copa America," the far-right president said, saying the governors of Rio de Janeiro, Mato Grosso do Sul and Goias had agreed for their states to play hosts, plus the capital, Brasilia, and a fifth yet to be named. Ramos tweeted: "Confirmed: the Copa America will be held in Brazil."

Bolsonaro said matches would be held without fans. Media reports had indicated the South American football confederation, CONMEBOL, was pushing to allow some fans, at least for the final. There are still plenty of potential pitfalls ahead as organizers race to pull together the June 13-July 10 championships.

At least six of Brazil's 27 states have said they will not host matches because of the pandemic. Opposition politicians meanwhile petitioned the Supreme Court to block the tournament, saying it would not be safe. They included the Workers' Party (PT) of leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who currently leads Bolsonaro in the polls for Brazil's October 2022 presidential elections.

'Insanity'

It has been an uphill battle to make the Copa America happen this year. Already delayed by 12 months because of

the pandemic, it was supposed to be co-hosted by Colombia and Argentina. But CONMEBOL, nixed the former on May 20 because of violent anti-government protests, and the latter on Sunday because of a surge of COVID-19.

Brazil, which hosted in 2019, has some advantages: a large economy, experience organizing big events and stadiums left over from the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. But has also recorded more than 460,000 deaths from COVID-19, second only to the United States. The coronavirus curve in Brazil has declined recently, from a weekly average of more than 3,000 deaths a day in April to about 1,800.

But experts say state and local officials lifted restrictions too soon, with just 10.5 percent of Brazil's 212 million people fully vaccinated. They warn rising infections and hospital occupancy rates indicate a new surge is coming, fueled by the spread of new variants. "It's impossible to describe the insanity of trying to hold an event of this magnitude here now," said infectious disease specialist Jose David Urbaz.

"The worst phases (of the pandemic in Brazil) in 2020 were three to four times smaller than what we're seeing today. We have this false sense that things have gotten better. The reality is, we're still in a terrible phase of very rapid spread," he told AFP. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Clinics	
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Kaizen center	25716707
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Rawda	22517733
Chest Hospital	24849400	Adaliya	22517144
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Khaldiya	24848075
Adan Hospital	23940620	Kaifan	24849807
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LeBron, Lakers on brink after Suns mauling, Nets advance

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker scored 30 points as the Phoenix Suns left LeBron James and the depleted Los Angeles Lakers facing elimination from the NBA playoffs on Tuesday with a crushing 115-85 victory. Phoenix took full advantage of the injury absence of the Lakers' Anthony Davis to dominate the defending NBA champions from early in the first quarter before romping to a comfortable win.

The Suns victory leaves Phoenix 3-2 ahead in the best-of-seven Western Conference first round series, meaning the Lakers must win in Los Angeles in game six on Thursday to keep their season alive. Even with a win tonight, the Lakers would face a trip back to Arizona for a decisive game seven, an assignment that looks even more daunting after Tuesday's blowout loss. "I feel like every game in this series, the next game is the biggest game," Booker said afterwards. "I think this was a real pivotal game for us. We wanted to protect home court and we came in here and showed that."

The Lakers took a 10-5 lead early in the first quarter, but trailed for the remainder of the contest, with Phoenix turning the screw with a dominant 21-2 run to start the second quarter. Phoenix led by 36 points in the third and a disconsolate James left the court well before the end of a grim night for the Lakers.

James led the Los Angeles scoring with 24 points, with Kyle Kuzma adding 15 from the bench. No other Lakers player made double figures. "We got our a** kicked — it's that simple," James said afterwards. "We've got to be better if we want to force a game seven. A lot to cover and see what we can do better in game six, but they pretty much just kicked our ass, there's nothing else really to say."

Lillard gem in vain

Elsewhere Tuesday, Damian Lillard produced a

record-breaking 55-point display but it was not enough to prevent the Portland Trail Blazers from slipping to a 147-140 double overtime defeat to the Denver Nuggets.

Blazers talisman Lillard once again lived up to his reputation as a supreme clutch competitor, single-handedly keeping the Blazers alive with a string of crucial three-pointers. The game five defeat leaves Denver 3-2 ahead in the best-of-seven playoff series.

Lillard's final points tally included 12 threes, a record for the NBA playoffs and only two behind the all-time record of 14 in a game held by Klay Thompson. The 30-year-old Portland star forced overtime with just 3.7 seconds remaining, draining a 27-footer to make it 121-121.

Lillard struck again at the end of overtime with a 26-foot three-pointer to make it 135-135. His final points of the night came with a 30-foot three-pointer that put Portland 140-138 ahead in double overtime, but a costly late blunder by CJ McCollum — stepping out of bounds — allowed Denver to snatch victory. Lillard declined to dwell on his dazzling performance following Portland's loss. "It don't matter, we lost the game," Lillard said. "At this point all that matters is that we can't lose another game in this series."

Nets advance

Nikola Jokic led the Nuggets scorers with 38 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists, while Monte Morris added 28 points. Michael Porter Jr finished with 26 points. In Tuesday's other game, James Harden scored a 34-point triple-double as the Brooklyn Nets advanced to a series against the Milwaukee Bucks with a 123-109 win over the Boston Celtics.

An impressive showing from Brooklyn's "Big Three" saw Harden add 10 rebounds and 10 assists while Kyrie Irving (25 points) and Kevin Durant (24



PHOENIX: Chris Paul #3 of the Phoenix Suns attempts a shot over LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the second half in Game Five of the Western Conference first-round playoff series at Phoenix Suns Arena on Tuesday in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

points) also weighed in with big contributions as the Nets completed a 4-1 victory in the best-of-seven series. "We've dealt with so much adversity through the regular season, it felt good to get some meaningful games in," Harden said. "It's time to lock in now." "They're a tough Boston team. They were down

a few players. But they kept fighting and fighting and made it tough for us," he said. "We're a special group, especially when we lock in defensively. If we can get three or four stops in a row — we can get it going offensively because we've got that much firepower." — AFP



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