

3 Kuwait key regional mediator and humanitarian donor: UK Ambassador



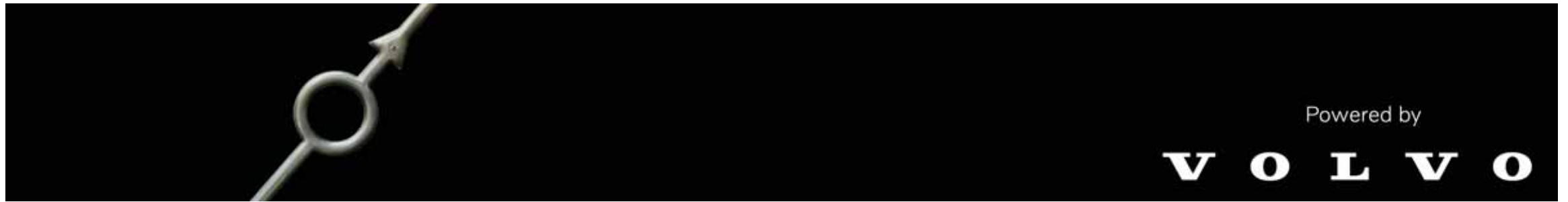
5 Ultraconservatives eye easy victory as Iranians to vote



12 Pandemic shakes up rankings of world's most livable cities



15 Jazz overcome slow start, Embiid shines for Sixers



More than 50,000 grade 12 students take paper exams

MoE urges unvaccinated private school students to take PCR test at Jaber Hospital



KUWAIT: Grade 12 students sit for their final exams yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh (More pics on Page 4)

KUWAIT: Students of grade 12 yesterday began their paper-based final exams with full compliance with health measures and strict precautions against COVID-19 across the country. In a press statement yesterday, Education Minister Ali Al-Mudhaf said the total number of public and private school students who took the general secondary exams is 50,743.

The minister, who visited a number of high schools, affirmed that education is the foundation of any country's development, pointing out that exams are the true measure and evaluation of students and the educational process.

Therefore, the ministry decided that grade 12 tests be held in schools with commitment to the utmost health precautions before, during and after conducting the exams. Mudhaf praised the efforts of the teaching and administrative staff and all the ministry's employees, calling on students to exert efforts and study hard to achieve their goals.

The education ministry yesterday urged private school students who have not been vaccinated

Continued on Page 2

Long, difficult path to political equality for Iranian women

TEHRAN: Iranian women's poor political representation could be set to worsen under an ultra-conservative poised to win next week's presidential election. Ebrahim Raisi, who heads Iran's judiciary, is the clear favorite from an all-male field of seven candidates to replace President Hassan Rouhani, a moderate elected on promises of social and cultural reform.

Women's rights campaigners in Iran have criticized Rouhani for breaking his promises to create a women's ministry and appoint three female ministers - instead presiding over a decrease in women's representation over his two terms in office. Only two women - Massoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and families, and Laya Joneydi, vice president for legal affairs - are represented in Rouhani's outgoing executive.

Unlike ministerial positions, the posts of vice president do not require parliamentary approval, and critics have accused Rouhani of not daring to submit female ministerial nominations to parliament for approval, even when moderates held a majority. Now, after conservatives and ultraconservatives swept last year's parliamentary elections, the chances of an ultraconservative president doing so seem even less likely.

"The biggest challenge for Iranian women is linked to their total absence from decision-making bodies," Elaheh Koulaei, a former reformist lawmaker, told AFP. Women's representation does not appear to be a priority for any of the seven candidates vying to replace Rouhani on June 18. Ultraconservative Raisi has paid little attention to women's issues, criticizing Rouhani's broken promises without revealing his own intentions.

Observers see little difference between pledges from ultraconservative Mohsen Rezaei, who has promised to have "at least two women ministers" if he wins, and reformist Abdolnasser Hemmati, who has pledged "at least one". But with parliament having the last word, those promises may count for little.

The number of female lawmakers today is just 17 out of 290, compared to four in the parliament elected a year after Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, said Zahra Shojaei, an academic who heads the Reformist Women's Party. The path towards the recognition of women is "long and difficult", said Shojaei, who served as reformist president Mohammad Khatami's counsellor for women's affairs from 1997 to 2005.

Continued on Page 2

MPs demand rights after bedoon man sets himself ablaze

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five lawmakers yesterday submitted a draft law stipulating basic rights for thousands of stateless people or bedoons, several hours after a bedoon man in his 60s tried to immolate himself. The man poured petrol on his body and set himself ablaze for unknown reasons. He was taken to hospital for treatment of deep burns and is in critical condition.

How Mumbai beat the odds, and the virus

MUMBAI: When COVID-19 arrived in India, few places looked as vulnerable as Mumbai. But a year on, South Asia's most crowded city has surprised many by tackling a vicious second wave with considerable success. Gaurav Awasthi even travelled hundreds of kilometers from his home on the outskirts of Delhi to get his ailing wife a hospital bed there, paying an ambulance more than a thousand dol-

'Model family' cut down on evening stroll

LONDON, Canada: A mother who was a "brilliant scholar," a cricket-loving father with "a welcoming smile," a teenage daughter who was "a friend to many"; a dotting grandmother: The victims of Sunday's truck-ramming attack in Canada, all Muslims with roots in Pakistan, were a "model family", friends say. The attack, dubbed a "terrorist" act by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, came out of the blue as the Afzaal family, taking one of the evening strolls they so loved, prepared to cross a street in the Ontario

The suicide attempt comes a few days after a young bedoon boy died while selling flowers under the scorching heat of the sun. The number of suicide cases among bedoons, many of whom are denied essential humanitarian rights to force them to reveal their original identity, has been on the rise in recent months in protest against their treatment by authorities.

Many bedoons, who number more than 120,000, are denied the right to education, health, jobs and even marriage certificates in order to force them to reveal their original identities. Bedoons claim they have the right to Kuwaiti citizenship because they or their forefathers had come to Kuwait decades ago, but the government says only 34,000 of them qualify for consideration for citizenship, while the rest dumped their passports to claim Kuwaiti citizenship.

lars to drive 24 hours straight. "I cannot ever repay my debt to this city," the 29-year-old told AFP, recounting an ordeal that saw him spend five days fruitlessly searching for a bed across several cities, including Delhi. "I don't know if my wife would be alive today if it weren't for Mumbai's health facilities."

The bodies began turning up early in India's financial capital during the first wave of infections last year - a man collapsing on a busy road, a rickshaw driver slumped over the wheel, a corpse lying in the street - in a grim echo of the 1918 flu pandemic. By May 2020, Abhignya Patra was working 18-hour days at the massive

Continued on Page 2

city of London. The lives of three generations were snuffed out in a moment: Madiha Salman, age 44, who was doing post-graduate work in civil and environmental engineering; her 46-year-old husband, Salman Afzaal, who loved to greet people at the mosque; their 15-year-old daughter, Yumna Salman; and Afzaal's 74-year-old mother, who has not been named. The couple's son, nine-year-old Fayeze, was instantly orphaned. He remains in hospital with serious injuries but is recovering, relatives said.

What had been an ordinary evening for the Afzaals was brutally cut short when a black pickup truck, driven by a 20-year-old suspect, took deliberate aim at them, jumping a curb and mowing them down.

Continued on Page 2



MUMBAI: In this picture taken on June 1, 2021, Mumbai's municipal commissioner Iqbal Chahal talks with his colleagues in their disaster management room at the municipal headquarters. — AFP



LONDON, Canada: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses members of the Muslim community and supporters during a vigil at the London Muslim Mosque on Tuesday. — AFP (See Page 5)

Local

Amir receives Kuwait's new Int'l Swimming Federation chief



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets 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 yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received the Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received the Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Badah Al-Muairi, Kuwait Olympic Committee

President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Kuwait Olympic Committee Secretary General and Executive Director of the Olympic Council of Asia Hussain Ali Al-Musallam on the occasion of the latter's election as President of the International Swimming Federation (FINA). His Highness the Amir wished Musallam success and progress to serve Kuwait in regional and international sports arenas. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister also separately received Muairi, Sheikh Fahad and Musallam: where His Highness Sheikh Mishal and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled wished the newly-appointed FINA chief luck and success in his new role. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Badah Al-Muairi, Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Kuwait Olympic Committee Secretary General and Executive Director of the Olympic Council of Asia Hussain Ali Al-Musallam.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Badah Al-Muairi, Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Kuwait Olympic Committee Secretary General and Executive Director of the Olympic Council of Asia Hussain Ali Al-Musallam.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Badah Al-Muairi, Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Kuwait Olympic Committee Secretary General and Executive Director of the Olympic Council of Asia Hussain Ali Al-Musallam.

Grade 12 students appear for...

Continued from Page 1

against COVID-19 to undergo a PCR swab test free of charge at Jaber Hospital tomorrow ahead of their final exams next week. Students will be able to undergo a swab test at the hospital from 8:00 am until 9:30 pm in order to attend their examinations, the ministry said in a statement.

The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) sent volunteers to schools to help implement preventive health measures against COVID-19, where they distributed masks and sanitizers to students and teachers entering schools. Salem Faisal, a student in the science section, said the maths exam yesterday was easier than he imagined. "I think because we took our classes online, they were easy on us where we had written and multiple-choice questions," he said.

Faisal praised the health measures taken inside the school, where students were required to follow all health requirements such as social distancing, wearing a mask, sanitizing hands and measuring body temperature before entering the test room. Another student, Noor Al-Mulla, agreed with Faisal, saying teachers kept obligating students to wear masks during the exam. "The social distancing was huge

between each desk. The exam was easy even though I didn't study hard enough," she said.

However, for students in the literary section, the French exam was hard for many of them. "The French language is a new topic for most of us. We learned a bit before the pandemic and practiced it only online. It is not fair to force us to take paper exams," said Eman Al-Hasan.

Ali Al-Omar, one of the students who had a hard time answering the French exam, said the French language exam is beyond the level a student depending on e-learning is able to reach. For Omar's father, Amjad Al-Omar, the main concerns were about health procedures. "I'm concerned if a student is infected but has no symptoms - he would be able to infect more than 600 others, and then these students can infect their parents," he said.

Ahmad Al-Zufairi, father of another student, noted that a paper exam will determine the student's ability to learn, whether in class or behind screens. "Some students did not put any effort into online classes. They were sleeping all year long," he said. Um Fahad, mother of a third student, complained that her son has asthma and he had a hard time answering the questions while wearing a mask.

Students taking the exams need to present a vaccination certificate issued by the health ministry or a negative result of the PCR test. According to the education ministry, the exams will be held in schools with a commitment to achieving the utmost health precautions before, during, and after the exams. — Agencies

"a brilliant scholar and a caring mother and friend," her friends wrote on a GoFundMe page that has so far raised Can\$470,000 to support Fayeze and the broader Pakistani community in London.

The London mosque and the National Council of Canadian Muslims have separately raised more than Can\$785,000 on the LaunchGood platform, while a fund-raising effort by a Muslim association at Western University has taken in Can\$700,000. Madiha Salman's Facebook page features pictures of her smiling children and of gifts they had made her for Mother's Day.

Husband Salman Afzaal was a "beloved member of the London community. Whether at his local cricket matches or at the Masjid (mosque) the first thing to greet you would be his gentle and welcoming smile," the GoFundMe post said. Daughter Yumna, a ninth grader, was "a loving friend to many". And Salman's mother, whose name has not been released, was "a pillar of their family" - someone who "cherished their daily walks". — AFP

'Model family' cut down on...

Continued from Page 1

The attack, in this city of 500,000 some 200 km southwest of Toronto, sparked anger and disbelief over another senseless attack on ordinary Canadian Muslims. "Everyone who knew Salman and the rest of the Afzaal family knew the model family they were, as Muslims, Canadians and Pakistanis," said a statement from their relatives. "They were always there giving and participating in spreading goodness." All were hard workers, and the children were "top students," it said.

Madiha Salman was finishing her doctorate at Western University in London. She had arrived in Canada in 2007 after completing studies in civil engineering and the environment in Pakistan. She was

How Mumbai beat the odds...

Continued from Page 1

Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital, better known as Sion. "It was non-stop," the 27-year-old anesthesiologist told AFP.

Patients' relatives described distressing scenes inside packed wards, with one man telling AFP he had to change his sick mother's diapers himself because staff were too overworked. A video shot inside Sion and widely shared on social media showed corpses wrapped in black plastic left on beds in a ward where patients were being treated. Every night, the city helpline fielded thousands of calls from desperate citizens, many with no chance of getting admitted to a publicly-funded hospital: Mumbai had just 80 ambulances and 425 intensive care units for a population of 20 million.

Something had to change fast, said Iqbal Chahal, a no-nonsense bureaucrat who took over as Mumbai's municipal commissioner last May. New field hospitals added thousands of beds, private facilities handed over their COVID-19 wards to the government and 800 vehicles were turned into ambulances. But these efforts could not combat the swift rise in infections. "We needed to chase the virus," Chahal told AFP.

A proactive approach focused on 55 slums including India's largest, Dharavi, where a strict lockdown was accompanied by aggressive sanitiza-

tion of public toilets, mass coronavirus screening and a huge volunteer effort to ensure that nobody went hungry. All positive test reports in Mumbai were routed through "war rooms" manned by doctors who would triage cases and decide where to send the patient, irrespective of "whether he is a minister, a big shot or a slum dweller", Chahal said.

As 2020 wore on, it looked like India might have miraculously beaten the pandemic and lockdown restrictions were eased. But in Mumbai, authorities didn't dismantle a single bed in the now-deserted field hospitals. This meant that when cases surged in March, the metropolis was much better prepared than many other Indian cities, where the health care system came close to collapse.

In the capital Delhi and elsewhere, patients died outside hospitals and crematoriums were overwhelmed. But not in Mumbai. Despite having a much higher population density than many other cities, Mumbai has seen significantly lower mortality rates. The city still suffered close calls, Chahal said, recalling one night in April when six hospitals faced dire oxygen shortages, putting 168 patients at serious risk unless they were shifted to other facilities. Everyone survived. "We always expected a second wave," Chahal said.

Patra recalls getting calls from colleagues in Delhi desperately searching for medical equipment. "As doctors, there is very little we can do in the absence of infrastructure," she said. Ruben Mascarenhas, co-founder of Mumbai-based non-profit Khaana Chahiye, said he would get dozens of messages every morning from people begging for oxygen and drugs - but as the pandemic wore on, the requests mostly came from outside the city. — AFP

Long, difficult path to political...

Continued from Page 1

After Iran's revolution, laws gave women a lower legal status than men. Unless expressly mentioned in marriage contracts, Iranian women must obtain authorization from their husbands in order to leave the country. Women are considered to have half the value of men in various legal aspects, such as inheritance and testimony in court.

Headscarves are mandatory in public, and women are subject to various types of discrimination, from not being allowed to attend men's foot-

ball matches in stadiums, to being banned from singing solo in front of male or mixed audiences. But the Islamic republic has also encouraged education for women, who for years now have outnumbered men at universities - a development that has transformed expectations and overturned centuries-old traditions.

Young women's access to higher education has opened up job prospects, particularly in business. "Women have shone everywhere in Iran when they have no obstacles blocking them - namely in education, philanthropy and entrepreneurship," Shojaei said. Former lawmaker Koulaei told AFP that "Iranian women have proved they can bring down barriers". "We need continuity, stability and the pursuit of efforts that are of course directly linked to the country's political situation and the process of democratizing society," she added. — AFP

Local

Kuwait key regional mediator and humanitarian donor: UK Ambassador

KUWAIT: The British Embassy made a press meet yesterday in the embassy, where British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis addressed the Kuwaiti media on various topics. The following are excerpts of her address to the local press:

Regional issues

Increased stability and security in the Gulf is a shared objective for the UK and Kuwait. There are many challenges in the region and we have many concerns in common, for example, about Yemen where the situation continues to deteriorate; and in relation to Iran where we are keen to see a return to its JCPOA commitments. Both of our governments agree on the need to make the ceasefire in Gaza durable, end the cycle of violence and support a long lasting two state solution.

Kuwait has a well-deserved reputation as a regional mediator and humanitarian donor. A recent example of Kuwaiti mediation is the resolution of the GCC dispute. This year Kuwait has also supported international humanitarian appeals for Yemen and Syria and has a proud tradition in this area.

The UK Minister of State for the Middle East, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, visited Kuwait last month. He held extensive discussions with the Foreign Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister and others on a range of regional and bilateral issues.

Travel and visas

Despite the pandemic, our Visa Application Centre remains open in Kuwait. Currently, Kuwait is on the 'Amber List' for travel to the UK. There are detailed instructions on the UK's www.gov.uk website which explain the steps to be taken in order to travel, and provides information about quarantine requirements.

Visas that have expired during the pandemic will not be renewed automatically. Applications for new visas can be made at the website www.gov.uk or at the Visa Application Centre at Al-Raya Tower. However travel restrictions are in place in the UK using the Red, Amber and Green system. This color coding is regularly reviewed - at the moment, every three weeks. Being vaccinated does not prevent you from carrying the virus, which is why the UK's entry policy, like Kuwait's, relies on PCR results.

We recognize that restricting foreigners from entering Kuwait creates many hardships and uncer-

tainities. The Embassy is in close contact with Kuwait authorities on the entry of British Nationals in general and some specific cases, but decisions on entry are ultimately made by the Kuwait Government. The entry of British Nationals is still under consideration by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. Other countries around the world, including the UK, are also restricting entry for public health reasons.

Politics

New opportunities to build on our existing strong and deep relationship are presenting themselves all the time. Traditional partnerships in Defense, trade and investments are supplemented by new links in Cyber security and technology - this year we are highlighting the particular strength of UK's innovation and technology capabilities with our Innotech campaign. Education links continue to grow and we are undertaking important work with the EPA on protection of the marine environment and more. There are also shared challenges to face, particularly in the areas of food security and health system resilience.

Joint Steering Group (JSG)

The JSG continues to be a strong vehicle for bilateral co-operation. The Group provides structure to progress shared objectives including Cyber; Defense; Security; Trade and Investment; Development; Health; Education; and Science and Culture. The last JSG was held virtually in 2020. The next session of the Kuwaiti-British Joint Steering Group will be held later this summer, hosted in the UK and hopefully in person if permitted.

Trade and investment

Kuwait has a historical investment relationship with the UK. The Kuwaiti Sovereign Wealth Fund was established in London in 1953 under the Kuwait Investment Office (KIO). The UK continues to welcome a wide range of corporate and private investments from Kuwait. And of course, Kuwaiti investment in the UK predates the UK's membership of the EU and has continued since the UK's exit from the EU.

Investor confidence remains high across the UK. We are keen to build on the support we provide to investors. Last year the British Prime Minister announced the creation of the Office for

Investment (OFI). The OFI will attract the most strategic investments to the UK focused on a range of sectors including Life Sciences, Clean Energy, Technology and Infrastructure. The UK welcomes Kuwaiti investors who wish to explore these important sectors.

And of course in the other direction, Kuwait Vision 2035 offers a range of exciting opportunities for British businesses. The Department for International Trade (DIT) based at British Embassy promotes business opportunities to encourage foreign investment and export trade between the two countries.

One key project is the Kuwait Airport Expansion which includes the new state of the art Terminal 2 and the construction of the runway. British companies have played a key role in designing the new terminal, drawing on our world leading capabilities. We are also working with Kuwait on water infrastructure projects where UK companies excel in technical and advisory services.

As we approach COP26, hosted in Glasgow in November, the development of renewable energy in Kuwait is an area of huge interest. The Shaghaya project will help Kuwait meet its ambitious target for renewable energy, and I hope will draw on UK companies with expertise in design, supply chains and grid management.

On the defense side, we are working on joint naval and air defense training which will help ensure Kuwait's security. Cybersecurity is another area where we are collaborating closely with the Kuwaiti government to address this challenge.

Today we will witness the signing of an important agreement between the Commandants of the UK Defense Academy and Kuwait's Mubarak Al-Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College. The Mubarak Al-Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College is the only staff college in the region to be accredited by the UK Defense Academy as providing equivalent training. This Agreement will deepen an already strong relationship, binding these two important Defense Education organizations even more closely.

Education

I am proud that there are approximately 5,000 Kuwaitis studying in the UK and the next generation of students is keen to continue their education at British universities. The Ministry of Higher



British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis

Education will award the next round of international scholarships between 19th June and 5th of July and Kuwait has recently published its approved list of UK university courses.

The British Council works with UK universities, with local agents, with the Ministry of Higher Education, and also helps applicants to prepare and certify their English via IELTS. The British Council and the British Embassy very much hope that the UK remains the number one destination of choice for Kuwaiti students.

Health guidelines

The United Kingdom is slowly opening up, people can now gather in groups which was not allowed last month when I was there. So these health guidelines are regularly updated. It is not true that passengers connecting flights in green list countries can enter the UK without quarantine. Accurate health and travel information must be presented upon entering the UK. Failing to provide accurate information or deliberately giving misleading information can result in fines or imprisonment and possibly both punishments.

The Military Aviation College agreement have not yet been finalized. Bilateral discussions between both the British and Kuwaiti sides are still ongoing. Kuwait still wants our support on air training, and we want to help. However, discussions and agreements always take time, we will announce updates on this matter once a final agreement has been reached.

It is too soon to tell the positive and negative impacts of Brexit. We are still busy signing agreements with countries around the world. The UK will always be a part of Europe, our people will always want to travel and do business with each other, and our security priorities are mutual. So discussions will continue on all of this. British nationals enjoy traveling and trading with European destinations such as Spain, France, and Greece. I wouldn't expect things to drastically change. I guess we will have to wait and see.

Defense Minister, US Ambassador discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received yesterday the US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. During the meeting, both sides discussed topics of common interest and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries, said the General Staff of the Army in a press statement. The meeting was attended by Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant-General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense, Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Head of the Military Cooperation Office at the US Embassy in the country, Brigadier General Darren Slayton. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Ambassador of Socialist Republic of Vietnam Ngo Toan Thang visited Kuwait Times yesterday and discussed matters of mutual concern with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

LOYAC director meets Belgium ambassador

KUWAIT: The Chairperson and managing Director of LOYAC Fareah Al-Saqqaf received Ambassador of Belgium to Kuwait Leo Peters at the LOYAC headquarters in Al-Qebliya School, where they discussed means of cooperation and cultural activities between LOYAC, its academies and the Kingdom of Belgium. The two sides discussed humanitarian and cultural issues of common interest and means of developing mutual cooperation for a better future. Saqqaf also welcomed the bilateral cooperation with Belgium and expressed her appreciation for the visit, pointing out that the European interest in civil work encourages us in LOYAC and that cultural exchange enhances the capabilities of young people and enriches their culture. Furthermore, she wished the ambassador more success in his mission in the country.



KUWAIT: LOYAC's Chairperson and managing Director Fareah Al-Saqqaf (right) meets Ambassador of Belgium to Kuwait Leo Peters.

India hails Kuwait's medical aid to fight COVID-19: Ambassador

NEW DELHI: The government and people of India have appreciated continuous relief support from Kuwait to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwait Ambassador to India Jassem Al-Najem said yesterday. Kuwait is in the forefront of global efforts in supplying medical liquid oxygen to India, Ambassador Najem said in a statement to the press on the arrival of an Indian military ship to the port of Mumbai from Kuwait, carrying oxygen cylinders and medical aid to support India fight the new mutated strain of the coronavirus. He said that oxygen supply from Kuwait has crossed 400 metric tons and 4600 oxygen cylinders were also shipped to India. Ambassador Najem reiterated Kuwait's keenness to help India deal with the pandemic and alleviate the sufferings of the friendly Indian people during this health crisis. Indian Foreign Minister Dr S Jayshankar is scheduled to arrive in Kuwait today, where he will meet with his Kuwaiti counterpart Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet



KUWAIT: This archive photo shows Kuwaiti relief supplies shortly after arriving in India. — KUNA

Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. Kuwait's Cabinet had decided to send urgent medical aid to India to fight the spread of the new mutated strain of the coronavirus. A Kuwaiti military plane had also arrived at Indira Gandhi Airport in New Delhi carrying 40 tons of relief materials from the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. — KUNA

Kuwaiti military airplane arrives in Jordan with aid for Palestinians

AMMAN: A Kuwait military aircraft arrived at Jordan's capital yesterday, carrying 40 tons of medical and relief aid to later be delivered to the Palestinian people. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani, a delegation from the Kuwait Society for Relief and Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization chief received the shipment. This campaign is being sponsored by Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of more than 30 Kuwaiti charity organizations, Ambassador Daihani said. The move embodies the "humanitarian, ethical and religious duties we have towards our (Palestinian) brothers," he added. Meanwhile, Member of the Kuwaiti Society for Relief Jamal Al-Nouri said that this shipment contains 30 tons of food supplies and 10 tons of medical equipment and baby formula. One part of the shipment will be delivered to Jerusalem and the other to the Gaza Strip, through local charities working in the field in cooperation with Kuwaiti Society for Relief, he added. — KUNA



Local

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News in brief

Kuwait could ban delivery motorbikes on highways

KUWAIT: Kuwait's traffic department could soon issue a ban on delivery motorcycles on highways over safety concerns, after receiving complaints about accidents caused by delivery motorbike riders not following traffic rules, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Two arrested with drugs

KUWAIT: The interior ministry said that Drugs Control General Department men arrested two people: an Asian and an Arab expat in possession of a large quantity of various drugs. The two were arrested at their residence, where 1.5 kg of heroine, 1.25 kg of shabu, 1 kg of Chemical, 1/2 liter of liquid shabu and shabu-making equipment were found. The two confessed to using and trading in drugs. Both were sent to concerned authorities.

Kuwait still on US high alert travel list

KUWAIT: The United States has eased travel restrictions to more than 110 countries and territories, but kept Kuwait in the high alert list of countries to which traveling is advised only in cases of emergency.

Kuwaiti oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 73 cents to \$70.60 per barrel Tuesday as opposed to \$71.33 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, globally, went up with the first going up by 73 cents to \$72.22 per barrel, while the latter went up by 82 cents to \$70.05 pb.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Grade 12 students arrive for the first day of their graduation exams in Kuwait yesterday. Vaccination for COVID-19 or a negative PCR are required before taking the exams. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh

KRCS distributes masks to grade 12 students

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced yesterday that its members volunteered in 65 high schools for grade 12 exams. KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said that the volunteers distributed masks and sterilizers to the students and teachers at school entrances, and also checked their temperatures. She praised the Education Ministry for its keenness to implement preventive health measures and precautions for teachers and students in order to assure their safety when conducting exams. — KUNA



Friendship Society covers treatment costs at hospital

KUWAIT: Kuwait Humanitarian and Friendship Society Chairman Ahmad Al-Sarraf said the society is cooperating with several parties to shoulder medication and drug costs and lend a helping hand to insolvent patients, particularly expats, according to the goals the society was founded for. He said the board thanks citizens and expats for their support and donations for the society's activities, which contribute largely to achieving its humanitarian goals.



Ahmad Al-Sarraf



Meanwhile, KHFS Director General Khalid bin Sabt visited the Director General of Salam Hospital and handed him a check to cover the treatment costs of several patients. He thanked him for the support the society receives from the hospital through reduced prices of required medicines. Bin Sabt also hoped that other hospitals will follow suit. He also handed a number of patients some very expensive medicines in cooperation with Mojel Company, which sold the medicines at a reduced price.



Markaz supports displaced families in collaboration with UNHCR

KUWAIT: In line with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program that aims to contribute to community service, Kuwait Financial Centre 'Markaz' partnered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support the needs of refugee communities. Markaz's support covered the needs of over 300 of the most vulnerable refugees, demonstrating the company's profound humanitarian responsibility and support to the UNHCR's initiatives.

Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Markaz's Chairman, received a trophy from Dr Samer Haddadin, Representative of UNHCR Kuwait Office, thanking Markaz for including the welfare of refugees in the

company's CSR program. Dr Haddadin also lauded the Company's role in setting an example towards humanitarian giving. Commenting on Markaz's intervention to sustain refugees with a dignified life, Abdullatif W Al-Nusif, Managing Director - Wealth Management and Business Development at Markaz, said: "We are proud of our partnership with UNHCR to help refugee families to overcome their hardships, through the unique initiatives of the organization in the field of sustainable humanitarian activities in the region."

Markaz considers the Corporate Social Responsibility a full-fledged activity. Its CSR strategy aims to fulfill its role towards society and the national economy. The strategy is founded on three pillars, namely, building human capacity, aligning Markaz's business environment with the principles of sustainable development, and promoting good governance in the business environment. Markaz's CSR include human capacity building, publishing research, achieving sustainable economic progress, developing the investment services sector in Kuwait, and promoting the performance of the public sector to drive economic development.

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Macron vows to defy security fears after slap

Gunmen kill 10 mine-clearing workers in north Afghanistan

Page 7

Page 6



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden waves as he and First Lady Jill Biden walk on the ellipse to board Marine One yesterday in Washington, DC. President Joe Biden and the First Lady are traveling to the United Kingdom for the G7 Summit and will later travel to Belgium and Switzerland, as part of an eight day trip through Europe. —AFP

Biden leaves Washington to meet allies

World still crawling out from under the wreckage of COVID-19

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden departs Washington early yesterday on the first foreign trip of his presidency, launching an intense series of summits with G7, European and NATO partners before a tense face-to-face with Russia's Vladimir Putin. Biden, 78, heads from the White House first to Britain ahead of a G7 summit in a Cornish seaside resort from Friday to Sunday. From there, in rapid succession, the veteran Democrat will visit Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, fly to Brussels for summits with the NATO military alliance and European Union, then finish up in Geneva, where he meets Putin next Wednesday.

With the world still crawling out from under the wreckage of COVID-19, Biden is casting his diplomatic marathon as a return to badly needed US leadership. But beyond the immediate challenges of boosting vaccine donations to poorer regions and reinvigorating post-pandemic economies, Biden's agenda features the even bigger task of shoring up a somewhat-tattered group of democracies against Russia and China. "This is a defining question of our time," Biden wrote in The Washington Post ahead of his trip.

"Will the democratic alliances and institutions that shaped so much of the last century prove their capacity against modern-day threats and adversaries? I believe the answer is yes. And this week in Europe, we have the chance to prove it." Biden's pitch marks a return to a traditional US worldview after four years during which Donald Trump flirted with autocrats and recast multilateralism as a dirty word.

And it's a message that the trip's choreography—setting out the military and economic might of the US alliances before Biden sits down with Putin—will reinforce. "He will go into this meeting with the wind at his back," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

Avoiding 'chaos'

Trump argued that the United States can't afford to be the world's policeman, an isolationist stance popular with his voters. The Biden administration has performed another 180-degree turn, declaring "America is back." According to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the alternative is China taking over or even "chaos."

Still reeling from Trump shock, European partners may eye Biden's vows with skepticism. There was friction last month when Washington blocked French attempts at the United Nations to demand a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Biden's ramping up of vaccine donations around the world also follows what critics saw as a long period of hoarding.

Biden's meeting on the sidelines of NATO with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan promises to be especially prickly. Biden has irked Erdogan, a sometimes Trump ally, by highlighting Turkey's dire human rights situation and recognizing the Ottoman Empire's genocide against the Armenians. Washington risks "losing a precious friend," Erdogan has warned. Yet Turkey plays a vital strategic role. Blinken told Congress on Tuesday that Turkey is often "not acting as the NATO ally it should be," but Washington has "an interest in trying to keep Turkey anchored to the West."

'More stable'

Expectations for the Putin summit are so low that simply making US-Russian relations "more stable"

would be considered a success, Blinken and other White House officials say. The White House sees the extension of the New START nuclear arms treaty in February as an example of where business can be done. Biden also needs the Kremlin to make progress with Iran, which is close to Russia. The list of tensions, however, is far longer.

Biden blames Russia for the massive SolarWinds cyber-attack, election interference, and at the very least harboring criminals behind ransomware attacks against the vital Colonial fuel pipeline and the US subsidiary of Brazilian meatpacking giant JBS. Biden will also press Putin about sabre-rattling on the Ukrainian border, the imprisonment of opponent Alexei Navalny, and his support for Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarussian strongman who forced a Ryanair airliner to land in Minsk, then arrested an opponent on the flight. It's a long to-do list for the US president on his first foreign trip. But Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that with decades in the Senate and eight years as vice president under Barack Obama, Biden has done his homework. "He's been getting ready for 50 years," she said. —AFP

Iranians to vote as Raisi emerges clear favorite

TEHRAN: Iranians will vote for a new president on June 18 in a poll many see as decided in advance, with ultraconservatives expected to strengthen their grip on power amid record low turnout. Just seven men have been approved to run: five ultraconservatives and two reformists.

With his main rivals excluded from the final list of candidates, judiciary head Ebrahim Raisi is the clear favorite in the 13th presidential poll since Iran's 1979 revolution. Campaigning kicked off in late May with little fanfare. Few campaign posters are visible in Tehran apart from those of Raisi, who took 38 percent of the vote in the last election in 2017.

The mood has been dampened by coronavirus restrictions on public gatherings, and observers expect many voters to abstain—something that tends to favor the conservative camp. Last year's parliamentary elections saw 57 percent abstention and allowed conservatives to dominate the legislature, after thousands of reform or moderate candidates were disqualified.

Ahead of the presidential poll, the Iranian press had widely predicted a showdown between Raisi and moderate conservative Ali Larijani, an adviser to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But after the powerful Guardian Council barred Larijani and other heavyweights from the poll, those who remain appear unlikely to pose a serious challenge to the ultraconservative judiciary chief.

Economic crisis

The office of president has limited powers in Iran, where ultimate power lies with the supreme leader. Current President Hassan Rouhani is nearing the end of two consecutive four-year terms, meaning he is constitutionally barred from running this year. Rouhani took office vowing to seek better ties with the West.



TEHRAN: This handout photo made available by the Iranian Young Journalist Club (YJC) shows Iran's presidential candidates (L to R) Mohsen Rezaei, Alireza Zakani, Mohsen Mehralizadeh, Amirhossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi, Saeed Jalili, Ebrahim Raisi, and Abdolnasser Hemmati, during the second televised debate ahead of the June 18 election. —AFP

But that stance took a severe blow in 2018 when Washington withdrew from a landmark agreement on Iran's nuclear program and reimposed biting sanctions. This year's election coincides with negotiations in Vienna to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. But a breakthrough appears unlikely before the election, and both Tehran and Washington have voiced doubts over the prospects of success.

The renewed sanctions have plunged Iran into a deep economic and social crisis, further exacerbated by the pandemic. Iran saw two waves of winter anti-government protests in the years prior to the pandemic, both of which were harshly put down. In a live televised debate Saturday, Raisi avoided clashing with reformists, instead focusing on Iranians' economic woes.

"Inflation is one of the serious problems people are facing today," along with the "dishonesty of certain officials" he said.

'More coherent'

Clement Therme, an expert at the European University Institute in Florence, said Iranian leaders hoped this month's election would help make the "regime"

more "coherent". Having taken control of parliament in 2020 and "faced with the impoverishment of the population", conservatives are "now preparing the ground... for a Raisi victory", he said. He added that other scenarios were unlikely, as rare opinion polls show that less than 40 percent of the electorate intend to vote.

With opposition groups outside Iran using social media to call for a boycott, Khamenei has urged Iranians to vote in numbers in a show of defiance to the "enemies of Islam". He also ordered candidates to avoid public statements on subjects other than the economy.

Raisi's challengers include ex-Revolutionary Guards chief Major General Mohsen Rezaei and ultraconservative former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili. The list also includes reformist ex-vice president Mohsen Mehralizadeh and central bank governor Abdolnasser Hemmati. Both are seen as reformists but neither has gained the support of the main reformist coalition.

If none of the candidates wins an overall majority on June 18, the two with the most votes will go head-to-head in a second round runoff on June 25. —AFP

Trudeau slams terrorist killing of Muslim family

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday denounced the killing of four Muslim family members, run down by the driver of a pick-up truck, as a hate-driven "terrorist attack," and urged the nation to stand up against intolerance. The victims—a husband and wife, their teenage daughter and the child's grandmother—were killed Sunday when the truck mounted a curb and struck them in the city of London, in Canada's central Ontario province.

The couple's nine-year-old son, orphaned in what police said was a planned attack targeting a Muslim family, was recovering in hospital from serious injuries. "This killing was no accident. This was a terrorist attack, motivated by hatred, in the heart of one of our communities," Trudeau said during an impassioned speech at the House of Commons. The Canadian leader later addressed an outdoor vigil of thousands at the mosque the family attended, speaking directly to the country's Muslim community.

"You are not alone. All Canadians mourn with you, and stand with you tonight," he said at the vigil, which was attended by all of the country's political leaders. He said Canada was "not immune" to the rising discrimination and division witnessed elsewhere in the world in recent years. "Together, we can counter this darkness, and this intolerance," he said.

'Model family'

The victims of Sunday's attack have been identified as Madiha Salman, age 44, who had done post-graduate work in civil and environmental engineering; her husband, Salman Afzaal, age 46; their 15-year-

old daughter, Yumna Salman; and a woman reported to be Afzaal's 74-year-old mother, who was not named. The victims, who were of Pakistani origin, were part of a "model family... always there giving and participating in spreading goodness," said a statement issued by their relatives.

Following Sunday's "brutal and horrific attack," the statement added, it was time for all Canadians, from the government on down, to "take a strong stand" against hatred, Islamophobia and intolerance. Canada's long reputation for tolerance has been bruised in recent years amid a series of hate and race-based crimes starting with a 2017 shooting at a Quebec City mosque that claimed six lives.

The country's Muslim population, just three percent of the total, has been left feeling increasingly vulnerable. Several Muslim organizations have demanded action to curb far-right extremist groups. The latest attack also came at a sensitive time for the authorities, on the heels of the shocking discovery of the remains of 215 indigenous children on the grounds of a Catholic school in British Columbia they had been forced to attend as part of a since-ended national effort at assimilation.

The suspect, identified as 20-year-old Nathaniel Veltman, was arrested at a mall seven kilometers (four miles) away from the site of Sunday's attack, said Detective Superintendent Paul Waight. Veltman has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder.

Several leaders of the Muslim community have called on the courts to deem the episode a terrorist attack. Among them is the Muslim Association of Canada, which asked authorities to "prosecute this horrific attack as an act of hate and terrorism." The episode brought back painful memories of the Quebec mosque attack in January 2017 and of a driving rampage in Toronto that killed 10 people in April 2018, among other attacks. —AFP

International

French President Macron vows to defy security fears after slap

Macron's assailant is to be charged with assaulting a public figure

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will continue to greet crowds during his travels despite a security scare that saw him slapped by a man in the south of France, a government spokesman said yesterday. Macron shrugged off his assault on Tuesday in the village of Tain l'Hermitage, calling it an "isolated event" and "stupidity", and he went to chat with and fistbump onlookers later in the day in the nearby town of Valence. "Obviously his trips are going to continue: The president will remain in contact with the French public," government spokesman Gabriel Attal said yesterday.

"It would be completely incomprehensible for people to be deprived of contact with the president because of an isolated individual who wanted to challenge" him, Attal added. Macron's assailant, a 28-year-old man identified as Damien T., remained in police custody yesterday and is expected to be charged with assaulting a public figure, which carries a maximum three-year prison term. He has been described as a fan of medieval martial arts and board games, while the French media raked over his social media activity looking for clues to his political sympathies.

He is a subscriber to several far-right YouTube channels. Popular evening talkshow *Le Quotidien* aired footage of one of its journalists meeting Damien T. and friends earlier in the day on Tuesday. One of the friends, who says he identifies with the anarchist movement, explains that they have come to speak to Macron about the "decline of France".

Police sources said that Damien T. had no criminal record and friends and acquaintances who spoke to AFP expressed surprise at his actions, describing him as a shy and placid character.

Safety debate

The slap has led to debate about whether it is safe for Macron to continue spontaneous meetings with members of the public. The centrist began a nationwide tour of France last week, promising to "take the pulse" of the country a fortnight before regional elections and 10 months before a presidential vote. He is widely expected to seek a second term in April and May next year, with polls giving him a narrow lead over far-right leader Marine Le Pen. The 43-year-old former investment banker decided to get out of his car to greet onlookers on Tuesday who were calling his name after a visit to a school in Tain l'Hermitage.

In footage of the incident, he can be seen striding over to a barrier, with his security detail behind him, before greeting Damien T., who grabs him with his left hand and strikes with his right. Experts highlighted yesterday how French security services advise French presidents on their safety, but do not have authority or powers to prevent them putting themselves in danger. "In the United States it's the opposite: the Secret Service decides if a trip is seen as too dangerous and no one opposes them, not the people in charge of protocol or even the president," Jean-Pierre Diot, a former



VALENCE: French President Emmanuel Macron (L) interacts with members of a crowd while visiting Valence during a visit in the French southeastern department of Drome, the second stage of a nationwide tour ahead of next year's presidential election. —AFP

member of France's specialist VIP police protection force, told *Le Parisien*.

"The Americans have a history of attacks," he added. Macron has been regularly booed and heckled in the street since coming to power in 2017, above all by anti-government "yellow vest" protest-

ers, but he had never been physically assaulted before Tuesday. The country has faced a string of Islamist attacks in recent years and Macron has been personally targeted during demonstrations in Muslim countries over his defence of French secularism and the right to blasphemy. — AFP

'Disinformation efforts' to discredit Belarus activist

PRAGUE: Not long after Belarus diverted an international flight, forced it to land in Minsk and then arrested activist journalist Roman Protasevich on board, an online campaign to discredit him began. Stories alleging that Protasevich had ties with neo-Nazis appeared initially in Russian-language media and quickly spread in dozens of languages.

Photos of young men doing Nazi salutes or wearing SS insignia began to pop up on social media, falsely claiming to show Protasevich in his younger years in what experts called a disinformation campaign similar to others against Kremlin critics. AFP tracked down the man in the Nazi salute photo, Konstantin Akhromenko, a young Belarusian, confirmed his identity and said the picture was taken "10-12 years ago".

"We were never Nazis. We took such photos just for laughs, because the Belarusian state propaganda called us Nazis," he told AFP. Similarly, the man in the SS helmet turned out to be not Protasevich but Eduard Lobov, a former Belarusian political prisoner who became a volunteer fighter in eastern Ukraine.

Journalist or fighter?

Many posts focused on the fact that Protasevich, by his own admission, spent some time with Ukrainian paramilitary units in eastern Ukraine after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 2014. Labelling him a "terrorist" and "extremist", they said that he fought with the Azov battalion, some of whose soldiers have been known to harbour white supremacist and neo-Nazi views.

Protasevich's family, colleagues and even some Azov fighters insist that he was in Ukraine only as a journalist, albeit embedded with Ukrainian forces battling the Russia-backed separatists. Some online claims about Protasevich contain photos of a young man in a military uniform and AFP has been unable to verify if it is in fact him.

In some of the pictures that bear a resemblance to him, the young man is wearing a military uniform; in others he is brandishing a Kalashnikov rifle and smiling for the camera. Often he is surrounded by soldiers wearing the insignia of the Azov battalion, a volunteer unit formed in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea.

'Belarus should be free'

Vladyslav Sobolevsky, the chief of staff of the Azov battalion in 2014-2017, said that Protasevich had joined as a journalist to "help Ukraine, and in the future to help his own country". "His views were: Lukashenko must leave, Belarus should be free," Sobolevsky said, referring to President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus since 1994. Likewise, Protasevich's father Dmitry, who lives in Poland, has said that Roman never actively fought as a soldier. "My son is and was a journalist. He was in Donbas as a journalist doing his job," he said. This was confirmed by both Azov commander Andriy Biletsky and by the battalion spokeswoman Anastasya Rymar, both of whom said that Protasevich followed the unit only to report on the action and did not take an active part in the fighting. The 26-year-old often mentioned his time in Ukraine in interviews, and there is a video of him being treated for a battle wound. But he always maintained he was there to document the fighting rather than fight himself. — AFP

Greens' election hopes hitting east German wall

BERLIN: Long popular in western cities, Germany's Greens are bumping up against a wall with voters in the ex-communist east that could cost them the chance to snatch Chancellor Angela Merkel's crown when she retires this year. The now 40-year-old centre-left ecologist party will gather from Friday for a congress to plot the course toward September's general election after a bruising performance last Sunday in Saxony-Anhalt state.

The poor vote showing cemented an image of lost momentum for the party, which for the first time in its history is staking a claim to the chancellery. "The Greens are still both: potentially the strongest political force in the country and a small niche party, depending on the place, time and situation," news weekly *Der Spiegel* said. Despite ambitions for a double-digit result, the Greens notched up just six percent in the country's poorest state—less than a point higher than their 2016 score.

"It wasn't what we had hoped," admitted a dejected Annalena Baerbock, also 40, the Greens' chancellor candidate. "Some of our messaging on climate protection failed to cut through to the voters," she said, despite devastating droughts in the

Iraqi Kurds in border zone flee Turkey's hunt for PKK

SULAIMANIYAH: One fine day in May, Yohana Khushfa gathered his 200 sheep and took off, along with 120 other villagers in Iraqi Kurdistan, fearful of the Turkish drones hunting Kurdish separatists. "Shrapnel blew out our windows and furniture," the mayor of Jelki, a village in the Al-Amadiya area, told AFP. "We were afraid for our lives and we left," said the 71-year-old, reached by telephone from a rugged strip near the Turkish border.

Since Turkey launched a new military campaign in northern Iraq on April 23, three civilians have been killed and four wounded. Amongst those, according to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a senior official from Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In the face of Turkey's actions, some 1,500 people from 300 families have fled their villages, according to Iraq's ministry for the displaced.

Others already left long ago, among them Berqi Islam, who fled in 2017 from Shiladzi, an area near the border where his brother was killed in Turkish bombing. With his family's farmland burnt down and no compensation paid by Iraqi Kurdish or federal authorities, he has yet to return. Erdogan, who has threatened to "clean up" parts of northern Iraq, accuses the PKK of using the mountainous border area as a springboard for its insurgency. The PKK has waged a rebellion in the mainly Kurdish south-east of Turkey since 1984 that has claimed more than 40,000 lives.

'Permanent presence'

Erdogan is willing to move "Turkey's ongoing military confrontation with the PKK from Turkey to territory the PKK controls or transits through in Iraq," said Aykan Erdemir, senior director of the Turkey Program at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. He said Baghdad and Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan and an ally of Ankara, appear to have accepted this. The growing Turkish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan "has been evolving into a permanent Turkish presence in the region", said Erdemir, a former opposition lawmaker in Turkey.

The Iraqi state, tied up with chasing down remnants of the Islamic State group and often challenged by pro-Iran Shiite armed groups "has no

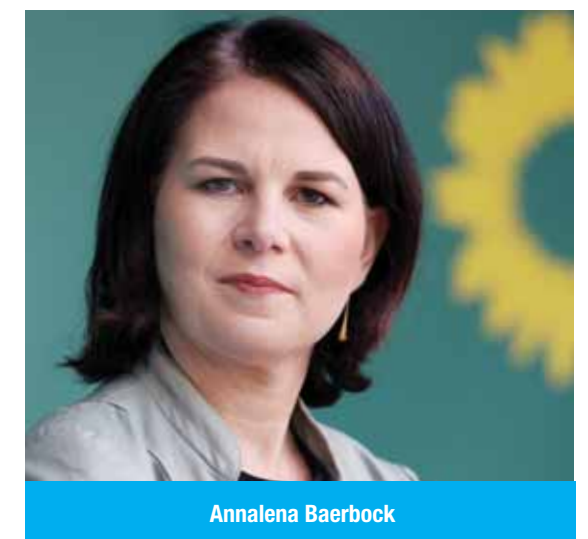
rural region in recent summers. "In the east, which is still marked by the shock of reunification, potentially costly ecological measures are not a big draw for voters," political scientist Hajo Funke told AFP.

The election handed Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) a resounding win with 37 percent of the vote, pushing the far-right AfD into a distant second place with 21 percent. The strong outcome put wind in the sails of CDU leader Armin Laschet, Baerbock's main opponent to run Europe's top economy after 16 years of Merkel at the helm.

Two-horse race

The Greens, out of federal government since 2005, had been riding high at the national level, with voters telling pollsters the climate crisis is their top concern, albeit by a much larger margin in the west. A survey last month also showed Germans hungry for change, with more than 60 percent hoping for a new government after the election. Senior Greens say they are happy the campaign is shaping up as a two-horse race, and that excitement about the youthful Baerbock, a mother of two small children, has endured among their energised base. But they acknowledge Baerbock, who is from the west but represents an eastern constituency outside Berlin in parliament, will have to make the Greens more than an one-issue party if they hope to win outright.

Greens co-leader Robert Habeck said the week-end election disappointment served as a wake-up call that they would need to "look beyond climate protection". He cited addressing the growing cleft



Annalena Baerbock

between rural poverty and urban wealth, particularly in creating opportunities for young jobseekers, and expanding public transport infrastructure as sure vote winners. He acknowledged that the "enormous political effort" required to bring down carbon dioxide emissions would have to be accompanied by "social measures" to cushion the blow to those whose jobs would be shed in the energy transition. The party is also planning a targeted campaign for voters over the age of 60 in both east and west, arguing that "climate protection is also a policy for your grandkids". — AFP

Moscow court considers 'extremism' label for Navalny group

MOSCOW: A court in Moscow was considering yesterday whether to brand jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's prominent anti-corruption organisation extremist, a ruling that would ban its activities and could see staff jailed. Prosecutors in April requested that Navalny's network of regional offices and his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) be hit with the label, saying the group was plotting an uprising with support from the West.

Lawyers representing the anti-graft group in the closed-door hearing said they expected a decision yesterday. Ivan Pavlov, an opposition-minded lawyer whose legal group is representing FBK said on Telegram that the Moscow City Court would film Wednesday's proceedings, meaning that in his view, "the judge intends to announce the decision today". The FBK routinely publishes investigations into alleged graft by officials at all levels of government.

Its most notable probes, showing sprawling luxury properties allegedly belonging to President Vladimir Putin and former president and prime minister Dmitry Medvedev. The allegations spurred massive street demonstrations that were met with swift and brutal police crackdowns condemned by leaders of Western countries.

Navalny's network of regional offices helped organise his smart voting strategy that urges voters to cast ballots for the candidate most likely to defeat Kremlin-linked opponents. Ahead of parliamentary elections in September—in which the deeply unpopular ruling United Russia party is expected to struggle—lawmakers passed legislation that bans members and sponsors of "extremist" groups from running in the polls. The bill, which was signed into law by Putin earlier in June, is expected to be used against allies of Navalny in the upcoming vote.

The law affects not only senior members and activists of Navalny's team but potentially tens of thousands of Russians who supported its work with donations. Leaders of such groups will not be able to run in parliamentary elections for five years, while members and those who helped finance their work will be banned from running for three years. — AFP



SULAIMANIYAH: File photo shows Iraqi Kurds lift banners and flash victory signs during a demonstration in the northeastern city of Sulaimaniyah on June 5, 2021, protesting a Turkish offensive in northern Iraq. — AFP

means of pressure on the PKK to make it leave", explained Adel Bakawan, director of the French Center for Research on Iraq (CFRI). In a sign of Turkey's growing confidence, its defence minister visited troops on Iraqi soil in early May, even though the dozen bases and other military posts that the Turkish army has set up over the past quarter of a century are illegal in the eyes of Iraqi law. Baghdad has summoned the Turkish ambassador several times in protest over Turkey's military actions, but the bombs continue to fall—taking away 2.5 percent of Iraq's forested areas, "an inhuman environmental crime" in the words of Iraqi President Barham Saleh.

'Setting up their own routes'

And the Turkish incursions are getting deeper—up to 20 kilometres (12 miles) inside Iraqi Kurdistan, said Kurdish MP Rivink Muhammad, himself from Al-Amadiya. "Until the latest campaign, Turkish forces were entering through the border posts, but now they are setting up their own routes to avoid the official crossings," added colleague Ali Saleh. Ankara, the PKK charges, wants a repeat of the situation in northern Syria, where Turkey has since 2016 conducted three military offensives that have left it in control of more than 2,000 square kilometres (770 square miles). Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar on Sunday defended his country's actions. "All of our operations only target terrorists, respecting international law and respecting the territorial integrity of our neighbours, particularly Iraq," he told reporters. — AFP

International

Gunmen kill 10 mine-clearing workers in north Afghanistan

Insurgents plant roadside bombs, mines to target govt forces

KUNDUZ: Masked gunmen killed 10 people working for the HALO Trust mine-clearing organisation in northern Afghanistan, the interior ministry said yesterday, blaming the Taliban for the latest attack to rock the violence-wracked country. The raid happened on Tuesday evening as dozens of deminers were relaxing at a HALO compound in Baghlan province, around 260 kilometres (160 miles) north of the capital, after a day spent looking for ordnance in the area. Baghlan has seen fierce fighting in recent months, with near-daily battles between the Taliban and government forces in several districts.

A survivor of Tuesday's attack told AFP that five or six armed men scaled the compound walls and gathered everyone together before asking if there were any Hazara present. Afghanistan's Shiite Hazara community is often targeted by jihadists from the Islamic State, who consider them heretics. "Nobody responded," said the survivor, who was wounded in the attack and asked not to be identified.

He told AFP the gunmen then asked the compound leader to identify himself, before shooting him. "Then one of them said 'kill them all,'" he said. "As they opened fire, we all tried to escape. Some were killed and some, like me, were wounded."

Taliban deny responsibility

The interior ministry blamed the Taliban for the attack, but a spokesman for the insurgents denied responsibility. "We condemn attacks on the defenseless & view it as brutality," Zabihullah

Mujahid said on Twitter. "We have normal relations with NGOs, our Mujahideen will never carry out such brutal acts." The UK-based HALO Trust told AFP "an unknown armed group" killed 10 staff and wounded 16 others. Violence has surged across the country since May 1 when the US military began its final troop withdrawal amid a deadlock in peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

In several districts where fighting has been intense in recent months, the insurgents have planted roadside bombs and mines to target government forces, but the explosives often kill and wound civilians. Afghanistan was already one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, a legacy of decades of conflict. The HALO Trust was founded in 1988 specifically to tackle ordnance left following the near ten-year Soviet occupation, and became a favourite cause of Britain's Princess Diana. The organisation's website says it has an Afghan workforce of more than 2,600 and has removed landmines from nearly 80 percent of the country's recorded minefields and battlefields. The United Nations Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov condemned what he said was a "heinous attack" on HALO workers. "It is repugnant that an organisation that works to clear landmines and other explosives and better the lives of vulnerable people could be targeted," he said in a statement.

Yesterday, the Taliban claimed it had shot down an Afghan military helicopter in the province of



Wounded people receive treatments at a hospital following an attack by masked gunmen which killed 10 people working for the HALO Trust mine-clearing organisation, at Pol-e-Khormi in Baghlan Province yesterday. —AFP

Wardak near Kabul, but the defence ministry said the aircraft had crashed due to "technical reasons".

Three crew members were killed in the incident, the ministry said. —AFP

'Hero' family rushes to aid Pakistan train crash victims

DAHARKI: As an express train hurtled through farmland in Pakistan and smashed into the carriages of another service that had derailed minutes earlier, a family of nearby villagers was jolted awake. "The blast of the collision was so loud that we woke up in panic," said Ali Nawaz, describing the start of a frantic bid to help passengers from the wreckage of the double disaster. "When we came out of the house we saw the train had halted, as we got closer to the scene we heard people calling for help."

At least 63 people were killed, according to officials, with dozens more wounded. With patchy mobile phone reception and a poor road network, it would be hours before emergency services could reach the site, some 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the nearest city of Daharki, deep in southern Sindh province.

Nawaz's family of around a dozen people lives just 500 metres (550 yards) from the tracks. The men raced to identify the most seriously wounded passengers to take to hospital by car while those who appeared more stable were loaded onto tractor trailers. The first passenger, a mother that Nawaz's cousin drove to the hospital, died in the back seat.

Back at the farmhouse, the women raced to fill water containers for the injured in the sweltering summer night. "They made a chain—the women would carry water to the midway point from where the men would carry it to the passengers," 63-year-old



DAHARKI: In this picture taken on June 8, 2021 Habiba Mai (R), wife of school teacher Ali Nawaz, who helped with the rescue efforts of the train collision, prepares tea for her family at her home near the train accident site in Daharki of Sindh Province. —AFP

Nawaz told AFP, cows and calves roaming the courtyard of his single-storey brick home.

'We did the best we could'

Hundreds of disoriented passengers emerged from the trains, slowly grasping the magnitude of the crash, which destroyed six carriages. They joined villagers in searching for survivors, clambering over the crumpled carriages to reach those trapped inside. Seat benches from the trains were turned into beds to carry people away, and bodies lined up on the ground and respectfully covered with scarves.

the hands of police — and some locals have formed "defence forces". Clashes have escalated in Kayah state near the Thai border in recent weeks. Locals have accused the military of firing artillery shells that have landed near villages and the UN estimates around 100,000 people have been displaced. "The junta's brutal, indiscriminate attacks are threatening the lives of many thousands of men, women and children in Kayah state", Tom Andrews said in a statement posted on Twitter Tuesday. "Let me be blunt. Mass deaths from starvation, disease, and exposure, on a scale we have not yet seen... could occur in Kayah state absent immediate action." AFP images from Kayah state have shown villagers manufacturing guns in makeshift factories as local defence groups go up against Myanmar's battle-hardened military. Diplomatic efforts to halt the bloodshed have been led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — of which Myanmar is a

member — but the bloc is riven with infighting and has managed to put little pressure on the junta.

An emergency summit in April produced a "five-point consensus" statement that called for an immediate halt to violence and a visit to Myanmar by a special envoy. But a special envoy has yet to be appointed, and violence has continued across the country. China — which enjoys exceptional leverage over Myanmar — has also been unwilling to condemn the junta and has refused to label its power-grab a coup.

Its foreign minister Wang Yi said Tuesday that Beijing's policy towards its neighbour "is not affected by changes to Myanmar's domestic and external situation." "China has supported, is supporting and will support Myanmar in choosing a development path that suits its own circumstances," Wang said at a meeting with junta-appointed foreign minister U Winna Maung Lwin in Chongqing. —AFP

Students were split into different rooms based on their level of COVID-19 risk, with contacts of confirmed cases taking the tests in smaller groups. But infected students with mild symptoms had to take the tough exams solo in brightly lit isolation rooms in the hospital or special locations. CCTV footage showed one student sitting at a lone desk and scratching his head as he read the exam paper, a bottle of hand sanitizer on the desk and officials monitoring him on a TV screen.

Other state footage showed masked examiners in protective clothing removing completed exam papers from infected students and hanging them up on a clothes-drying rack to be sprayed down with disinfectant. Provincial officials inspected testing sites in Guangzhou late last week and urged examiners to make sure "students feel comfortable, parents are at ease and society is reassured," the local government said.

Last year's gaokao exams were delayed as schools hesitated to resume mass activities due to the coronavirus, which first emerged in the country in late 2019. Life in China has since returned almost to normal, with authorities responding to sporadic outbreaks with aggressive testing and localised quarantines.

Guangzhou authorities shut down cinemas and



SHENYANG: A woman holds a flower as she waits for her child to finish the first exam of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), known as Gaokao, in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. —AFP

karaoke bars across the city on Tuesday, and have locked down neighbourhoods and ordered travellers leaving the city to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test. China reported eight locally transmitted COVID-19 cases yesterday, all of which were detected in Guangdong province. —AFP

News in brief

Attack on polio vaccine team

PESHAWAR: Two policemen were shot dead while escorting a polio vaccination team in north-western Pakistan yesterday, the second such attack this year. Healthcare workers flanked by a security detail were going door to door in a village near the city of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, when they came under attack. Polio has been eradicated across the world apart from in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where distrust of vaccines and vaccination teams is rife. "Two attackers came on a motorcycle and one of them shot at the policemen, both of whom died at the scene," district police officer Zahid Ullah told AFP. A second police official, Omar Ali, confirmed the toll. —AFP

French writer wins literature prize

MADRID: Celebrated French writer Emmanuel Carrere was awarded Spain's prestigious Cervantes prize for literature yesterday, one of the most important awards in the Spanish-speaking world. Carrere, a leading exponent of "autofiction" where writers fictionalise their own lives, is known for a string of books including "L'adversaire" (The Adversary, 2000), "Un Roman Russe" (My Life as a Russian Novel, 2007) and his new hit memoir "Yoga". In awarding the prize, the jury hailed the 63-year-old Parisian screenwriter and director for his "highly personal work that opens up a new space for expression that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction". Over a writing career of nearly 40 years, Carrere has built up a body of work based on self-exploration, which often recounts the lives of others. —AFP

CAR accuses French national of spying

BANGUI: Prosecutors in the Central African Republic (CAR) yesterday accused a French national of espionage, conspiracy and harming state security, in a case that has sparked tension with CAR's former colonial power. Juan Remy Quignolot, who was arrested in the capital Bangui on May 10, "has been placed in custody" pending an inquiry by an investigating magistrate, said public prosecutor Eric Didier Tambo. "The accusations are of espionage, illegal possession of military and hunting weapons, criminal association, harming domestic state security and conspiracy," said Tambo. He made no reference to any country or organisation for whom Quignolot allegedly worked. At the time of his arrest, the CAR accused Quignolot of possessing a "huge quantity of combat weapons" and as passing himself off as a journalist. —AFP

Fire kills three at Russian hospital

MOSCOW: Three people have died in a fire at a hospital in the Russian city of Ryazan, investigators said yesterday, with local authorities suggesting the blaze was caused by a faulty ventilator. The fire broke out in the intensive care unit of a state hospital in Ryazan, about 200 kilometres (120 miles) southeast of Moscow, at around 3:30 am local time (0030 GMT) yesterday, the local branch of the Investigative Committee said in a statement. Three people died from carbon monoxide poisoning and seven others were hospitalised, it said. A probe has been launched on suspicion of "causing death by negligence". Investigators said the cause of the fire was being established, but the governor of Ryazan region said it was likely caused by a ventilator. —AFP

UN rapporteur warns of 'mass deaths' from starvation in Myanmar

WASHINGTON: The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar has warned of "mass deaths" from starvation and disease in the wake of fighting between rebel groups and junta forces in the east of the coup-stricken country. Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the February putsch and a brutal military crackdown on dissent that has killed over 800, according to a local monitoring group.

Fighting has flared in several communities — especially in townships that have seen a high death toll at

Chinese students take crucial 'gaokao' exams

BEIJING: Teenage COVID-19 patients in southern China bent over test papers and scribbled answers alone in hospital rooms, taking the life-changing "gaokao" college entrance exams despite being in virus-induced isolation. Guangdong, a populous province bordering Hong Kong, has reported dozens of COVID-19 cases in recent days, prompting authorities to impose travel curbs and mass testing just ahead of the infamous exams, an annual moment of peak anxiety for students and parents.

The gaokao—which began on Monday and ends Wednesday—is typically the most stressful point of a Chinese student's life, with results determining admission into universities and shaping career prospects. The local government has dispatched hundreds of taxis and buses to ferry students from neighbourhoods affected by the outbreak to exam venues, with state broadcaster CCTV showing footage of drivers in hazmat suits spraying down their cars.

Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021

China accuses US of 'paranoid delusion' over innovation bill

US Senate passes sweeping industrial policy bill aimed at China

BEIJING: Beijing yesterday accused Washington of "paranoid delusion" after the US Senate passed a sweeping industrial policy bill aimed at countering the surging economic threat from China.

America's political parties overcame partisan divisions to support pumping more than \$170 billion into research and development, one of the most significant achievements in Congress since Joe Biden's presidency began in January. The United States Innovation and Competition Act represents the largest investment in scientific research and technological innovation "in generations", according to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

"We are in a competition to win the 21st century, and the starting gun has gone off," Biden said.

"As other countries continue to invest in their own research and development, we cannot risk falling behind." The bill is seen as crucial for US efforts to avoid being out-manoeuvred by Beijing as the adversaries compete in the race for technological innovation.

The foreign affairs committee of China's top legislature called the bill an attempt to interfere in the country's internal affairs and deprive it of its "legitimate right to development through technology and economic decoupling", state media reported. "The bill shows that the paranoid delusion of egoism has distorted the original intention of innovation and competition," said the National People's Congress foreign affairs committee, according to a report by

the official Xinhua news agency.

It said the bill was "full of Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice".

'Leader in innovation'

The package, a key provision of which addresses a shortage of semiconductors that has slowed US auto production this year, will help US industry bolster its capacity and improve technology.

The bill now heads to the House of Representatives. "Today, the Senate took a critical bipartisan step forward to make the investments we need to continue America's legacy as a global leader in innovation," US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in a statement praising the passage of the bill. "This funding isn't just about addressing the current semiconductor chip shortage, it is about long-term investments," she said.

Schumer called the measure "one of the most important things this chamber has done in a very long time, a statement of faith in America's ability to seize the opportunities of the 21st century". The proposal aims to address a number of technological areas in which the United States has fallen behind its Chinese competitors.

The bill allocates \$52 billion in funding for a previously approved plan to increase domestic manufacturing of semiconductors. It also authorizes \$120 billion over five years for activities at the National Science Foundation to advance priorities including



The United States Innovation and Competition Act represents the largest investment in scientific research and technological innovation "in generations".

research and development in key areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum science.

And it facilitates tie-ups between private firms and research universities. "This is an opportunity for the United States to strike a blow on behalf of answering the unfair competition that we are seeing

from communist China," said Republican Senator Roger Wicker, one of the main co-sponsors. Whichever countries best harness technologies like AI, robotics and quantum computing will be able to shape innovation to its image, added Schumer, before criticizing Chinese President Xi Jinping. — AFP

Bitcoin proves double-edged sword for criminals

LONDON: Regulators have repeatedly criticized the growth of cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin because of their popularity with criminals but the technology's transparent transactions can also work against law breakers.

The lesson is one that has been learnt by cybercriminal hackers Darkside the hard way after the organization extracted a \$4.4 million ransom from oil company Colonial Pipeline in bitcoin. Following the ransomware extortion, which forced the shutdown of a major fuel network in the eastern United States last month, the US Justice Department said it has clawed back \$2.3 million of the funds by tracing financial transactions.

"Following the money remains one of the most basic, yet powerful, tools we have," US Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said on Monday. The financial forensics to track crypto transactions are more complex on the decentralized and anonymous networks.

For a traditional bank payment, police can turn to the bank that sent

or received the money but for bitcoin, the registry that records these transactions—the blockchain—does not ask users to reveal their identity. But the blockchain is also public and available to everyone to download and piece together who might own the anonymous addresses where the bitcoin arrives.

While some users keep their bitcoin safe in an offline wallet, for example on a USB stick or hard drive, Darkside's bitcoins were always linked to an online account.

Without specifying how they came by it—whether by hacking or through an informant—US authorities have said they were able to access the "private key" to the hackers' online account.

In 2019, analysis of the blockchain enabled British and American authorities to dismantle a child pornography ring and arrest more than 300 people in 38 countries. The complex tracking of transactions has become an industry in its own right. Firms specializing in blockchain analysis have developed, such as Chainalysis



MIAMI, Florida: People enjoy themselves at the Bitcoin 2021 Convention, a crypto-currency conference held at the Mana Convention Center in Wynwood in Miami, Florida. — AFP

in the United States and Elliptic in Britain.

According to a Chainalysis report released in February, cryptocurrency transactions for illegal purposes reached \$10 billion in 2020, one percent of total cryptocurrency activity for the year. In 2019 criminal activity using the online currencies reached a record \$21.4 billion.

The total cost of ransomware payments alone made in cryptocurrencies

soared to nearly \$350 million in 2020. "Cryptocurrency remains appealing for criminals, primarily due to its pseudonymous nature and the ease with which it allows users to instantly send funds anywhere in the world," Chainalysis said. Elliptic analysts believe they have identified the bitcoin wallet that received the ransom payment from Colonial Pipeline to Darkside, and found that at least one other payment of \$4.4 million. — AFP

France to 'fight' for Amazon inclusion in digital tax

PARIS: France said yesterday it would make sure that internet commerce giant Amazon is subject to a minimum global tax endorsed by the Group of Seven wealthy nations. According to the plan, countries would be allowed to tax a share of the profits of the most profitable companies in the world at a rate of at least 15 percent, regardless of where they are based.

This would apply, however, only to companies whose profit margins exceed 10 percent. Despite Amazon's colossal footprint and a market capitalization of more than \$1 trillion, its profit margin last year amounted to just 6.3 percent, placing it firmly below that threshold.

But French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the broadcaster RMC that the potential loophole would not stand. The tax reform "must apply to Amazon," he said. "France will fight to make sure that it does." He said the tax reform had been negotiated at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development with the specific aim of making all digital giants pay their fair share.

"The problem with Amazon is that some of its businesses don't generate a profit margin of more than 10 percent," Le Maire said, singling out its deliveries branch. At Amazon's cloud-based services, meanwhile, margins are "very large," he said. The answer was to treat Amazon's businesses separately for tax purposes "so that all the very profitable parts are certain to be subject to this digital taxation".

Le Maire acknowledged there were several obstacles still to overcome before the world could



BANGALORE: Employees of Amazon and their dependent family members wait to be vaccinated against the COVID-19 coronavirus during a vaccination program, at an Amazon India office building in Bangalore. — AFP

apply the digital tax regime. One was that China's agreement was needed. "Believe me, that's going to be a very different ballgame," Le Maire said.

Another is the hope of some European countries to go beyond the 15 percent tax rate, which Le Maire said constituted only a "minimum rate." The final challenge is to make sure that "all digital giants are subject to this tax without exception."

The Group of Seven wealthy nations may have endorsed a plan to ensure the world's biggest companies pay a minimum global tax rate, but US tech behemoth Amazon may escape it. The landmark deal is supposed to help put an end to top multinationals shopping for countries with low corporate tax rates in which to book their profits instead of paying where they conduct their business.

By introducing a minimum tax rate of 15 percent

without exceptions proponents of the plan hope multinationals will have less incentive to go through complex efforts to shift where they pay taxes.

Top 100

There is a second "pillar" in the plan: countries would be allowed to tax a share of the profits of the most profitable companies in the world, regardless of where they are based. The caveat: it applies only to companies whose profit margins exceed 10 percent.

That would affect about 100 companies, including US tech giants such as Facebook and Google, but as some experts have pointed out, not Amazon. Despite Amazon's colossal footprint and market capitalization of more than \$1 trillion, its profit margin last year amounted to just 6.3 percent. — AFP

Musk, Bezos, other billionaires avoid US income taxes

WASHINGTON: Several of the richest Americans have paid zero income tax in some years, according to an investigative report published Tuesday that comes as Washington weighs new proposals to address tax avoidance by the wealthiest individuals and companies.

The bombshell report, by New York-based journalism nonprofit ProPublica, showed Amazon Chairman Jeff Bezos paid no income tax in 2007 and 2011, while Tesla chief Elon Musk avoided all payments in 2018. Some of the richest Americans "pay little in income tax compared to their massive wealth—sometimes, even nothing," said ProPublica, which did not disclose how it obtained the confidential tax data. Others who paid nothing to the Internal Revenue Service in some years included news industry billionaire and former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, activist investor billionaire Carl Icahn, and philanthropist and financial giant George Soros. ProPublica says the billionaires did nothing illegal in their tax declarations, but employed tax-avoidance strategies "beyond the reach of ordinary people." They also benefited from the way taxable income is defined in the US tax code, since it does not take into account the growing value of assets like stock and property, and only taxes proceeds from sales of those items.

The report comes days after G7 finance ministers endorsed a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15 percent, one of several tax proposals aimed at ensuring profitable multinationals pay their fair share. Other efforts include Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren's initiative to tax the super-wealthy, including the value of their stock holdings and homes, rather than focusing on income alone.

"Our tax system is rigged for billionaires who don't make their fortunes through income, like working families do," Warren said as she published the ProPublica article on Twitter. "It is time for a #WealthTax in America to make the ultra-rich finally pay their fair share."

ProPublica's report is based on IRS tax returns of extremely wealthy people over more than 15 years. "Taken together, it demolishes the cornerstone myth of the American tax system: that everyone pays their fair share and the richest Americans pay the most," the article said. — AFP



Elon Musk

Business

China factory prices soar but consumers avoid cost surge

World's second-largest economy works to contain surge in prices

BEIJING: China's factory gate inflation rose at the highest rate in over a decade last month, official data showed yesterday, as the world's second-largest economy worked to contain a surge in commodity prices. Factories so far seem to be absorbing costs rather than passing them on to consumers as domestic demand recovers from the strict coronavirus lockdowns imposed last year. The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, exceeded expectations to spike 9.0 percent on-year in May, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

This marks its highest jump since September 2008. In particular, prices in the oil and natural gas extraction industry rose 99.1 percent from a year ago, said NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan. "PPI is definitely a concern," said UOB economist Ho Woei Chen.

Metal prices started to rise earlier this year with a recovery in construction as well as steel demand for the car industry, she said, adding that recent operation curbs in major steel-producing city Tangshan drove also steel prices higher. "Probably, producers are absorbing some of these costs but it won't be sustain-

able for them to keep doing that," said Ho.

For now, PPI inflation has "already triggered Beijing's response including vowing to add supply and cracking down on bitcoin mining," Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting told AFP.

He cautioned that it would be unrealistic to expect a sharp drop in raw material prices in the near future, with "policy inertia" and a need to minimize incidents ahead of the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party on July 1 meaning an output surge is unlikely. But consumer prices were "generally stable" last month, Dong said. The consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose less than expected to 1.3 percent on-year, official data showed. China's CPI has been driven up in recent years by pork prices after an African swine fever outbreak ravaged stocks, but this has since mostly stabilized with boosted supplies of the staple meat. Dong said yesterday that "live pig production continued to recover and the pork supply continued to increase". Analysts expect a rise in CPI inflation as producer prices pass through, but believe the rise will be gradual. — AFP



SHENYANG: A vendor cuts meat at a market in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province yesterday. — AFP

Gulf Bank participates in INJAZ Kuwait's career forum

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank participated last Tuesday in the JAHEZ career forum, which was launched by INJAZ Kuwait for high school and university students, in addition to recent graduates. The program showcases local and international community leaders' work experiences to the local youth, with the aim of educating them on the requirements for the modern day workforce.

The JAHEZ forum aims to increase the youth's awareness regarding future jobs and the modern workplace, especially in light of recent and future developments across various industries and artificial intelligence. Through the program, participants will get a chance to discuss the various skills needed to boost workforce readiness and increase their added value when joining today's job market.

This year's program was held virtually, over a three-hour period, with the participation of Alghanim Industries, Agility, Floward, and Gulf Bank, which was represented by Hamad Bahrouh from the Bank's Human Resources Department, and who presented the various opportunities available for recent graduates at Gulf Bank. The program was broadcast via video conferencing app, Zoom, as well as various social media channels, with the participation of over 250 students.

Commenting on this year's program, Lujain Al-Qenaie, Assistant Manager for Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "We are extremely happy to participate in this year's JAHEZ forum, especially in light of recent economic developments, which have proven that now more than ever, job seekers

would do well to acquire the skills needed to enable them to excel in the sector of their choosing. At Gulf Bank, we are very keen on participating in these kinds of cultural and educational programs in large part due to our ongoing commitment to achieving economic sustainability. We hope that today's youth will find the best opportunities for them available in today's job market, and that we welcome them as our own colleagues very soon!"

It is worth noting that INJAZ Al Arab held their first virtual regional career forum on the 30th and 31st of March 2021. It is now being followed by 13 INJAZ member nations with their own individual

and national versions of the event, with INJAZ UAE and INJAZ Oman having already wrapped up their own career forums in April. The forums aim to boost employability while also highlighting potential job markets.

As part of its commitment to empowering long-standing partnerships, Gulf Bank has extended its support to INJAZ Kuwait, a non-profit, non-governmental organization for education and training in workforce readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. As part of their ongoing strategic partnership with INJAZ, and in light of the ongoing health conditions, Gulf Bank is also participating in INJAZ Kuwait's annual "Company Program" competition, which is scheduled to be held virtually before the end of the month, and in which students will pitch their business ideas to a panel of judges. It is also worth noting that last year, Gulf Bank also participated in three INJAZ Al-Arab programs: Job Shadow, Head Start, and a workshop on the future of Arab youth in cooperation with consulting firm, McKinsey & Company.

tive ruling on the illegality of using the test-manipulating technologies from the European Court of Justice, which handed down its decision in April 2020.

Penalized twice?

French fraud investigators determined that VW sold nearly 950,000 diesels with the masking devices in France, generating sales of nearly 23 billion euros. Consumer groups have assailed VW and other implicated automakers for selling cars that performed much worse in terms of emissions than they were led to believe. But in its statement, VW said a German court ruling in 2018, which led to a one-billion-euro fine over similar charges, had already taken into account the cars sold in France.

"For Volkswagen, the actions under investigation in France are included and identical to those already concluded in Germany, but the judges told us that they had to investigate further before making a final decision," a lawyer for the automaker, Nicolas Huc-Morel, said. VW has already challenged this decision with a Paris appeals court, which has yet to take up the case.

The French charges came the same day that VW's former chief Martin Winterkorn was charged by Berlin prosecutors over alleged false statements to a parliamentary panel over the scandal. Winterkorn, who resigned a week after the diesel scandal broke, has agreed to repay the company around 11 million euros in damages and interest, sources said Sunday. He along with four other ex-Volkswagen colleagues are due to go on trial together in Germany in September on charges of organized commercial fraud and tax evasion. The company has insisted that the cheating was the work of lower-level employees, but German media reports say it intends to seek a total of more than a billion euros in damages from its former executives.

Renault's denial

Renault, for its part, denied on Tuesday "having committed any offence" and said its vehicles do not have "any rigging software for pollution control devices." But fraud investigators who began looking into the allegations in 2017 accused Renault's top managers, including longtime chief Carlos Ghosn, of using or knowing about "fraudulent strategies" to falsify emission test results since 1990. Ghosn, who fled to Lebanon in late 2019 to avoid charges of financial misconduct in France and Japan, where he led Renault's alliance with Nissan, was questioned by French magistrates in Beirut.

But Ghosn was heard only as a witness, and would need to be in France to be formally indicted. Consumer groups have assailed the implicated automakers for selling cars that performed much worse in terms of emissions than they were led to believe. "Dieselgate" also became a key factor in pushing the European Parliament to adopt legislation last November that will open the door to US-style class action lawsuits against companies accused of widespread fraud or other crimes. — AFP

Al-Sayer announces winners of final raffle draw

KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons Co (MNSS) Group Spare Parts Division distributed the final raffle draw prizes to the winners of Toyota Genuine Parts Winter Promotion 2021 on Monday, 17th May, 2021 at the Canada Dry Parts Retail outlet. Electronic raffle draw through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Computer system selected the winners and they collected the prizes adhering to the ministry guidelines and maintaining the health precautions of COVID-19. Toyota Parts Division is committed to the Kuwait government norms and has Customers and Employee Safety foremost in its daily operations.

Desmond Lew, Business Director for Group Parts, Accessories and Logistics handed over the prizes to the winners. According to Desmond Lew "I thank all our valued customers for choosing Toyota Genuine Parts. Your valuable support made this special campaign a big success during these trying times. Congratulations to the lucky winners from the draw. At Al-Sayer we are passionate to deliver outstanding service and our products and services always reflect the Toyota value of customer first".

Top 5 winners of the first raffle draw

Prize	Names of Winners	
First Prize	KD 1000	Mohammed Motlaq Naser Alotaibi
Second Prize	iPhone 12	Ahmad Dojan Doan AIDiferi
Third Prize	iPhone 12	Mohammad Mazyad Tami Almutairi
Fourth Prize	Apple Watch	Nayef Nouri Abdalkareem
Fifth Prize	Apple Air Pods Pro	Ezathullah Rahim Haji Pour

Global tax still far from a reality

PARIS: After the accolades, an agreement among the world's wealthiest countries to set a global minimum tax on the biggest companies now faces a long, bumpy road to implementation.

The path is complicated even among the Group of Seven rich nations that endorsed the plan, with US President Joe Biden having to convince recalcitrant members of Congress. In recent years countries have previously clashed over taxing the overseas profits of big companies, especially US tech giants.

But the mood has changed as governments look for new sources of revenue after spending huge sums to protect their economies during the coronavirus crisis. The agreement between the US and its G7 partners Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Germany and Canada in London at the weekend is only the first step in a long process.

"There is still quite a long road to go," Elke Asen, a policy analyst at the Tax Foundation think tank in Washington, told AFP. The reform now goes to finance ministers of the Group of 20 developed and emerging countries at a July meeting. The "more difficult part", Asen said, will be the next step: Negotiations between 139 nations under the aegis of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

"I think we're probably looking at a few years here before it's actually finally implemented," she said. A source close to the negotiations said the G7 agreement "is a very important first step but there is still a lot of work to do to get" a G20 agreement and a majority of 139 countries to back the plan.

'Contentious details'

The reform has two "pillars". The first would allow countries to tax a share of the profits of the 100 most profitable companies—such as Facebook or Google—in the world, regardless of where they are based. The second pillar is a global minimum corporate tax of "at least" 15 percent, which aims to stop competition between countries to attract multinationals by offering them extremely low rates.

But "none of the contentious details" such as the precise rate or tax base "have been resolved", said Simon MacAdam, senior global economist at Capital Economics. Still, Nicolas Veron, senior fellow at the

In addition to the five winners, 70 additional winners were also selected who won Toyota Parts Vouchers worth KD 21 each.

Toyota Genuine Spare Parts Winter Promotion 2021 which commenced on 14th January, 2021, concluded on 16th April, 2021. With every KD 5 spent at any Al-Sayer Toyota Parts Retail outlets, customers were eligible to participate in the electronic raffle draw for a chance to win cash prizes of KD 1000 and many other attractive prizes. Total of 225 winners were selected in the three draws. Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer continues to guarantee highest level of customer satisfaction through quality assured genuine products at fair competitive prices. Al-Sayer Toyota Genuine Spare Parts operates 16 exclusive outlets across Kuwait to offer an enhanced customer experience through better accessibility and convenience.



VW, former CEO charged over 'dieselgate'

PARIS: German automaker Volkswagen said yesterday that it has been charged in France over alleged cheating on emissions testing, as its former CEO was accused in Berlin of making false statements over the "dieselgate" scandal. In a statement a day after French rival Renault announced it had also been charged in the inquiry, VW denied causing any "harm" to French consumers.

A source close to the investigation said it had been charged last month with "deceit over substantial qualities of a product, resulting in a danger for human and animal health."



DRESDEN: Volkswagen (VW) ID 3 electric cars of German carmaker Volkswagen are pictured at the 'Glassy Manufaktur' (Glaeserne Manufaktur) production site in Dresden, eastern Germany Tuesday. — AFP

A court has ordered it to post 10 million euros (\$12.2 million) in bail as well as a bank guarantee of 60 million euros—the same required of Renault—to cover potential compensation payouts, the source said. The scandal erupted in 2015 when a US investigation revealed that VW had equipped around 11 million vehicles with devices capable of producing fake carbon dioxide emission readings during tests, even though actual emissions could be up to 40 times higher.

The company later admitted to the trickery, dealing a massive blow to its reputation for solid engineering and well-built, high-performance vehicles. Fines, legal fees and vehicle recalls have already cost the company some 32 billion euros.

France's Peugeot, now part of the Stellantis group following its merger with Fiat Chrysler, is also under investigation over suspected emissions cheating. The French inquiry was delayed while authorities waited for a defini-

Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics, said there are enough countries behind the plan now, and "a desire to succeed which makes one optimistic". A country that decides to raise taxes currently risks making companies flee elsewhere, said Sebastian Jean, director of the Paris-based Centre for Prospective Studies and International Information. But when a "critical mass of countries are doing it... it's those that stay out that are penalized", Jean said. While Biden has the support of G7 allies, he has more work to do back home, as nearly half the 100 companies in "pillar one" are American.

Asen said the US Congress is traditionally slow at passing tax treaties and "that is one concern a lot of countries have". US Senator Mike Crapo and Congressman Kevin Brady, the top ranking Republicans on taxation in Congress, called it a "speculative agreement". They said in a joint statement that the deal "appears premature given the many unanswered questions" about the two pillars and their potential effect on US companies.

Irish concerns

Certain countries will take some convincing. Europe is divided between its biggest economies—with Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands backing the plan—and those that have benefited from their low tax rates. One country unhappy about the reform is Ireland, whose 12.5 percent corporate tax has lured the likes of Google, Facebook and Apple.

"There are 139 countries at the table, and any agreement will have to meet the needs of small and large countries, developed and developing," said Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe.

Switzerland, with taxes below 12 percent in some cantons, said it would take "the necessary measures to maintain a very attractive economic place". Outside Europe, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said he expected a "tough fight" in the G20 to convince China.

The country has a 25 percent corporate tax rate which drops to 15 percent for high-tech companies.

"It will be difficult to go much higher than 15 percent if we want the Chinese to agree," the source close to the negotiations said. Asen said the final deal could be a "patchwork where each country... implements it a little differently to make it better aligned with their own national tax policy".

"It may not be a 100 percent harmonized global minimum tax in the end," she said. — AFP

Business

Jazeera Airways to operate weekly flights to Heathrow starting June 18

First LCC in Middle East to operate a direct route to LHR

KUWAIT: Leading Middle East-based low-cost carrier (LCC), Jazeera Airways, yesterday announced that it will launch a new service to London Heathrow airport on Friday, June 18, 2021, making the airline the first LCC in the Middle East to operate direct flights to the airport.

The airline has scheduled direct flights between Kuwait and London Heathrow every Friday and plans to increase its frequency as travel restrictions ease. Commenting on the new service, Jazeera Chief Executive Officer, Rohit Ramachandran, said, "The new service to Heathrow Airport enables Jazeera to cater to popular demand for flights to London, including demand from business travellers, Kuwaiti students and the large segment of accustomed tourists who we believe are more than eager to return to London this summer, while many of whom own homes in the area.

"As the vaccinations against the COVID-19 virus roll out in Kuwait and across the world, countries are opening their borders for a gradual return of summer traffic. Jazeera pilots and cabin crew have already been fully vaccinated, and we continue to mandate strict safety measures in all our facilities. Our customers can rest assured that they will be travelling safely to London with us." Passengers should review COVID-19 regulations before book-

ing to ensure compliance with local regulations on vaccination and PCR test certificates.

Travel advisory

Kuwaiti citizens travelling out of Kuwait should ensure they carry their vaccination certificate. At the time of this announcement Kuwait is on the UK amber list and all travellers require a PCR test within 72 hours of their departure, as well as to book and pay in advance for two PCR tests on Day 2 and Day 8 from their arrival to London, in addition to completing a passenger locator form. Quarantine is for 10 days upon arrival, however an extra PCR test with a negative result that is performed on Day 5 can release the traveller from quarantine, with the Day 8 test still mandatory. Currently only fully vaccinated Kuwaitis can travel out and into Kuwait. However, an extension to all residents, who have been vaccinated, is under consideration.

Safety measures

Jazeera has also implemented many other measures to ensure the safety of passengers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its expanding fleet of Airbus A320neo aircraft are all equipped with hospital grade HEPA air filters. Every safety and precautionary measure is also a standard today on its aircraft and at Jazeera Terminal T5 in Kuwait.



NBK releases documentary 'The Path Towards A Sustainable Future'

KUWAIT: Underscoring its unwavering efforts towards achieving a future of sustainable growth, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has released the documentary narrating the construction journey of its new headquarters, whereby NBK presented a role model of sustainable modern architecture that will become a source of inspiration for all outstanding works of engineering for many years to come.

In the 35-minute documentary, the project executives present all the details, challenges, critical moments and difficult times that the work team consisting of 2,000 workers, engineers and administrators, succeeded in transforming into successes accu-

mulated over 21 million working hours that translated the idea into a reality and a new headquarters for the bank, and gifted Kuwait with an outstanding architectural icon.

All the details of the documentary reflect the main objective of building the new headquarters of the bank, which did not compete to be the tallest and most glamorous, but rather focused on creating a sustainable and green headquarters the bank, bringing all employees under one roof to provide them with a work environment accommodating innovation and excellence.

With the completion of the works, the bank's new headquarters, which rises 981 feet tall divided into 63 floors, with a total area of 1.36 million sq. ft, has become one of the new landmarks of the financial district in the heart of Kuwait City.

NBK's management is proud of the completion of the new headquarters, not because it is a high-rise and outstanding building, but because it symbolizes a long history of excellence, a present of develop-

ment and leading institutional work that provides a role model for modern banking entities, and also reflecting a futuristic vision to consolidate the bank's leadership and maintaining the course towards sustainable growth.

This edifice is one of the key achievements of NBK's management, which accentuates its proactive and insightful vision and prudent policies, which make the bank always able to overcome any challenges and sustain growth. It is also a continuation of the sincere efforts started seven decades ago by Kuwaiti merchant families who anticipated the future by establishing a national banking entity that was always an active contributor in promoting national growth and prosperity. The new headquarters also represents a cornerstone in NBK's integrated strategy to achieve sustainable development, a beacon for all in the field of modern architecture, and a role model for green buildings, as the building was fully designed and implemented in line with LEED Gold requirements, the leading green buildings standards.

stc provides Kuwaitis with an opportunity to join the telecom world

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, renews its open invitation to aspiring Kuwaiti individuals who would like to join stc's talented team and gain experience in the telecom and digital solutions world.

stc announced during a roundtable, attended by local media representatives, that it is keen to attract and employ talented Kuwaiti individuals from different fields and backgrounds, starting with fresh graduates up to senior executives. stc indicated that it is welcoming applicants across various fields and sectors, including technical and specialized positions dealing with strategy, marketing, technology and human resources, in line with its commitment to attract and recruit local Kuwaiti talent.

During the roundtable, stc's Human Resources team, led by Chief Human Resources Officer, engineer Ahmad Al-Hammad, answered queries related to the Company's focused recruitment strategy to hire talented Kuwaiti individuals. Below are more details from the roundtable:

Q: What are some of stc's competitive advantages that can aid in attracting talented Kuwaitis?

Al-Hammad: stc offers growth to employees through state of the art learning and development platforms to expand their skillsets and provide them with opportunities to advance in their career within the company. The company also recognizes and rewards employees that excel in their performance and achievements through various rewards and recognition programs.

Following the launch of its new brand, stc focused on redefining its strategy towards enabling digital transformation across different sectors. The transformation was carried out internally and externally to enrich the experience of the employees and customers. This resulted in an improved digital experience to employees where the company focuses on digitizing all employee transactions.

In hand with its strategy to support the Kuwaiti society and economy, stc emphasized its efforts towards attracting motivated and talented Kuwaiti individuals through its various internships and internal development programs.

Q: What are the key pillars of your HR strategy to attract Kuwaiti talents?



Ahmad Al-Hammad

Al-Hammad: The HR strategy is based on a vision to attract talents and provide them with opportunities to grow within the company to reach their full potential. The strategy is also focusing on culture and digital experience of the employee, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

The culture transformation the company went through following the launch of its 3D values (dynamism, drive and devotion) aimed at creating synergies between teams, with the ultimate objective of achieving the company's strategy, while promoting self-development, gaining knowledge, experience and technical expertise.

As part of the strategy, stc focuses on offering continuous learning and development programs, which aided in supporting the key pillars throughout the past period. The Company has now effectively implemented its e-learning programs through various recognized international institutions, such as LinkedIn Learning and Gartner, to continue offering employees with training and development opportunities.

Additionally stc have developed an internal recruitment platform under the name of Khatwa. Khatwa program is designed to not only strengthen an employee's career path but also to establish a career network by providing opportunities to experience different roles within the Company. This allows individuals to gain vast experience and knowledge regarding the operational and technical aspect of the Company, while developing their leadership skills.

stc is proud to be part of a regional group that follows international standards within its industry, allowing its employees to widen their knowledge base and gain experience to the highest levels in line with the best global organizations

Q: What are your goals when it comes to enabling digital transformation and how will this benefit the company and local community?

Al-Hammad: Primarily, stc's digital transformation strategy aims to enrich the lives of its individual and cor-



Al-Hammad with the HR team

porate customers by providing innovative solutions through our latest products and services available in the telecom and digital world. To achieve this strategy the company focused on enriching the digital experience internally with the employees through the employee portal, performance management system and various other digital tools and channels.

The importance of this vision became more evident since the global Coronavirus outbreak, as the Company managed to continue its operations interruption-free during the full lockdown period. This was achieved by implementing remote working protocol for all employees that was supported by the digital platforms which allowed each employee to carry out their day to day tasks and operations remotely without any impact. stc is proud to be the fastest and most effective to adapt the remote work process and culture for its employees in Kuwait, which was accomplished by the dedication and flexibility of our employees and the digital cultural transformation the company went through.

Q: What can you tell us about the Company's performance culture?

Al-Hammad: stc strongly believes in empowering its employees to achieve their full potential. The company's culture is performance oriented that aims at enabling the employees to achieve their goals in alignment with the company's strategy. The performance management system and culture go hand in hand with competitive rewards and recognition schemes that are part of the company's strategy to reward and recognize top performers.

Q: Is your current recruitment strategy limited to experienced professional, or does it include recent

KFH activates guide feature on its Instagram account

KUWAIT: Keeping up with the latest updates by digital platforms and through adopting digitization, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has become the first Kuwaiti bank to activate Instagram's Guide feature.

This comes as part of KFH efforts to reinforce communication and constructive interaction with customers by facilitating access to its content on its social media channels, and to learn more about the bank's services and products, awareness campaigns and various offers.

The new feature effectively and quickly provides customers with all information about KFH's services and events, such as e-banking solutions, awareness campaign "Diraya", community events, activities and contests of interest to the public, customers and followers.

The Guide feature has a consistent content categorized into different windows, each one containing all the materials that fall under it without overlapping, which facilitates search and access process in an easy and flexible way. KFH focuses on enhancing the role of advanced digital tools in analyzing customers' thoughts and measuring their interaction in order to be in line with their demands.

KFH is keen to be active in various electronic and social media channels, as part of a strategy to always be the closest to customers and the public, and to learn more about their interests and interact with them, as well as getting involved in different social events. KFH's social media accounts have over one million followers which confirms the efficiency of its social media strategy. The bank also aims to target the youth segment in the first place, as they constitute the highest follow-up rate, reaching about 70 percent of the total followers.

As KFH's social media accounts witness a positive interaction from followers, the bank seeks to provide more innovative and creative content. KFH is keen to invest in social media channels in distinctive ways that make it closer to its customers and the public, paving the way for customers to express their opinions and suggestions regarding the products, services, campaigns, offers and discounts offered by the bank.



Lifestyle | Features



White tiger cub Yanek plays with her mother at the National Zoo in Havana. — AFP photos



White tiger cub Yanek plays with a sibling at the National Zoo in Havana.



White tiger cub Yanek plays with her mother.

HAVANA ZOO INTRODUCES YANEK, A RARE WHITE TIGER, CUBA'S FIRST

A Havana zoo has introduced the country's first-ever white Bengal tiger, a rare type not known to exist in the wild. Mother Fiona gave birth to four cubs — including white tiger Yanek — at the National Zoo of Cuba in March; but only now, it said, are the cubs independent enough to be presented to the public as they play and swim in their special zoo pool. "We are very happy that a white tiger has been born in Cuba; it is the first time that this has happened," said the animals' caretaker Angel Cordero. They were also the first tiger cubs born on Cuban soil in more than 20 years.

Along with Yanek, Fiona and fellow Bengal tiger Garfield are the proud parents of sisters Melissa and Gaby, and

brother Miguel. Conservation group WWF describes white tigers as "a genetic anomaly," with none known to exist in the wild. There are several dozen in captivity. White tigers are Bengal tigers whose parents carry a recessive gene, according to the nonprofit Wildcat Sanctuary in Minnesota, which helps and studies felines. They are not albinos or a separate species.

Some parks and zoos inbreed white tigers, as the rarity draws more visitors, though this is often at the cost of malformations and other genetic problems, according to the sanctuary website. The Asian big cats are classified as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The WWF says

about 3,900 tigers remain in the wild, "but much more work is needed to protect this species if we are to secure its future in the wild."

"In some areas, including much of Southeast Asia, tigers are still in crisis and declining in number," the WWF website says. Cordero said the cubs were displaying typical "aggressive" behavior, mimicking their mother as they mock-attack one another. At the zoo, Fiona receives 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of meat per day, while the cubs, already weighing in at between eight and 11 kilograms each, get two kilograms of meat each. — AFP



Veterinarians treat a white tiger cub at the National Zoo in Havana.



White tiger cub Yanek plays with her mother and siblings.

MTV Video Music Awards set for September 12 in New York

The MTV Video Music Awards will take place on September 12 in New York, the channel announced Tuesday — the latest news that live entertainment is coming back in the city as it emerges from the pandemic. MTV has yet to announce which artists will perform at the event, to be staged in front of an audience at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Last year, MTV initially announced that the 2020 edition would be held at the same arena before canceling that plan and hosting a scattered, behind-closed-doors ceremony with pre-recorded musical performances in several New York locations.

The eligibility period for this year's videos is from July 2020 to June 2021. Cultural activities are returning to New York as the city reopens in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, boosted by vaccinations. Also on Tuesday, Madison Square Garden announced that it would host on June 20 the first event in front of a capacity crowd since coronavirus struck in March 2020 — a Foo Fighters concert. Only spectators that can prove they have been vaccinated against Covid-19 will be allowed in, the venue said. "We've been waiting for this day for over a year. And Madison Square Garden is going to feel that hard," said lead singer Dave Grohl.

On Monday, Bruce Springsteen announced that his hit Broadway show will reopen on June 26, also in front of vaccinated audiences. And Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the city is planning a major concert in Central Park in August to celebrate the city's "rebirth" as part of a week of "homecoming" events. — AFP



In this file photo US rapper Lil Nas X poses with the Song of the Year Award in the press room during the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey. — AFP

Morose no more: The French savor post-lockdown life

Are the French recapturing their traditional joie de vivre after a year of COVID lockdowns robbed the country of some of its most cherished traditions? As France yesterday enjoyed the

reopening of indoor restaurant dining and a relaxation of a curfew, the third phase in a four-stage lifting of virus restrictions, the mood was unusually buoyant. In Paris, where cafe terraces have been thronged nightly since reopening outside on May 19, the stereotypical surly waiter has all but vanished, replaced by smiling servers content to wait tables again.

Customers, too, are still in celebratory mode, three weeks after entertainment and cultural venues flung open their doors after being shuttered for seven months.

UK composer vows to defy government on theatre reopening

Theatre impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber said in an interview published yesterday he is prepared to be arrested if the British government does not lift all coronavirus restrictions. All measures are due to be eased on June 21 but there is increasing concern the move could be delayed because of rising infection rates in some parts of the country. Lloyd-Webber, who has had a string of hits in London's West End and on Broadway in New York, said postponement would be another blow for the hard-hit entertainment industry.

The "Cats" and "Evita" composer has been among the loudest voices in the sector calling for theatres to reopen in full, insisting they are "completely safe" for the public. Lloyd-Webber is putting on his first musical in six years, "Cinderella", next month, and said whatever happens, "we are going to open, come hell or high water". Asked by The Daily Telegraph what he would do if the government postponed the lifting of restrictions, he said: "We will say: 'Come to the theatre and arrest us'."

He also promised to either sue the government or demand compensation if

his new show could not open, outlining the huge financial burden of closures. It is costing £1 million (\$1.4 million, 1.2 million euros) a month to keep his six theatres closed and he has remortgaged his central London house to finance his business, he added. He also said there was a "real risk" of having to sell some of his theatres if reopening was postponed. Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said he "completely sympathized" with Lloyd-Webber's plight and said the government wanted to get the-

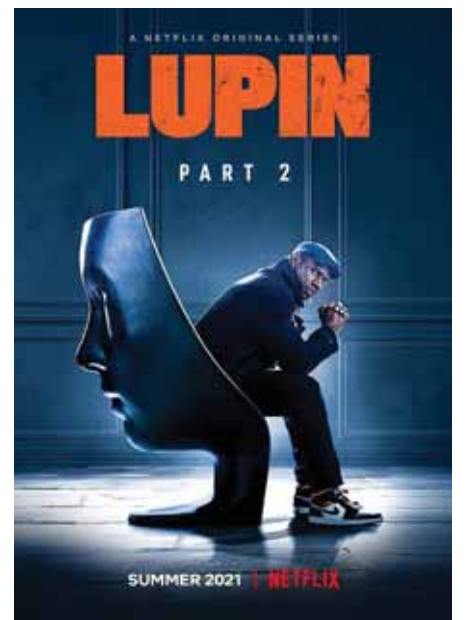


Andrew Lloyd Webber

atres reopened. "I know that people are desperate to go to them, tickets are selling fast for all those productions because people have been away too long," he told Sky News television. "But you have just got a few more days to wait until the judgment that the Prime Minister (Boris Johnson) is going to make on the basis of the data." A decision on lifting all social distancing measures is expected next week. — AFP

'Lupin' back to steal the show on Netflix

Five months after it became the first major streaming hit of 2021, "Lupin" will return Friday with fans desperate to see how Omar Sy's gentleman-burglar escapes the latest cliffhanger. Netflix delivered only the first five episodes of the show in January, inspired by the cat-and-mouse novels of Maurice Leblanc from the early 20th century, because the pandemic interrupted filming last year. Sy plays Assane Diop, a fan of the novels who uses the character of Lupin as he seeks vengeance for his wrongly-accused father. The combination of a charismatic lead, Parisian backdrops and an undercurrent of race relations made it the first bona fide made-in-France hit for Netflix, which is investing heavily in the country.



But despite the winning ingredients, Sy himself seemed rather perplexed when asked why it was so popular. "I really don't know!" he told reporters at a Netflix round-table, laughing. "When something like that happens the thing is just to embrace it and don't try to understand. It's just beautiful, I'm very happy and thrilled." Writer George Kay, who also helped pen recent TV hits "Criminal" and "Killing Eve", said the season takes a tense turn in the second half. Assane finds himself "in a conflicted situation: do I keep pushing to get revenge for my father or do I focus on being a good dad," he said at the round-table.

But Kay, who worked alongside French writer Francoise Uzan, said "Lupin" remained a family-friendly show and "the central thing is to make it as fun as possible". Paris retains its starring role in the new season, with the Musee d'Orsay, catacombs and Chatelet Theatre making for sumptuous backdrops to the action.

Netflix France boost

Dubbed into some 15 languages, and subtitled into 30, "Lupin" topped the Netflix charts in a dozen countries in January, including the first time a French show had done so in the United States. The company said 76 million households watched the first installment in the first 28 days after its release, beating its main non-anglophone rival, the Spanish crime drama "La Casa de Papel" (which clocked 65 million household views for its fourth series). It was a much-needed boost for Netflix after its first foray into the French market, 2016's "Marseille", was panned by critics.

The streaming giant had a rocky start to its relations in France, where it has sometimes been viewed as a threat to the country's beloved cinemas. But having opened a swanky new Paris headquarters last year, Netflix has made significant inroads, partnering with creative associations and schools, and announcing a major production boost for 2021, with 27 films, series and documentaries in the pipeline. "Lupin" has also been a boost for French bookshops, with new editions of Maurice Leblanc's classics racking up more than 100,000 sales since January, according to publisher Hachette. A smart social media campaign has also helped the show, with one ad featuring Sy in disguise putting up a poster on the Paris metro. A recent post snuck a web address (assane-diop.com) into a trailer. The website revealed that a third instalment of "Lupin" is already on the way. — AFP

gotten," the paper noted in an editorial on May 31.

A sharp fall-off in infections after a third lockdown in April—the number of patients in intensive care has more than halved to under 2,500 — and a spell of good weather have given the French further cause for what President Emmanuel Macron described on Tuesday as "a form of lucid optimism." The dramatic turnaround in France's once-blighted vaccination drive has also given the country cause for cheer. — AFP

cent. The curfew and capacity limits are set to be scrapped altogether on June 30 if infections, which have fallen sharply in the last month, continue to fall.

For Le Monde daily, France is in the throes of a "covida"—a COVID-era cultural reawakening reminiscent of the "movida" that transformed Spain in the 1980s, after the death of dictator Francisco Franco. "Since the partial lifting of health restrictions on May 19 the country has gone in record time from a state of depression to a form of insouciance we had nearly for-

Lifestyle | Features

New Yorkers seek to shed pandemic pounds

As fitness-conscious New Yorkers emerge from the pandemic, many residents are hitting the gym to get back in shape, but without putting too much pressure on themselves after the psychological stresses of the past 15 months. Thirty-year-old Benny Maidenbaum comes from a family of sportsmen and said he's always been "very active." Basketball twice a week and pounding sidewalks as a real estate agent kept him fit. But in March 2020, all that stopped. "I had no activity, was sitting at home. I gained weight, like 15-20 pounds (seven-nine kilograms). They call it 'corona weight,'" he tells AFP at TS fitness studio on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Health journals and articles have indeed talked about "Quarantine 15"—unwanted extra pounds gained from the upheaval of our daily routines, including lack of activities and emotional eating caused by the anxiety of the pandemic. About 42 percent of American adults said they had gained more weight than they intended—an average of 29 pounds—during the pandemic, according to a survey conducted by the Harris Poll for the American Psychological Association.

Angela Thuman, a 42-year-old bank worker, lost 32 pounds over the winter



Noam Tamir, Founder & CEO of TS Fitness coaches Benny Maidenbaum at TS Fitness in New York City. — AFP photos



before the pandemic struck. She put it back on during the COVID crisis. "It made me depressed and my anxiety was sky high. I had no motivation whatsoever," said Thuman, who lives in Maryland. Maidenbaum said he found himself stuck at home eating junk food, without any interest in healthy options. "It's like you're in a hole. There is no way out," he said. Maidenbaum says TS Fitness has helped him "break the cycle" of unhealthy living.

Founder Noam Tamir says the studio has seen attendance increase significantly in recent weeks. "With summer coming, being outside more, not fitting into the clothes they used to and obviously revealing more of their body, they want to get into a fitness routine," he said. The studio has offered Zoom classes throughout the pandemic but people "crave that human-to-human contact," Tamir added.

Khristel Rhoades, a 40-year-old stay-

at-home mother, notes that there are more people in Central Park now than during the pandemic's early days. "People are more comfortable. Initially, people would kind of jump when they thought you were coming by," she said while walking on the paved loop that goes around Manhattan's green lung.

'Stigmatization'

Rhoades is among those who found exercise helped them through the pan-

demic. "It's kept me sane for sure," she said. Many specialists warn against stigmatizing weight gain, particularly at a time when people are still feeling extremely fragile psychologically. "The very last thing we need right now is a diet," warned author Virginia Sole-Smith in her *Burnt Toast* newsletter. "It's so much more important to have compassion for everything your body has gone through in the past year. And maybe even pride, for everything your body has helped you survive," she added.

But for Thuman, she said she had "a little bit of motivation" to lose weight as the pandemic dragged on, after separating from her husband. Thanks to steady walks, a new diet and Facebook groups, Thuman has lost 22 pounds and is almost down to the weight she was pre-pandemic. "I like the way that I feel now," she told AFP. Like many, Maidenbaum refuses to set a target for his weight loss. "If you put a timeframe, I realize you're building up a lot of pressure on yourself," he said, choosing to focus instead on a healthy lifestyle. "As long as you show up and put in the work, that's really all that matters." — AFP



In this file photo a Sotheby's employee holds a 1933 Double Eagle Coin during the 'Three Treasures - Collected by Stuart Weitzman,' a dedicated live auction, of three treasures from the personal collection of the fashion designer and collector. — AFP

US gold coin sells for record \$18.87m at Sotheby's auction

A 1933 US gold coin that was never issued after Franklin D. Roosevelt removed America from the gold standard sold for a record \$18.87 million at a Sotheby's auction in New York Tuesday. The auction house described the 1933 Double Eagle, the last US gold coin made and intended for circulation, as "one of the most coveted coins in the world" and it didn't disappoint. The \$20 coin, designed by the American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sailed past its pre-sale estimate price of between \$10 million and \$15 million.

It also smashed the record for the most expensive coin in the world, set by a 1794 Flowing Hair silver dollar that sold for \$10 million in 2013. The Double Eagle has an image of Lady Liberty on one side and an American eagle on the other. The 1933 Double Eagles were the last American gold coins intended for circulation by the United States Mint but were never legally issued for use. That year, President Roosevelt removed the United States from the gold standard in an effort to lift America's battered economy out of the Great Depression.

All of the coins were ordered to be destroyed, apart from two which were given to the Smithsonian Institution. However, in 1937, several of the coins appeared on the market, sparking a Secret Service investigation in 1944 that ruled that the coins had been stolen from the US government and were illegal to own. Prior to the probe, one of the coins was purchased and mistakenly granted an export license, Sotheby's said in its notes.

It ended up in the coin collection of King Farouk of Egypt. When Sotheby's tried to auction the Double Eagle in 1954, the US Treasury successfully had it withdrawn. The coin's whereabouts were then unknown until 1996 when it was seized during a Secret Service sting at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. A five-year legal tussle ensued and it was decided that the coin could be privately owned.

Other Double Eagles that have surfaced have been ruled property of the United States following cases that have even gone to the Supreme Court. The coin bought Tuesday is therefore the only 1933 Double Eagle allowed to be legally sold. In 2002, it established a new world auction record for any coin at the time when designer Stuart Weitzman bought it for \$7.59 million. — AFP

Elephants in India tested for coronavirus after rare lion's death

Twenty-eight elephants have been tested for COVID-19 at a forest reserve in southern India, officials said yesterday, after the reported death of a rare Asiatic lion from the virus. In what is believed to be the first known death of an animal in India from the coronavirus, a nine-year-old lioness at a zoo in Chennai in Tamil Nadu state passed away in early June, local media reported. The feline was among nine lions that had tested positive for the virus, including two who were in critical condition, Chennai's *The New Indian Express* newspaper reported last week. "After lions in Vandalur Zoo tested positive for COVID-19, we were asked to

test the camp elephants as a precautionary measure," a forest ranger at Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the south of Tamil Nadu told AFP yesterday.

Nasal and anal samples were taken from 28 elephants, including two calves, on Tuesday, and sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The animals' handlers lifted their trunks to collect a sample from a nostril, according to video shared by the reserve. They also inserted swabs into the elephants' rectums. The results are expected to arrive in a week. "The animals had no symptoms, it was just as a precaution," the ranger said. "There was no difficulty in taking the sample swabs themselves as these are all trained elephants."

Some 21 tigers in a zoo in the eastern state of Jharkhand underwent virus tests last week after a 10-year-old tiger with a fever died, local media reported. The tiger had returned a negative rapid antigen test but officials said they were also awaiting results from an RT-PCR test, the Press Trust of India reported. — AFP



Pandemic shakes up rankings of world's most liveable cities

The pandemic has shaken up the rankings of the world's most liveable cities, a study released yesterday showed, with metropolises in Australia, Japan and New Zealand leaping ahead of those in Europe. Auckland tops *The Economist's* annual survey of the world's most liveable cities in 2021 followed by Osaka and Tokyo in Japan, Adelaide in Australia and Wellington in New Zealand, all of which had a swift response to the COVID pandemic.

"Auckland rose to the top of the ranking owing to its successful approach in containing the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed its society to remain open and the city to score strongly," the

Economist Intelligence Unit said. In contrast, "European cities fared particularly poorly in this year's edition." "Vienna, previously the world's most liveable city between 2018-20, fell to 12th. Eight of the top ten biggest falls in the rankings are European cities," according to the study. The biggest fall overall among the European cities was the port city of Hamburg in northern Germany, which fell 34 places to 47th.

The trend was motivated by a "stress on hospital resources" which the study said increased for most German and French cities and resulted in a "deteriorated healthcare score". Pressure on European health systems also had a knock-on effect on culture and overall liveability because of restrictions on movement, the Economist said. The most notable rise was recorded by Honolulu, Hawaii, in the United States, which came 14th in the ranking and moved up 46 places because of its containment of the pandemic and fast vaccination program. Damascus remains the city where life is most difficult because of Syria's ongoing civil war. — AFP



Food delivery riders make their way into a McDonald's outlet in Bogor, to buy the new BTS-meal deal for hungry fans in the K-Pop mad country, causing more than a dozen McDonald's outlets to temporarily shuttered over virus fears. — AFP photos



Food delivery riders queue up at a McDonald's outlet in Bogor to buy the new BTS-meal deal for hungry fans in the K-Pop mad country, causing more than a dozen McDonald's outlets to temporarily shuttered over virus fears.

McDonald's BTS-meal frenzy sparks virus closures in Indonesia

More than a dozen Indonesian McDonald's outlets were temporarily shuttered yesterday over virus fears as the chain's new BTS meal deal sparked frenzied buying from fans in the K-pop mad country. Jakarta and several other cities slapped closure stickers on at least 13 outlets that were deluged with online food-delivery drivers picking up a meal set named after the hugely popular Korean boy band. "We temporarily closed four of six McDonald's stores here in Semarang for a couple of days," said Fajar Purwoto, the city's public order agency head. "I don't want Semarang to be in the Covid-19 red zone again".

Indonesia is one of the hardest-hit nations in Asia. Jakarta authorities did not respond to requests for comment. But local media said five stores in the capital were shut over BTS-meal orders. The meal set of chicken nuggets, fries and a drink, first made available in Indonesia yesterday, has been on offer in dozens of countries since May. BTS have become global superstars with millions of fans around the world since their debut in 2013. — AFP

Spain fashion retailer Inditex back in black

Spanish fashion retailer Inditex — owner of brands such as Zara, Massimo Dutti and Bershka — said yesterday that strong growth in online sales helped it return to profit in the first quarter after coronavirus lockdown measures pushed it into the red a year ago. Inditex—which runs its business year from February to January—said in a statement that it booked net profit of 421 million euros (\$510 million) in the three months

to April, compared with bottom-line loss of 409 million euros a year earlier. "The first quarter stands out for its solid operating performance, with growth in operating expenses... significantly below sales growth," the statement said.

Revenues expanded by 50 percent to 4.9 billion euros—with online sales surging by as much as 67 percent in local currency terms—and underlying or operating profit jumped by 155 percent to 1.2 billion euros. "Sales were higher across all geographies and every brand despite the fact that 24 percent of trading hours were unavailable due to lockdowns and restrictions (16 percent of the group's stores remained closed at the end of the quarter) in addition to other capacity restrictions," Inditex said. —AFP

Sports

Benzema exits early as France beat Bulgaria in final pre-Euro friendly

PARIS: Karim Benzema was forced to leave the pitch with a dead leg on Tuesday as world champions France beat Bulgaria 3-0 in their final friendly one week before beginning their Euro 2020 campaign. Benzema was taken off in the 39th minute at the Stade De France in what is France's last match before they take on Germany in their opening Group F match of the European Championship against Germany on June 15.

France also face reigning European champions Portugal and Hungary, who will play two of their group matches in front of big crowds at the Puskas Arena in Budapest. The 33-year-old Benzema had been recalled with great fanfare to the national team following a near six-year exile, but his replacement Olivier Giroud showed why Les Bleus are considered among the favorites for the tournament with a late brace which took his France total to 46.

Giroud, 34, is now just five goals behind France's all-time top scorer Thierry Henry but will likely be sidelined when Benzema returns. "When people call on me, the most important thing is to do the job," Giroud told broadcaster M6. "I had good service from my teammates. They know where I'm going to be in the box so I just tried to finish well."

Antoine Griezmann scored the opening goal in front of 5,000 joyous supporters who were also celebrating their return to live football in the stadium. Charlene Lecuir was one of those fans lucky enough to get a ticket for Tuesday's match, and told AFP she let out a "scream of joy" when she learned she would be attending. Fans were allowed in if they had a negative test for COVID-19 within the previous 48 hours or proof they had been completely inoculated for the virus.

Benzema's 'dead leg'

The supporters were worried when, with France already ahead thanks to Griezmann, Benzema sat down in the middle of the pitch and was checked over by team doctors after having fallen heavily when attempting a header a few minutes earlier. He then left the field, but France coach Didier Deschamps played down the injury, saying it was a "dead leg".

"He took a good hit on the muscle above the knee," Deschamps told M6. "He stopped playing because he felt it hardening... the medical staff are at his side." Benzema had been sidelined by Les Bleus since 2015 over his alleged role in a blackmail plot involving his former international teammate Mathieu Valbuena. He missed out on France's 2018 World Cup win and their run to the Euro 2016 final on home soil.

Benzema has scored 27 goals for France and was last month named as this season's best French foreign-based player by the country's players' association. He scored 29 goals last season for Real Madrid, passing 20 league goals in all three seasons since Cristiano Ronaldo did for Juventus in 2018.

Elsewhere a Spain side made up of young players due to captain Sergio Busquets' positive COVID-19 test, which led to the entire first team squad being put in isolation, thumped Lithuania 4-0. Hugo Guillamon began the rout in the fourth minute before AC Milan forward Brahim Diaz doubled their lead 20 minutes later.

Abel Ruiz missed a penalty on the half-hour mark but nine minutes after the break Juan Miranda made it three with a perfectly placed free-kick. Javi Puado rounded off the scoring in the 73rd minute. Spain, whose first team squad



SAINT-DENIS: France's forward Antoine Griezmann (left) and France's midfielder Paul Pogba (right) talk to France's forward Karim Benzema, injured, during the friendly football match France vs Bulgaria ahead of the Euro 2020 tournament, at Stade De France in Saint-Denis, on the outskirts of Paris on Tuesday. —AFP

will be vaccinated on Wednesday according to the country's health ministry, open their Euro campaign in Group E against Sweden in Seville on Monday.

The Swedes have also been affected by the virus, announcing on Tuesday positive tests for

Dejan Kulusevski and Mattias Svanberg. Robert Lewandowski drew a blank as Poland drew 2-2 at home with Iceland. Karol Swiderski replacing the Bayern Munich forward and saving the Poles' blushes with two minutes remaining. —AFP

News in brief

Super League 'settlement'

LONDON: The six rebel English clubs that signed up to the European Super League have reached a financial settlement with the Premier League worth a combined £22 million (\$31 million), reports said yesterday. Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham announced themselves as founder members of the competition in April but the project quickly collapsed after widespread opposition. Sky News reported the settlement yesterday and sources at one of the clubs told Britain's Press Association that agreement had been reached, with clubs facing a £25 million fine and 30-point deduction if there are further attempts to break away. It is understood the money will go to grassroots and community projects. —AFP

Rodez sign Enzo Zidane

TOULOUSE: Enzo Zidane, the oldest of Zinedine Zidane's four sons, has signed for Rodez, the French Ligue 2 club said yesterday. Enzo Zidane, a 26-year-old midfielder, came through the youth system at Real Madrid where he made his debut for the B team in 2014. Since leaving Real in 2017 he has been at several clubs without ever succeeding in establishing himself: Alaves in the Spanish second division, Lausanne in Switzerland and most recently CD Aves in the Portuguese second division. The club has links with the Zidane family. Zinedine has been a shareholder since 2012 and his wife Veronique, Enzo's mother, is originally from the town. —AFP

Wolves appoint Lage

LONDON: Wolves yesterday announced the appointment of former Benfica boss Bruno Lage as the new manager of the Premier League club to replace Nuno Espirito Santo. The Portuguese led Benfica to the Primeira Liga title in his first season in management in 2019 but left the club the following year after failing to defend the crown. The 45-year-old has previous experience of working in Britain in coaching roles with Sheffield Wednesday and Swansea City under Carlos Carvalhal. Nuno, who left at the end of the season, secured successive seventh-place finishes in the Premier League after promotion from the Championship in 2018 but Wolves could only manage 13th place in the 2020/21 campaign. —AFP

New doubts cloud Copa America in Brazil

SAO PAULO: New doubts gathered Tuesday over the Copa America five days from kickoff, as Brazil's Supreme Court agreed to consider blocking the troubled tournament and the Brazilian national team's players said they were against holding it.

Organizers are battling the odds to pull off the South American football championships this year despite the coronavirus pandemic. It has forced them into a last-minute search for an emergency host country that ended with the controversial choice of Brazil last week.

Brazil's Supreme Court said it would rule today on

England boss Southgate speaks of 'pride' on eve of Euro 2020

LONDON: England manager Gareth Southgate has spoken of how his grandfather's service in World War II shaped his own identity and values, expressing his pride in representing his country on the eve of Euro 2020. Southgate's side launch their campaign against Croatia at Wembley on Sunday, with the manager aiming to build on their run to the World Cup semi-finals in 2018. All three of England's group matches are at home and Wembley is hosting some of the knockout matches at the delayed tournament, including both semi-finals and the final. Former England international Southgate, writing in the Players' Tribune, said different people had different ideas of what it "means to be English".

"For me, personally, my sense of identity and values is closely tied to my family and particularly my granddad," he wrote. "He was a fierce patriot and a proud military man, who served during World War II. The idea of representing 'queen and country' has always been important to me. We do pageantry so well in Britain, and, growing up, things like the

Neymar helps Brazil to perfect six in WC qualifying

MONTEVIDEO: Neymar scored one goal and created the other as Brazil maintained their perfect start to World Cup qualifying with a 2-0 win over Paraguay on Tuesday. Substitute Lucas Paqueta sealed the win deep into injury time in Asuncion as Brazil opened up a six point lead at the top of South America's single qualifying group after a sixth win out of six.

Paraguay's first defeat saw them drop out of the automatic qualification places. Brazil got off to a quick start with less than four minutes on the clock. Gabriel Jesus, recalled to the starting line-up, crossed from the right and although Richarlison missed his attempted volley, Neymar was unmarked at the back post to bobble the ball past goalkeeper Antony Silva.

Paraguay did not crumble, though, and center-back Omar Alderete forced an incredible save out of goalkeeper Ederson with a blockbuster drive from 30 yards. Miguel Almiron also found space in the box but his shot was deflected behind by Eder Militao.

In between, Silva was out quickly to smother a chance for Richarlison. The Everton forward thought he'd extended the lead just before halftime with a brilliant dipping volley, but he was denied by an offside flag.

Paraguay had a strong start to the second half as Ederson saved a Gustavo Gomez header but Marquinhos should have doubled the visitors' advantage when he somehow headed

two requests to block the 10-nation tournament, which is scheduled to open Sunday and run through July 10. Chief Justice Luiz Fux said given the "exceptional nature of the case," he had decided to have the full 11-member court take up the matter in an extraordinary virtual session.

Hours later, the Brazilian national team's players said they were against holding the tournament, but put to rest rumors that they were planning a boycott. "We are against organizing the Copa America, but we will never say no to the Brazilian national team," the players said in a joint statement on social media.

Neymar and team — as well as Brazil's coach, Tite — were reportedly caught off guard by news the tournament would be held in Brazil. The players were blunt in their criticism of South American football confederation CONMEBOL. "We are dissatisfied with CONMEBOL's handling of the Copa America," they said. "Recent events lead us to believe the process of organizing the tournament will be inadequate."

queen's Silver Jubilee (in 1977) and royal weddings had an impact on me."

Southgate, early in his tenure as England boss, took his players to train with the Royal Marines. "Because of my granddad, I've always had an affinity for the military and service in the name of your country — though the consequence of my failure in representing England will never be as high as his," he said. "My granddad's values were instilled in me from a young age and I couldn't help but think of him when I lined up to sing the national anthem before my first international caps. My belief is that everyone has that pride. And that includes the players."

Southgate, who missed a penalty in England's semi-final shootout defeat by Germany at Euro 96 on home soil, also spoke of how he felt "parental instincts" kick in as manager. "I can't help it," he said. "After all, I'm old enough to be a father to most of my players. I see players scrolling on their phones straight after the final whistle and I think... hmmm, is that a particularly good idea? Reading abusive comments on Twitter or Instagram is never going to help performance."

The England boss said he understood the coronavirus pandemic had "put added pressure on everyone" but did not understand abusive messages. A number of players in his Euro 2020 squad including Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling have suffered

Neymar's cross wide from four yards out.

Brazil had chances to kill the game off on the counter but Neymar screwed an effort wide and Gomez did brilliantly to block Richarlison's shot. But in injury time, Neymar played in Paqueta on the right to send a precise left-foot finish just inside the far post.

Argentina blow two-goal lead

Miguel Borja scored four minutes into stoppage time to rescue a 2-2 draw for Colombia in a World Cup qualifier against Argentina in Barranquilla. Argentina were off to a flying start, helped by woeful home defending, to move 2-0 up inside eight minutes through goals by Cristian Romero and Leandro Paredes. But Colombia's substitutes turned the game around in the second half as Luis Nuriel netted from the spot and then Borja snatched a point at the death. "We went out to press, we scored two goals but unfortunately we couldn't hold on, I think we were tired," said Argentina forward Lautaro Martinez.

Argentina remain unbeaten in second place while Colombia are just outside the automatic qualification spots in fifth. The visitors will be kicking themselves, though, after a fast start and having the better chances throughout.

Three minutes in, Romero rose highest to head home a Rodrigo De Paul free-kick from wide on the right that made it all the way to the edge of the six yard box. A few minutes later, Lionel Messi picked out Marcos Acuna and his rasping left-footed drive was deflected inches past the corner of post and crossbar. Colombia failed to fully clear the resulting corner and following some pinball in the box, Paredes was able to run past four players, find space and shoot low into the corner across goalkeeper David Ospina. Argentina were well on top and Ospina had to save a fierce drive from Martinez on 27 minutes, with Nicolas Gonzalez putting the rebound a whisker past the post.

Political football

Already delayed by 12 months because of the pandemic, the Copa America — the world's oldest running international football tournament — was originally due to be hosted by Colombia and Argentina.

However, the former fell through because of violent anti-government protests, and the latter because of a surge of COVID-19. With the clock ticking down to the opening match, Brazil stepped in last week as replacement hosts.

But the 2014 World Cup host country has also been battered by COVID-19. And experts warn it is facing a new surge that a major international sports tournament could exacerbate. The pandemic has claimed more than 475,000 lives in Brazil, second only to the United States.

The tournament has become a divisive, politically loaded matter in the country. Far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has regularly defied expert advice on containing the pandemic, gave his blessing to host it. But epidemiologists have voiced alarm, as have Bolsonaro critics and some coaches and players from participating countries.

'Right to live'

The cases the Supreme Court agreed to hear were brought by national metalworkers' union CNTM and by opposition Congressman Julio Delgado and his Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). The union argues that hosting the tournament "risks causing an increase in COVID-19 infections and deaths," the court said in a statement announcing it had agreed to hear the cases.

Delgado and the PSB argue that hosting "violates the fundamental rights to life and health," it said. Several other requests to block the tournament were also filed in various courts, including another to the Supreme Court by the left-wing Workers' Party (PT) of former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who is shaping up as Bolsonaro's likely opponent in presidential elections next year.

Brazilian officials have said matches will be held without fans, with mandatory COVID-19 testing for teams every 48 hours, restrictions on their movement and chartered flights to carry them to matches in the four host cities. —AFP



BURTON-ON-TRENT: England's manager Gareth Southgate gestures during a training session at the St George's Park stadium in Burton-upon-Trent yesterday, ahead of the UEFA Euro 2020 football competition. —AFP

racist abuse online.

"Why would you tag someone in on a conversation that is abusive?" said Southgate. "Why would you choose to insult somebody for something as ridiculous as the color of their skin? Why? Unfortunately, for those people that engage in that kind of behavior, I have some bad news — you're on the losing side." —AFP



ASUNCION: Brazil's Lucas Paqueta (left) celebrates with teammate Neymar after scoring against Paraguay during their South American qualification football match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 at the Defensores del Chaco Stadium in Asuncion on Tuesday. —AFP

Colombia finally came alive in first half stoppage time but Muriel's shot was blocked by Nicolas Otamendi, while Duvan Zapata blazed over. They were back in it six minutes into the second period, though, after Otamendi brought down Mateus Uribe in the box and Muriel slotted in from the spot. —AFP

Sports

Jazz overcome slow start to beat Clippers, Embiid shines for Sixers

LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell scored 45 points and Rudy Gobert made a clutch block at the buzzer as the Utah Jazz rallied to beat the Los Angeles Clippers 112-109 in the opening game of their NBA playoff series on Tuesday.

Mitchell scored 32 of his game high 45 in the second half, carrying the Jazz on his back offensively after the team got off to a sluggish start in the best-of-seven Western Conference second round series. "I let my team down in the first half," Mitchell said. "They were kicking my butt. I said, 'It is on me'. I had to set the tone and I did." Game two is tonight in Utah.

Mitchell got help on the defensive end from France's Gobert, who is in the running to win his third defensive player of the year award. Gobert helped sealed the win when he denied Clippers forward Marcus Morris's three-point attempt at the final buzzer in front of the crowd of 18,007 at the Vivint Smart Home Arena. The Jazz defense smothered attempts by Kawhi Leonard and Paul George before the ball ended up in the hands of Morris.

Despite coming off a short rest after beating the Dallas Mavericks in seven games, the banged-up Clippers stormed out the gate and took a big lead by going on a 22-2 run in the first quarter. Los Angeles led 25-18 at the end of the first and by 13, 60-47, at the half. The Jazz had six days of rest between series and it took them half the game to shake off the rust, but when they finally got going in the third quarter they outscored the Clippers 32-19 to level the score 79-79 heading into the fourth.

"We scrambled on the fly," said Mitchell, who missed a month of the regular season with an ankle injury. "We did some things wrong and we are going to have to make some adjustments. We have to come to play every single day."

Bojan Bogdanovic and Jordan Clarkson chipped in 18 points each while Joe Ingles added eight points with seven assists in the win. The Jazz, who are missing all-star guard Mike Conley with an injury, have never lost to the Clippers in the postseason, having earned wins in 1992, 1997 and 2017. Conley's availability for game two is uncertain.

Leonard scored a team high 23 points and George added 20 for the Clippers, who didn't have much time to celebrate a hard-earned and strange series win over the Mavericks in which neither home team won a game until game seven.

Embiid stars

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored a playoff career high 40 points and added 13 rebounds as the top-seeded Philadelphia 76ers toppled the Atlanta Hawks 118-102 to level their Eastern Conference series at one game each.

Tobias Harris tallied 22 points, Seth Curry finished with 21 and five threes, and Shake Milton came off the bench to score 14 points as the Sixers reserves scored 26 points in the second half in front of a crowd of 18,600 at Wells Fargo Center. Game three in the best-of-seven series will be played tomorrow in Atlanta.

Embiid is playing despite being diagnosed with a lateral meniscus tear in his knee. After eliminating the Washington Wizards in five games, Philadelphia came into the series knowing that all-star Embiid would be playing with a small tear in his right knee.

Trae Young, who was the star of game one, finished with 21 points and 11 assists. He came into the game averaging 30.2 points in the postseason. Danilo Gallinari had 21 points and nine rebounds, and Kevin Huerter added a playoff-career-high 20 for the fifth-seeded Hawks.



SALT LAKE CITY: Rudy Gobert #27 of the Utah Jazz blocks the ball to win the game against the LA Clippers during Round 2, Game 1 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Tuesday at vivint.SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. — AFP

Bogdanovic scored 14 points while Clint Capela had 10. "Whenever we got close we just turned the ball over or gave up a basket," coach Nate McMillan said. "We didn't really do a good job of controlling or establishing our defense all night long." The Hawks had a 14-20 record when coach Lloyd Pierce was fired and McMillan took over on an interim basis. Including the playoffs, the Hawks are 32-13 since then. — AFP

Nuggets ace Jokic named 2021 NBA MVP

LOS ANGELES: Denver Nuggets star Nikola Jokic was named the NBA's Most Valuable Player on Tuesday, completing a remarkable rise to the pinnacle of basketball after entering the league in 2014 as a lowly 41st draft pick. The 6ft 11in (2.10m) Serbian center scooped the season MVP honors after a 2020/2021 campaign that has seen him average a career-best 26.4 points per game with 8.3 assists and 10.8 rebounds. "Stat wise, you know, I think this was my the best season of my life," Jokic said shortly after the award was announced. "Kind of the cherry on the top is probably the trophy — so I think this is my the best season of my life."

The 26-year-old Jokic is the lowest draft pick ever to win the MVP, and the first player in Denver history to take the accolade. "To be honest, I didn't even think of being in the NBA when I started to play basketball back home," Jokic said. "It was playing Euro League, because that was kind of the closest top league to my country... But then the Denver Nuggets drafted me it was an opportunity for me to become an NBA player, and I think I did a good job of using that opportunity."

Jokic is the fifth international player to win the award after Hakeem Olajuwon (1994), Steve Nash (2005, 2006), Dirk Nowitzki (2007) and Giannis Antetokounmpo (2019, 2020). Jokic beat out competition from the Golden State Warriors' Steph Curry and Philadelphia 76ers ace Joel Embiid who were both finalists for the award. Jokic was instrumental in guiding Denver into the second round of the playoffs this season, finishing the regular season 47-25 despite injuries to key personnel including Jamal Murray, P.J. Dozier and Will Barton.

Nuggets coach Michael Malone earlier this year praised Jokic for hitting the ground running in the new campaign despite a short off-season following last year's pandemic disruption. "He stayed in great shape and he came back ready to go," Malone said. "He didn't ease himself into the season. He came back playing at a high level, and he's done that for every game we've played this year." Jokic agreed with his coach's assessment. "We had a really good season last year and we had like two months rest. I started the season really well and I played kind of the whole season really well." — AFP



RALEIGH: Alex Nedeljkovic #39 of the Carolina Hurricanes makes a save against Pat Maroon #14 of the Tampa Bay Lightning during the third period in Game Five of the Second Round of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs at PNC Arena on Tuesday in Raleigh, North Carolina. — AFP

Defending champion Lightning oust 'Canes to reach NHL semi-finals

LOS ANGELES: Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 29 shots for the shutout and Brayden Point scored a powerplay goal as the Tampa Bay Lightning blanked the Carolina Hurricanes 2-0 Tuesday to reach the semi-finals of the NHL playoffs. The Lightning used Vasilevskiy's superb goaltending, timely scoring and a stingy defense to win the second round best-of-seven series in five games.

"We've got a lot of confidence in our group," Point said. "I thought we had a pretty good regular season where we were kind of building to this. We just feel confident." Tampa Bay will play either the New York Islanders or the Boston Bruins in the final four. The Islanders lead that series 3-2.

Point scored a nifty goal to open the scoring four minutes into the second as he took a pass from Alex Killorn and then deked goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic and backhanded the puck into the top half of the net in front of a crowd of 16,200 in Raleigh, North Carolina.

It was another example of the Lightning's offensive stars finishing off plays around the net, especially on the power play which has been one of their strengths in the postseason. "They're both two big-time players that made big-time plays," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said of the passing play.

Forward Ross Colton added the insurance goal with his third of the playoffs at 9:04 of the third. "Today was one of our best games of the playoffs," said Colton. "We have good confidence in each other and we feed off each other."

It was a disappointing second round exit for the Hurricanes, who won the Central Division regular-season title, finishing ahead of the defending Stanley Cup champ Lightning. Carolina went 20-3-5 at home during the regular season (including 3-1 against Tampa Bay) and won all three home games in the first round against the Nashville Predators. The 25-year-old rookie Nedeljkovic made 23 saves as he appears to be on the way to becoming the Hurricanes goaltender of the future. — AFP

News in brief

Squash queen 'thrilled'

KUALA LUMPUR: Nicol David, the most successful female squash player of all time, said she is "thrilled and overwhelmed" that her life story will be immortalized in an upcoming biopic. The Malaysian is an eight-time world champion and spent an unprecedented nine years as world number one between 2006-2015. "I always dreamt of one day telling my story, to be able to inspire everyone to work hard for what they want to achieve," she wrote on Facebook earlier this week. The 37-year-old retired from the sport just two years ago after a glittering career spanning two decades. The film, "I am Nicol David", will be produced by Malaysia's Ace Pictures. It will be in English, and producers are going to search for an actress in Malaysia to play David. - AFP

Vietnam postpones Games

HANOI: Vietnam plans to postpone this year's Southeast Asian Games, state media said yesterday, as the country grapples with a new virus outbreak. The regional Olympics are due to be held in Hanoi and 11 other locations—some of them at the epicenter of the fresh COVID-19 wave—from November 21 to December 2. But Vietnam reportedly wants to move the 31st SEA Games to next year. The SEA Games are expected to attract nearly 20,000 participants, including about 7,000 athletes, from 11 countries, according to state media. As well as Olympic disciplines, sports are likely to include billiards and snooker, bodybuilding, chess, bowling and kurash, an ancient form of Uzbek wrestling. - AFP

Trampoline to Olympics

SHANGHAI: Legendary Chinese trampolinist Dong Dong will compete at the Tokyo Olympics, state media said yesterday, making a record fourth appearance at the Games. The 12-time former world champion will be the first male trampolinist to participate in four Olympics and will be desperate to go out on a high — he has said that he will retire after Tokyo. The 32-year-old, who has won a medal at each of the last three Olympics, will take part in the men's individual event. Dong qualified second for the Chinese team behind the 2019 world champion Gao Lei, Xinhua news agency said, citing a notice from China's gymnastics authorities. Dong has reached the podium in all three of his previous Olympic appearances: bronze at the age of 19 in Beijing in 2008, gold in London four years later and silver in Rio in 2016. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adaliya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khaldiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Kaifan	24849807
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shamiya	24848913
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shuwaikh	24814507
Adan Hospital	23940620	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Nuzha	22526804
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Qadsia	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
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1. Selling Cars (Toyota Corolla) 5 nos.
2. Selling Cars (Toyota Yaris) 3 nos.
3. Selling Sales Vans (Half Lorry) 6nos.
4. Selling Mid-Haul 1nos.
5. Selling Pickup 1nos.

Date of Auction started
10th June 2021

Last Date of submitting Bid Form
24th June 2021

Contact Number: 55889621,66000759

Krejcikova ousts Gauff to reach first Grand Slam semi-final at French Open

PARIS: Unseeded Barbora Krejcikova of the Czech Republic reached her first Grand Slam semi-final at the French Open yesterday as she beat 17-year-old Coco Gauff 7-6 (8/6), 6-3. The 33rd-ranked Krejcikova saved five set points in the opening set and finished off Gauff, the 24th seed, on her sixth match point to set up a clash with reigning champion Iga Swiatek or Maria Sakkari for a spot in the final.

Krejcikova, who is also through to the last four of the women's doubles with Katerina Siniakova, claimed her 10th successive win on the tour having arrived in Paris on the back of a maiden singles title in Strasbourg.

"I'm here and I'm in the semi-finals, and I never really imagined I'd be standing here one day on this court, especially in singles, and being able to win," said Krejcikova, a 2018 Roland Garros doubles champion. "Already for me this is something I'd never dreamed of."

Krejcikova recovered from a rocky start, falling 3-0 and 5-3 behind against Gauff, the youngest Grand Slam quarter-finalist since 2006. But the Czech saved a set point on the Gauff serve in the ninth game, and fought off two more at 5-6 to secure a vital hold and force a tie-break. Two superb forehand winners snuffed out another two set points for Gauff, as Krejcikova won the last four points of the tie-break to clinch the first set after 70 minutes.

"I think it was very important. I was down all the time. I just had to go for every point and every ball and just enjoy it. I just made it somehow," said Krejcikova, battling nerves of her own

after racing 5-0 ahead in the second set. "In the second set I started really well and I was leading. I got a little bit tight."

Gauff saved five match points but eventually fell short, ending her run after becoming the youngest American woman to make the last eight in Paris since Jennifer Capriati in 1993. "She's incredible," said Krejcikova, 25. "She's 17 years old. When I was 17 I played ITFs, I played 15Ks. I just told her to keep going, and her time's going to come."

Medvedev out

Daniil Medvedev's French Open campaign came to an end on Tuesday with an ill-judged underarm serve on match point followed by an impassioned outburst over his eagerly-awaited showdown with Stefanos Tsitsipas being played inside an empty stadium.

The colorful world number two was beaten 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 by Greek fifth seed Tsitsipas who will face Germany's Alexander Zverev for a place in Sunday's final. It was only Tsitsipas's second win over Medvedev in eight meetings and it ended in bizarre fashion. The mercurial Russian decided to serve underarm on match point down.

But as he approached the net, hoping to finish the point with a volley, Tsitsipas merely fired a backhand winner beyond him. "I was thinking about this during the whole match, like that maybe in the important point I could do it because my opinion was that he was quite far back in the court, so that can always work," explained the 25-year-old.

"I didn't see the opportunity before

but I thought it's going to be a good choice to bring him surprise. I sometimes do it on practice. Usually guys are a bit surprised. But it didn't work out at all. I won't say it was a mistake. It was something that I dared to do and maybe next time I won't do it knowing that he's ready."

Tsitsipas had his own description for the ploy which backfired so badly for his opponent. "A very millennial shot," said the Greek, who also made the semi-finals in Paris last year where he was beaten by Novak Djokovic. "I saw he kind of stopped. I felt like there was something coming up, so at that point I think I got prepared for it."

Medvedev had never won a match at Roland Garros in four attempts before this year. So winning four matches in one visit was progress even if he was dismayed that his match was selected for the penultimate evening session. It was played inside an empty Court Philippe Chatrier as spectators were banned under a 9pm COVID-19 curfew. This year's French Open is staging evening sessions for the first time under a broadcast agreement with streaming giant Amazon.

"It was without a doubt the match of the day but Roland Garros preferred Amazon to people," said Medvedev. He compared the situation to the Formula One world championship when the 2020 Australian Grand Prix was set to take place in Melbourne even though there had been a Covid-19 outbreak in the paddock. The race was eventually cancelled.

"Yesterday I started the third season



PARIS: Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova celebrates after winning against Coco Gauff of the US during their women's singles quarter-final tennis match on Day 11 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. — AFP

of (Netflix documentary series) 'Drive to Survive' and there's an episode called 'Cash Is King'," added Medvedev. "They were in Australia ready to race, and they asked Lewis Hamilton what he thinks about racing in the conditions the world was in right now, and he said, I don't know what we are doing here. And so they asked him, Why do you think they make you race? And he said, 'Cash is

King.' It was the same here."

Tsitsipas now has the most wins on the ATP tour this season (38) and won clay court titles at Monte Carlo and Lyon. He will be playing in a third successive Grand Slam semi-final. Medvedev, the 2019 US Open runner-up and this year's Australian Open finalist, suffered his first quarter-final loss at a major. — AFP



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