

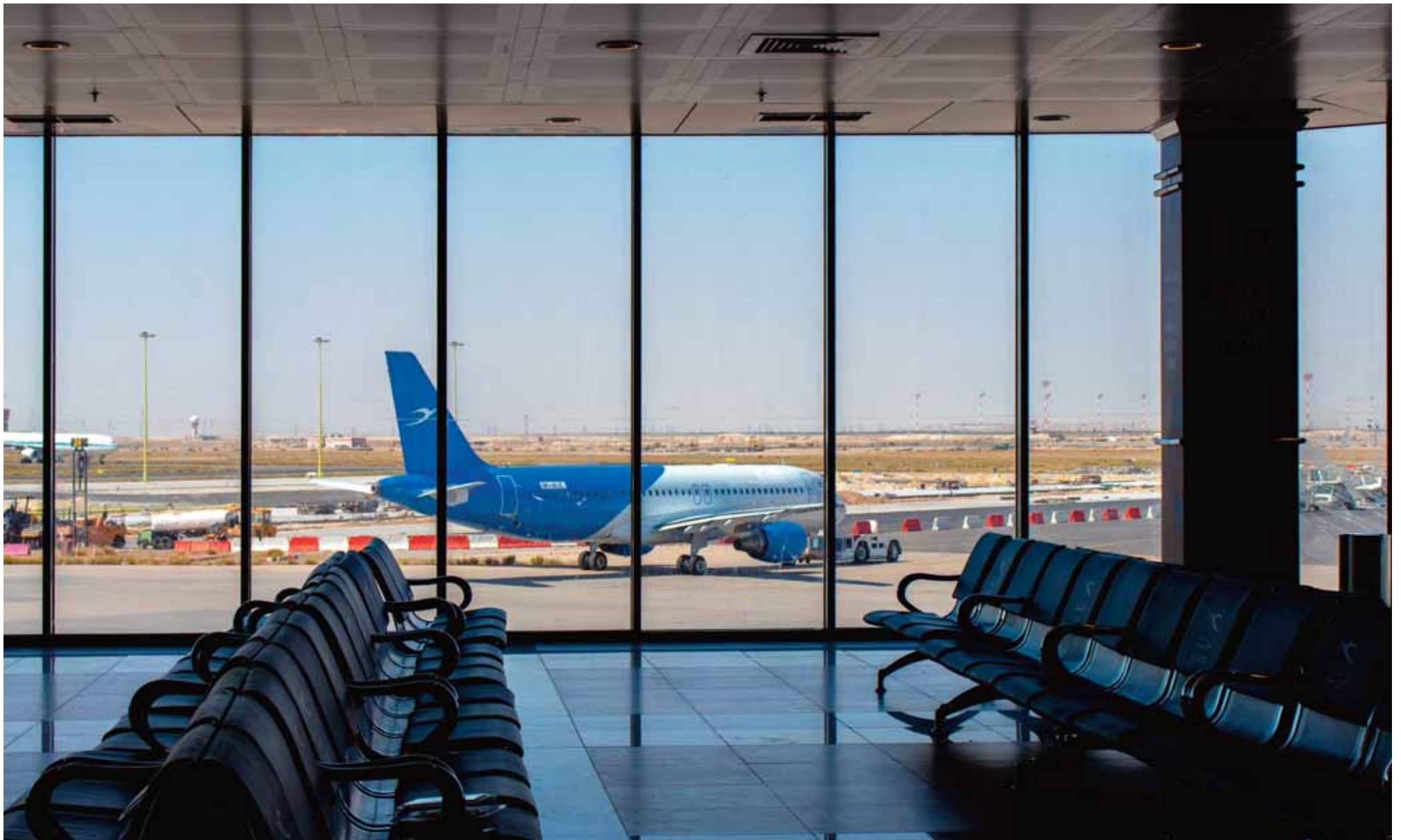
Friday Times

ISSUE NO: 18451

THULQADA 1, 1442 AH | FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2021

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V O L V O



**People vaccinated abroad
may register with MoH**

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Local

Summer time dread and mantras to counter it



SCRIBBLER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jamie Etheridge

local@kuwaittimes.com

The prospect of spending the entire summer hiding from Kuwait's 55C+ heat fills me with anxiety. I have two children who recently completed the school year and all they want is to have some fun, travel and get a break from the last year and half of pandemic isolating.

I hated to tell them that we would not be traveling and that we would stay in Kuwait the entire summer. Don't get me wrong, I love Kuwait and have lived here for a long time and know many ways to keep myself and my kids busy during the weekends and slower summer period. But facing another summer of no travel and unbearable heat feels impossible.

Still I firmly believe that if you cannot change the circumstances, it is empowering to change the way you think about the circumstances. So I'm going to do my best to think positively (while acknowledging how much the situation sucks) and also share those positive vibes in case it might help others. Here are some ways I'm changing my mindset, my mantra for all those staying in Kuwait this summer:

Summer in Kuwait can be fun because it will give me time to reconnect with my family, my friends and my children after 15+ months of pandemic isolation and social distancing.

Summer is a great time to read. I will make a list of books or start on my TBR (to be read) with a goal of reading at least one book a week.

Summer is a great time to learn a new hobby or take a class. Summer camps are returning. There are art classes and sewing classes and even karate classes for adults. Gyms are opening back up. Time to work on that beach body.

Summer is only three months. That's twelve weeks. Count them down. Set a goal for each week. Learn a new recipe. Sketch. Knit a hat. Play chess.

Summer is a great time to help someone else. Find a way to volunteer, in person or online, or help someone else who is struggling at this time.

One of the hardest parts of summer is seeing my friends posting their travel and vacation photos on social media. Since we are still in the middle of a pandemic, not as many people are traveling but it still feels hard when you see someone else enjoying a mountain hike in cool woods or swimming off a beautiful Mediterranean beach. So I'm limiting my social media exposure over these twelve weeks and also reminding myself that everyone deserves a break. It's perfectly human to feel a bit of envy but also to remind myself that everyone's circumstances are different.

Summer isn't forever and hopefully by the time it's over, Kuwait and the world will be closer to a new normal that allows for travel for everyone. In the meantime, God keep everyone safe and healthy.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive on a highway through a dust storm that hit Kuwait yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The Life of Expatriates



IN MY VIEW

By Nejouad Al-Yagout

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Each time an expatriate reads the newspaper, it appears they are not only reading the news, but searching for hope. They are searching for a way beyond discriminatory laws, a way beyond being treated as second-class, a way beyond waiting to see whether they or their loved ones will get deported because of their age or education level.

At a company, an expatriate is still seen as a visitor, a temporary resident, an alien, someone dispensable. Their degrees, their intelligence, their service are taken for granted. And in instances where they work harder than anyone in the workforce, their dream of a promotion can be derailed by a local who punches in and out, unless the expatriate happens to hail from specific countries.

And while their children are born here, neither the parents nor their offspring will ever know what it is like to hold a Kuwaiti passport. Their Civil ID will always be another color, a stark reminder of their status.

And as they look to locals for support, expatriates notice the voices of local humanitarians are silenced by the

deafening roars of lawmakers who rant about demographics to garner votes and money. Like them, these humanitarian locals are not in positions of power to transform the status quo. Unlike them, though, these locals are not worried about getting in trouble with authorities for speaking out against injustice. An expatriate cannot demand his/her rights because they will be told, at best: "This is not your country." At worst, they will be imprisoned or deported.

The laws meant to protect expatriates are not always implemented, which is why they spend so much time worrying behind closed doors, worried about their family's future, a future they wanted to build here but may now have to give up on. A future that appears to prod them to leave of their own accord.

Many have already left, many are waiting to leave, and many have no choice but to stay, for they have nowhere to go. It is the latter two groups of expatriates who we need to focus on; they are our last chance to redeem ourselves and to create a harmonious society in which we all thrive, side by side; they are our last chance to salvage what remains of our heritage—a heritage shared by locals and expatriates alike. Ask the latter; they have more stories to tell us since they outnumber us. They have just as much love and commitment to the land as we do.

What separates us is merely the color of our documents, a color that can be overlooked when we hear their stories and how much blood and sweat and tears they shed for this country. Our country and theirs.

Kuwait Times

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Local

Farmers face labor shortage, look at rising produce prices



By Nawara Fattahova

Kuwaiti farmers say they are facing problems that can also affect consumers including ones that could lead to price rises in fruits and vegetables.

Farmer Yousef Al-Kreibani told the Kuwait Times that one of the biggest problems that all farmers are facing now is a labor shortage.

“Due to the pandemic, we don’t have enough workers to do the job as we can’t replace those who left. Some workers went on vacation and couldn’t return, while the contracts of others finished and they wanted to return home, as they usually stay for three years only. Now we can’t replace them as no foreigners are allowed to enter the country to work since last year,” he said.

“Half of my workers left last year (about 50 out of 100). Most of them left to their country, while few just left the farm. I usually hired 20 to 30 workers every year, which didn’t happen this year. This huge shortage of manpower resulted in the farm not being fully planted, which reduced my production,” he added.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in late February 2020, Kuwait has severely limited the numbers of expatriates who could come into the country. It has stopped



Farmer Yousef Al-Kreibani

all visit visas and for a time stopped issuing work visas and encouraged expatriate to leave. Currently the airport is closed to foreigners including to thousands of legal residents abroad wishing to return.

According to the latest figures from the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources in 2021, there are approximately 7,000 farms in Kuwait. Not all are productive, however, and others focus on

livestock rather than fruit and vegetable production. According to farmer Kreibani, the approximate number of workers in each farm is between 25 to 30. He told Kuwait Times that about half of his staff left work at the outbreak of the pandemic, as the majority returned to their countries, while few left to work in other jobs. In 2020, 1.96 percent of the employees in Kuwait were active in the agricultural sector.

Beyond the question of labor, Kuwait’s farmers also claim that imports are undermining their profit margins.

“We recently sold many of our products without profits, below cost due to imports. For instance, we had to sell potatoes for 200 fils per kilo, while their actual cost is 500 fils. We had to sell our products for any price to prevent spoilage, as we don’t have huge storage areas like those of importing companies, who can dictate the price. Our farmers invest in cultivation and not in storage,” explained Kreibani.

According to him, the solution to this problem is by applying a crop calendar.

“The crop calendar is applied in most countries, as it protects local production. So if there is self-sufficiency in certain products, no imported products should be allowed. Kuwaiti products are sold at an auction while imported ones are not. This lowers the price of Kuwaiti produce, but at the supermarket the price is high due to the percentage added by the merchant who buys it at the auction,” Kreibani said.

Some would argue, however, that limiting imports of fruits and vegetables could also have a reverse effect, causing scare supply and thus triggering a price rise.



KFU Treasurer
Jaber Al-Azmi



KFU President
Abdullah Al-Damak

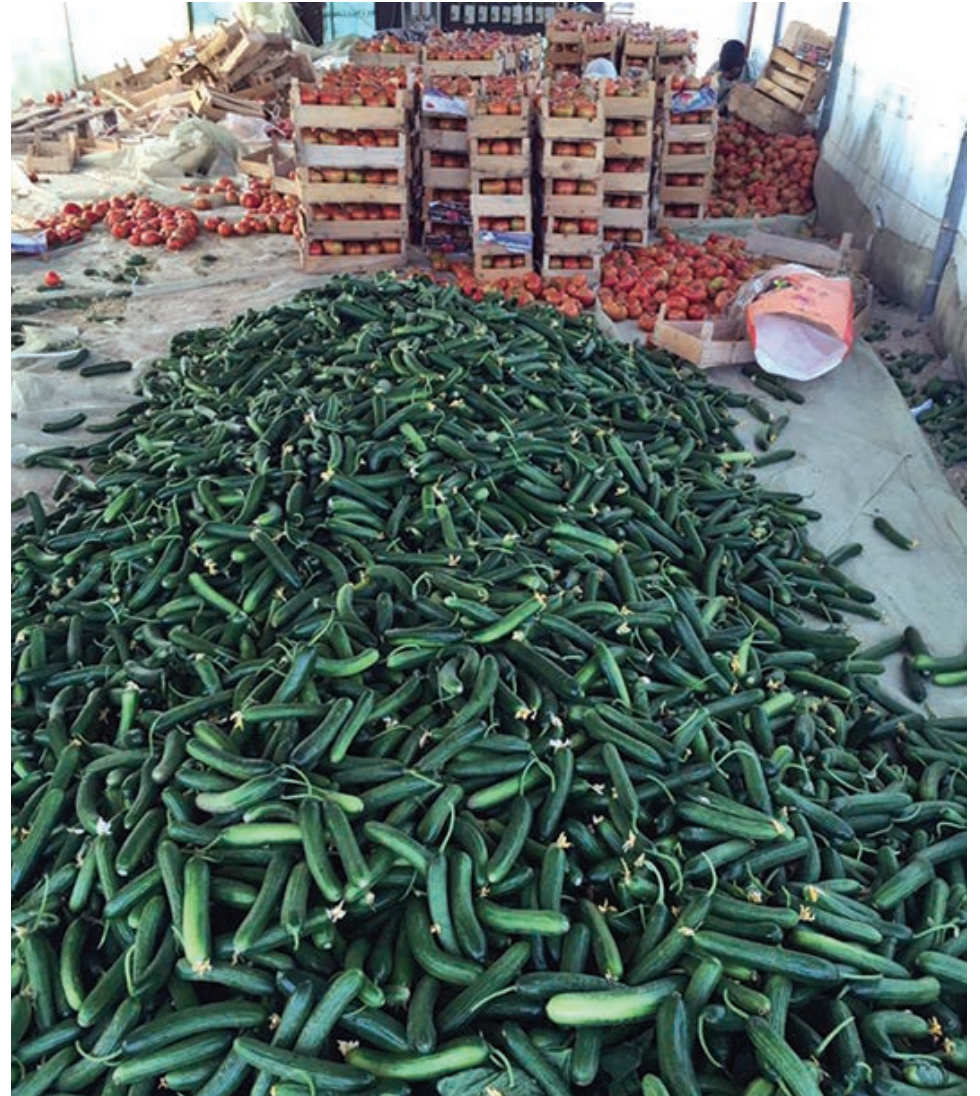
But at the same time, local farmers want more policies that encourage and protect local production. "This institution or body should protect local production. There are many different ministry decrees and resolutions every year that are not helpful for farmers or are not applied. The latest decree should be in force from June 1, which bans dealers from selling local agricultural products to the Cooperative Union. This should make the prices of local products cheaper, but I'm not sure if this rule will be respected," Jaber Al-Azmi, Treasurer for the Kuwait Farmers Union demanded an independent authority for national food security.

"The labor shortage decreased agriculture production, which will soon lead to a rise in the prices of products. We have self-sufficiency in some products during the entire year, such as cucumbers. We should not be importing these products at all. We

have self-sufficiency in other products during some periods, so imports should stop during these periods. During the beginning of the pandemic last year, when imports stopped for two months, we managed to have self-sufficiency," stressed Azmi.

Abdullah Al-Damak, Head of Kuwait Farmers Union, said new farmers are the most affected by this unpleasant situation.

"Many of them took loans to start agricultural projects and are not able to repay them. One of the solutions that might help local products is to have a separate area outside the supermarket for local products, similar to gas cylinder outlets and others. The crop calendar will definitely help too. Also, the government should allow farmers to bring in manpower from abroad," he told Kuwait Times.



Agricultural facts about Kuwait

According to the latest figures from the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources in 2021, the approximate number of farms in Kuwait is around 7,000. Some of these farms are not productive, and some are for livestock. According to farmer Kreibani, the approximate number of workers in each farm is between 25 to 30. He told Kuwait Times that about half of his staff left work, as the majority returned to their countries, while few left to work in other jobs.

According to <https://www.statista.com>, the statistic shows the distribution of employment in Kuwait by economic sector from 2010 to 2020. In 2020, 1.96 percent of the employees in Kuwait were active in the agricultural sector, 24.38 percent in industry and 73.66 percent in the service sector.

According to the statistic from 2019, the number of expat employees in private sector is: 1,616,412, which equals 96 percent of employees in the private sector.

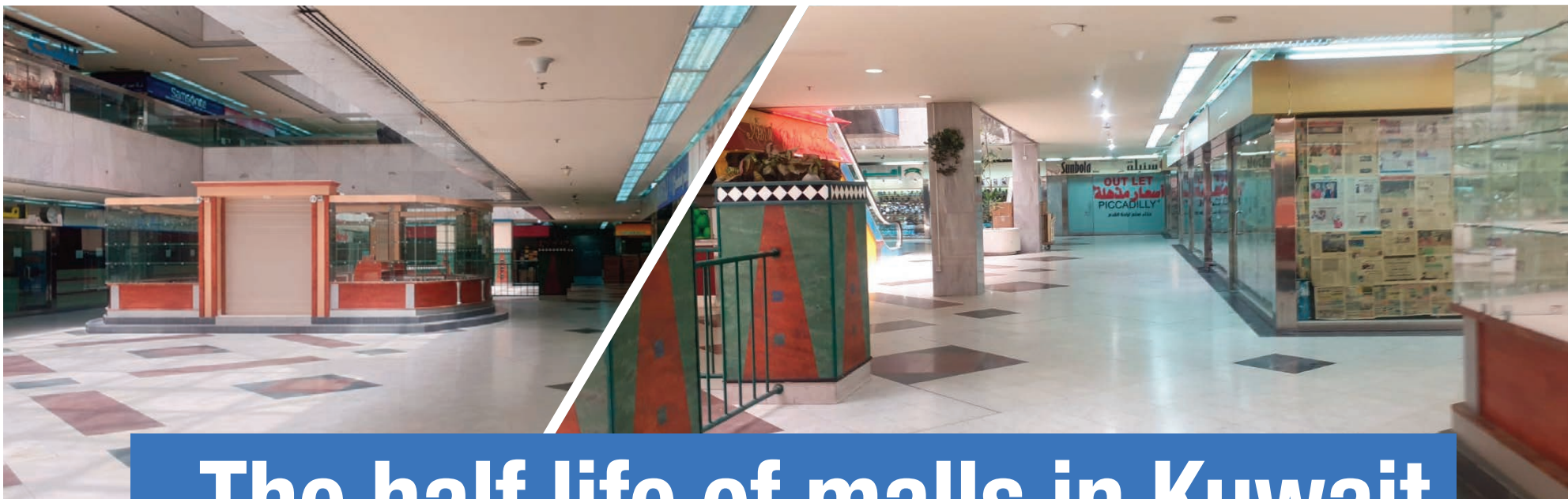
<https://tradingeconomics.com> mentioned that agricultural land (percent of land area) in Kuwait was reported at 8.4175 percent in

2018, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources. Kuwait - Agricultural land (percent of land area) - actual values, historical data, forecasts and projections were sourced from the World Bank on June of 2021.

Kuwait: Crop production index (2004-2006 = 100), 1961 - 2018: For that indicator, we provide data for Kuwait from 1961 to 2018. The average value for Kuwait during that period was 31.7 index points with a minimum of 0.7 index points in 1961 and a maximum of 121.8 index points in 2013. The latest value from 2018 is 98.3 index points. For comparison, the world average in 2018 based on 189 countries is 102.0 index points. Source: <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com>

GDP by sector for the year 2020: agriculture (0.4 percent), industry (58.7 percent), services (40.9 percent) (2017 est.) source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

Local



The half life of malls in Kuwait

'Memories of Al-Muthanna'

By Ben Garcia

Malls and shopping complexes play an important role in Kuwait's social life. They are not just destinations for shopping and eating out but also important gathering points for socializing, meeting friends and enjoying the weekend. This is especially true in summer time when outdoor temperatures make life indoors the only viable option. But malls also have a complex half life; one is built and comes into fashion and becomes a gathering place, then a new shopping mall is built and the older one fades from popularity. Most people who have grown up in Kuwait remember a shopping mall popular in their youth that has now fallen out of favor.

One such mall is the near empty Al-Muthanna Complex in Kuwait City. Once the most popular and visited shopping destination for people in Kuwait, Al-Muthanna is now mostly a store of memories. Built in the early 1980s, Al-Muthanna Complex once played host to a wide range of clothing and shoe stores, bookshops, restaurants and cafes. It

was a thriving, popular location especially on weekends.

Helen Emmanuel has loads of memories of Al-Muthanna Complex, from the time she arrived in Kuwait in the early 1980s. When her cohort of nurses from the Philippines arrived in Kuwait in 1986, a restaurant in Muthanna Complex was their first stop from the airport.

"We arrived in April 1986 in the afternoon. Of course we were all hungry, so the mandoub from the ministry of health took us to Al-Muthanna Complex to eat before taking us to our accommodation in Riggae," she recalled.

"We had no cameras at that time and no smartphones to capture the moments. But my memory of Muthanna Complex is vivid and until now I can visualize the first time I arrived in Kuwait and at the complex," she said.

"For many of us expats, Kuwait City was Al-Muthanna and Al-Muthanna was Kuwait City. I cannot forget Al-Muthanna because I met my husband at this complex. It was our meeting place from the time of courtship until I finally said yes to him," she said.



"Al-Muthanna became a sanctuary for my children too - I have seven kids and they all grew up visiting Al-Muthanna Complex, especially for lunch or dinner at restaurants or to play after Sunday church service," she said. Helen's last visit to Al-Muthanna Complex was in 2016.

Ahmed Jaber, a Palestinian born in Kuwait, shared his unforgettable experiences of Al-Muthanna Complex with Kuwait Times. "I miss the old days when I used to visit that place to play computer games with my brother. We played from morning till evening...those were the days," he reminisced.

"After I completed my university, my first job was at Salhiya Complex near Muthanna. So I normally hung out with friends there after work. It is really sad to see the current condition of the complex. It's old, there's no maintenance and there seems to be no more branded shoes, watches or clothes there anymore, unlike before when we used to see big names inside," he lamented.

Anna Del Mundo, a Filipina businesswoman who arrived in Kuwait in 1985, has

fond memories of Al-Muthanna Complex. "Kuwait City, especially Muthanna, is a special place for me because I have lots of memories of my younger days in Kuwait there. I remember buying stationery from a huge bookstore in the basement and sitting on the benches to write letters and send them to my family in the Philippines. Muthanna was a household name for many expats. We could buy almost everything there, from shoes to sunglasses to food; you name it, they had it all," she recalled.

"I used to meet several Filipino community leaders at Muthanna. Many Filipino entertainers and singers were brought to Kuwait by Kuwait Plaza Hotel, before it changed to Swiss-Belhotel. Now it's Inn & Go. When it was the Kuwait Plaza Hotel, many Filipino singers visited for a week or two to entertain visitors. That's how I remember Muthanna," Anna told Kuwait Times. "Muthanna was once very popular - it was The Avenues mall for us at that time."



KUWAIT: Photos showing empty offices and shops inside Al-Muthanna Complex in Kuwait City.

— Photos by Ben Garcia

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Local

Kuwait and India sign MoU on domestic sector recruitment

Jaishankar meets PM, hands over Modi's letter to Amir



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives from India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar a letter from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar pose for a photo.

By Sajeew K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait and India yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on labor, leveraging cooperation between the countries on recruitment of domestic workers.

The MoU brings the Indian domestic workers in Kuwait within the ambit of a legal framework which streamlines their recruitment and provides them with protection of law. The MoU was signed, in the presence of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, by Indian Ambassador Sibi George and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri.

Both ministers welcomed the signing of the MoU which will introduce an employment contract ensuring the rights and obligations of both the employer and the domestic workers. It seeks to establish a mechanism for 24-hour assistance to domestic workers. The MoU provides for establishment of a joint committee for periodic review and assessment and to follow up the implementation of the MoU which will conduct annual meetings, according to a press release issued by the Indian embassy.

Dr Jaishankar, who arrived in Kuwait on Wednesday night leading a high-level delegation, met with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday morning. He handed over to him a letter from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The visiting minister thanked the leadership for Kuwait's prompt supply of liquid medical oxygen and other oxygen-related supplies to India to fight the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Both sides discussed the state of bilateral relations and also the devel-

opments in the region.

Jaishankar's visit comes at the invitation of Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah and is part of the enhanced high-level political exchanges in the context of 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait.

The visiting minister held talks with Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah. The talks were also attended by Dr Abdullah Issa Al-Salman, Minister of Commerce and Industry. Both sides reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and exchanged views on the regional developments and global issues. They also discussed the challenges posed by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, the distress it caused to humanity and reiterated their commitment to jointly fight the pandemic and address the myriad of issues that their citizens face such as travel restrictions and issues related to vaccination. The topics covered also included food security, cyber security, cooperation in the energy sector and issues related to the Indian workforce in Kuwait.

Both sides agreed to hold the first India - Kuwait Joint Commission meeting later this year and also to set dates for early meetings of the Joint Working Groups on health, hydrocarbon and manpower. The two sides also agreed to set up new joint working groups in other areas of cooperation.

The joint celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait were launched at the meeting. The year-long celebrations will continue through 2021-2022.

In the evening, Jaishankar chaired a roundtable conference of Indian ambassadors in the GCC countries and Iran. The minister, who arrived in Kuwait on a three-day official visit on Wednesday night, was received at Kuwait International Airport by Acting Assistant Foreign Minister Abdul Razzaq Al-Khleeafa and Kuwait's



Indian Ambassador Sibi George and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri pose for a photo after signing an MoU in presence of Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Dr S Jaishankar.



The launching of joint celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait.

Ambassador to India Jasem Al-Najem. Indian Ambassador Sibi George and senior officials of the Embassy of India were also at the airport to receive the minister and the Indian delega-

tion. The visiting minister is scheduled to address the Indian community today at 6 pm on a virtual platform, strictly adhering to the COVID-19 protocol.

Local

People vaccinated abroad may register with MoH

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health has established a website platform for people to register vaccines that they have received abroad. Both citizens and residents can register their vaccine record at the Ministry of Health website. This will enable the Kuwait Ministry of Health to verify and validate the vaccination record for those vaccinated by non-Kuwaiti health authorities.

Vaccinated individuals with records approved by the Kuwaiti Public Health Department may then download the Immune App from the Apple App store or Google Play store to

access their vaccination details.

Neither the website registration nor the Immune App are mandatory, but registering will provide a convenient method for individuals to prove their vaccination status for entry to cinemas or other venues requiring proof of vaccination.

Prior registration might also prove a useful step for residents who hope to return from abroad and need to prove vaccination status before arriving in Kuwait. The airport is currently closed to foreigners, including legal residents stuck abroad.

Kuwait's government has already announced that it will only recognize four vaccines: Oxford-Astrazeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson&Johnson.

It is unclear if Covidshield which is a version of the Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine produced in India, will be included in the list. The platform to register vaccines for people vaccinated abroad can be accessed on the following link: https://vaxcert.moh.gov.kw/SPCMS/PH/CVD_19_Vaccine_External_Registration.aspx.

Kuwait PM meets newly-appointed ambassadors



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets UAE's Ambassador Dr Matar Al-Neyadi. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets France's ambassador Anne-Claire Legendre.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets UK's ambassador Belinda Lewis.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Vatican's ambassador Eugene Martin Nugent.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held talks yesterday with a number of international ambassadors, all of whom have just started their respective tenures. UAE's ambassador Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, in addition to France's and the

UK's envoys; Anne-Claire Legendre and Belinda Lewis respectively, were among those to have met His Highness the Prime Minister. The Vatican's ambassador to Kuwait Eugene Martin Nugent also had a meeting with His Highness the Prime Minister. — KUNA

Russian ambassador hails ties with Kuwait

KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the State of Kuwait Nikolay Makarov released the following statement on the occasion of his country's national day:

"On June 12, Russia celebrates its National Day. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the leadership and the people of Kuwait for their kind greetings on this occasion and to emphasize that friendly relations that happily exist between Russia and Kuwait have a deep-rooted history and continue to witness steady and stable development (just last year in spite of the coronavirus crisis, our bilateral trade rose by 30 percent).

"Our friendship is based on mutual respect, shared interests and common approaches to international relations - Russia and Kuwait uphold the supremacy of the international law, principles of non-confrontation and strive for peaceful settlements of conflicts. Kuwait's remarkable humanitarian and charitable efforts as well as its contri-

bution in settling regional crises are highly recognized by the UN and international community.

"Given the extraordinary circumstances the whole world is going through due to the coronavirus pandemic we would like once again to commend the measures taken by Kuwait to tackle the coronavirus crisis, prevent the virus from spreading in the country and mitigate the negative consequences on people's lives. We are strictly abiding by all relevant health regulations, considering it our contribution to joint efforts to achieve a common goal and overcome the pandemic. Moreover, most of the Embassy staff were able to get vaccinated thanks to the Government of Kuwait.

"Before the coronavirus crisis we witnessed many Kuwaitis visiting our country as tourists and businessmen. Now Russia is gradually lifting travel restrictions and resumed organizing global offline events like the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum which took place a week ago. This northern cultural and historic capital of Russia is also a Euro 2020 football championship host city - and with strict adherence to health regulations, people from any country can come and enjoy the games. We hope that more Kuwaiti citizens will soon be able to visit our country again to see its incredible historic and natural sites, learn more about our history, culture and traditions."

Opposition MP appeals to Amir over dire situation

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmaker Muhannad Al-Sayer yesterday sent an appeal to the Amir to intervene to help resolve the country's dilemmas resulting from a lingering political dispute with the government.

"I am certain that your highness does not accept the deterioration that has affected all establishments in the state, especially in the legislative assembly. I am sure you do not accept that there are over 800 immigrant Kuwaitis" who have left the country and are living abroad, Sayer said in statements directed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

He said that the deterioration has badly hit employment where some 30,000 Kuwaitis are waiting for jobs and housing where thousands are waiting for houses. The deterioration has negatively impacted health, education and other sectors.

Sayer said that His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah has failed to fulfill promises he made and that his alliance with Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is obstructing the functioning of the National Assembly.

The lawmaker said that political reforms are essential to introduce reforms in housing, education, health and others, adding that corruption has become so rife and insisted that the assembly will refuse to be part of ongoing corruption.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri warned that the situation is deteriorating fast and "we are heading to a dark path," adding that as a result of the deterioration "you should expect that everything in the country will be sold within the next two years."

He also warned that a majority of Kuwaitis will become poor despite the huge wealth. Opposition MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf meanwhile charged what he described as "forces of the darkness and the deep state" are trying to show the parliamentary opposition as if they aim at destabilizing the government which is completely untrue.

In the meantime, the technical office of the assembly's financial and economic affairs committee warned the panel against approving the draft five-year development plan 2020/2021 - 2024/2025 because this will mean approving taxes. The office said in a note that the development plan clearly calls for imposing selective taxes, value added taxes and raising charges on some public services and therefore will negatively impact the income of Kuwaiti citizens.

Friday Times International

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Myanmar junta hits Suu Kyi with graft charges

Risky undercover work key in ANOM police coup

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CARBIS BAY: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (C) and his wife Carrie Johnson (R) walk with US President Joe Biden (L) and US First Lady Jill Biden at Carbis Bay, Cornwall yesterday, ahead of the three-day G7 summit being held from 11-13 June. —AFP

N Ireland casts shadow over Boris-Biden meeting

CARBIS BAY: US President Joe Biden was set to warn British Prime Minister Boris Johnson not to imperil peace in Northern Ireland as they held their first face-to-face meeting. The pair were all smiles as they posed for media in Carbis Bay, Cornwall, on the eve of the G7 leaders' summit, with Biden congratulating Johnson on his recent marriage. "We both married way above our station," Biden quipped. Johnson replied: "I'm not going to disagree with the president on that or indeed on anything else." The meeting, at the start of Biden's first foreign tour as president, is billed as a chance for the old allies to help shape the post-pandemic world, in areas from climate change to technology and trade.

They will agree a modern version of the 1941 charter signed by their predecessors Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt that determined the new world order after World War II. But while keen to reaffirm the strength of the two countries' "special relationship", Biden has reportedly ordered US diplomats to rebuke Johnson over his handling of Brexit and its effects on peace in Northern Ireland.

The Times said Washington's most senior diplomat in London, Yael Lempert, told Brexit Minister David Frost that the UK government was "inflaming" tensions in Ireland and Europe with

its opposition to checks at ports in the province".

US national security advisor Jake Sullivan insisted the president—a proud Irish-American with distant family still in Ireland—would not make "threats or ultimatums" to Johnson. But he said Biden was "rock solid" in the belief that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that ended three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland must be protected. Adding to the pressure on Johnson, EU leaders said they would also bring up the row when they meet the British leader on Saturday, as member state Ireland said it welcomed US support.

Peace deal

The row centres on new trading arrangements for Northern Ireland introduced in January after the UK left the European single market and customs union, nearly four years after the divisive Brexit vote. Under a new protocol, checks are supposed to be carried out on deliveries heading into Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, to prevent goods going into the European single market via neighbouring EU member Ireland.

But pro-British unionist communities say the new rules have driven a wedge between the province and the rest of the UK, increasing the likelihood of reunification with Ireland. London

suspended checks earlier this year because of threats to port staff, and the protocol has been blamed for the worst violence in years in the British-run province. Talks to resolve the simmering row broke up in London without agreement Wednesday, with Europe threatening retaliatory action, including tariffs, if the new trading arrangements are not implemented.

Johnson's spokesman made no comment to reporters about the US warning, adding only: "Protecting the Belfast Good Friday Agreement is in everyone's interests and that's been our focus and priority throughout our talks with the EU."

'The US is back!'

Biden touched down in England on Wednesday night, announcing "The United States is back!" as he outlined the need for global collaboration to rebuild after Covid-19 and to reset diplomatic ties after the isolationism of the Trump era. The White House said he will announce a "historic" US donation of half a billion Covid vaccine doses for 92 poorer countries, to "supercharge" the collective fight-back against the global pandemic.

Other G7 countries—hosts Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan—will also contribute, and outline a "comprehensive roadmap"

to ending the pandemic, a senior administration in Washington added.

As Russia and China also engage in so-called "vaccine diplomacy" and campaigners press for a level playing field on global vaccine distribution, the official denied the US was seeking any quid pro quo. "This is the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do, and it is tangible proof that it is going to be the world's democracies who ultimately deliver when it comes to beating the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

Immediately after his arrival, Biden said he would stress the need for a multilateral approach to tackling global issues at every stop on his week-long trip—and appease allies baffled and alienated by the approach of his predecessor Donald Trump.

The White House said there was a need to renew commitments to "democratic principles in the face of genuine challenges and authoritarian competition" in the world today. After the G7 ends on Sunday, Biden will visit Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle and fly to Brussels for summits with the NATO military alliance on Monday and the European Union on Tuesday before a likely tense meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday in Geneva. —AFP

International

Macron to announce withdrawal of French troops in Sahel

France currently has 5,100 troops in the Sahel region

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron is set to announce yesterday a partial withdrawal of French troops deployed in the Sahel region of Africa for almost a decade to battle jihadist insurgents, three sources with knowledge of the plan told AFP. The issue is set to be discussed at a defense council meeting ahead of a rare press conference by Macron later in the day, the sources said, asking not to be identified by name. The French army declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

France currently has 5,100 troops in the arid and volatile Sahel region, which stretches across Africa under the Sahara desert and spans half a dozen countries. The Barkhane operation dates back to an initial deployment undertaken from January 2013 as Paris sought to respond to growing instability in the region caused by Islamist militants. For years Macron has tried to get Western allies to help shoulder the burden of an anti-terror fight that aims to stop Islamist extremists from exploiting anger over poverty and ineffective governments. The killing in April of the veteran leader of Chad, a close Paris ally, and a coup in Mali last month have also underlined the threat posed by continued political instability in the region.

A jihadist foothold in the region could make

it easier to send over fighters to Europe to carry out terror attacks, officials warn. But despite some successes for France's Barkhane force including last year's killing of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader Abdelmalek Droukdel, insurgents have continued to carry out deadly attacks.

And so far only a few hundred soldiers are participating in the international Takuba task force, including Estonians and Czechs, and Macron has failed to secure significant contributions from France's larger European allies. A joint anti-terror force by the G5 nations—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—remains plagued by a lack of equipment, funds and training. The anti-insurgency effort has cost the lives of 50 French soldiers, prompting calls in France for a review of Barkhane's mission and speculation that Macron was ready to bring some troops home. "Changes that are likely to be significant will be made to our military deployment in the Sahel when the time comes, but they will not be made immediately," Macron said in February after a video summit with the leaders of the G5 countries.

In the Sahel region itself the presence of French forces is also rejected by some politicians and locals as a colonial throwback. The an-



HOMBORI, Mali: In this file photo a French soldier secures a perimeter during a break in the military convoy's trip between Gossi and Hombori ahead of the start of the French Barkhane Force operation in Mali's Gourma region. — AFP

ouncement by Macron could force security in the Sahel up the agenda of a meeting of G7 leaders in Britain from Friday to Sunday, and a summit of the NATO military alliance in Brussels on June 14. The Sahel is seen by many Western politicians and experts as a major risk because of the growing strength of jihadist groups there, as well as its role as a crossroads for arms and people-smug-

gling. Leaders of the G5 nations have warned Macron in February they would be hard pressed to keep insurgents from making further inroads in case of a rapid French pullout. Since then, the veteran leader of Chad and close French ally, Idriss Deby Itno, has been killed, while Mali has suffered a second coup in nine months that has badly strained relations with Paris. — AFP

Protests erupt in Sudan after Petrol subsidy cuts

KHARTOUM: Sudanese blocked streets in Khartoum with burning tyres yesterday to protest a government's decision scrapping subsidies on petrol and diesel that more than doubled prices. Sudan's economy has sunk further into a deep crisis since the overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, sparking frequent demonstrations and risking social unrest in a country in transition. The lifting of subsidies, which took effect Tuesday, saw the price of petrol shoot up from 150 Sudanese pounds (\$0.34 cents) to 290 pounds per litre, while diesel went up from 125 to 285 pounds.

It is the latest in reforms by Sudan's transitional government which vowed to fix the economy, which had been crippled by US sanctions under Bashir. Late Wednesday, an influential trade union group that had spearheaded mass protests leading to Bashir's ouster, urged the Sudanese to demonstrate against the "unjust" decision. "We call on protesters to take to the streets now and daily until these unjust decisions are overturned," the Sudanese professionals association said in a Facebook



KHARTOUM: Tuk-tuks (motorized rickshaws) and motorcycles queue-up for fuel at a petrol station in Al-Amarat district of Sudan's capital Khartoum yesterday. — AFP

statement. Responding to that call, small groups of protesters were seen blocking streets in several Khartoum neighborhoods yesterday with burning tyres.

Sudanese motorists queuing at petrol stations to fill up, were also angry. "This government should hand in its resignation. It is unable to manage the country," said one of them, Sofian Ibrahim. Another motorist, Haroun Mohamed, said: "We are living a very bitter reality. The prices of everything on the market will now shoot up." Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim said scrapping subsidies on petrol and diesel was part of policies aimed at "serving the

interests of the Sudanese people and the Sudanese economy".

"Even if people bring down this government, the next one will also have no option but to go on this track to fix the economy," he told reporters late Wednesday. Sudan's transitional government has struggled to rebuild the economy and end the country's international isolation since the ouster of Bashir, and hopes that reforms will make it eligible for an IMF debt relief initiative that would help settle a staggering \$60 billion foreign debt. Since April, inflation has soared over 360 percent, according to official data. —AFP

Outcry as Muslim lawmaker equates US with Hamas

WASHINGTON: Pressure mounted yesterday on US congresswoman Ilhan Omar as a Jewish group of fellow Democratic lawmakers called on her to clarify her remarks about "unthinkable atrocities" committed by the United States, Hamas and the Taliban. Omar, one of the first two Muslim women elected to the US Congress, has antagonized or offended members of her Democratic Party in the past with comments that have been decried as anti-Semitic or anti-Israel.

Her latest remarks led to a rare public letter of disapproval from 12 House Democrats, who wrote that "equating the United States and Israel to Hamas and the Taliban is as offensive as it is misguided." The United States and Israel are imperfect and, like all democracies, at times deserving of critique, but false equivalencies give cover to terrorist groups," wrote the group, led by Brad Schneider of Illinois. "We urge Congresswoman Omar to clarify her words." At a Monday House hearing Omar had grilled Secretary of State Antony Blinken over accountability for victims of crimes against humanity.

She then followed up with a tweet that read: "We have seen unthinkable atrocities committed by the US, Hamas, Israel, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." In their letter the Jewish lawmakers said Omar's comments equating actions by a rule-of-law nation and those of organizations that "engage in terrorism" potentially "reflects deep-seated prejudice." Omar, who was born in Somalia and immigrated as a refugee in the mid-1990s, pushed back yesterday. "The Islamophobic tropes in this statement are offensive," she tweeted. — AFP

International

Twelve killed in Myanmar military plane crash

Emergency responders rescue boy and a sergeant from the plane's crew

YANGON: Twelve people were killed when a Myanmar military plane carrying a senior monk and several donors to a religious event crashed in a central region of the country, a junta spokesman said yesterday. The plane, which was carrying six crew and eight passengers, crashed shortly before it was due to land in the city of Pyin Oo Lwin, spokesman Zaw Min Tun said in a statement, blaming "bad weather".

Footage broadcast by local media showed wreckage strewn around the twisted body of a plane lying on open ground near overhead pylons, and a small plume of smoke billowing upwards. AFP was unable to verify the footage. Emergency responders were able to rescue a boy and a sergeant from the plane's crew, the statement said, adding they had been sent to a nearby military hospital for treatment. Kavisara, a prominent monk from the Zay Kone monastery near the capital Naypyidaw, and seven

donors had been on board, travelling to Pyin Oo Lwin to open a religious event, it said. Pyin Oo Lwin is home to the Defence Services Academy, where the military's top brass are trained. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is a graduate.

He visited the monastery and paid homage to its chief monk on February 2, state media reported, a day after ousting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power in a coup. Myanmar has been in turmoil since, with mass protests convulsing daily life and sending its economy spiralling. The country's Buddhist monkhood led an earlier struggle against military rule but is split on the coup that ended the country's nascent democracy, with some prominent religious leaders defending the new junta.

The military has sought to quell mass anti-coup protests with bloody crackdowns that have killed more than 800 civilians, according to a local monitoring group. This has prompted civilians

in some townships to form "defence forces", while some of Myanmar's ethnic rebel armies have stepped up offensives against the military.

Last month, the Kachin Independence Army—an ethnic rebel group that has waged a decades-long insurgency against the military—downed an army helicopter during fierce clashes. Plane crashes are common in Myanmar, which has an underdeveloped aviation sector, and the country's monsoon season has caused problems for commercial and military flights in the past. A military plane crashed into the Andaman Sea in 2017, killing all 122 people on board in one of the deadliest aviation accidents in the country's history. Authorities blamed bad weather. And in 2015, an Air Bagan passenger plane veered off the runway amid bad weather and heavy rain. A passenger and a person on the ground were killed. — AFP

Child survivor of Italy's cable car crash leaves hospital

ROME: The sole survivor of a deadly cable car crash in Italy was released from hospital yesterday, health authorities said, noting that the five-year-old's condition was "much improved". Fourteen people, including Eitan's Israeli parents, younger brother and great-grandparents, were killed in the May 24 accident after a cable snapped on the aerial tram bringing weekend visitors to the top of the Piedmont region's Mottarone mountain.

"Early this morning Eitan was discharged from the Isola Margherita ward of the Regina Margherita hospital," said the Turin children's hospital in a statement. The child — who had suffered from severe chest and abdomen injuries — returned home to Pavia, south of Milan, with his aunt, the hospital said.

"His condition is much improved now," said the statement, adding that a full recovery would take 60 days. The cable car accident, which came at the start of Italy's much-anticipated reopening to tourists after coronavirus closures, was the country's worst in over two decades. It remains unclear why the pull cable snapped just before the car reached the summit on the 20-minute trip up the mountain.

Investigations have revealed, however, that emergency brakes that could have prevented the tragedy by stopping the car on its supporting cable had been deactivated. Because the brake was not activated, the car flew backwards and crashed to the ground, sliding down the mountain before coming to a stop.

Police arrested the owner of the cable car operating company and a technical director, but released them soon thereafter pending an investigation. The company's chief technician, however, remains under house arrest. He has admitted to disabling the brake system because of recurring malfunctions, according to the chief prosecutor.

Eitan, who was airlifted in critical condition to the hospital after the accident, spent a week in intensive care with his aunt at his bedside. — AFP



JABAL AL-ZAWIYA: Syrian man mourns over the body of a victim killed in reported bombardment by government forces on the village of Iblin in the Jabal Al-Zawiya region in Syria's rebel-held northwest Idlib province, yesterday. — AFP

Regime shelling kills 10 in northwest Syria

BEIRUT: Syrian regime shelling on the opposition-held Idlib enclave killed 10 people yesterday, one of the deadliest violations of a 15-month-old ceasefire, a war monitor said. The incident started with rocket fire near the village of Ablin, which lies around 25 kilometres (15 miles) southwest of the city of Idlib.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three civilians, including a man, a woman and her child, were killed in the shelling, which occurred near the line separating regime forces from the opposition-held enclave. A second attack killed seven people who had gathered at the site of the first, said the monitor.

They were all members or affiliates of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, a jihadist organisation that includes ex-members of Syria's former Al-Qaeda franchise, the Observatory said. The at-

tack was one of the deadliest since a March 2020 ceasefire, which was brokered by the conflict's main Russian and Turkish brokers and has largely held since.

An HTS spokesman and an HTS media coordinator were among the seven killed, added the Observatory, which has yet to determine the other victims. An AFP correspondent in the area saw the remains of a house destroyed by the rocket fire as well as a charred vehicle parked outside. The bodies of several victims were lined on the floor and covered with blankets.

HTS and its allies control around half of Idlib province as well as slivers of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia. More than three million people live in the region, half of whom have been displaced from other parts of the country.

Since the ceasefire deal, the Russian-backed regime has stopped short of launching a fully-fledged land offensive to deliver on its promise to reconquer the entire country. But violations of the ceasefire are relatively frequent as government forces try to maintain their stranglehold on the enclave. — AFP

International

Castillo holds razor-thin lead in Peru vote as Fujimori alleges fraud

Peruvian authorities and election observers dismiss counting fraud

LIMA: Leftist Pedro Castillo held a razor-thin lead Wednesday in Peru's polarizing presidential election as his right-wing rival Keiko Fujimori made renewed allegations of voter fraud she claimed involved half a million ballots. With 99 percent of votes counted from Sunday's presidential poll, rural school teacher and union leader Castillo retained a tiny lead of 50.2 percent over Fujimori's 49.7 percent. Late Wednesday Fujimori asked the National Electoral Tribunal (JNE) to annul the results of 802 polling stations, the equivalent of 200,000 votes.

She also asked for another 300,000 ballots to be reviewed, so "half a million votes are in play," she said at a press conference. Fujimori, the daughter of jailed former president Alberto Fujimori, led in early counting but as Castillo slowly gained ground she alleged "irregularities" and "signs of fraud." Peruvian authorities and election observers have dismissed any possibility of counting fraud.

For Fujimori, the stakes are higher than mere power: she faces more than 30 years in prison if convicted on charges of taking money from scandal-tainted Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht to fund presidential bids in 2011 and 2016. She has already spent 16 months in pretrial detention. Under Peruvian law, election victory would see the charges suspended until after her term, but defeat could see her put on trial.

Crises and corruption

Peruvians voted on Sunday for their fifth president in three years after a series of crises and corruption scandals saw three different leaders in office in a single week last year. Both candidates had previously agreed to respect the outcome. As Fujimori spoke, Castillo

thanked backers rallying in his support. "Let's not be provoked by those who want to see this country in chaos. Therefore, we make a call for peace and tranquility," he tweeted. Castillo earlier said party observers considered his triumph a done deal, even as authorities held back on announcing an outcome.

"In the name of the Peruvian people," Castillo thanked "embassies and governments from Latin America and other countries" for messages of congratulations on his "victory." Late Wednesday Castillo supporters rallied outside the vote counting office in downtown Lima, while a pro-Fujimori crowd gathered in a large Lima park to denounce the vote "fraud." No government has officially recognized a Castillo victory, although Bolivia's former leftist president Evo Morales sent a message of "congratulations for this victory."

The win is "also for the Latin American people who want to live with social justice!" tweeted Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president. Castillo is ahead by 79,000 votes, but with ballots still being tallied and votes being challenged by both sides, the process will likely take 10 to 12 days to be fully resolved, an official from the vote counting authority ONPE told AFP. As in Peru's three previous presidential elections, also tightly-run, the tail-end of vote counting has been slow due to delays in the arrival of ballots in Lima from rural and jungle areas, and from abroad—where one million of the country's 25 million eligible voters live.

Fujimori has taken most of the expat votes counted, but Castillo is widely popular among rural electors. Overcoming that difference for Fujimori "will be very difficult, because there should be more votes that remain to be counted in Peru than abroad," analyst Hugo



LIMA: Peruvian leftist presidential candidate Pedro Castillo of Peru Libre waves to supporters from his party headquarters' balcony in Lima. —AFP

Otero told AFP. Peru's military committed itself in a statement to "respect the will of the people expressed at the ballot box," even as calls circulated on social media for the armed forces to prevent Castillo from taking power. Both Castillo and Fujimori have said they will respect democracy and form governments that will lead to economic stability. Whoever wins will lead a nation battered by recession and the world's highest coronavirus death rate, with more than 186,000 deaths among its 33 million population. Two million Peruvians have lost their jobs during the pandemic and nearly a third now live in poverty, official figures show. Peruvians will also be looking for stability, with seven of their last 10 leaders either convicted or under investigation for graft. —AFP

Pope rejects German bishop's offer to quit over abuse

ROME: Pope Francis yesterday rejected an offer by Cardinal Reinhard Marx, a top German bishop, to resign over the mishandling of sexual abuse and cover-up scandals. Continue as you propose (in your pastoral work) but as Archbishop of Munich and Freising," the pope wrote to Marx, referring to the position he was offering to vacate. Marx announced earlier this month that he had offered the pope his resignation over the church's "institutional and systemic failure" in handling child sex abuse scandals. The stunning decision came after the church in Germany, like in many places elsewhere, was shaken by allegations of wide-ranging abuse by clergymen against minors.

In his letter, the pope agreed with Marx in calling the clerical sexual abuse scandals "a catastrophe" and the way the Catholic Church dealt with them "until recently". "The entire Church is in crisis because of the abuse issue" and "the Church cannot proceed without tackling this crisis. The policy of burying the head in the sand leads nowhere," he wrote. In his original letter to the pope dated May 21 and published on June 4 by his archdiocese, Marx said: "It is important to me to share the responsibility for the catastrophe of the sexual abuse by Church officials over the past decades."

Investigations and reports had "consistently shown there have been many personal failures and administrative mistakes but also institutional or 'systemic' failure," added Marx, who was



VATICAN CITY: In this file handout photo Pope Francis (right) meeting with chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, Archbishop of Munich and Freising, German Cardinal Reinhard Marx (left) during a private audience at the Vatican. —AFP

president of the German Bishops' Conference from 2012 to 2020. Slamming colleagues who "refuse to believe there is a shared responsibility in this respect", he said the Church was at "a dead end". Marx—who was never personally accused of abuse or cover up, and who would have remained a cardinal even if Francis had allowed him to quit as archbishop—added that he hoped his resignation would offer a new beginning for the Church. Speaking to journalists, he confirmed the pope had given him permission to publish the letter and that he would continue in his role until he received a response to his offer. —AFP

UK schools plagued by sexual harassment

LONDON: UK schools are failing to protect children from unwanted explicit photos, videos and comments in a culture where online sexual harassment is now seen as normal, a government watchdog said yesterday. The report by Ofsted, based on testimony from hundreds of children, was "very concerning", Education Minister Gavin Williamson tweeted. Despite the scale of the problem, school heads and teachers "consistently underestimated the prevalence of online sexual abuse," the schools inspection body said.

The report comes after the Everyone's Invited website posted thousands of anonymous accounts of sexual abuse and harassment at British schools, drawing government attention to the problem. "Children and young people told us that sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become 'commonplace'," said Ofsted. Such behavior is so common that schools should assume it is happening, whether or not children report it to teachers, Ofsted said. "Some forms of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse have become so normalized for children that they do not see the point in reporting and challenging this behavior," it said. Almost 90 percent of girls and nearly 50 percent of boys said they or their peers regularly received unwanted explicit photos and videos, it said. "Sexist name-calling", including use of words like "slag" and "slut", happens often, according to 92 percent of girls. —AFP

International

Navalny team vows to fight on after 'extremism' ruling

Navalny's closest allies still in Russia are under house arrest

MOSCOW: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption group vowed yesterday to fight on, despite a court ruling branding it an "extremist" organisation and requiring it to shut down. Western countries and the European Union were quick to condemn Wednesday's late-night ruling, but senior Russian officials doubled down, describing Navalny as an agent collaborating with Washington.

The court decision was the latest in a series of moves against critics of President Vladimir Putin, with some of his loudest opponents fleeing the country and several prominent activist groups and independent media shutting down. The ruling bans Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and a network of regional offices from continuing to operate and, under a recently passed law, prevents those previously associated with the groups from running in parliamentary elections.

The FBK was defiant, saying in a Thursday morning Twitter post: "We woke up, smiled with destructive intent and knowing that we are a 'danger to society' will continue to fight corruption!" What exactly the group will be able to do is unclear in the wake of the ruling, which followed a hearing behind closed doors.

Navalny's closest allies still in Russia are under close law enforcement supervision, some under house arrest, and other prominent aides have fled the country. Navalny himself was jailed for more than two-and-a-half years in February after he returned to Russia from Germany where he had been convalescing after a poisoning attack in

Siberia that he blamed on the Kremlin. After Wednesday's ruling Navalny, who is in a penal colony outside Moscow, acknowledged supporters would need to alter their strategy.

'We will not retreat'

"But we will not retreat from our goals and ideas. This is our country and we have no other," the 45-year-old said in an Instagram post. The European Union yesterday condemned the court decision, describing it as the latest effort to "suppress" Russia's opposition. "It is an unfounded decision that confirms a negative pattern of a systematic crackdown on human rights and freedoms which are enshrined in the Russian constitution," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement on behalf of the 27 member states.

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had earlier described the ruling as "perverse" and "Kafka-esque," while the United States called on Moscow to end the crackdown and release Navalny. US President Joe Biden has promised to raise the issue of human rights with Putin when the two meet next week for a summit in Geneva.

The spokeswoman for Russia's foreign ministry defended the ruling, saying the swiftness of the international outcry suggested Navalny was actually working with foreign governments. "This means that they are politically involved in the story," Maria Zakharova said in a radio interview, adding that Washington, with its response, was exposing "agents".

"They show such political zeal because it



MOSCOW: Lawyers (from L) Maxim Olenichev, Evgeny Smirnov, Ilya Novikov, Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Voronin speak with media near the Moscow City Court yesterday, which is considering whether to brand jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's prominent anti-corruption organisation extremist. — AFP

touches those whom they supervised, those whom they supported politically and in other ways," Zakharova said. Russian officials have repeatedly accused the country's opposition of working for and receiving funding from foreign interests.

Prosecutors had in April requested that Navalny's organisations be hit with the "extrem-

ist" label, saying the group was plotting an uprising with support from the West. Announcing the decision from the Moscow city court steps after a marathon session on Wednesday, a spokesperson for prosecutors said Navalny's groups had "incited hatred and enmity against government officials, but also committed extremist actions". — AFP

China arrests 1,100 over cryptocurrency money laundering

BEIJING: China has arrested more than a thousand people for using the profits from crime to buy cryptocurrencies, security officials said, as part of a growing crackdown on the industry.

The country's bitcoin mines power nearly 80 percent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies, although trading in China is banned. Officials have started to turn a sharp eye towards cryptocurrency miners to prevent speculation and stamp out money laundering.

Chinese police busted a network of 1,100 people involved in laundering money by buying cryptocurrencies, the ministry of public security said in a statement dated Wednesday.

The launderers charged clients commission to convert illegal proceeds into virtual currencies via crypto exchanges, the ministry said, without outlining the

amount of money involved.

China banned trading in cryptocurrencies in 2019 and is increasingly tightening restrictions on bitcoin mining. In April, the northern region of Inner Mongolia closed down all its cryptocurrency mines, claiming they failed to meet annual energy consumption targets.

The region accounted for eight percent of the computing power needed to run the global blockchain — a set of online ledgers to record bitcoin transactions. That is higher than the amount of computing power dedicated to blockchain in the entire United States. The northwestern province of Qinghai announced a similar ban on cryptocurrency mining on Wednesday, but no data is available about the size of the operations in the region. — AFP

German city dissolves elite police unit over far-right chats

FRANKFURT: The German state of Hesse yesterday said it was dissolving Frankfurt's elite police force after several officers were accused of participating in far-right online chats and swapping neo-Nazi symbols. The "unacceptable conduct" of some members of the SEK special deployment commando made the dissolution of the team "inevitable", said Hesse state interior minister Peter Beuth.

An expert committee will oversee a complete restructuring of the unit, he added. It comes a day after prosecutors in the western city of Frankfurt said they were investigating 20 police officers, including elite commandos, over extremist material shared in chat groups.

Seventeen of the accused are suspected of distributing content which incites racial hatred, or of sharing neo-Nazi images. Three officers stand ac-

cused of obstruction of justice because, as superiors, they allegedly failed to stop or sanction the chats.

The probe was launched in April, authorities said. Most of the offending content was exchanged in 2016-17, with the most recent from 2019. The accused are all male and range in age from 29 to 54. Nineteen are active police officers and one retired.

The probe began with allegations against a 38-year-old SEK officer in Frankfurt accused of sharing illicit content including child pornography. A search of his mobile phone uncovered some of the racist chats in question.

The case is only the latest example of alleged extremism in the ranks of the German police. Last September, officers in the most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia swooped on colleagues accused of spreading what prosecutors called "repulsive" far-right propaganda in WhatsApp groups.

Last July, prosecutors announced the arrest of a former police officer and his wife suspected of having sent threatening emails to politicians and other public figures across Germany. The anonymous messages were all signed "NSU 2.0", a reference to a German neo-Nazi cell that committed a string of racist murders in the 2000s.

Also last year, Germany's defence minister ordered the partial dissolution of the elite KSK commando force over right-wing extremism. — AFP

International

Risky undercover work key in ANOM police coup

'Human intelligence at the end of the day is still needed'

PARIS: In bamboozling criminal networks into embracing a bogus encrypted messaging app, police relied on cutting-edge tech to outflank gangsters in the sting that has become known as ANOM. In the operation some 12,000 phones were turned into listening devices, resulting in stunning success with more than 800 arrests worldwide so far. But none of it could have worked without the oldest of law enforcement ruses: An inside man tasked with winning the trust of a suspicious and ruthless underworld. "Human intelligence at the end of the day is still needed," said Vanda Felbab-Brown, an organized crime researcher at the Brookings Institute in Washington.

"What signals often give you is a technical picture, a picture of the network. It rarely gives you strategic intelligence: how do these people think, how do they make decisions," she said. The ANOM sting was devised in 2018, when the FBI infiltrated and shut down the Canada-based Phantom Secure encryption service that had supplied its modified phones to crime syndicates. It recruited a former Phantom developer to build the ANOM service and then made drug traffickers, arms sellers and others believe that they were a safe option for carrying out business.

The Trojan Shield operation, carried out with Australian police, prevented around 150 murders, foiled several narcotics shipments and led to seizures of 250 weapons and \$48 million in currency, officials announced this week. "This is quite a honeypot," said Bryce Pardo, a drug crime and policy researcher at the Rand Corporation, referring to systems that surreptitiously monitor and capture network data. "I'm guessing a lot of people are smashing their devices and probably going into hiding," he said.

Erdogan's long arm: Turks arrested and abducted abroad

PARIS: The disappearance of a Turkish teacher in Kyrgyzstan has renewed claims that Turkey's secret services have abducted scores of the country's citizens abroad over the past five years. The kidnappings and forced renditions are mostly of suspected supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the Muslim preacher who Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blames for a failed coup against him in 2016. Turkey has boasted that its secret service masterminded some of the cloak and dagger operations, with the justice minister saying 107 "traitors" had been captured abroad by 2019.

Before Gulen became Erdogan's arch-enemy, the elderly US-based cleric—who denies any part in the coup—was one of his closest and most powerful allies. Gulen's worldwide network of schools was once an important part of Turkish soft power abroad. Here are some of the most notorious cases:

Bishkek mystery

Orhan Inandi, a Turkish-born Kyrgyz citizen who used to head a network of Gulen-linked schools in Kyrgyzstan, went missing on June 1. His car was found near his home with the door open, tyres flat and with the teacher's phone and jacket still inside. While some 1,000 Kyrgyz security forces search for him, his wife claims he is being held inside the Turkish consulate in Bishkek. As hundreds protest over the disappearance in the Central Asian capital, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov visits Erdogan Wednesday, who says the two leaders agree the Gulen movement "poses a national security threat to both countries".

Trust no one?

The fact that hardened criminals, hypervigilant and wary by nature, were taken in by the sting will have others wonder whether they can trust anybody. "It instills a very high level of insecurity at the highest level of groups, and they will become very distrustful of each other," Felbab-Brown said. The uncertainty, the arrests and disrupted deals are likely to pay dividends for law enforcement for months. In effect, the ground has shifted under criminals' feet—How to communicate? Are risky face-to-face meetings going to be required more often? And how to know if the next encryption service to emerge will truly be secure?

"It makes it difficult for these groups to persist with those kind of operations," Felbab-Brown said. Rival groups that were not ensnared by the ANOM deception could take advantage of the situation, expanding their operations or moving into new markets or territory. "It certainly opens the possibility of significant changes in the global criminal landscape," said Jake Harrington, a former FBI officer now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

'Primitive methods'

Adding a landmark technological coup to a classic sting is likely to become standard operating procedure for police agencies hoping to keep up with increasingly sophisticated criminal networks. "This is the first time where law enforcement designed and rolled out an encrypted chat service on its own," Pardo said. "That fact alone may scare other criminal groups from using encrypted chat services." It will also force changes to other time-

Nairobi coup

Last month Gulen's nephew Selahaddin Gulen disappears from a police station in the Kenyan capital despite a court order banning his extradition. He later appears handcuffed, triumphantly photographed between two Turkish flags in Ankara. The abduction echoed the most celebrated operation ever by Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), when its agents seized Kurdish PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Nairobi in 1999. The founder of the Kurdish Workers' Party, which has fought a guerilla campaign against Ankara since the 1980s, has been held on an island prison off Istanbul since.

Kosovo scandal

The former head of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, a border police chief and a top interior ministry official are charged in February with abusing their positions in handing over six Turks working in Gulen-linked schools to Turkey in March 2018. The men's families say they were tortured on a private jet by Turkish agents on their way to Turkey.

Uzbekistan

The same month, Turkish state media reports that two Gulenists had been captured and returned from Uzbekistan.

Moldova five

Europe's top rights court condemns Moldova in June 2019 over the "extra-legal transfer" the previous September of five Turkish nationals with alleged ties to Gulen. They were put on a special plane back to Turkey in a joint operation between Turkish and Moldovan intelligence agencies. A report earlier this year by Freedom House says Erdogan has pursued his "perceived enemies in at least 31 different countries."

Gabon three

Erdogan hails the MIT agents who flew three suspected members



PARIS: An illustration picture shows the ANOM logo displayed on the screen of a smartphone in Paris. —AFP

tested techniques for underworld dealings.

A park meeting with a conspirator wearing sandals and a T-shirt to prove he is not wearing a wire, for example, will be just as important as enlisting IT specialists to devise new covert communication techniques. For intelligence agents, figuring out how to track deals made with bitcoins will be as essential as keeping an eye on handovers of bags full of cash. And while ANOM illustrated the huge role played by new technologies, it also proved that grooming undercover recruits remains key for making inroads against organized crime. "We'll be combining super-modern technologies with very primitive methods," Felbab-Brown said. —AFP



ANKARA: This handout picture shows Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) posing next to his Kyrgyz counterpart Sadyr Japarov (left) during an official ceremony at the presidential complex in Ankara. —AFP

of the Gulen movement from the west African state of Gabon after a secret mission in April 2018.

Mongolian stand-off

Mongolia grounds a Turkish air force jet in July 2018 after Ankara denies claims it had tried to smuggle a Gulen-linked teacher from the country. Veysel Akcay was seized by five men as he left his home in the capital Ulaanbaatar and thrown into a minibus. He was later freed and the jet allowed to leave after a stand-off between the Mongolian and Turkish governments.

'Money man' grabbed

Turkey says its spies in Sudan repatriated businessman Memduh Cikmaz in November 2017. Ankara claims he was Gulen's "money man". —AFP

International

Iran's COVID cases surpass 3m

Tehran pinned hopes on vaccinations to help combat the crisis

TEHRAN: Iran's confirmed COVID-19 cases surpassed the three million mark yesterday, the health ministry said, while daily cases and deaths continued a downward trend ahead of a presidential poll. The Islamic republic, battling the Middle East's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, is preparing to hold its presidential election on June 18. The country has been struggling since late March to contain its "fourth wave" of COVID-19 blamed on a surge in trips made during Persian New Year Holidays.

Tehran has pinned hopes on vaccinations to help combat the health crisis, but the rollout of its inoculation campaign started in early February has progressed more slowly than authorities had wanted. In the past 24 hours, the country officially recorded 12,398 new cases of infection, the health ministry announced. Iran also recorded an additional 153 coronavirus-related deaths, it said, bringing the total to 81,672.

Daily infections and fatalities have been on a downward trajectory since their peaks of 25,582 on April 14 and 496 on April 26, respectively. Election campaigning, initially a cause of concern for spreading the virus, kicked off in late May with little fanfare and much of it taking place on social media. But ultraconservative candidate Ebrahim Raisi, who is seen as the frontrunner, delivered a speech during a rally at a packed stadium in southwestern Iran late Wednesday, drawing criticism for not observing health protocols.

How the Bahais endure in Iran

PARIS: Holakou Rahmanian, born into a Bahai family in Tehran in 1989, grew up like any Iranian child, shone at school and passed his exams with flying colors. But then he applied to go to university. "I received a message saying 'your file is incomplete,'" he told AFP. After making enquiries, "I realized it had nothing to do with having an incomplete file, but everything to do with being a Bahai," he said in a telephone interview. "I was very frustrated." The true reason for his being barred was passed on verbally but not in any official document. The Bahai community in Iran, the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority, is subjected to discrimination in every aspect of life, from education to burial, representatives say.

The Bahai faith, unlike Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism is not a recognized belief in the Islamic republic and the community's members have suffered persecution since the 1979 revolution. While repression is no longer on the scale seen in the revolution's bloody immediate aftermath, Bahais are still imprisoned, barred from higher education, banned from public service and face problems building businesses. With hardline judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi on course to win this month's presidential election, representatives fear there is little chance of any improvement soon.

'Cradle to grave'

The Bahai faith is a relatively modern monotheistic religion with its spiritual roots dating back to the early 19th century in Iran, promoting the unity of all people and equality. It has millions of adherents across the world but its origins and biggest community in the Middle East are

State news agency IRNA said "more than 50,000" people attended the event at Ahvaz city's Takhti football stadium, filling the seats and the field itself. "Not observing social distancing and health protocols was very evident at the event," it said.

Vaccine shortage

Health officials have warned of signs that the recent drop in virus numbers might be reversed as Iranians drop their guard. "The drop in infections has either slowed or stopped in some provinces due to residents not observing health protocols," health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Sunday, when daily infections had hit a more than five-month low. "This can be a serious cause of concern," she added. Iran started its vaccination campaign using Russia's Sputnik V jab in early February, and later imported a limited number of AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, delivered via the Covax vaccine-sharing program.

Tehran has also received shipments of China's Sinopharm and India's Covaxin. The Islamic republic has given over 4.2 million Iranians their first vaccine dose and only 742,817 their second, the health ministry has said, amid shortages that have delayed the vaccination drive. The southern province of Fars, for instance, stopped its inoculation program from Sunday over the "depletion of vaccine shipments", IRNA said. Speaking to the Iran newspaper, national virus taskforce speaker Alireza Raisi confirmed the shortage and said new

in Iran. Adherents say the tenets of the faith encourage a non-confrontational approach known as "constructive resilience" that helps the community that numbered 300,000 before the revolution to stay alive. Its crown jewel is the grassroots Bahai Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) that has allowed young people-including Holakou Rahmanian — to gain access to university-level teaching. Helped greatly by the internet, it offers a combination of online learning, often from abroad by Bahai emigres, home teaching, and classes in property rented by the community. "Bahais in Iran are persecuted from cradle to grave. This is the picture," said Diane Alai, representative of the Bahai International Community (BIC) to the United Nations in Geneva. "There is not a single Bahai in Iran who has not been affected-the types of persecution are so widespread," Alai told AFP by phone.

But she added: "Despite the persecution, they want to continue to live in Iran and contribute to the prosperity of the country." There was an outcry last month after rights groups said that Bahais were no longer allowed to bury their dead in land in Tehran as they had done traditionally. Instead, they were being co-opted into using a mass grave originally intended for victims of a 1988 massacre of regime opponents. This was part of a pattern of "systematic" violations against the Bahais also including "arbitrary arrest and detention, forcible closure of businesses, confiscation of property, bans on employment in the public sector, denial of access to higher education, and hate speech campaigns on state media," Amnesty International said. Following the outcry, this situation was rectified, according to the BIC.

'Turn up the heat'

Bahais, regarded as apostate by many Islamic religious conservatives, were subjected to persecution even under the shah, though not on the institutionalized scale seen after the revolution. Many prominent Bahais left after 1979, such as the architect Hossein Amanat, who designed the futuristic structure in Tehran that was known as the Shahyad



ESLAMSHAHR, Iran: Iranian presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi (podium center) speaks during an election campaign rally in the city of Eslamshahr, about 25 kilometers south of the center of the capital Tehran. —AFP

shipments were expected next week. Iran has five homegrown vaccines that are currently undergoing clinical trials.

The first, dubbed COVIran Barakat and funded by a state-run conglomerate, started trials more than five months ago and is expected to be publicly available by June 22, Alireza Raisi said. Iran says its arch enemy the United States has hampered its access to vac-

cines through a tough sanctions regime, with international banks tending to refuse transactions involving Iran even through food and medicine are technically exempt. Former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a landmark nuclear agreement and reimposed sanctions on Tehran in 2018. Iran and world powers have been engaged in talks in Vienna to try to revive the accord. —AFP

(In Memory of the Shah) Tower and now, still a landmark, the Azadi (Freedom) Tower. Over 200 Bahais were executed in the early years of the Islamic Republic, according to activists. Ten Bahai women including 17-year old Mona Mahmudnizhad were hanged in June 1983 in the southern city of Shiraz in a case that caused global horror. The Bahais sought to find ways to live in the country despite the obstacles, and some of them even fought in the war with Iraq.

Yet their status remained a taboo, with activists accusing the Iranian authorities of hoping the persecution would cause the community to disintegrate. That silence was only occasionally broken, such as in 2016 when the daughter of late former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Faezeh Hashemi, outraged conservatives by meeting a prominent jailed Iranian Bahai, Fariba Kamalabadi, who was on leave from prison. A lack of modern census data makes estimating the number of Bahais currently in Iran difficult, but representatives believe the population remains comparable to the pre-revolution figure. The goal of Iran's leaders is to "remove the Bahai faith as a viable entity in Iran", said James Samimi Farr, of the US Bahai Office of Public Affairs. "My fear is Iran will continue to turn up the heat to test the patience of the international community," he said.

BIHE 'red line'

Rahmanian told AFP he grew up being told that "we always had to keep a low profile. I was advised not to talk about my faith openly". Yet, he has "zero bad memories" from contact with fellow pupils. At the BIHE, he studied computer science, specializing in artificial intelligence. Rahmanian left Iran in 2012 and managed, with difficulty, to have his BIHE credentials recognized in the United States. He graduated from the University of California in Santa Cruz in 2018 and got a job with Microsoft. He now works on AI with Amazon and also teaches at the BIHE, in recognition of how it helped him, and that he calls, proudly, "a red line that the community will never let go of". —AFP

International

Australia faces UN complaint over Indigenous man's death in custody

More than 450 Aboriginal died in Australian custody since 1991

SYDNEY: An Indigenous woman announced yesterday she will file a complaint with the United Nations over her son's death in a Sydney prison, alleging the Australian government failed to protect his right to life. Leetona Dungay said no one had ever been held accountable for the death of her son, David Dungay, at Long Bay jail in December 2015 aged 26. She is now taking the case to the UN Human Rights Committee, saying she hopes it will spur Australia into taking action against those responsible for this case and other Indigenous deaths in custody.

"We need to go to the international stage to seek justice—to shame our government into action, to expose systemic racism that runs throughout the justice system," she said. "The government and the prison had a duty of care to keep David safe, with people who were trained properly to keep him alive. The system failed, and David lost his life because of that failure." An inquest found that David Dungay, a diabetic, died after being restrained and injected with a sedative following his refusal to stop eating biscuits in his cell.

His cries of "I can't breathe" in the moments leading up to his death have caused campaigners to draw parallels with the case of African American man George Floyd, whose 2020 murder

sparked global Black Lives Matter protests. "We hope that this complaint will shine a global spotlight on the incarceration crisis facing First Nations people in Australia," said Indigenous academic Larissa Behrendt, who helped prepare the complaint.

The lawyers will argue that Australia failed to meet its human rights obligations under international law. The Attorney-General's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. More than 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have died in Australian custody since 1991, when a top-level inquiry recommended a series of sweeping reforms.

Lawyer Jennifer Robinson said the government had failed to implement recommendations that would have prevented deaths. "As a result... the rate of First Nations deaths in custody remains unacceptably high, with at least five deaths already in 2021," she said. "This has to change." The 1991 inquiry found Indigenous people were more likely to die in custody because of their "grossly disproportionate" over-representation in detention, a situation that has only worsened over the past three decades. Indigenous Australians now make up roughly 29 percent of adult prisoners—despite comprising just three percent of the total population, official statistics show. —AFP



SYDNEY: Leetona Dungay, the mother of David Dungay Jr, speaks during a press conference at NSW Parliament in Sydney. —AFP

Sri Lanka probes possible oil slick off sinking ship

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced an investigation yesterday into a possible oil slick reported off its west coast where a container ship is submerged after burning for 13 days. Coast Conservation Minister Nalaka Godahewa said local experts were asked to examine an oil patch of about 0.35 square kilometers (0.13 square miles) where MV X-Press Pearl ran aground earlier this month. "I visited the area by boat yesterday and what we noticed was a thin film of oil which looked like diesel," Godahewa told reporters in Colombo. "It did not look like bunker oil, but we have asked our experts to examine."

The X-Press Pearl reported an onboard acid leak and caught fire just as it was due to enter the Colombo harbor on May 20. The fire was put out after 13 days, but the vessel's stern hit the bottom of the shallow sea when a tug attempted to move it to deeper waters. Authorities are bracing for a possible oil spill from the submerged wreck or almost 300 tons of bunker oil thought to be still in its fuel tanks.

The owners of the vessel have already deployed representatives from the International Tankers Owners Pollution Federation (ITOPF)



NEGOMBO, Sri Lanka: UK-based Oil Spill Response experts look for pollutants from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl, at Sarakkuwa beach, north of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo yesterday. — AFP

and Oil Spill Response (OSR) to monitor any oil spill and help with the clean up of beaches. Godahewa said five vessels, including two Indian Coast Guard ships equipped to deal with oil spills, were anchored around the sinking vessel, but none reported a leakage from the submerged wreck. Tons of micro plastic granules from the

ship swamped an 80-kilometre (50-mile) stretch of beach declared off-limits for residents. Fishing in the area has been banned. Sri Lankan environmentalists last week sued the government and the ship's operators for allegedly failing to prevent what they called the "worst marine disaster" in the country's history. —AFP

Eleven dead in Mumbai building collapse

MUMBAI: At least 11 people, including eight children, were killed when heavy monsoon rains caused a residential building to collapse in a Mumbai slum, Indian authorities said yesterday. Mumbai city authorities confirmed that seven other residents were injured in the incident late Wednesday even as search and rescue operations continued for several others feared missing. Residents have been evacuated from nearby structures considered to be in a dangerous condition. Of the injured, six were in stable condition, with one 30-year-old woman admitted to hospital in critical condition.

"Three persons are still suspected to be trapped and the search operation is on to find them," Prabhat Rahangdale from the Mumbai city authority told the Indian Express daily. Collapses of poorly constructed buildings are common during the monsoon, which officially hit India's financial capital on Wednesday bringing widespread flooding and traffic chaos. —AFP

International

Myanmar junta hits Suu Kyi with graft charges

Suu Kyi charged with sedition and breaching a colonial-era secrecy law

YANGON: The Myanmar junta has hit deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption charges over claims she accepted illegal payments of gold and more than half a million dollars in cash, state media reported yesterday. The country has been in turmoil since the generals ousted Suu Kyi on February 1, with more than 850 civilians killed in a brutal crackdown by security forces on near-daily protests against the coup.

The 75-year-old Nobel laureate, who has been in custody since the putsch, is facing a raft of wide-ranging criminal charges, including sedition and breaching a colonial-era secrecy law. The latest charges relate to allegations by the former Yangon region chief minister that Suu Kyi illegally accepted \$600,000 in cash from him along with around 11 kilograms of gold. The Anti-Corruption Commission found evidence that Suu Kyi had committed “corruption using her rank”, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar, a state-run newspaper. “So she was charged under Anti-Corruption Law section 55.” She is also accused of abusing her authority when renting two areas of land for her charitable foundation.

After weeks of legal wrangling, two of Suu Kyi’s trials are due to start in earnest next week, hearing evidence from witnesses. In Naypyidaw, the remote capital purpose-built by the previous military regime, her trial on charges of violating restrictions during last year’s election campaign

and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies will start on Monday. A separate case is scheduled to start on June 15, where she is charged with sedition alongside ousted president Win Myint and another senior member of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Charges ‘absurd’

Her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, dismissed the corruption charges as “absurd”. “There is an undeniable political background to keep her out of the scene of the country and to smear her prestige,” he told AFP, saying she could face long prison terms on the secrecy and corruption charges. “That’s one of the reasons to charge her to keep her out of the scene.” Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years under house arrest during the previous military rule before her 2010 release.

Her international stature diminished following a wave of military violence targeting Buddhist-majority Myanmar’s marginalized Muslim Rohingya community, but the coup has returned Suu Kyi to the role of cloistered democracy icon. The junta has previously said it would hold fresh elections within two years but has also threatened to dissolve the NLD. “That election-I cannot say if it will materialize or not, and maybe NLD will not be able to compete,” Khin Maung Zaw told AFP. “But for Aung San Suu Kyi, if she is convicted under these charges she will not be allowed to compete.”

Richard Horsey, senior advisor on Myanmar



YANGON: In this file photo a protester holds up a poster featuring Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration against the military coup in front of the Central Bank of Myanmar in Yangon. —AFP

to the International Crisis Group, told AFP that smearing opponents with corruption was a long-standing tactic of the military. “Their ludicrous charges of illegal walkie-talkie use and COVID violations will allow them to lock Aung San Suu Kyi away, but corruption charges are a way to try and besmirch her reputation,” he said.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in

the November poll, which Suu Kyi’s NLD won in a landslide. Elsewhere in Myanmar yesterday, twelve people were killed when a military plane carrying a senior monk and several donors to a religious event crashed in a central region of the country. Two others on board—a boy and a sergeant from the plane’s crew—survived the crash and were taken to a military hospital, a junta spokesperson said. —AFP

Belgium ready to accept Afghans who worked with troops

BRUSSELS: Belgium’s defense minister said yesterday the country could take in around 30 Afghans who had worked with its military during the NATO mission, as the alliance wraps up a two-decade deployment. Minister Ludivine Dedonder said decisions would be taken on a “case-by-case” basis and one man considered to be at risk was already being moved to Belgium with his family. “His arrival will of necessity be rapid since there is a danger to this person. It will happen around the same time as our troops, with his partner and his child,” Dedonder told broadcaster RTBF.

NATO allies have been under pressure to relocate thousands of local staff who served with them often as translators, fixers or guards, ahead of a September 11 deadline set by US President Joe Biden for troops to leave the country. Over the past two decades, dozens of Afghan translators have been killed and tortured in targeted assaults by the Taliban. Dedonder told lawmakers that Belgium wanted to “take responsibility” for those who worked with its troops.

She put the number at around 30 people, but said



BRUSSELS: Defense minister Ludivine Dedonder attends a session of the chamber commission of Defense at the federal parliament, in Brussels. —AFP

that some had also worked with other Western nations and might decide to ask for visas to different countries. The Taliban on Monday said that Afghans who worked with foreign forces in the past have nothing to fear once international troops leave, as long as they “show remorse”. —AFP

Hong Kong speedboat smuggling bust nets luxury goods trove

HONG KONG: Hong Kong customs announced their biggest ever bust of a speedboat gang smuggling luxury goods into the mainland yesterday, unveiling a haul that included watches, handbags and shoes, endangered animal parts, cosmetics, wines, whiskey and cigars. The massive seizure—valued at HK\$120 million (\$15.4 million)—is a window into the thriving smuggling networks that operate along the border between Hong Kong and China. Simple economics makes the trade hugely lucrative.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong has no sales tax, making it one of the cheapest places in the world to buy luxury goods. But over in China, punitive taxes often mean that luxury items cost up to double the price, providing a powerful smuggling incentive. A vast cornucopia of items get trafficked over from Hong Kong. Two bizarre recent operations that were disrupted included frozen meat and pets, some of whom were thrown overboard by smugglers and drowned when police gave chase.

Yesterday, the Customs and Excise De-

partment unveiled the city’s largest bust to date of a cross-border smuggling operation that used speedboats. Mark Woo, head of Customs’ syndicate crimes investigation bureau, said officers had been monitoring a smuggling gang for weeks before they moved on a speedboat as it was being filled up last Wednesday.

Subsequent raids at three warehouses uncovered a treasure trove of luxury items of the type that are devoured by China’s moneyed elites. “The syndicates carried out very sophisticated counter-surveillance activity on our officers,” Woo told reporters, describing how the gang used drones to monitor for police and deployed decoy speedboats in the waters between Hong Kong and the neighboring mainland city of Shenzhen. The raids netted 66,000 luxury goods and cosmetics, 400 endangered plants from Africa and America that are valued in traditional Chinese medicine and 2.3 tons of high-value foods that included items like shark fin, sea cucumbers and bird nests. —AFP

Friday Times

LIFESTYLE

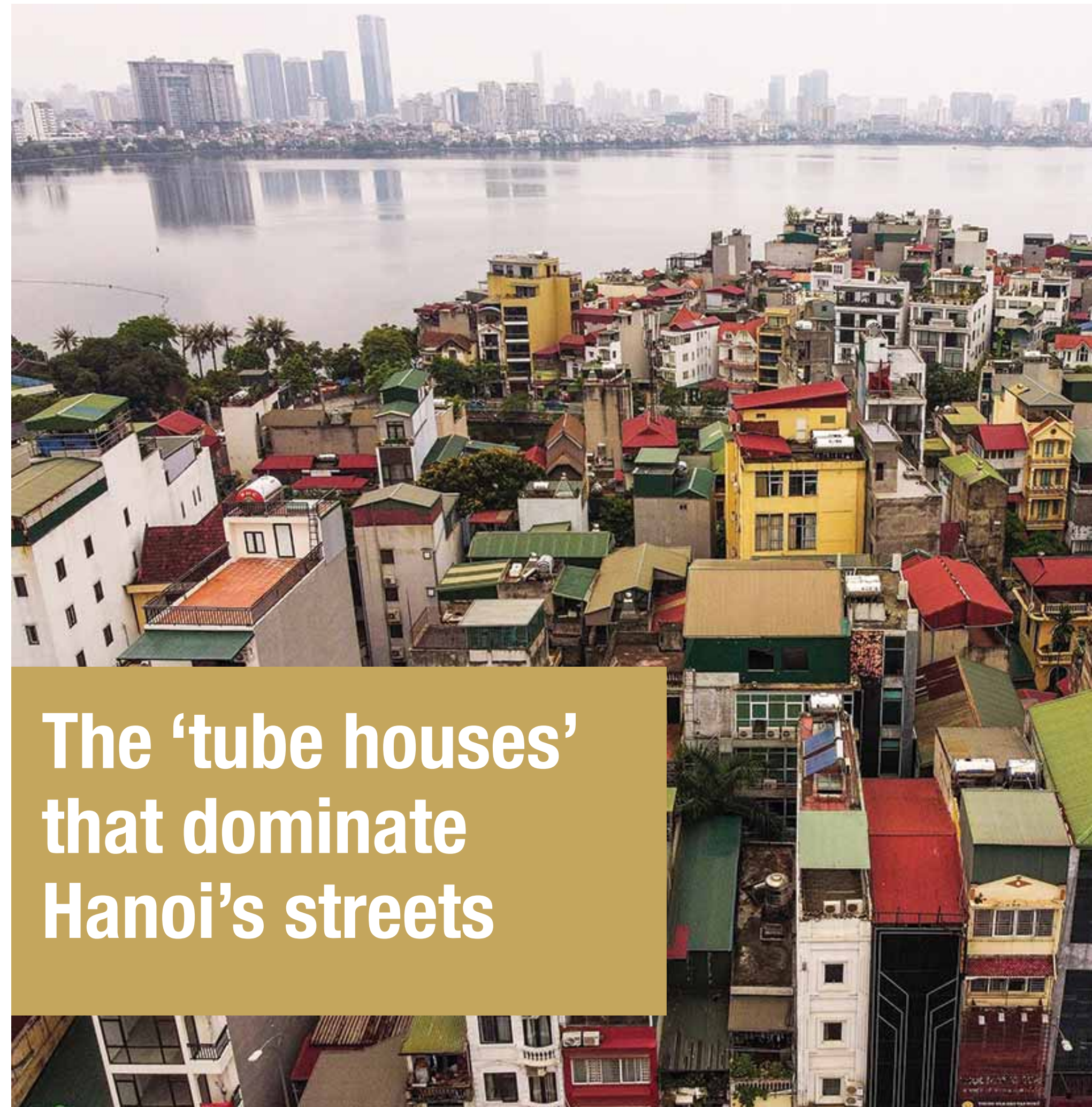
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Work dries up for
Jordan's donkeys
as coronavirus
cripples tourism

See Pages 24-25

Camels are pictured in front of the Treasury, in Jordan's ancient city of Petra. — AFP



The 'tube houses' that dominate Hanoi's streets

Lifestyle | Feature



This photograph shows narrow residential houses, known as “nha ong”.



This aerial photograph shows narrow residential houses, known as ‘nha ong’ in Vietnamese or ‘tube houses’, in a densely populated urban area of Hanoi. — AFP photos

Tall, thin and brightly coloured, Hanoi’s “tube houses” dominate the city’s streets as nine million people compete for space in Vietnam’s bustling capital. Although Vietnam saw a number of villas and garden houses built during the French colonial period, Hanoi has few of these grand residential homes. Instead, tree-lined streets are packed with dwellings that are barely four meters wide, but are three times that in depth.

Typically, a tube house might be home to a family of four but two or three generations of relatives sometimes have to jostle for space. The first tube houses-known as “nha ong” in Vietnamese-are thought to have appeared in the capital at the end of the 19th century, when villagers looking to sell

silver, traditional herbs and tools began to move to the area. A narrow architectural style evolved from the limited available space, said Tran Quoc Bao, a senior lecturer at the National University of Civil Engineering.

The design is still a favorite in modern day Hanoi, where architects now refer to them as “adjoining houses”. “This model of house is essential for an urban architect (today). The adjoining house is a combination of both the traditional and modern residence,” the Hanoi-based lecturer told AFP, adding that they can also be found in many other Vietnamese cities.—AFP



This photograph shows narrow residential houses, known as “nha ong”.



This aerial photograph shows narrow residential houses, known as “nha ong”.



This photograph shows narrow residential houses, known as “nha ong”.

Lifestyle | Features



This handout photograph shows Emma, a white five-year-old female rhino, at Tobu Zoo in Miyashiro, Saitama prefecture a day after arriving from Taiwan for breeding. — AFP

Looking for love, white rhino 'Emma' lands in Japan

Like many of us, Emma has had her travel plans derailed by coronavirus. But after months of delay, the white rhino has arrived in Japan and is looking for love. The mild-mannered five-year-old comes by way of Taiwan's Leofoo Safari Park, where she beat a herd of competitors for the chance to find a companion and breed. She had been scheduled for transfer to the Saitama Tobu zoo outside Tokyo in March, but complications caused by the pandemic pushed back her departure. "After some delays due to the coronavirus, Emma, a southern white rhino, arrived at our zoo on the evening of 8th June," the Saitama Tobu zoo said in a statement.

"We slowly opened the shipping container which was placed in front of her sleeping room. Emma, without showing any signs of shyness, went straight into the sleeping room," it added. The rhino used the extra time in Taiwan to prepare for the move, with keepers using Japanese for words like "come" and "no" to get her ready for her new home. Safari staff

said she was picked from a herd of 23 rhinos because of her even temper and slender physique. "Emma was chosen because of her mild personality... and her smaller size also makes it easier to ship overseas," Sean Wu, the park's chief veterinarian and animal manager, told AFP earlier this year. "She seldom gets into fights with other rhinos or snatches others' food."

She is expected to be on show to the public in Japan for several weeks, but she also has the more serious business of getting acquainted with her first suitor: 10-year-old Moran. Zoo breeding programs have played a key role in repopulating southern white rhino herds. The species currently numbers around 19,000, found in the wild across southern Africa, according to the conservation group Save the Rhino. They were nearly wiped out in the last century but managed to recover thanks to conservation efforts. — AFP

Paris Opera star finally bows after 3 failed attempts to leave

Saying goodbye can be hard, and for one star dancer at the Paris Opera who has been trying to leave since 2019, it can also take a long time. Eleonora Abbagnato, an "etoile" (the highest rank in the ballet company), has had three farewell performances cancelled but is determined that the fourth attempt today will be for real. "I think it's my last chance," the 42-year-old Italian said, laughing. Abbagnato was due to depart in December 2019, but the show was cancelled due to a new strike by Opera staff.

Then the pandemic intervened to cancel two more planned farewells in 2020. Missing an etoile's goodbye—a classic event with a marathon ovation and blizzard of confetti and glitter—would have been a shame. So, after nearly a quarter of a century since she was inducted into the company, Abbagnato is returning to the Palais Garnier for one more turn with a tribute to celebrated choreographer Roland Petit. "It's like I never left. I'm rediscovering the incredible energy of the Palais Garnier, it's one of the most beautiful venues," said Abbagnato who, since 2015 has assumed the double role of star dancer in Paris and ballet director at Rome Opera House.

Ending today with Petit is a perfect gift, she said. "It was he who discovered me at the age of 11 in a little private school in Sicily. It was the great choreographer of French dance bringing me to the Paris Opera." It has indeed been something of a fairytale: born into a Palermo family more interested in football, Abbagnato fell in love with ballet when her mother left her in a dance school while she worked afternoons in a clothes shop above. Scouted by Petit, and then by Paris Opera's

legendary ballet school director Claude Bessy, she became at the age of 14 one of the few foreigners among the "little Opera rats," or trainee ballerinas.



In this file photo Italian ballet dancer and Etoile at the Paris Opera Ballet Eleonora Abbagnato poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

Campaign

Abbagnato, who has two children with ex-footballer Federico Balzaretti, is hardly disappearing into retirement. A regular on TV in her homeland, she sees her mission as "saving Italian dance", which has lost two companies in Florence and Verona in recent years. She has helped revive the Rome Ballet, luring renowned global choreographers and tying up with Dior, although she faced a brief crisis in 2019 when a dancer's union criticized her "disrespectful attitude". Petit, who died in 2011, remains a revered figure whose flamboyance transformed French dance in the second half of the 20th century.

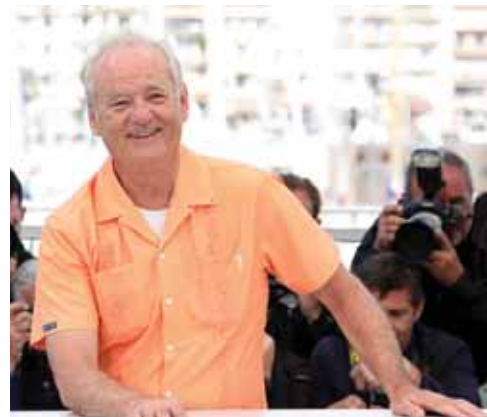
Today, Abbagnato will appear in two of his ballets, "Le Rendez-Vous" and "Le Jeune Homme et la Mort" ("The Young Man and Death") — one she has danced many times since she was 19. "Roland Petit brought me to all these beautiful roles, very very young, and right up to the end of my career," she said. "It's fitting that I finish this big part of my life with him." — AFP

Bill Murray and Anne Frank fill out bumper Cannes edition

The latest curveball in US comedian Bill Murray's career—a film about his show-tunes collaboration with a German cellist—was among the additions to the Cannes Film Festival announced yesterday. Murray, who has had one of the least predictable careers in film history, teamed up with cellist Jan Vogler in 2017 to perform a number of US theatrical standards. A resulting concert film, "New Worlds, the Cradle of a Civilization" will have a special screening at the festival, which has been postponed from its usual May slot to July 6-17.

Also appearing outside the official competition is the latest animated feature from Ari Folman, Israeli director of the beloved "Waltz with Bashir" that electrified Cannes in 2008. Folman's latest, "Where is Anne Frank?" follows the journey of Kitty, the imaginary friend from Frank's renowned diary of her time trying to evade the Nazis as a child in wartime Amsterdam. Enfant terrible Gaspar Noe is also returning to Cannes, where his transgressive films, from the drug-fuelled "Climax" to the 3D pornfest "Love", have made him a fixture at the world's leading film get-together.

Noe's latest, "Vortex", stars another master of shock cinema, Italian director Dario Argento, and will run in the new Cannes Premier section of the festival. The bumper crop of films follows the pandemic-induced cancellation of last year's edition. The official selection was announced last week, with 24 films from renowned names such as Wes Anderson, Nanni Moretti and Sean Penn, competing for the Palme d'Or and the affection of a jury headed by Spike Lee. — AFP



Bill Murray

TWO VIKING RELATIVES REUNITED IN DENMARK AFTER 1,000 YEARS

Separated for 1,000 years, two Viking warriors from the same family were reunited on Wednesday at Denmark's National Museum, as DNA analysis helps shed light on the Vikings' movements across Europe. One of the Vikings died in England in his 20s in the 11th century, from injuries to the head. He was buried in a mass grave in Oxford. The other died in Denmark in his 50s, his skeleton bearing traces of blows that suggest he took part in battles.

DNA mapping of skeletons from the Viking era—from the eighth to the 12th century—enabled archaeologists to determine by chance that the two were related. "This is a big discovery because now you can trace movements across space and time through a family," museum archeologist Jeanette Varberg told AFP. Two of her colleagues spent more than two hours on Wednesday piecing together the skeleton of the man in his 20s, from the remains freshly arrived from Oxford. The 150 bones have been lent to the Danish museum by the Oxfordshire Museum in Britain for three years.



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 An employee from The National Museum of Denmark unpacks the skeleton of a man found in a mass grave in Oxford, England.

The historical consensus is that Danish Vikings invaded Scotland and England from the late eighth century. The younger of the two men "may have been cut down in a Viking raid, but there is also a theory that they (the skeletons in the mass grave) were victims of a royal decree by English King Ethelred the Second, who commanded in 1002 that all Danes in England should be

killed," Varberg said. It is very rare to find skeletons that are related, though it is easier to determine the relationships for royals, according to Varberg.

While the two were confirmed to be relatives, it is impossible to determine their exact link. They may have been half-brothers, or a grandfather and grandson, or an uncle and nephew. "It's very difficult to tell if they lived in

the same age or they differ maybe by a generation, because you have no material in the grave that can give a precise dating. So you have a margin of 50 years plus or minus," Varberg said. — AFP



Two skeletons lie in a showcase at The National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen. — AFP photos



Employees from The National Museum of Denmark unpack the skeleton of a man found in a mass grave in Oxford, England in Copenhagen.



An employee from The National Museum of Denmark unpacks the skeleton of a man found in a mass grave in Oxford.



Tourists ride donkeys and horses as they visit Jordan's ancient city of Petra, after it reopened following closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP photos

Work dries up for Jordan's donkeys as coronavirus cripples tourism

Herds of hard-working donkeys once carried hordes of tourists on the rocky paths of Jordan's Petra, but visitor numbers crashed amid the pandemic and the loyal animals are left without a job. "Before coronavirus, we all had work," said Abdulrahman Ali, a 15-year-old donkey owner at the ancient rock-carved desert city, where the sure-footed animals carry tourists up steep paths in the blazing sun. "The Bedouins of Petra made a

living and fed their animals," he said, sitting waiting for a handout of fodder from a charity, explaining that many owners today are struggling to meet the cost of feeding them. In 2019, the number of visitors to the UNESCO World Heritage site topped a million for the first time. But in March 2020, the famous tourist destination was closed, and the crucial income from the tourists dried up.

Dependent on tourism

"When tourism stopped, nobody could buy fodder or medicine anymore," said Ali, who could earn as much as \$280 on a good day, supporting his mother and two brothers. "Anyone who has a little amount of money now spends it on his own food, not his animal." Before the pandemic, tourism made up more than a tenth of Jordan's GDP, but revenues slumped from \$5.8 billion in 2019 to \$1

billion last year, according to government figures. Since Petra reopened in May, tourist numbers have been slow to rebound. Only some 200 visitors a day come to Petra, compared to more than 3,000 before the pandemic hit, said Suleiman Farajat, heading the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority.

Farajat said some 200 guides used as many as 800 animals-including horses,



Jordanian horses and donkey owners take their animals to the PETA clinic.



Donkeys are pictured at the PETA clinic, treating animals used by locals to transport visitors in the Jordanian ancient city of Petra.



A Jordanian donkey owner waits for customers in Jordan's ancient city of Petra.

Lifestyle | Feature

Friday, June 11, 2021



Egyptian vet Hassan Shatta, treating donkeys and horses used by locals to transport visitors in the Jordanian ancient city of Petra, is pictured.



Jordanian donkey owner Abdulrahman Ali, 15, feeds his animals at the PETA clinic.

camels and mules as well as donkeys-for tourist rides across the desert site. The economic ripple effect of tourism was widespread. "Before the crisis, 80 percent of the inhabitants of the region depended directly or indirectly on tourism," Farajat said. "With the pandemic, not only working animal owners were affected, but also hotels, restaurants, those with souvenir shops or stores, and hundreds of employees have lost their jobs."

Many donkey owners are turning to a clinic supported by the animal rights group PETA, where vets treat maltreated and malnourished donkeys for free. "Before coronavirus, my family and I owned seven donkeys working in Petra," said Mohammad Al-Badoul, 23, waiting with four other donkey owners to fill a sack with animal feed. "We had to sell them for lack of income. Now we only have one, and I can barely feed it."

'Starving'

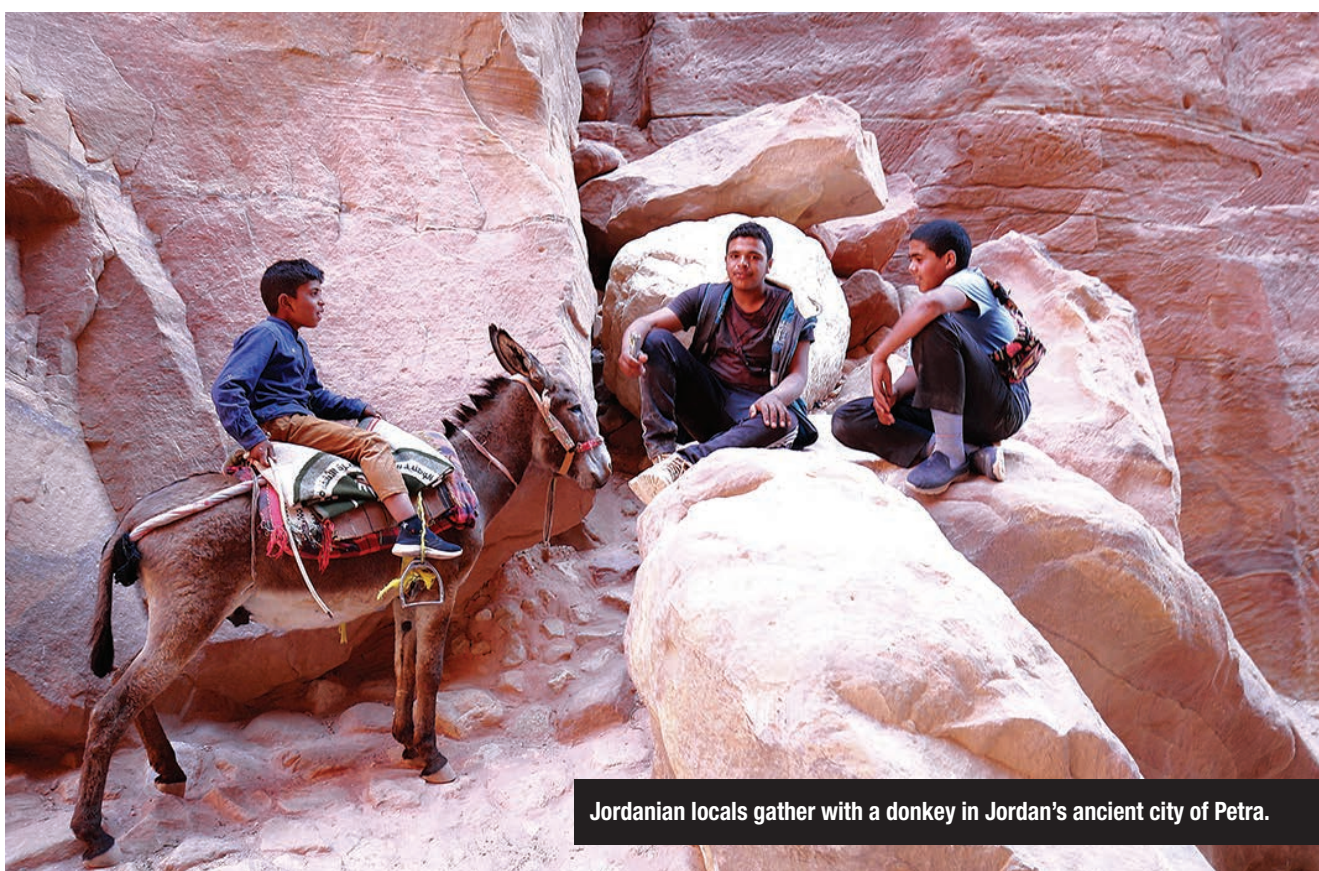
Egyptian vet Hassan Shatta, an equine surgery specialist who runs the PETA clinic,

said he launched a donkey-feeding program late last year. "During the COVID-19 lockdown, and with the lack of tourism, people could not afford to feed their animals anymore," Shatta said. "Some of them ended up starving and we picked them up brought them here," he added, noting some 250 animals had been treated, with some 10-15 cases arriving a day.

In the past, PETA had treated animals with deep cuts from being beaten or abused, but Farajat, from Petra's tourism authority, says the working conditions of the donkeys is now "not that bad". But there are plans to replace some of the traditional donkeys with a new system of 20 electric cars introduced by the tourism board next month. The cars will be "driven by the animal owners," Farajat said. Switching to electric cars will, Farajat hopes, put an end to the criticisms against the mistreatment inflicted on animals. — AFP



Tourists ride donkeys and horses as they visit Jordan's ancient city of Petra after it reopened following closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Jordanian locals gather with a donkey in Jordan's ancient city of Petra.



Egyptian vet Hassan Shatta, an equine surgery specialist who runs the PETA clinic, treating donkeys and horses used by locals to transport visitors in the Jordanian ancient city of Petra, is pictured.



Jordanian donkey owner Abdulrahman Ali, 15, waits at the PETA clinic.



Combination of pictures taken yesterday shows a partial solar eclipse, pictured in Gaiberg near Heidelberg, southwestern Germany. — AFP photos

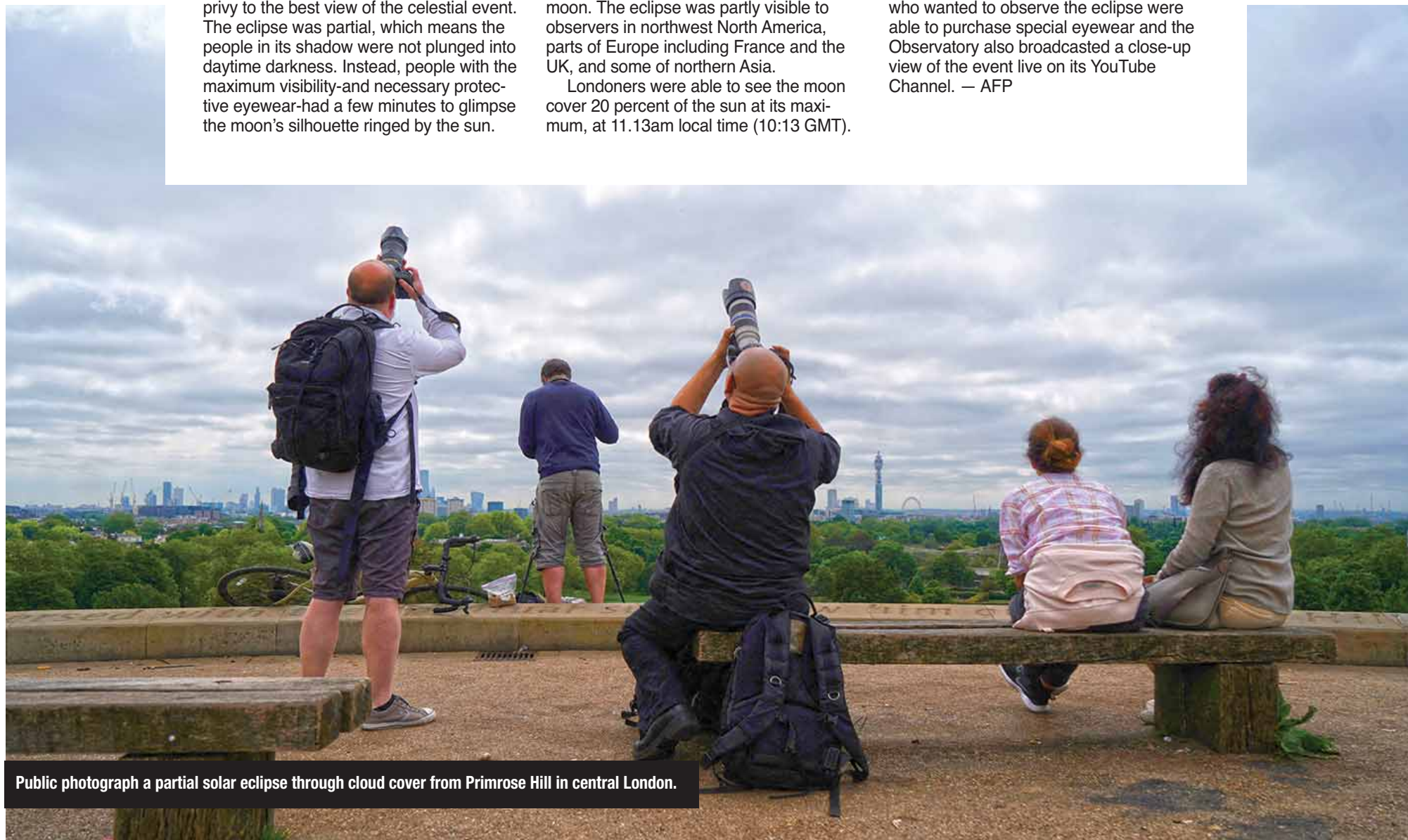
Partial eclipse swept over northern hemisphere

A solar eclipse was visible over the Earth's northern hemisphere yesterday with parts of Canada and Siberia privy to the best view of the celestial event. The eclipse was partial, which means the people in its shadow were not plunged into daytime darkness. Instead, people with the maximum visibility-and necessary protective eyewear-had a few minutes to glimpse the moon's silhouette ringed by the sun.

In northwest Canada, northern Russia, northwest Greenland and the North Pole, the sun was 88 percent obscured by the moon. The eclipse was partly visible to observers in northwest North America, parts of Europe including France and the UK, and some of northern Asia.

Londoners were able to see the moon cover 20 percent of the sun at its maximum, at 11.13am local time (10:13 GMT).

"The farther southeast people were, the less the sun was obscured," Florent Deleflie of the Paris Observatory told AFP. Those who wanted to observe the eclipse were able to purchase special eyewear and the Observatory also broadcasted a close-up view of the event live on its YouTube Channel. — AFP



Public photograph a partial solar eclipse through cloud cover from Primrose Hill in central London.



A annular (partial solar) eclipse is seen as the sun rises over Scituate Light in Scituate, Massachusetts.



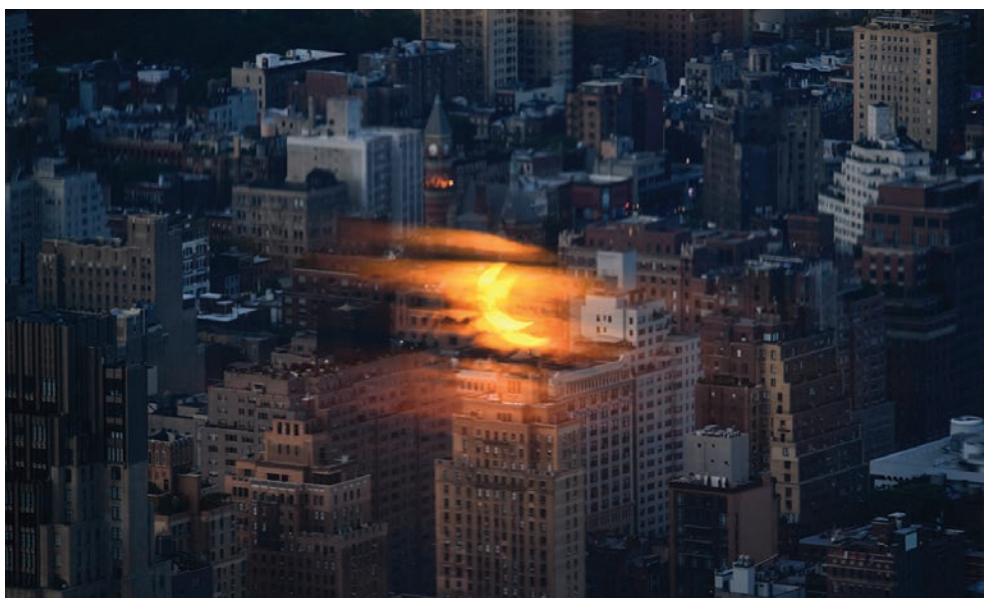
A eclipsed sun rises over Tobermory yesterday in Ontario, Canada.



An eclipsed sun rises over Tobermory in Ontario, Canada.



Members of the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York watch as the sun rises partially eclipsed from Summit One Vanderbilt, a high rise in New York City.



A partial solar eclipse is reflected on a glass panel before buildings of the Manhattan skyline, from the Edge viewing deck in New York.



Pupils, wearing protective glasses, look at the partial solar eclipse in Schiedam.

Kids Page

Word Search

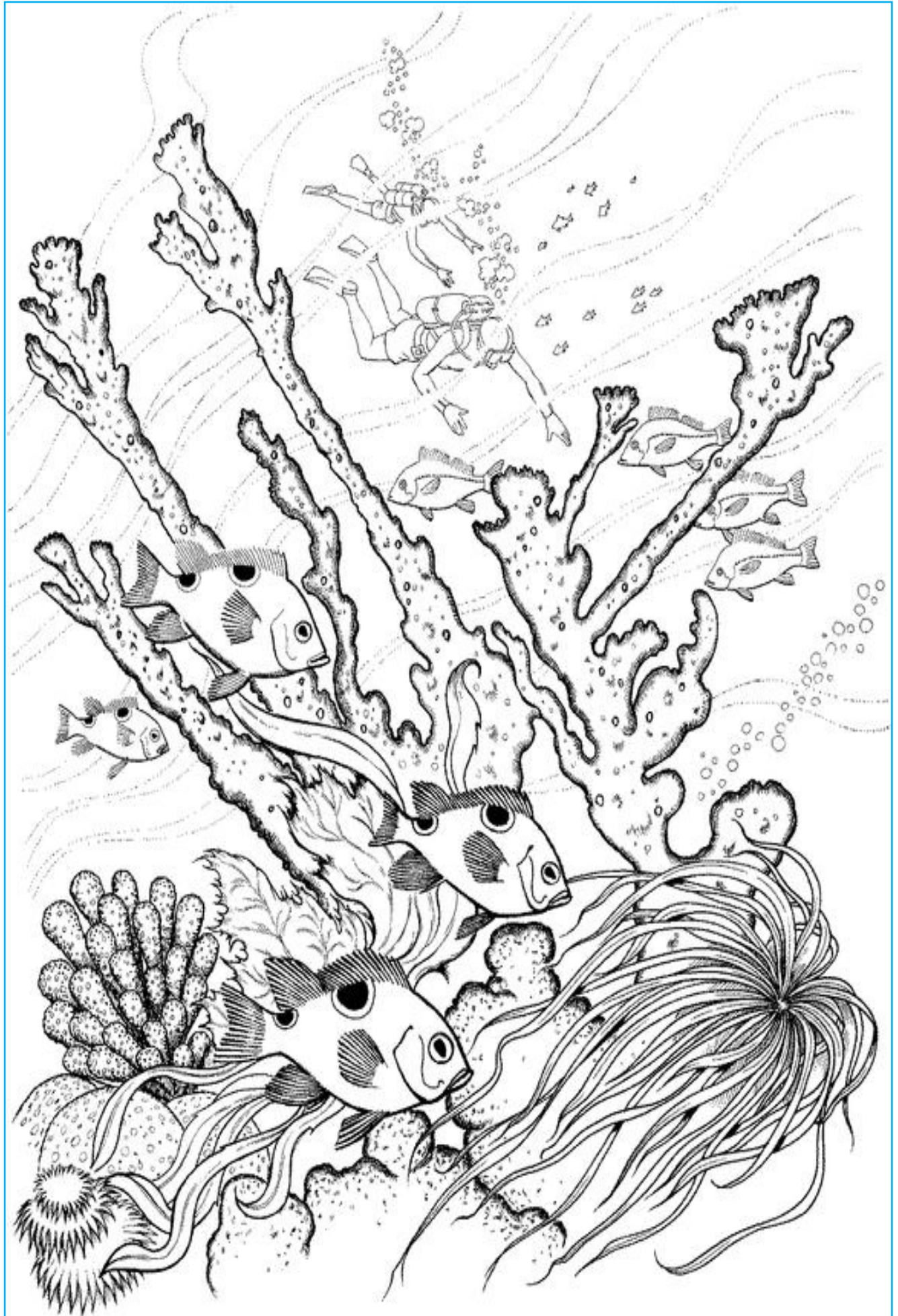
AIRPORTS

Find the three letter codes for 30 international airports in the word search grid.

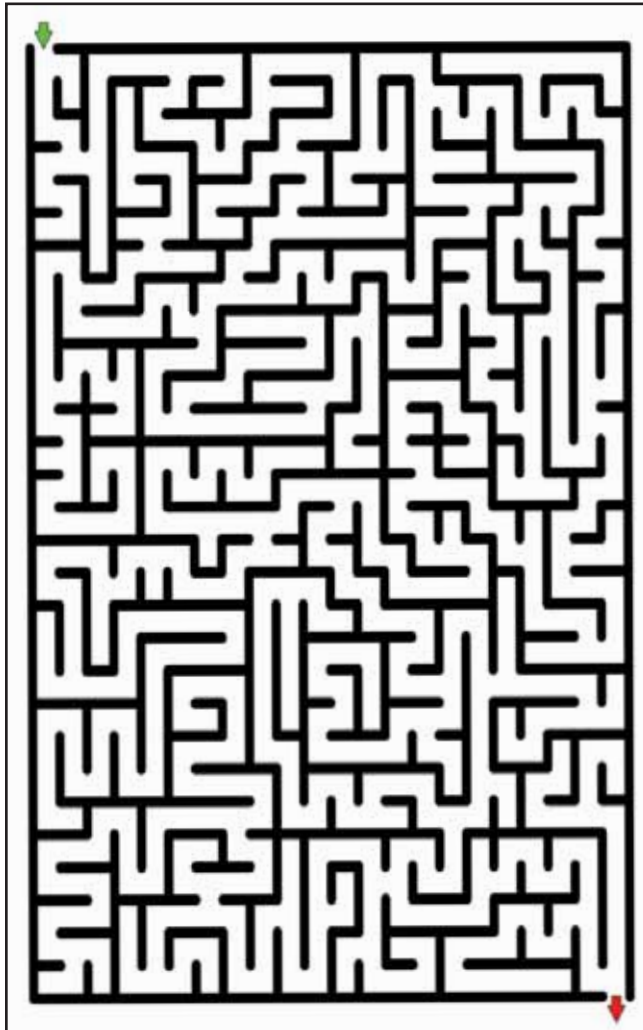


- | | |
|--|--|
| AMS (Amsterdam Schiphol) | ICN (Incheon International) |
| ATL (Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International) | IST (Ataturk International) |
| BKK (Suvarnabhumi Bangkok) | JFK (John F Kennedy International) |
| CAN (Guangzhou Baiyun International) | KUL (Kuala Lumpur International) |
| CDG (Charles de Gaulle International) | LAS (McCarran International Las Vegas) |
| CGK (Soekarno-Hatta International) | LAX (Los Angeles International) |
| CLT (Charlotte Douglas International) | LHR (London Heathrow) |
| DEL (Indira Gandhi International New Delhi) | MAD (Madrid Barajas International) |
| DEN (Denver International) | MIA (Miami International) |
| DFW (Dallas Fort Worth International) | ORD (Chicago O'Hare International) |
| DXB (Dubai International) | PEK (Beijing Capital International) |
| FRA (Frankfurt am Main International) | PHX (Phoenix Sky Harbor International) |
| HKG (Hong Kong International Kai Tak) | PVG (Shanghai Pudong International) |
| HND (Tokyo International) | SFO (San Francisco International) |
| IAH (George Bush Intercontinental Houston) | SIN (Singapore Changi International) |

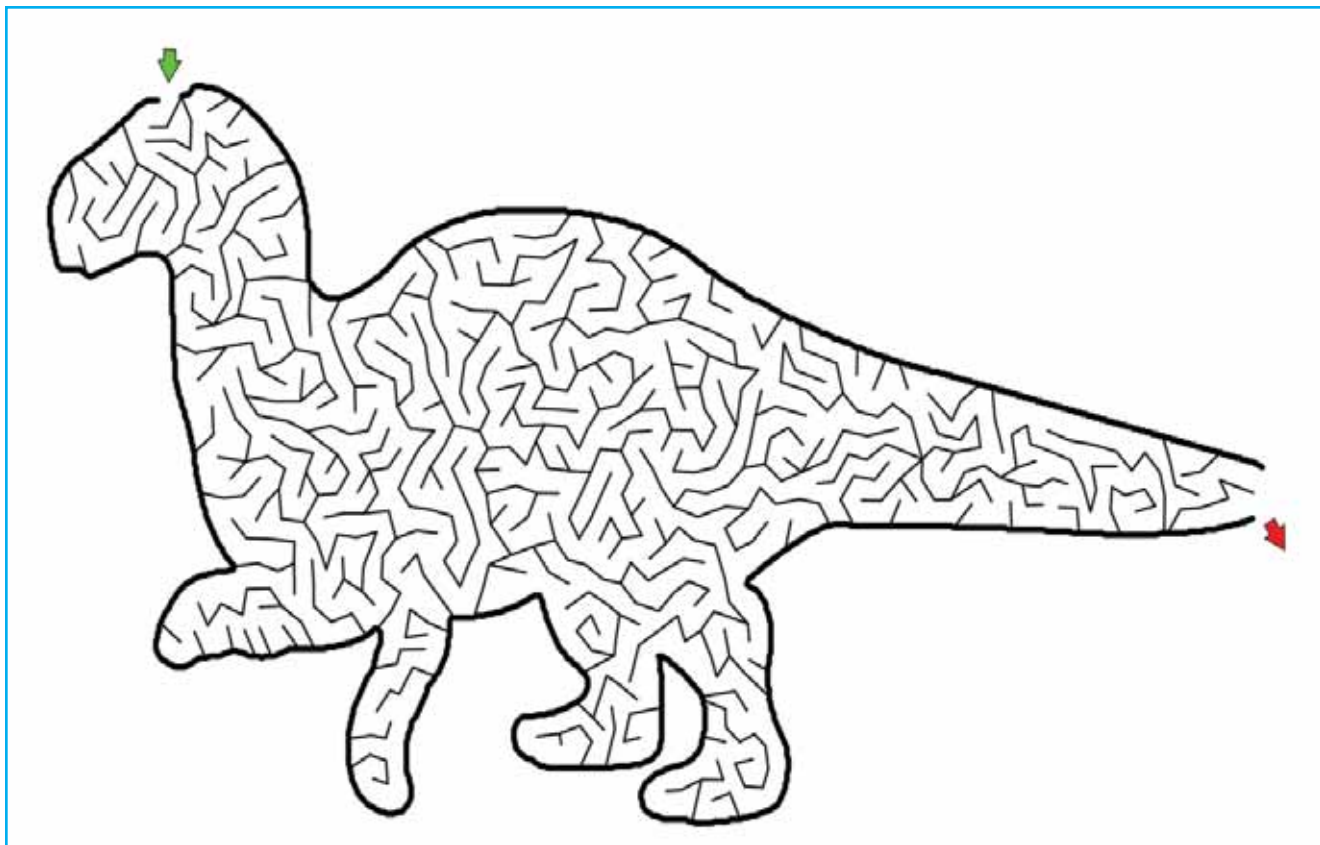
Color It



Kids Mazes



Find the way



Word Scramble



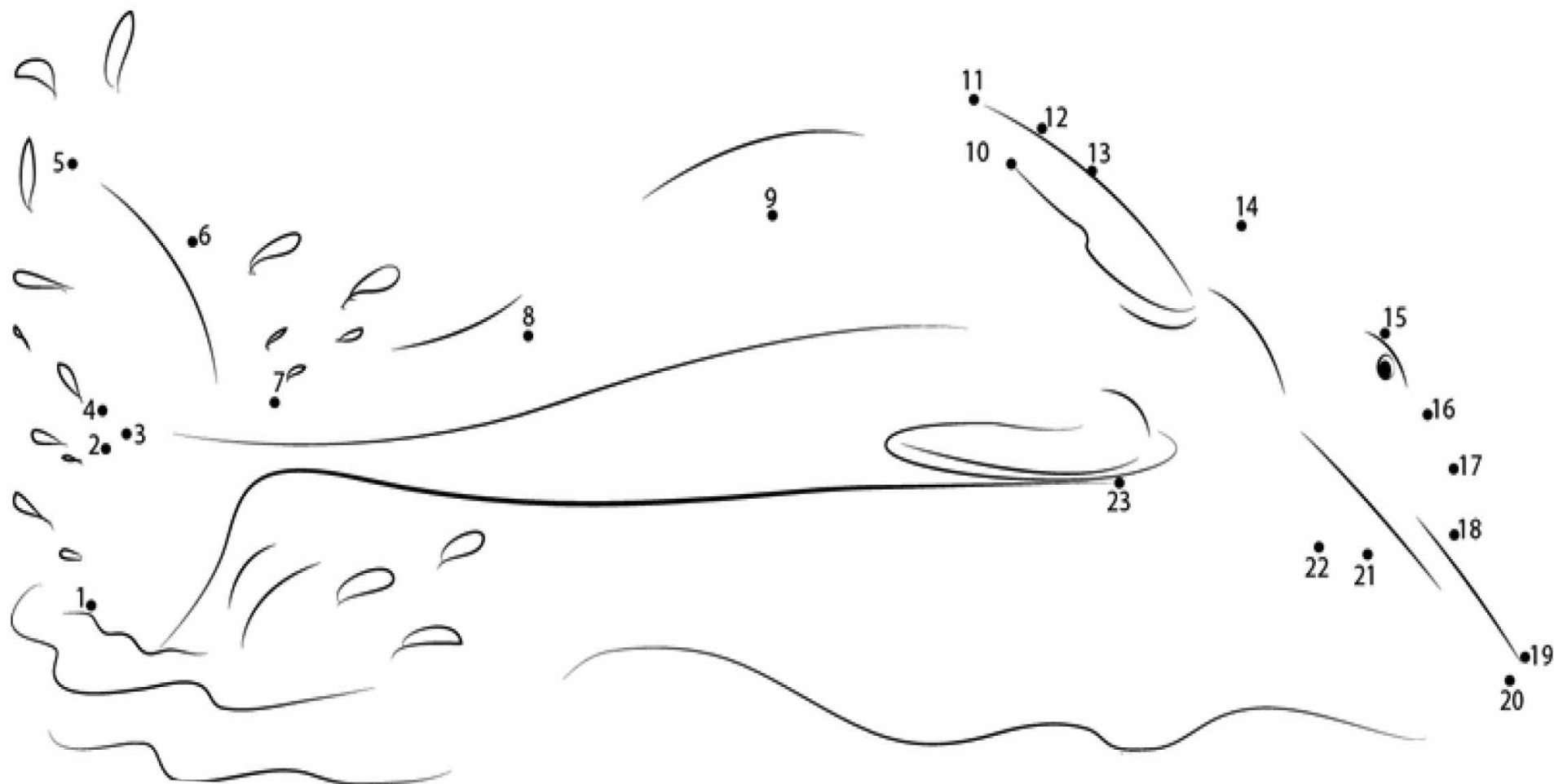
Computer Terms

Word Scramble

Help! The school computer had its memory scrambled and we need your help to get things back in order. Can you unscramble the computer terms and write the correct word on each line?

- | | | | |
|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| EITRRNE | _____ | KEERSAP | _____ |
| SAEHRC | _____ | UADOLP | _____ |
| LLCORS | _____ | NTERPRI | _____ |
| BOKEDYRA | _____ | IONC | _____ |
| UNMSAERE | _____ | SOTWRFEA | _____ |
| VSIRU | _____ | NLDDWOAO | _____ |
| EVRSER | _____ | SOEUM | _____ |
| FOTN | _____ | RSDAWSPO | _____ |
| MONORIT | _____ | EACCH | _____ |
| EENSRC | _____ | YEAGBTIG | _____ |
| HAKCRE | _____ | FODRLE | _____ |
| WSREROB | _____ | OEMUDNTC | _____ |

Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2021

31 Thousands strike in Greece over new labour reform



32 Peugeot to be prosecuted in France over 'dieselgate'



33 ECB in hot seat over easy money as economy strengthens



PITTSBURGH: File photo taken on March 31, 2021 US President Joe Biden speaks in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The reopening US economy pushed weekly filings for jobless benefits to a new pandemic low for the sixth consecutive week, the Labor Department said yesterday. —AFP

Markets steady awaiting ECB, US inflation

Tokyo's Nikkei closes higher, recovering early losses

NEW YORK: European stocks steadied yesterday awaiting the outcome of a monetary policy meeting of the European Central Bank and US inflation data, as traders seek clues over the timing of interest rate hikes. Traders were tracking also the start of a summit of G7 wealthy nations, ahead of which the United States said it would buy 500 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to distribute among poorer nations. "This week's price action in equity markets appears to have been more or less dictated by how big a rise we might see in today's US (inflation)... as well as how the European Central Bank sees the current outlook for the economy," noted Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK. With the global economy seeing a blockbuster recovery from last year's virus-induced collapse, investors are in a broadly buoyant mood with expectations that equities will continue higher thanks to reopenings, vaccinations, government stimulus and vast central bank support.

However, that optimism is being dampened by

fears the rebound is causing a spike in inflation that will force banks—particularly the Federal Reserve—to wind back their ultra-loose programmes sooner than previously flagged, despite constant reassurances they will not. The release of May's US consumer price index is now crucial, with warnings that a big miss to the upside of the 4.7 percent forecast would ramp up expectations of policy tightening.

Still, observers said there seemed to be a little more calm on trading floors of late as investors accept the rises would be temporary owing to a lower base of comparison with last year and soaring commodity prices.

Ahead of the US data, the European Central Bank is expected to hold its easy money policy in place, though its post-meeting statement will be pored over for its plans as the recovery develops. "It will be hard to avoid taper talk so how the ECB responds to questions around tapering will be of central importance to the market's expectations and the euro," said Neil Wilson of Markets.com.

Traders were keeping tabs also on relations between Beijing and Washington in the wake of US President Joe Biden's decision to revoke his predecessor Donald Trump's executive order against Chinese-owned mobile apps TikTok and WeChat. It comes as commerce officials from the world's two biggest economies have held discussions on trade and investment links. Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and his counterpart Gina Raimondo "agreed to promote the healthy development of pragmatic cooperation in trade and investment", during a phone call yesterday.

Meanwhile, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index recovered early losses and closed higher yesterday on tech rallies, with sentiment sustained by the acceleration of Japan's vaccination drive. The Nikkei 225 index rose 0.34 percent, or 97.76 points, to 28,958.56, but the broader Topix index edged down 0.02 percent, or 0.41 points, to 1,956.73. "Tech shares led today's gains," Toshikazu Horiuchi, a broker at IwaiCosmo Securities, told AFP. "The acceleration of

vaccine delivery also supported buying sentiment." Investors' focus was shifting to the key US consumer price index and a European Central Bank meeting, brokers said. "The ECB is likely in no rush to deliver a taper message," Tapas Strickland, senior analyst at National Australia Bank, said in a commentary.

"The key question is whether the ECB provides guidance on the pace of (asset) purchases" in the third quarter, he added. The dollar fetched 109.53 yen in Asian afternoon trade against 109.63 yen in New York late Wednesday. Industrial robot maker Fanuc jumped 1.75 percent to 26,390 yen with chip-testing equipment manufacturer Tokyo Electron up 1.60 percent at 47,570 yen.

Pharmaceutical firm Eisai dropped 7.01 percent to 10,000 yen on profit-taking after double-digit rises following the US approval of the Alzheimer's drug it developed with Biogen. Kewpie was up 1.09 percent to 2,577 yen after a report said the Japanese mayonnaise maker has developed a vegan version of scrambled eggs that are made of soy beans. —AFP

Business

Thousands strike in Greece over new labour reform

‘No matter what the government does, this bill is condemned by workers’

ATHENS: Thousands of demonstrators marched in Greece yesterday as a 24-hour nationwide strike against a new labour reform shut down transport and public services. Over 16,000 people took part in separate demonstrations in Athens organised by unions and opposition parties, police said, with leftist, socialist and communist party leaders also attending the rallies.

“No matter what the government does, this bill is condemned by workers,” Dimitris Koutsoumbas, head of the communist KKE party, told reporters. “It belongs in the trash heap,” he said. Another 10,000 marched in Thessaloniki, and protests were held in other major Greek cities.

Critics have labelled the reform, which promotes working hour flexibility, “modern-day slavery”. “Hands off the 8-hour (working day),” read a banner carried by pro-communist protesters in the capital. “Slavery is not progress,” said another.

The government says the reform — to be put to a vote in parliament next week — introduces optional working hour flexibility, sets rules on remote work, improves parental leave and includes safeguards against workplace sex harassment.

The Greek economy has reopened after a second six-month pandemic lockdown. State data last week showed output grew by 4.4 per cent in the first three months of the year, com-

pared to the previous quarter.

Labour Minister Costis Hatzidakis has said the new rules allow staff to personally negotiate with management the option of working more hours during part of the year, and subsequently take more time off. A working day of up to 10 hours is permitted under the reform, in return for additional paid leave.

But unions and opposition parties say it undermines collective bargaining, disrupts employees’ personal lives and formalises overtime exploitation by employers — especially large businesses — which has already been going on for years. “Workers cannot pay for their rent, (the needs of) their children, their shopping with paid leave,” the main opposition Syriza party’s speaker against the bill, Mariliza Xenogiannakopoulou, told parliament.

“Once personal contracts are formalised, they will proliferate...and become the norm,” she said. Unions are also opposed to the reform setting stricter rules on calling strikes. The government’s majority in parliament already approved the bill at a first reading on Wednesday, ahead of a plenary vote next week. The 24-hour walkout sidelined ferry services and trains, forced flight rescheduling and snarled most public transport in Athens. Public services shut down and most journalists also went offline for the day. — AFP



ATHENS: A woman holds a placard reading in Greek “stop to Hatzidakis (minister of labour) law - fire Mitsotakis” as she takes part in a demonstration part of a 24-hour general strike called by Greece’s labour unions and opposition parties in Athens yesterday. —AFP

Toshiba sought govt help to influence shareholder vote

TOKYO: Japan’s Toshiba sought government help to try and influence a boardroom vote proposed by activist shareholders at its last regular annual general meeting, according to an independent probe published yesterday.

The troubled industrial conglomerate “devised a plan to effectively prevent shareholders from exercising their shareholder proposal right and voting rights at the AGM” in July 2020, investigators said. The meeting, at which the activist shareholders’ resolutions were rejected, was “not fairly managed”, concluded their 140-page report.

It also detailed how Toshiba had pursued an intervention from Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which did not respond to a request for comment. “Toshiba requested METI’s support for the so-called measures to counter the activists at the AGM,” said the report by three law firms, which Toshiba did not immediately comment on.

Toshiba was once a symbol of Japan’s advanced technology and economic power but has lurched from scandals and losses to a recovery in recent years. The group has worked on its financial woes and strengthened its governance, with a board now composed of mostly external direc-

tors. But it has faced pressure from activist shareholders who want to see faster growth and a clearer long-term strategy.

The probe said Toshiba had worked “so to speak in unison” with the trade ministry to deal with shareholders who were proposing to appoint new external directors at the AGM. In May 2020, then-CEO Nobuaki Kurumatani met Yoshihide Suga, who at the time was the government’s chief cabinet secretary and is now prime minister, the report alleged.

Suga denied involvement yesterday, telling reporters: “I am not aware at all. There is no such thing.” The probe found no evidence that Toshiba had interfered with ballots at the AGM. “Based on digital forensics and interviews with related parties, there were no circumstances that suggested that Toshiba hid or intentionally did not count voting forms in order to ensure that resolutions would be passed in its favour,” the report said.

The probe was launched after shareholders alleging vote irregularities pushed Toshiba to hold an extraordinary off-schedule general meeting in March. In April, Kurumatani resigned in a shock move as a now-stalled buyout offer from a private equity fund stirred further turmoil within the firm.

Amir Anvarzadeh, a strategist at Asymmetric Advisors, said the allegations were “hardly surprising as for years Toshiba has used its political connections to get its way”. “The releasing of the results of the investigation looks to be a big win for Toshiba shareholders and should force in new management and board structure,” he added. — AFP

Global banking regulator mulls tougher crypto rules

GENEVA: The top international banking supervisory authority yesterday targeted toughening up the rules on cryptoassets, notably for more speculative ones such as bitcoin. The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision said it was launching a public consultation on proposals for how the world’s banks could best manage their exposure to cryptoassets.

The BCBS, which sets the rules for banks, said cryptoassets could increase risks to the banking system. Its reform proposals concern the capital that banks must set aside to guard against default risks. The public consultation on preliminary proposals “for the prudential treatment of banks’ cryptoasset exposures” runs until September 10, the BCBS said.

“While banks’ exposures to cryptoassets are currently limited, the continued growth and innovation in cryptoassets and related services, coupled with the heightened interest of some banks, could increase global financial stability concerns and risks to the banking system in the absence of a specified prudential treatment.”

The committee said there has been rapid growth in cryptoassets over the past few

years, with the estimated market capitalisation of some of those assets recently reaching new all-time highs. “Cryptoassets are defined as private digital assets that depend primarily on cryptography and distributed ledger or similar technology,” according to the consultative document issued yesterday.

Range of concerns

It said that while the market remained small relative to the size of the global financial system and banks’ exposures to cryptoassets are currently limited, the market’s absolute size was meaningful and developing rapidly. “Cryptoassets have given rise to a range of concerns including consumer protection, money laundering and terrorist financing, and their carbon footprint,” the committee said.

“The growth of cryptoassets and related services has the potential to raise financial stability concerns and increase risks faced by banks.” The committee said certain cryptoassets had shown a high degree of volatility, and could present banks with a range of risks to their liquidity and credit.

The Basel committee is proposing subdividing cryptoassets into two groups. The first would deal with assets that could fall under existing rules, which would be bolstered with modifications and fresh guidance. These would include “tokenised traditional assets” such as bonds or shares recorded using the new technologies, but also “stablecoins”. — AFP

Business

Peugeot to be prosecuted in France over 'dieselgate'

Two other subsidiaries to appear before the Judicial Court

PARIS: French car maker Peugeot is facing prosecution in France over the "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal, its parent company Stellantis said Wednesday, after similar charges were announced against Renault and Volkswagen.

"Two other subsidiaries of Stellantis, Automobiles Citroen S.A. and FCA Italy S.p.A, have been summoned to appear before the Judicial Court of Paris, on June 10 and in July, respectively, as part of the same investigation," Stellantis said in a statement.

The US-European auto giant said Peugeot was under investigation "on allegations of consumer fraud in connection with the sale of Euro 5 diesel vehicles in France between 2009 and 2015".

Stellantis said Peugeot will have to guarantee 30 million euros (\$37 million) "for the potential compensation for losses", as well as pay bail of 10 million euros (\$12.2 million), comprising 8 million euros (\$9.7 million) for potential damages and 2 million euros (\$2.2 million) for court representation.

"The companies firmly believe that their emission control systems met all applicable requirements at the relevant times and continue to do so and look forward to the opportunity to demonstrate that," Stellantis added.

The announcement came a day after German automaker Volkswagen said it was facing charges over the scandal, and two days after Renault said the same.

"Dieselgate" erupted in 2015 when VW admitted that it had equipped around 11 million vehicles with devices capable of pro-

ducing fake carbon dioxide emission readings during tests, even though actual emissions could be up to 40 times higher.

A legal source said the charges against Peugeot concerned allegations of "fraud endangering the health of a human or animal".

France's DGCCRF anti-fraud agency had in February 2017 filed a report with the French justice system alleging that there was a "global strategy aimed at fabricating fraudulent motors and then commercialising them". Investigators allege that some 1.9 million Euro 5 diesel cars, "whose motors functioned using the fraudulent strategy", were sold by Peugeot-Citroen in France between September 2009 and September 2015.

The DGCCRF estimate the maximum fine over the allegations could cost the company 5 billion euros (\$6.1 billion).

The revelations that Volkswagen had installed devices in 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide to dupe pollution tests plunged the company into a deep crisis.

It has so far cost the German car giant more than 30 billion euros in fines, legal costs and compensation.

Stellantis was created in January 2021 after the merger of France's PSA and US-Italian rival Fiat Chrysler became official.

The long-awaited 50/50 tie-up, which was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, formed the world's fourth-biggest automaker by volume and brought together producers such as Peugeot, Citroen, Fiat, Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, each of which continued under their own brand names. — AFP



PARIS: File photo shows the logo of Peugeot. French car-maker Peugeot is facing prosecution in France over the "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal, its parent company Stellantis said yesterday. — AFP

AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT: In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 09 June 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes, over 12 month period and has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

The bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Mohammad Faleh Al-Hajri, Khaleel Ali Abdullah, Rasheed Amer Al-Azmi, Abdulkareem Abdullah Al-Saeed, Bandar Nader Al-Shammari, Khetam Oudah Mohammad, Mohammed Ali Gholoum Hussain, Nawaf Fares Al-Dabbous, Bushra Abadi Abdulmajeed, Khaled Mohammad Al-Khater, Ali Haydar Al-Safar, Mariam Ahmad Bohamad, Jassim Yousef Al-Kandari, Ahmad Raslan Namouz, Jamal Hasan Al-Fadhlah, Sabah Eid Nassar, Souad Abdulla Al-Jasmi, Ahmad Noor Abul Hassan, Behzad Bahram Ali And Zilfa Zaid Al-Zaid.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to all customer segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique

Al-Hassad

The highest number of winners in Kuwait

Quarterly	KD 250,000	Eid Al-Fitr & Adha	KD 100,000
Privilege	KD 25,000	Weekly	KD 20,000



savings account with many advantages.

Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms..

IATA to roll out COVID 'travel pass' in Mideast

DUBAI: The International Air Transport Association announced yesterday its digital travel pass will "go live" in the Middle East in the coming weeks, as Europe and the US relax travel restrictions. Countries around the world are racing to adopt digital certificates in order to unlock an expected revival in international tourism after the coronavirus pandemic crippled the aviation industry for more than a year.

No one vaccine certification system has yet been universally accepted or recognised, though IATA's travel pass has gained popularity among the Gulf's giant carriers. "We have received very positive feedback on the IATA travel pass," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general, in a briefing on Thursday. "It will go live in the next couple of weeks with a number of carriers in the Middle East region," he added, without specifying which airlines. Gulf heavyweights Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways were among the first companies to start testing the app in January, followed by several other global carriers, including Singapore Airlines.

IATA's pass is a mobile app that would enable passengers to create a "digital passport" to provide proof of their testing and vaccination history that can be shared with airlines and immigration officials. Last month, EU leaders welcomed the introduction of a bloc-wide Covid-19 pass that they hope will unlock a summer surge in tourism.

The 27 member states want the EU Digital Covid Certificate, to be launched on July 1, to turn the page on coronavirus restrictions that have crimped Europeans' cherished freedom of movement. The move came as several member states with large tourism industries, including France, Greece and Spain, eased their coronavirus restrictions. On Tuesday, the United States eased its warnings against travel to dozens of countries, including Japan. —AFP

Business

ECB in hot seat over easy money as economy strengthens

ECB's governing council expected to hold interest rates at historic lows

FRANKFURT: Markets will be looking for clues on when the European Central Bank might start winding down monetary stimulus, as the economic rebound from the pandemic accelerates and eurozone inflation surges past the bank's target. The ECB's 25-member governing council is widely expected to hold interest rates at historic lows and leave its massive bond purchasing schemes in place at its six-weekly meeting.

But with vaccination progress and post-lock-down spending brightening the outlook, ECB president Christine Lagarde can expect a grilling from reporters on how policymakers plan to wean the region's economy off crisis support. A similar debate is raging in the United States, where concerns are growing that inflation will skyrocket, forcing the Federal Reserve to reduce its bond-buying scheme or even lift interest rates to prevent the economy from overheating.

'Avoid tapering talk'

The ECB's main tool to cushion the impact from the coronavirus is its 1.85 trillion euro pandemic emergency purchasing programme (PEPP), set to run until March 2022. The Frankfurt institution in March announced it would buy bonds at a "significantly" higher pace to soothe market jitters about rising bond yields. ECB officials have hinted they are wary about removing support at the first sign of green shoots, leading observers to expect the

faster PEPP pace to be maintained for another quarter.

Lagarde herself has repeatedly stressed her commitment to preserving "favourable financing conditions" until the rebound is firmly established. But the ECB won't "be able to avoid the tapering discussion for long", said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. "Unless the economy unexpectedly stumbles over the summer, the ECB will likely have to change the tune and start to scale back its net asset purchases from September onwards," agreed Berenberg economist Holger Schmieding.

Inflation overshoot

The ECB's vast bond purchases are aimed keeping borrowing costs low to spur spending and investment in the 19-nation currency club. On top of PEPP, the ECB is also hoovering up 20 billion euros a month in government and corporate bonds under a pre-pandemic scheme to boost growth and drive up inflation. The ECB has also offered ultra-cheap loans to banks and set its bank deposit rate at minus 0.5 percent-meaning lenders pay to park excess cash at the ECB.

The goal is to push inflation "close to, but below" two percent, a target that has been out of the ECB's reach for years. But consumer prices have risen rapidly in recent months, driven by soaring energy prices and temporary factors including a shortage of semiconductors and raw materials as



FRANKFURT: File photo shows the headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. —AFP

well as pent-up demand as whole sectors of the economy emerge from shutdowns.

Inflation in the euro area hit 2.0 percent in May, overshooting the ECB's benchmark to reach its highest level in nearly three years. Core inflation however, which strips out energy and other volatile items, remains muted. Lagarde has pledged that the ECB will "look through" what is forecast to be a

brief surge in headline inflation. The bank will also unveil updated quarterly forecasts yesterday, with observers saying inflation forecasts could be revised upwards from the current 1.5 percent for 2021 and 1.2 percent for 2022.

Economic growth estimates are predicted to stay broadly unchanged at 4.0 percent this year and 4.1 percent in 2022. —AFP

NBK, LOYAC support cybercrime awareness among youth

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its support to LOYAC and sponsors its Cybercrime Committee Program as part of its commitment toward corporate social responsibility. NBK's sponsorship to the program aims to raise awareness on the cybercrime protection laws in Kuwait, and the most common mistakes that youth make on social media. The Cyber Crime Committee Program runs for 3 weeks, where participants will explore and research with specialists from the Ministry of Interior about topics that encourage their role as active members in our society.

The Program addresses cybercrime in Kuwait, the legality and how to correctly use online platforms. The participants are to create and showcase an awareness campaign based on their research and information they received. "NBK's sponsorship is part of its ongoing drive to fulfill its corporate social responsibilities", said NBK Public Relations Officer, Joanne Al Abdul Jaleel. "As part of the program, NBK and LOYAC will produce a video campaign for social media to help raise

awareness on cybercrime."

Al Abdul Jaleel added "NBK's sponsorship and support comes in line with the bank's customary and ongoing spirit of corporate citizenship as well as the vital role it plays in supporting youth." NBK continues to promote a range of philanthropic missions and social welfare programs as part of the humanitarian dimension of its corporate social responsibility to assert its leadership in supporting Kuwait's social development, standing as a model in serving all aspects of the community.

LOYAC is a nonprofit organization that runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.



Joanne Al Abdul Jaleel

Facebook remote work made permanent

NEW YORK: Facebook on Wednesday said it will give employees the option of sticking with remote work for the long term, even offering to help some interested in moving to other countries. Beginning on June 15, Facebook will let any employee whose job can be done remotely ask to work that way permanently, the internet giant told AFP. "We believe how we work is more important than where we work," Facebook said while sharing an update to its remote work policy.

"We want to be the place where people can do the best work of their careers while ensuring a consistent experience for employees no matter where they're located." Facebook and other Silicon Valley firms shifted to remote work early in the pandemic, relying on the internet tools they create to get jobs done. Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg has said he expects the shift to remote work to be a lasting one at the leading social network, which plans to look for employees able to do their jobs from wherever they happen to live.

Facebook recently began reopening its offices after a yearlong pandemic shutdown, but without perks such as free food and commuter

shuttles. The rollout of vaccines and improving health conditions were cited as reasons for gradually welcoming employees back to abandoned campuses. Facebook said work schedules for those returning to offices will be flexible, but its guidance is for people to be on-site at least half the time. The leading social network said it is on track to have most of its US campuses at 50 percent capacity by early September. Some Facebook offices in Europe and Asia are open, according to the California-based firm.

Safety protocols in place include wearing face masks and keeping one's distance at work, along with routine COVID-19 testing, according to Facebook. As of June 15, Facebook will also expand remote work across international borders, supporting moves from the United States to Canada as well as shifts to Britain from other parts of Europe, the company said. Google and Microsoft have unveiled similar hybrid schemes for workers, while some firms such as Twitter have told employees they can work remotely indefinitely.

Apple is reportedly facing employee resistance to its plan to bring employees back to the office. The iPhone maker has called for employees to return three days a week starting in September, according to the tech news site The Verge. But some Apple workers have signed a letter calling for more flexibility for employees who have been doing their jobs remotely for more than a year. —AFP

Classifieds



NOTICE
June 08, 2021



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Civil Aviation
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Mr. Philip Edman Akkarawatte, Sri Lankan national, son of Mr. David Solomon Akkarawatte, resident of No-31 Abodiraja, Mawatha Polwatha, Minuwangoda, Sri Lanka and Ms. Nicole Rajulu Kalasala Manavala, Indian national, daughter of Mr. Rajulu Babu Kalasala Manavala, resident of Bldg No 82 R No 2946, Telak Nagar Chebbur, Mumbai, Maharashtra-400089, India both presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965- 22533125).

Dr. Vinod Gaikwad First Secretary
(CCE) and Marriage Officer.
Embassy of India, Kuwait. Email:
cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: welfare2@indembkwt.gov.in

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot with moderate to fresh north westerly wind with speed of 25 - 60 km/h causing rising dust.

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot with moderate to fresh north westerly wind with speed of 20 - 45 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			Fresh Wind + Dust	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 10/06/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	45 °C	32 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	45 °C	33 °C		
ABDALY	45 °C	27 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	46 °C	32 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	42 °C	31 °C		
AHMADI	44 °C	35 °C		
NUWAISIB	48 °C	29 °C		
WAFRA	45 °C	29 °C		
SALMY	44 °C	27 °C		

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital 24812000

Amiri Hospital 22450005

Maternity Hospital 24843100

Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital 25312700

Chest Hospital 24849400

Farwaniya Hospital 24892010

Adan Hospital 23940620

Ibn Sina Hospital 24840300

Al-Razi Hospital 24846000

Physiotherapy Hospital 24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707

Rawda 22517733

Adaliya 22517144

Khaldiya 24848075

Kaifan 24849807

Shamiya 24848913

Shuwaikh 24814507

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	06/11	Hot and Dusty	45 °C	32 °C	NW	30 - 70 km/h
Saturday	06/12	Hot and Dusty	45 °C	33 °C	NW	25 - 65 km/h
Sunday	06/13	Hot and Dusty	46 °C	34 °C	NW	25 - 65 km/h
Monday	06/14	Hot and Rising dust	46 °C	35 °C	NW	25 - 60 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	03:13
Sunrise	04:48
Zuhr	11:47
Asr	15:21
Sunset	18:47
Isha	20:19

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	46 °C
MIN. Temp.	31 °C
MAX. RH	24 %
MIN. RH	05 %
MAX. Wind	N 50 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

Sports

Djokovic ready to face 'biggest rival' Nadal for 58th time

PARIS: Novak Djokovic said facing Rafael Nadal for the 58th time today, with a place in the French Open final on the line, will be "a great battle" against his "biggest ever rival". Djokovic secured the eagerly-awaited clash when he reached his 40th Grand Slam semi-final with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 7-5 win over Italy's Matteo Berrettini. It will be his 11th appearance in the last-four in Paris where he was champion in 2016.

Nadal, the 13-time winner, beat Argentina's Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 to make the semi-finals for the 14th time. He will be playing in his 35th Slam semi. "I'll probably pick Rafa as the biggest rival I've ever had in my career," said world number one Djokovic. "The anticipation for the match against him, any match, any surface, any occasion, is always different from any other. Let's have a great battle."

Although Djokovic has the edge at 29-28 in their overall rivalry stretching back 15 years, Nadal enjoys a 7-1 record in their French Open meetings and is 19-7 overall on clay. Djokovic's last win over the Spanish star on a clay court was in Rome five years ago. Nadal's record in Paris now stands at 105 wins against just two losses. One of those defeats, however, was at the hands of Djokovic in 2015.

'Release of emotions'

With Djokovic's quarter-final extending be-

yond the national 11pm curfew, play was halted for around 20 minutes at 3-2 in the fourth set so that 5,000 fans could be funnelled out of Court Philippe Chatrier. Djokovic eventually claimed the match on a third match point in the 12th game but only after he kicked out at an advertising board in frustration at missing the first two.

His scream into the humid night air told of his relief as his bid to win a 19th Grand Slam and be the first man in more than 50 years to claim all four majors twice stayed on course. "It was a release of all the emotions I had kept inside me," said Djokovic who hit 44 winners and saved all three break points he faced against the Italian. "After all the fans left and the little break it wasn't easy to find rhythm. It was really a very difficult match for me." He added: "It was a great battle against a player who serves well and is powerful. Maybe I could have finished on the tie break, but I'm happy to have won."

Nadal also has a landmark in view in Paris. If he gets to Sunday's final and wins, he would secure a record-setting 21st major, edging ahead of Roger Federer in the all-time race. Wednesday's night session was the 10th and last at this year's tournament but was the first to allow in fans after the 9pm Covid-19 curfew was pushed back to 11pm.

The previous nine sessions were played in an empty Court Philippe Chatrier, not a good



PARIS: In this file photo taken on October 11, 2020 Spain's Rafael Nadal (right) and Serbia's Novak Djokovic talk prior to their men's final tennis match at the Philippe Chatrier court at The Roland Garros 2020 French Open tennis tournament in Paris. —AFP

look for streaming giant Amazon who had secured the broadcast rights. "I thought the atmosphere was Davis Cup like, to be honest," said Djokovic. "It was a lot of fans involved,

every single point cheering, screaming. Just electric atmosphere out there. I'm happy that I had that experience of playing in front of the crowd in the night session." —AFP

Kuwait resumes sport activities for all age groups

KUWAIT: Kuwait Olympic Committee announced resumption, as of yesterday, of all sport activities for all age groups in local clubs and sport association after a halt for more than 15 months due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, sport clubs and associations must comply with Ministry of Health's measures to ensure safety of players, the committee said in a statement. The committee urged the clubs and association to ensure wellbeing of players of all ages in order to make sure smooth preparations for the next season.

Meanwhile, Kuwait and Salmiya sport clubs said they were ready to compete in the 23rd Asian Club League Handball Championship from June 12 to 21 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In separate statements yesterday, the clubs' officials noted that their teams aim to represent Kuwait in the final stages of the competition and develop the performance of Kuwaiti handball. Kuwait club's team played five friendly matches in the training camp in Serbia, winning four matches, the club's handball media coordinator Saad Al-Shimmari said. He added that the team signed contracts with four professional players for the tournament. In the meantime, member of the board of Salmiya club Dr Hussein Al-Khodhari noted that the team prepared for the tournament in a training camp in the Qatari capital, Doha. Clubs from Saudi, Qatar, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, Iran and Yemen will also take part in the competition. —KUNA

Salisbury, Krawczyk win French Open mixed doubles crown

PARIS: Joe Salisbury became the first Briton to win the French Open mixed doubles in 39 years yesterday as he and American partner Desirae Krawczyk beat Aslan Karatsev and Elena Vesnina 2-6, 6-4, 10-5 in the final. It is a second Grand Slam title for Salisbury, 29, who won the 2020 Australian Open men's doubles with Rajeev Ram. The 27-year-old Krawczyk finished runner-up in last year's women's doubles at Roland Garros with Alexa Guarachi. "They killed us in the first set, and I think that it was a combination of sort of us getting better, then they dropped their level a bit," said Salisbury. "But I think all week we have just gone into it kind of relaxed, enjoying ourselves and seeing what happens. We have come out with a Grand Slam title." —AFP



PARIS: Desirae Krawczyk of the US (left) and Britain's Joe Salisbury react after winning a point against Russia's Elena Vesnina and Russia's Aslan Karatsev during their mixed doubles final tennis match on Day 12 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. —AFP

Kuwaiti shooters grab three medals at Arab shooting tourney

CAIRO: Kuwait's shooters Nasser Al-Maklad, Abdulrahman Al-Faihan and Talal Al-Torqi won on Wednesday the gold, silver and bronze medals respectively in Men's Trap shooting contest at the Arab shooting championship hosted by Egypt. In separate statements to the press, the shooters dedicated their medals to His

Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people. Maklad said he was very happy for winning this medal, regretting that he did not qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. Torqi said that it is a great achievement for Kuwait, which has made several successes in this field. He pointed to his gold medal he won at the world shooting tourney hosted by Italy two weeks ago. He stressed that he would do his best in the next championships mainly Tokyo Olympics to raise Kuwait's flag. Meanwhile, Faihan voiced his delight about his silver medal, noting that he was about to snatch the gold. The game helps players prepare for the next Olympic games, he added. The tourney, which will run until June 12, features 300 male and female shooters from 16 Arab countries. —KUNA

Sports

Jazz center Gobert wins third NBA Defensive Player of Year award

NEW YORK: Utah center Rudy Gobert was named NBA Defensive Player of the Year on Wednesday, the third time the Jazz's French big man has earned the award. Gobert, who also won the award in the 2017-18 season and in 2018-19, is the fourth player to win the award at least three times, joining Dikembe Mutombo and Ben Wallace — who both won it four times — and Dwight Howard who won it three times.

The 7-foot-1-inch (2.16m) player dubbed the “Stifle Tower” received 84 first-place votes and earned 464 points from a global panel of 100 sportswriters and broadcasters. In his eighth NBA season, Gobert led the league in defensive rebounds per game with 10.1, total defensive rebounds with 720 and total blocked shots with 190.

He ranked second in blocked shots per game (2.70) and posted six games with at least 15 defensive rebounds and eight games with five or more blocks. “It takes team effort, mental toughness, hard work and dedication,” Gobert told broadcaster TNT as the award was announced prior to the night's playoff game between the Denver Nuggets and Phoenix Suns. TNT broadcasted a video of Gobert being surprised with the trophy at his locker by cheering teammates. “It's been a great year,” he said, “but we have a higher goal and that's to win a championship.”

Philadelphia 76ers guard Ben Simmons of Australia finished in second place with 287 points (15 first-place votes). Golden State Warriors forward Draymond Green, the 2016-17 Defensive Player of the Year, finished in third place with 76 points.

Players received five points for each first-place vote, three points for each second-place vote and one point for each third-place vote. The Jazz lead the Los Angeles Clippers 1-0 in their best-of-seven Western Conference second-round playoff series after a 112-109 victory on Tuesday.

Gobert made a key — and characteristic — contribution to that

victory with a big block of a three-point attempt by Marcus Morris as time ran out. Gobert said recently it's the kind of contribution he feels is expected of him. “I come in every single night trying to be the best that I can be for this team and anchor this team defensively,” he said.

‘Stabilizing force’

Behind Gobert, Utah finished third in the NBA in defensive rating and second in opponents' field goal percentage (44.7). The strong defense helped propel the Jazz to a league-leading 52-20 regular-season record and the top playoff seed in the Western Conference.

Selected as an NBA All-Star for the second time, Gobert averaged 14.3 points and 13.5 rebounds in 71 games this season. He led the NBA in total rebounds (960) and also shot an NBA-high 67.5% from the field. “The things that Rudy does are unique, and he's a stabilizing force, particularly on the defensive end,” Jazz coach Quin Snyder said.

Gobert finished third in voting for the 2020 award won by Giannis Antetokounmpo — after a season in which Gobert was in the spotlight early for making light of the emerging coronavirus pandemic by handling reporters' recorders only to be diagnosed himself with COVID-19.

He later donated \$500,000 to support COVID relief efforts and in December he inked a contract extension with the Jazz worth a reported \$205 million over five years. The 28-year-old, who was the 27th overall selection in the 2013 NBA draft, credited his mother with making what has turned into a stellar NBA career possible.

“She sacrificed a lot for me to be able to do what I love,” he said. “I grew up in a small town in France, I wasn't really supposed to be here. If you would have asked me when I started basketball if I was going to win Defensive Player of the Year, I would have probably not believed it. Three of them is just amazing.” —AFP



SALT LAKE CITY: Rudy Gobert #27 of the Utah Jazz is interviewed after 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

Inter Miami in talks over Messi move: Report

LOS ANGELES: Lionel Messi could move to Inter Miami as part of a new 10-year deal the Argentinian superstar is negotiating with Barcelona, the owner of the Major League Soccer side said Wednesday. The Miami Herald newspaper reported that Inter owner Jorge Mas and co-owner David Beckham have had “serious talks” with Messi about joining the Florida franchise for a short-term stint built into his new Barcelona contract.

Reports in Spain have said that under the new deal proposed by Barcelona, Messi will play two more seasons with the La Liga giants through to the end of the 2022-2023 campaign before ending his playing career with two seasons in Miami. He would then return to Barcelona for six years in a “global ambassador” role.

Inter owner Mas told the Herald on Wednesday that he was optimistic that Messi would eventually play in Miami. “David and I have been working really hard, we have aspirations of bringing the best players here and Leo Messi is a generational player, arguably the best player of all time,” Mas said. “I am optimistic Messi will play in an Inter Miami shirt because I think it will complete the legacy of the greatest player in our generation and will meet with the ambitions of the owners of Inter Miami to build a world class team.” Speculation about Messi's future has intensified with the 33-year-old out of contract with Barcelona at the end of this month. The six-time Ballon D'Or winner told Spanish television last December he hoped to play in MLS eventually. “I always had the dream of being able to enjoy and have the experience of living in the United States, experience what the league there is like,” Messi told the La Sexta channel in an interview. —AFP

Islanders oust Bruins, book NHL semi-final clash with Lightning

NEW YORK: Brock Nelson scored two goals as the New York Islanders beat the Boston Bruins 6-2 on Wednesday to reach the NHL Stanley Cup playoff semi-finals. Kyle Palmieri scored his seventh goal of the playoffs as the Islanders polished off their best-of-seven series four games to two.

The Islanders lined up a semi-final meeting with the Lightning for the second consecutive season. The Lightning beat the Carolina Hurricanes in five games to advance. Josh Bailey and Jean-Gabriel Pageau had two assists apiece for the Islanders and Semyon Varlamov made 23 saves.

Brad Marchand scored twice, and Tuukka Rask made 23 saves for the Bruins, who have lost in the second round for two straight seasons after reaching the Stanley Cup final in 2019. Travis Zajac gave the Islanders a 1-0 lead at 8:52 of the first period on the rebound of Noah Dobson's shot from the point.

Marchand knotted the score at 1-1 on the power play with a wrist shot from the right face-off circle at 17:36 after the Bruins failed to score on a 14-second two-man advantage. Palmieri nearly gave the Islanders the lead in the final second of the first period, but his turnaround shot in the left circle hit the crossbar.

Nelson worked his way around defenseman Matt Grzel-



UNIONDALE: Brock Nelson #29 of the New York Islanders scores against the Boston Bruins at 5:20 of the second period in Game Six of the Second Round of the 2021 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at the Nassau Coliseum on Wednesday in Uniondale, New York. —AFP

cyk and scored on the rush with a wrist shot from the slot to make it 2-1 at 5:20 of the second. Varlamov maintained the advantage with a pad save on a shot from Charlie Coyle and Nelson scored his second of the game on a backhand to make it 3-1 at 12:39.

Palmieri stole the puck from Grzelczyk in front of the net and beat Rask to give the Islanders a 4-1 lead before the second period ended. Marchand cut the deficit to 4-2 with a power play goal at 5:38 of the third. Cal Clutterbuck and Ryan Pulock scored empty-net goals in the final minute for the 6-2 final. —AFP

Suns scorch Nuggets for 2-0 NBA series lead

LOS ANGELES: Chris Paul scored 17 points and handed out 15 assists Wednesday to propel the Phoenix Suns to a crushing 123-98 victory over Denver and a 2-0 lead in their NBA playoff series. Veteran point guard Paul was the keystone of the Suns' dominant victory, pulling down five rebounds and finishing the night without a turnover.

Every Suns starter scored in double figures and Phoenix did not give the Nuggets a chance to celebrate the NBA Most Valuable Player award that Denver center Nikola Jokic received on Tuesday. Devin Booker scored 18 points for Phoenix. Deandre Ayton added 15 points and 10 rebounds and also kept Jokic in check for much of the night.

Jokic finished with 24 points, 13 rebounds and six assists, sitting out the fourth quarter with Phoenix in full control. "It was a team effort, once again," Paul said. "We knew how important this game was," he added, noting the Suns did not want to head to Denver for game three on Friday with the series split. "We just wanted to maintain home-court advantage and get the win."

Leading 52-42 at halftime, the Suns pushed the lead to 60-43 with the help of two three-pointers from Jae Crowder. Phoenix led 86-67 heading into the final quarter, when they pushed the lead to as many as 31 with Jokic and Aaron Gordon on the bench.

Gordon and Crowder both received technical fouls after

a testy exchange in the third quarter, but the incident was just a blip in the Suns' march. The Nuggets clearly continue to miss Jamal Murray — out with a torn knee ligament — and Jokic got little aid from his banged-up supporting cast.

Denver missed eight of their first 10 shots and things went downhill for them from there. Michael Porter, who hurt his back in game one, played 27 minutes and put up 11 points — but connected on just three of 13 shots from the field.

Will Barton, sidelined since April with hamstring trouble, came off the bench in the first quarter and scored 10 points in 16 minutes. But Nuggets coach Michael Malone was offering no excuses when he called the game "embarrassing."

"I saw one team that wanted to be here, played with purpose and urgency, and one team that did not want to be here and played with no urgency — and that's why we got our ass kicked," Malone said after the Nuggets lost by the biggest margin they surrendered all season.

"We've got a lot of guys that played really bad tonight," Malone said. "And we allowed the impact of not making a shot to affect the other end. This was just an embarrassing performance all the way around, from top to bottom."

After home games where they were buoyed by an enthusiastic crowd, Paul said the Suns must "make sure we

"When he comes to Sombor, you can see him on the street and he'll always have time for a chat," he added. Gordana Ralevic, his English teacher, remembered "little" Jokic as an "excellent" academic student. As a heavier kid "he had problems with PE lessons... he really struggled", she told AFP. "But he fought — and succeeded, as we can see."

'Organized improvisation'

Jokic himself has admitted he could not hold the abdominal plank position for more than 20 seconds when he first came to the NBA, but was drilled by trainers into shedding some pounds, while still maintaining a bulkier physique.

According to his father, basketball was love at first sight. "As a child, with his dummy in his mouth, he would watch his brothers play (basketball) without moving, without making a sound, sitting on my lap," said Branislav Jokic.

Even though he entered the NBA circus as 41st pick in the second round — almost the equivalent of Denver finding a golden nugget while strolling in their backyard — the center immediately entranced fans and sports analysts.

Jokic keeps things simple on the pitch, combining light movement and simple tap-ins with uncanny precision, especially laser-sharp passes that have seen him likened to an NFL quarterback on court. His style stands out in the entertainment-focused NBA, but is typical for Serbian basketball. Aleksandar Miletic, a local sports journalist, once described it as "jazz basketball".

It is "organized improvisation... letting a player out of the collective without harming the team", he explained. Former San Antonio Spurs forward Zarko Paspalj, one of the first Europeans to venture in the NBA, believes Jokic is an "old-school example of Yugoslav basketball". "Here, boys are taught to be modest. Jokic carries his upbringing proudly, and presents that image, while being an amazing player," Paspalj told AFP. —AFP



PHOENIX: Chris Paul #3 of the Phoenix Suns puts up a shot over Michael Porter Jr #1 of the Denver Nuggets during the first half in Game Two of the Western Conference second-round playoff series at Phoenix Suns Arena on Wednesday in Phoenix, Arizona. —AFP

travel with the same energy." "We've been a really good road team all season long," Paul said. "We'll rest and try to get ready for the Mile High." —AFP



PHOENIX: Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets shoots the ball against the Phoenix Suns during Round 2, Game 2 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Wednesday at Phoenix Suns Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. —AFP

Nikola Jokic: The low-key Serb star who stormed NBA

BELGRADE: Nikola Jokic is not your usual NBA Most Valuable Player — slightly doughy, not the quickest, media-shy and he rarely dunks. His playing style is typical of the game developed in the former Yugoslavia described as "jazz basketball" — a style that relies on improvisation and individual creativity rather than speed and sheer power.

And the 26-year-old Nuggets superstar is also typical in another way: his calm, modest personality reflecting his background in rural northern Serbia. The down-to-earth persona helped to bring him legendary status among Serbian fans long before the extraordinary season that earned him the MVP award. "He seems like the guy we all know," Stefan Gojkovic, a 31-year-old Belgrade native, told AFP. "The one who fools around on the local basketball pitch before grabbing a beer with his friends afterwards."

In his native Sombor, a sleepy northern city where 6ft 11ins (2.11m) Jokic returns each year, he prefers to keep a low profile, spending his time with his family and indulging his other passion: horses. "He inherited this from me," his father Branislav Jokic, 61, a retired agricultural engineer, told AFP in 2019. "As a child, he would clean the stables before going to school."

He has married his high school sweetheart and will often stop by his former school to talk to young players on a small court, beneath his mural. "He was a wonderful kid, who grew into a wonderful young man," Vladimir Karanovic, Jokic's former elementary school principal, told AFP.

Sports

'Football's coming home': England aim to emulate spirit of Euro 96

LONDON: Twenty-five years after England's dramatic Euro 96 campaign revived the nation's love affair with football, Gareth Southgate's side aim to emulate the golden summer when football came home. England manager Southgate leads his team into their opening match of the European Championship against Croatia at Wembley on Sunday. It should be a memorable occasion as England play on home turf at a major tournament for the first time since Euro 96.

For Southgate, England's role as one of several hosts of the delayed Euro 2020 offers a chance for redemption after his penalty miss condemned the country to Euro 96 semi-final heartache against Germany. If England can create the same wave of national enthusiasm that Terry Venables' team surfed 25 years ago, Southgate will have a chance of winning a first major title for the country since the 1966 World Cup.

English football was undergoing a long-awaited rebirth by the time Euro 96 arrived, recovering from a dark period in which its image was badly damaged by hooligan gangs who clashed in decaying stadiums. The Premier League had been established four years earlier, with Britpop bands Blur and Oasis and even future prime minister Tony Blair jumping on the bandwagon to broaden the game's appeal.

Capturing the optimistic "Cool Britannia" mood, comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner teamed up with The Lightning Seeds to write England's Euro 96 anthem "Three Lions". With its "Football's Coming Home" chorus, the song became the soundtrack to England's summer. Yet, while there were unforgettable days ahead, England started Euro 96 in disarray.

Celebrating Paul Gascoigne's birthday during a pre-tournament trip to Hong Kong, England players found themselves on the front pages after a drunken evening at the China Jump bar. The debauchery peaked in the "dentist's chair" — a drinking game in which the footballers sat with their mouths open as tequila and vodka were poured in.

Gascoigne and other players were also involved in a heated dispute that led to televisions being damaged on a Cathay Pacific flight back to London. Rather than read the riot act as tabloid headlines screamed "Disgraceful", Venables fostered a seige mentality among his squad.

'We had a lot of fun'

Venables' ploy nearly backfired when England were held to a 1-1 draw against Switzerland in their opening game at Wembley. But England's tournament turned in the grudge match against Scotland, an opponent who lie in wait for Southgate's men in their Euro 2020 group. Alan Shearer headed England into the lead and David Seaman saved Gary McAllister's penalty before Gascoigne repaid Venables' faith with a sublime goal that showcased his maverick genius.

Gascoigne celebrated by lying on the ground while Teddy Sheringham squirted a water bottle into his open mouth in a nod to their "dentist's chair" antics. "Gazza saw the dentist's chair in the middle of this bar. From that moment it turns into chaos," former England midfielder Jamie Redknapp recalled.

"One of the great nights. And Gazza's like 'I'm going to score against Scotland and when I do, I'm going to do the dentist chair'. Apart from Bobby Moore lifting the World



BURTON-ON-TRENT: England's defender Kieran Trippier (left), forward Marcus Rashford (second left), defender Harry Maguire (second right) and defender Kyle Walker take part in a training session at St George's Park in Burton-upon-Trent, central England, yesterday ahead of the UEFA EURO 2020 football competition. —AFP

Cup, that's the best picture I've seen of anyone in an England shirt."

England produced one of their greatest performances to crush the Netherlands 4-1 in their final group game. But after surviving a tense shootout to beat Spain in the last eight, England's infamous penalty demons resurfaced when they faced Germany in a pulsating semi-final.

Stefan Kuntz cancelled out Shearer's opener and, after Gascoigne was inches away from an extra-time winner, it was

Southgate who played the villain with his shoot-out miss. Southgate wept on Venables' shoulder, while Germany went on to beat the Czech Republic in the final.

Despite the painful denouement, Euro 96 remains an iconic moment in English football, one that Southgate would love to recreate with his team over the next month. "It was not only that we reached the semi-finals, it was that we had a lot of fun along the way, and I think the whole country did too," Shearer said. —AFP

Spain's Diego Llorente tests negative days after positive test

MADRID: Spain defender Diego Llorente has tested negative for COVID-19, the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) said yesterday, just days after a positive test sparked fears of infection within Spain's Euro 2020 squad. "The confirmation PCR tests carried out on Wednesday 9 June were negative. The counter-analysis has confirmed the result in the last few hours... suggesting (Tuesday's result) was a false positive," the RFEF said. The announcement came as Spain prepared to vaccinate its entire Euro 2020 squad just days before the start of the tournament. The sudden decision was taken after Llorente's diagnosis on Tuesday, two days after captain Sergio Busquets tested positive. —AFP

Denmark to lift mask rules, raises crowd size for Euro matches

COPENHAGEN: Denmark yesterday announced the easing of several COVID measures, regarding the use of face masks, bar and restaurant opening hours, and crowd sizes at Euro matches as it prepares to lift all restrictions by October 1. The Scandinavian country also plans to phase out its "corona pass" required for some activities by the same date.

"We will be able to do everything that we have missed, because we now have the epidemic under control," Health Minister Magnus Heunicke told reporters. Masks will no longer be required as of June 14, except on public transport during rush hour and for standing passengers. That requirement will subsequently be lifted on September 1.

Bars and restaurants will be allowed to stay open until

midnight as of June 11, compared to 11pm currently. As of July 15, they will be allowed to remain open until 2am. Nightclubs will be authorized to reopen on September 1, but visitors will need to show a "corona pass" to enter until October 1.

The document, which certifies that the bearer has either tested negative for the virus or is immune, will be phased out entirely by October 1. Museums, cinemas and theatres will no longer require it as of August 1, and bars and restaurants as of September 1. Up to 10,000 people will be allowed at public events of June 14.

Exceptionally, the four Euro 2020 matches to be played in Copenhagen will be able to welcome 25,000 spectators, up from the 16,000 that had been planned until now. However, given the short notice, Denmark's football association said the increase will not apply to the first match on Saturday, when Denmark meets Finland.

Relatively spared from the pandemic, Denmark currently has just 122 COVID patients in hospital, the lowest number since October. Among the country's 5.8 million inhabitants, 24.2 percent are fully vaccinated and 42.7 have received a first dose. —AFP

Sports

France eye Euro 2020 glory as kick-off looms

LONDON: Euro 2020 finally kicks off today as Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal prepare to defend their title and world champions France seek a rare double a year after the tournament was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. France's fearsome forward line makes them favorites to win a third European crown at the pan-continental event, while top-ranked Belgium and a youthful England side will be major threats.

For the first time, the tournament is taking place in 11 cities across Europe — instead of one or two countries — despite the lingering shadow cast by the COVID-19 crisis. Dublin and Bilbao were dropped from the list of host cities after being unable to give guarantees they could meet UEFA's requirement of accommodating limited numbers of spectators, but Seville stepped in for Bilbao while Dublin's games went to London and Saint Petersburg.

The action gets under way at Rome's Olympic Stadium today, where Italy take on Turkey in front of 16,000 fans. Favorites France are not in action until Tuesday in the headline act of the first round of group matches when the world champions take on Germany in Munich.

"All the other countries envy us," said a recent front page of French sports daily L'Equipe underneath pictures of Kylian Mbappe, Karim Benzema and Antoine Griezmann. All eyes will be on 33-year-old forward Benzema, who was recalled after an international exile of five-and-a-half years following a prolific season for Real Madrid.

Holdovers Portugal and Hungary complete Group F, dubbed the tournament's group of

death. Ronaldo is now 36 but is still going strong and is supported by a better squad than five years ago, which also boasts the outstanding talents of Joao Felix, Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva and Ruben Dias.

Can England triumph at home?

England have the carrot of knowing both semi-finals and the final will be played at Wembley, while Italy and the Netherlands are eager to impress after failing to qualify for recent tournaments. Captain Harry Kane believes England will start their bid to win Euro 2020 in a "better place" than they were before reaching the 2018 World Cup semi-finals.

"I feel like now we've had a bit more experience, players in the biggest games for their club and obviously players who have played in that World Cup have had that experience as well," he said. "We haven't won a tournament as a country for a long time, so there needs to be a lot of good mentality along the whole way as it is a long, tough journey to get to the later stages of a major tournament."

Europe is at last getting to grips with the coronavirus pandemic, with infection rates down and vaccinations picking up pace but concerns over possible virus clusters persuaded UEFA to allow nations to name expanded squads of 26 players.

Spanish football chiefs announced this week they had set up a "parallel" squad of 17 reserves after defender Diego Llorente became the second player in the squad to test positive for COVID-19. Two Swedish players — forward



CLAIREFONTAINE-EN-YVELINES: France's coach Didier Deschamps (second left), French President Emmanuel Macron (center), his wife Brigitte Macron (second right) and French Football Federation (FFF) president Noel Le Graet (right) pose for a group picture with France's players before a lunch in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines yesterday ahead of the UEFA EURO 2020 football competition. —AFP

Dejan Kulusevski and midfielder Mattias Svanberg — have tested positive for the virus.

But despite the ongoing threat, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has been bullish, insisting Euro 2020 will be safe. "It will be the first event of a global dimension to be held since the pandemic struck," he said. "It will be the perfect opportunity to show the world that Europe is adapting. Europe is alive and celebrating life.

Europe is back."

The clearest illustration of that is set to come from Budapest, where it is hoped the new Puskas Arena will be packed to capacity. Each of the host cities will welcome back fans, with capacities of between 25 percent and 100 percent apart from Munich, which aims to host a minimum of 14,500 fans — around 22 percent of capacity. —AFP

Immobile looks to bury demons as Italy kick off Euro 2020 against Turkey

ROME: Top Italy striker **Ciro Immobile** will be looking to shake off the demons of World Cup failure as the 'Azzurri' return to the big stage in Friday's European Championship opener against Turkey in Rome. Roberto Mancini's resurgent four-time world champions are being touted as possible dark horses after failing to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

But Italy lack the high-profile strike partnerships of rivals such as Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo and Joao Felix, France's Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema and England's Harry Kane and Marcus Rashford. And despite a club-record 150 goals in five seasons for Lazio, Immobile has been unable to shake off the tag of being unable to score when it matters.

The 31-year-old bore the brunt of criticism for failing to find the net in the World Cup play-off defeat to Sweden in November 2017. "I didn't want to play anymore, it was too much sadness to manage and negative thoughts," recalled Immobile.

Mancini has rebuilt Italy since, with the team on a 27-match unbeaten run. Immobile won the European Golden Shoe in the 2019-2000 season for his 36 league goals, and scored 20 last campaign as Lazio finished sixth.

For the former Borussia Dortmund and Sevilla reject this could be his last chance to shine on the bigger stage. "I have a strong personality," he insists. "I'm not very gifted technically, but where

I don't get there with the technique I get there with strength, tenacity and cunning."

Success has been slow coming on the national team since Immobile made his debut in 2014. He has scored 13 goals in 46 games, but has found more consistency under Mancini with six goals. Italy's strike options also include Torino skipper Andrea Belotti, who has scored 12 goals in 33 games.

However the 27-year-old has limited experience. His only trophy so far is the 2014 Serie B title with Palermo. Belotti scored 13 league goals for Torino last season, as the club avoided relegation with a 17th-place finish. Behind Immobile and Belotti, 21-year-old Sassuolo forward Giacomo Raspadori has received a call-up to the senior national side, giving them another attacking option.

'King Burak'

Despite an unbeaten record against Group A rivals Turkey in 10 previous meetings — seven wins and three draws — Italy's defenders could have their work cut out against star forward Burak Yilmaz. 'King Burak' comes into the Euro fresh from leading Lille to their fourth league title in his first season in France, top-scoring for the club with 16 goals in 28 games.

The 35-year-old will be his team's main goal threat, having scored five goals in four matches with Turkey in 2021. "Our main objective is the match against Italy," said Yilmaz, of a group which also includes Wales and Switzerland.

"We are playing better against the big teams. We have to win this game. We are not afraid of anyone on the pitch. We want to start the competition in the best possible way and take Turkey to the place they deserve. Our excellent results in the Euro qualifiers and the World Cup have raised a lot of expectations among our people. We are aware of this and we bear this responsibility."



VATICAN CITY: This photo taken yesterday by The Vatican Media shows Italian football federation president (FIGC) Gabriele Gravina (right) offering Pope Francis a jersey of Italy's national football team with the Pope's name and signed by Italy's players, during a private audience at The Vatican on the eve of the UEFA EURO 2020 football competition. —AFP

A year after being postponed due to the pandemic, the 24-team tournament spread across 11 venues throughout Europe gets underway in front of an estimated 16,000 fans in a Stadio Olimpico at 25 percent capacity. For Italy, who have won the European trophy just once in 1968, it will be a first major match since their Euro 2016 quarter-finals defeat on penalties to Germany. —AFP



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