



6 Children pay the price in mass Pak HIV outbreak



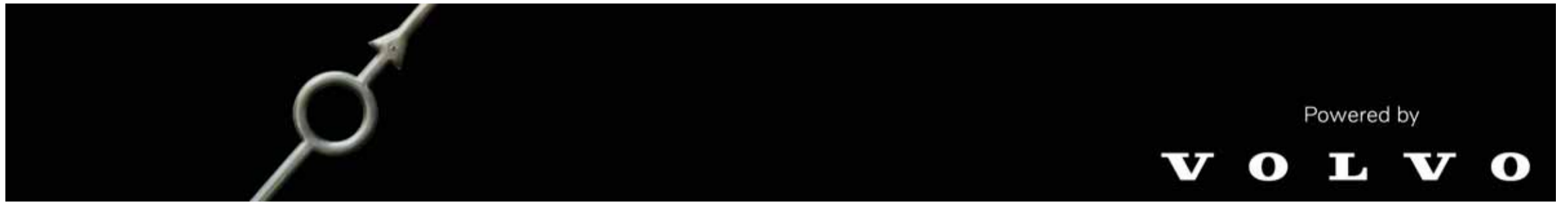
8 Lebanon currency hits new low against dollar



12 Socialism wedding attended by Communism, Leninism, Marxism



16 Scotland stunned by Czechs' Schick on return to Euro



MoH: Cases of Delta variant of COVID-19 detected in Kuwait

Kuwait reports 1,563 new coronavirus cases, 8 deaths

MoI evacuates civilians stuck on Failaka



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah supervises the evacuation yesterday of 140 citizens and residents who were stuck on Failaka Island due to the bad weather conditions this weekend. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced yesterday that it had detected an unspecified number of cases of the Delta variant of the coronavirus, previously known as the Indian variant, amid a clear spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in Kuwait. In a statement to KUNA, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad provided no details on the number of Delta variant cases, when they were discovered and whether they were detected among citizens or expats.

Dr Al-Sanad said in a statement the ministry is conducting genetic examinations of the virus on a regular basis to study patterns of the spread of COVID strains in Kuwait and coordinating with countries around the world to combat the virus. The Delta strain has been detected in more than 62 countries throughout the world.

With the emergence of new strains of the coronavirus in some countries, the health ministry has scrambled to take precautionary measures such as genetic planning by specialized technical teams to contain the virus, Dr Al-Sanad added. He called on

the public to observe strict health precautions to ward off the pandemic, as official statistics show that Kuwait has reported more than 1,300 coronavirus cases every day since June 7. The spike comes shortly after the government ended a partial curfew and reopened malls, restaurants and cafes and a host of other activities.

Health officials announced 1,563 people tested positive yesterday for the coronavirus, while eight related deaths were reported, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 329,526 and the death toll to 1,820. Another 1,464 people recovered from the virus, raising total recoveries to 311,559, Dr Al-Sanad said in a statement. The number of people undergoing treatment currently stands at 16,139, with 172 of them in intensive care units, he added.

The head of the higher consultative committee for the coronavirus Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah said yesterday that new variants of coronavirus are stirring waves of the disease locally and in Gulf countries. He said vaccination and compliance with health precautions are the only measures to deal with the new variants.

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News in brief

Kuwait FA sacks Carrasco

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football Association on Sunday named Thamer Enad, a Kuwaiti, as the new manager of the national football team, replacing Spaniard Andres Carrasco. In a press statement, the KFA said the decision to appoint Enad came after the team's failure to reach the second round of the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023. The association also apologized to all fans for the bad results. — KUNA

Iran navy receives 2 warships

TEHRAN: Iran's navy took delivery yesterday of two new warships in a ceremony broadcast by state television. "The defense ministry has achieved a major task today in supplying two ships to the Islamic Republic of Iran - the destroyer Dena and a minesweeper (Shahin)," Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said. The delivery of the two ships came after Iran announced on Thursday that it had "for the first time" sent a small squadron of ships into the Atlantic Ocean with the goal of "reinforcing its maritime capabilities". — AFP

Egypt upholds death for 12

CAIRO: An Egyptian court yesterday upheld death sentences for 12 Muslim Brotherhood members, concluding a trial linked to a 2013 mass killing of some 800 people by security forces at an Islamist sit-in at Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square in eastern Cairo. Those condemned include senior Brotherhood figures Mohamed Al-Beltagy and Safwat Hegazy, a judicial source said, adding that the rulings are final and cannot be appealed. No Egyptian official has been tried over the Rabaa killings. — AFP

Man with 39 wives dies

NEW DELHI: A polygamist and sect leader who had 39 wives and at least 127 children and grandchildren has died in northeastern India aged 76, officials said. Zinghaka Chana, who lived in the remote state of Mizoram as the patriarch of what is believed to be one of the world's largest families, suffered from diabetes and hypertension and died in hospital on Sunday. — AFP

Biden rallies NATO against China threat

BRUSSELS: NATO leaders vowed yesterday to work together against the 'systemic challenge' posed by China's aggressive policies and put Russia on notice about its flouting of international law. As US President Joe Biden renewed Washington's Transatlantic ties at his first summit with the Western allies, the leaders issued a broad statement of intent.

China's increasingly assertive actions in building a nuclear arsenal along with space and cyber warfare capabilities threatens the international

order, they said. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the allies would seek to cooperate with China on global issues like climate change, as European capitals wanted. But, in a nod to Washington's growing concern, he warned: "China's growing influence and international policies present challenges to Alliance security."

"Leaders agreed that we need to address such challenges together as an alliance, and that we need to engage with China to defend our security interests. We are concerned by China's coercive policies," he said, citing Beijing's expanding nuclear arsenal. In the summit communique, the leaders warned Russia's President Vladimir Putin, whom Biden will meet tomorrow in Geneva, that there will be no quick return to "business as usual".

Continued on Page 2



BRUSSELS: US President Joe Biden (right) speaks with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan prior to a plenary session of a NATO summit at the NATO headquarters yesterday. — AFP

Houthi drone falls on Saudi school

RIYADH: A bomb-laden drone launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels crashed into a Saudi school on Sunday, state media said, despite growing diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire between the warring parties. No injuries were reported in the strike in southern Asir province, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

reported, citing civil defense authorities. Photos released by SPA showed the damaged roof of a building as well as what appeared to be broken parts of the drone. The reported attack comes three days after the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-linked rebels said it had stopped carrying out attacks in Yemen in order to pave the way for a peaceful settlement. The escalation is aimed at "preparing the political ground for a peace process in Yemen", coalition spokesman Turki Al-Maliki told Saudi state television on Thursday.

But shortly after his comments, Yemeni state media

reported that at least eight civilians had been killed and 27 others wounded in strikes in the northern city of Marib. The Houthis have led a months-long offensive to seize Marib and its surrounding oilfields - the last significant pocket of government-held territory in the north. Earlier this month, Omani officials visited Sanaa to try to convince the rebels to accept a ceasefire, according to rebel sources. The effort to secure peace in Yemen comes after Saudi Arabia and regional rival Iran restarted talks in April, with their first high-level meeting since Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016. — AFP

Dubai's yachts offer socially distanced luxe

DUBAI: Dubai earned a reputation for delivering luxury for those with cash to splash years ago, but amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a new mode of travel has become popular - yachts. "It's more private, you're with only family and friends, and it's the ideal outing during a pandemic," said Nada Naem, a 36-year-old Saudi citizen living in Dubai. Dozens of white yachts are seen every day zipping

through the emirate's bays, canals and islands, while others are docked along the coast in Gulf waters overlooking the skyline of high-rise towers.

"You feel like you can breathe," Naem said, adding that she had not left Dubai since the pandemic began last year. "It's like you've travelled." Unlike so many parts of the world, Dubai opened its doors wide open to tourists just a few months after the coronavirus pandemic took hold last year. Life in the Gulf emirate - one of the first destinations to welcome visitors again last July - returned to largely normal, with restaurants and hotels up and running and beaches open to the public.

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DUBAI: A luxury yacht is pictured at the Dubai Marina on June 10 2021. — AFP

Local

Kuwait commemorates World Blood Donor Day

Kuwait Red Crescent Society kicks off blood donation campaign



KUWAIT: Kuwait Ministry of Health's Blood Transfusion Services Department commemorated the World Blood Donor Day yesterday under the theme: Donate blood and revive the world. Marking the World Blood Donor Day raises awareness on need of safe blood transfusion as well as shedding light on contributions of donors who help save lives of people, Hanan Al-Awadhi, Acting Department head, said in a statement to KUNA.



Hanan Al-Awadhi

She added blood donation by the public contributed to increasing the blood stocks at the blood

bank, a matter that showed great social and humanitarian responsibility. People continue to donate blood despite restrictions and extraordinary circumstances emanated from the coronavirus pandemic, she said.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday launched a blood donation campaign in coordination with Kuwait Central Blood Bank marking the World Blood Donor Day that falls annually on June 14. KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said in a statement to KUNA on sidelines of the campaign, organized at Sheikhha Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Center that it was aimed at providing blood donations to patients and others in need. The campaign is also a back-up to the Ministry of Health with respect to securing blood donations, encouraging people to donate blood and enhancing awareness of the necessity of such humanitarian act. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A coordinatory meeting was held between Kuwait Fire Force represented by Chief Lt. General Khalid Al-Mikrad, with the Investigations General Directorate in the presence of Deputy Director General Jamal Al-Reesh. Both sides discussed coordination about following up violation of preventive conditions in regards to the fire force in order to achieve social security.



Kuwait research center earns invention patent

KUWAIT: The Environment and Life Sciences Research Center, affiliated with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), has been granted an invention patent for making a product for enhancing the soil's physical components from the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

KISR said in a press release yesterday that the inven-

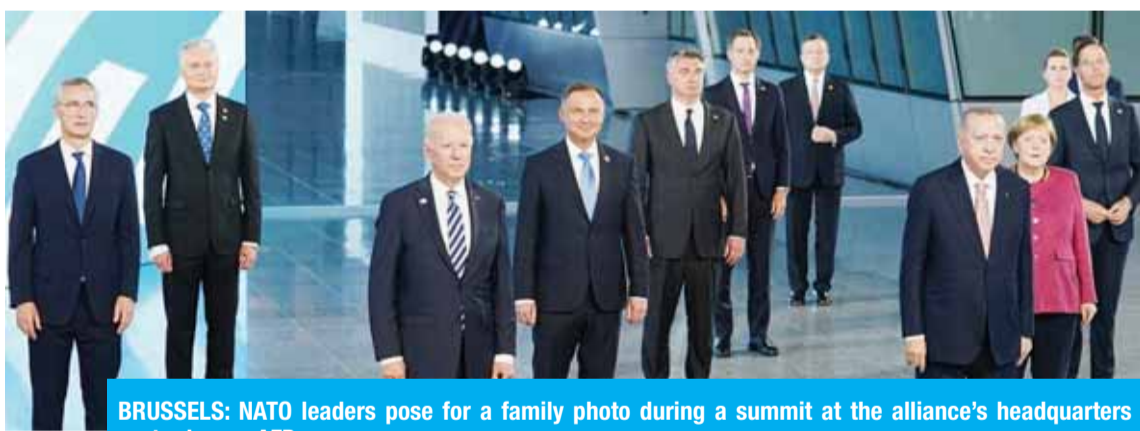
tion was recorded in the name of the center's researchers, Dr Hanaa Bou-rizk and Dr Shawki Lahaleh. The pair has re-used agricultural waste to reclaim sandy plots of land for cultivation. Accumulation of such randomly discarded waste increases "green house" emissions, underground water pollution, but their use with the newly made product can be beneficial for agriculture.

The innovated organic product, mixed with some fertilizers, can be added with the sand or soil where it acts like a sponge that keeps humidity at the roots' level. USPTO is an agency in the US Department of Commerce that issues patents to inventors and businesses for their inventions, and trademark registration for product and intellectual property identification. — KUNA

Kuwait, Bahrain to discuss Arab issues with EP president

KUWAIT: Speaker of Kuwait National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain Fawzia Zainal, discussed issues to be presented with President of the European Parliament David Sassoli later this month.

Al-Dustour News Network reported in a statement yesterday, that both sides reviewed over the phone the positions of the European Parliament toward Arab and human rights issues and ways to support the Arab views toward these files. The call comes within the framework of decisions and recommendations of the 31st session of the emergency conference of the Arabic Inter-Parliamentary Union. Speaker Al-Ghanem held talks in Geneva with the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Duarte Pacheco, in Geneva last week and is scheduled to meet with the President of the European Parliament Sassoli later this month. — KUNA



BRUSSELS: NATO leaders pose for a family photo during a summit at the alliance's headquarters yesterday. — AFP

Biden rallies NATO against...

Continued from Page 1

Russia's military build-up and provocative behavior on NATO's eastern frontier "increasingly threaten the security of the Euro-Atlantic area and contribute to instability along NATO borders and beyond". The allies reiterated their support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, demanding that Moscow "withdraw the forces it has stationed in all three countries without their consent".

Stoltenberg hailed what he said was Biden's strong commitment to NATO - an implicit contrast to the difficult ties under the previous US president, Donald Trump. Arriving at NATO headquarters in Brussels for a summit with his 29 counterparts, Biden stressed that the alliance was "critically important" to US security.

"I think that there is a growing recognition over the last couple of years that we have new challenges," Biden told Stoltenberg at bilateral talks just ahead of the main summit. "We have Russia that is not acting in a way that is consistent with what we had hoped, as well as China," he said. "I want to make it clear: NATO is critically important for US interests in and of itself. If there weren't one, we'd have to invent it," he said.

And he stressed once again that Article 5 of the NATO treaty - the obligation of members to defend one another, once called into question by Trump - was a "sacred obligation". "We're not entering a new

Cold War and China is not our adversary, not our enemy," Stoltenberg told reporters as he arrived at NATO headquarters ahead of the leaders.

Looming large at the summit is also the scramble to complete NATO's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan after Biden surprised partners by ordering US troops home by Sept 11. France's President Emmanuel Macron met one-on-one with his Turkish counterpart and fellow ally Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead of the summit, and Biden was due to meet him later.

On the table will be Ankara's offer to secure Kabul airport after NATO troops leave - but also concerns in other capitals about Turkey's own aggressive regional policy. The final statement did not mention Turkey's role at the airport, but did stress that the alliance would continue to pay to keep the facility open. Some allies are concerned about the rush to leave Afghanistan and some had questioned the strategy of an alliance that Macron warned in 2019 was undergoing "brain death".

Other leaders arriving for the talks dismissed this phrase, but European leaders stressed that they did not want to be drawn into a US confrontation with China at the cost of focusing on Russia. The summit at NATO's cavernous Brussels headquarters is set to greenlight a 2030 reform program. The leaders will agree to rewrite the core "strategic concept" to face a world where cyberattacks, climate change, and new technologies pose new threats.

Moscow's 2014 seizure of Crimea from Ukraine gave renewed purpose to NATO and fellow leaders were keen to sound Biden out ahead of his Wednesday meeting with Putin. On China, Biden is picking up from where Trump left off by getting NATO to start paying attention to Beijing and he is pushing for the alliance to take a tougher line. — AFP

MoH: Cases of Delta variant of...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, MP Hisham Al-Saleh yesterday asked Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah to clarify the circumstances surrounding the death of a Kuwaiti woman who died hours after receiving a dose of a COVID vaccine. The lawmaker said "the woman died on Friday amid reports of other deaths following the vaccination". Saleh asked the minister about the number of deaths reported after vaccination, if any. He also asked the minister if the ministry

has conducted an investigation after the death of the woman, identified as A.D.

According to the woman's husband, she was in good health. Hours after getting vaccinated, she felt pain in the jaw and later in the neck. She died while being taken in an ambulance to Jaber Hospital, he said. Saleh also asked the minister why the ministry has not held a press conference to clarify the case.

The health ministry issued a statement yesterday saying the woman died at the intensive care unit of the hospital, but provided no details on the circumstances or causes of her death. The statement defended the medical staff and the attention they accorded to the woman, threatening to take action against social media posts that were highly critical of the staff.

Dubai's yachts offer socially...

Continued from Page 1

The UAE, made up of seven emirates including Dubai, launched an energetic vaccination drive with some of the highest inoculation rates worldwide, and continues to enforce strict rules on wearing masks and social distancing. But some are fearful of overseas travel, and wary of crowded places where the risk of catching COVID-19 is higher.

For those who can afford the price tag, yachts are seen as a safer bet. "When they eased the lockdown... people preferred something secure and safe with regulations," said Mohammed Al-Sayyed, manager of Royal Star Yachts charter company. "We are providing them with the proper customer service, following all the rules, sanitizing the yacht."

For now, yachts are allowed to operate at 70 percent capacity. The company has a fleet that includes a 141-foot (42-m) yacht able to host 80 passengers at full capacity - if you can afford the \$4,900 price for a three-hour cruise. Charter companies said they have seen an increased interest in yachting after coronavirus measures eased, especially among those who want to spend time with friends and family. "People want to do sightseeing, cruising," said Sayyed, who has been in the yacht industry for eight years. "They want to relax."

Cheaper yachts to hire include the company's 90-foot "Big Daddy" - capable of normally carrying 65 people, at \$1,225 for three hours - down to small-

er boats. Some in Dubai said that when the price was split between a group, the cost was not as steep as it seemed at first. "It can actually be more affordable than an all-inclusive brunch at a restaurant," said Naeem.

And while some groups have been busted by authorities flouting the rules and slapped with hefty fines, most excursions run smoothly. Sayyed insisted his company follows all the rules and that even on the most luxurious "party yachts", there are COVID-19 regulations still in place, including the need for passengers to socially distance from each other and wear masks.

Dubai, known for its skyscrapers and mega-projects, boasts the most diverse economy in the oil-reliant Gulf region and has built a reputation as a financial, commercial and tourism hub. Tourism, which drew some 16 million visitors a year before the coronavirus hit, took a severe downturn in the first few months of the pandemic.

But a flood of arrivals since the beginning of the year has regenerated the industry, and helped many business activities recover. Other yacht charter companies report an increase in demand for rentals in recent months. And being out at sea doesn't mean the guests must skimp on takeaway food or drinks. Jet skis and speed boats are on standby - for an extra fee - to take orders and deliver groceries from shore to ship.

"To go on a boat is as simple as being outdoors and being away from strangers, gathering with only those you trust," said Palestinian Jeelan Herz, who has lived in the UAE for more than 30 years. "It's also something you can enjoy safely with children - go to the middle of the ocean, take part in water activities and take a nice dip." — AFP

Local

KAC Chairman: 100 flights headed to Guangzhou during COVID-19 crisis

KUWAIT: The number of flights operated by Kuwait Airways to China's Guangzhou reached 100, carrying on board more than 10,000 passengers, along with the cargo flights during Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, Kuwait Airways Chairman Ali Al-Dakhan announced yesterday.

He added in press remarks that he received a letter of thanks and congratulations from Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport Board of Directors Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jia Chen Qiu for reaching such a number of flights.

The letter also included an appreciation for KAC being the first international aviation company operating its flights to Guangzhou airport since halting the commercial flights due to COVID-19, with high punctuality in arrival timing, abiding by the required health precau-

tions, with full disinfection of its flights.

It also included the thanks and appreciation of Jia Chen Qiu to KAC, for its support to Guangzhou airport, which greatly contributed in boosting the bilateral ties between Kuwait and China, especially in the commercial exchange, which played a key role in the stabilization of the trade between both nations. KAC is meeting the demand of its customers at high efficiency despite the special circumstances the commercial aviation sector is suffering worldwide, he affirmed. — KUNA



Ali Al-Dakhan



MoI evacuates 140 civilians stuck on Failaka Island



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah supervises the evacuation process. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Ministry of Interior evacuated 140 citizens and residents that were stuck on Failaka Island due to the bad weather conditions this weekend. Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah super-

vised the evacuation process, said the ministry's security media and public relations department in a press statement yesterday.

It noted that the coast guards were able to transfer the stranded people to safe grounds

securely, and the ministry also provided staffed ambulances to check their well being. The Ministry of Interior called upon sea-goers to contact the coast guards at: 1-880-888 in case of emergency. — KUNA

MoH to boost services to limit the spread of new variants

KUWAIT: Internal medicine and infectious diseases specialist at the Ministry of Health and Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) fellow Dr Ghanim Al-Hujailan lauded the efforts of the health ministry to fight COVID-19, affirming that ministry officials do not spare any effort to prevent the virus from spreading.



Dr Ghanim Al-Hujailan

He added the country is in urgent need of quick and accurate PCR tests that are able to detect the major COVID variants - British, African, Brazilian and Indian - that are more dangerous. He said such tests are available in global markets including in Saudi Arabia and Oman. This is in response by health officials to provide the minimum of health services to limit the spread of new variants that are highly infectious and deadly.

Dr Hujailan hoped the health ministry will follow suit by boosting the required supplies and enhancing the level of approved tests based on speed, accuracy and efficiency, and not for being the cheapest, in order to prevent any danger the health system in the country may face, especially after the opening of borders.

Hujailan expressed worries about the increase in daily infections with coronavirus variants in neighboring countries, as the number of cases doubled during the month of May from 1,063 to 3,000 daily, adding the percentage of cases of the variants varies between 40 to 50 percent of existing cases in Kuwait.

He said the policy of extending the period of the second dose of vaccination against the virus is one of the most important reasons behind the increase of the number of cases, and despite clinical studies that indicated that the acquired immunity after taking the second dose of the Oxford vaccine after three months is marginally better, all experts agree that the longer the period, the more opportunities for the virus to spread and mutate into new variants.

Dr Hujailan called for adopting new health protocols through boosting the financial capabilities of the health sector by presenting high quality test materials to ensure good performance and accurate results. He said the lack of finances should not be an excuse to use cheap and bad coronavirus test materials at the expense of the health of citizens and expats.

ACK holds learning virtual forum

KUWAIT: The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK), held the Teaching and Learning Excellence in the e-Era Forum on June 2. The Forum was held virtually aiming to strengthen post-pandemic practical teaching strategies and reflection in real-life situations, to yield effective contributors to the job market and society that empower deeper reasoning, thinking out of the box, and long-term retention of information.

The forum focused on tackling the subjects of distance learning and the changes brought upon the teaching and learning process because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following keynote speeches, the

forum consisted of two panels. The first panel's discussion focused on practicality in online teaching, while the second panel highlighted the role of technology in shaping the future of higher education.

The Teaching and Learning Forum takes place every year with topics that help enhance the teaching and learning experience of educators and invites local and international speakers with panel discussions and workshops to ensure educators are updated on new teaching and learning pedagogies.

Commenting on the importance of the forum, Rola Mourdaa, Manager of TLC, said: "I believe in the important role that we as educators play to contribute to the development of a nation and it is our responsibility to work in alignment with Kuwait's 2035 ambitious economic vision. This forum served as a platform for educators to implement post-pandemic practical teaching strategies. Teachers make a difference every day, and we want this difference to count."



Kuwaiti youth train colorful macaw parrots

KUWAIT: Keeping domestic birds has always been a passion for many people in Kuwait and this love extended to macaw parrots. Some Kuwaitis began breeding the colorful parrots and enjoy watching them fly. A group of Kuwaiti youth owning macaw parrots gather at the sea coast, yards and public parks to practice their hobby, training macaw parrots to fly. Macaw is a domestic bird which needs training to fly as well as knowing its owner to return to the same take-off point. — KUNA



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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Trees sway in the wind during a dust storm on Sunday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Insshardul ship departs from Kuwait carrying more than 7,500 oxygen filled cylinders. The ship, which brought back to Kuwait empty ISO cryogenic tank and semi-trailers, is home-bound now. This brings the current phase of oxygen supply to India from Kuwait to an end.

BB launches Wellness Initiative to benefit its employees in cooperation with Kuwait Hospital

Aiming to promote the health and safety of its employees

KUWAIT: Borgan Bank announced the launch of the Wellness Initiative for the benefit of its employees, organized by the Human Resources Department in partnership with Kuwait Hospital, the leading hospital in the provision of high-quality medical services. The initiative aims to promote the health and safety of its employees who will benefit from a comprehensive range of free preventive health checkups, which will allow them to diagnose any potential health problem without obvious symptoms and prevent chronic diseases.

Borgan Bank's campaign, which will run for three months which started in May and will run until the end of July 2021, pays tribute to employees who worked round-the-clock during the COVID-19 pandemic to contribute to the continued success of the Bank during these challenging and unprecedented times. Continuously seeking to encourage its staff to develop a healthier lifestyle and improve



their quality of life, Borgan Bank strives to launch effective programs dedicated to its employees' health and wellness. The Bank's latest sponsored preventive health checkup, available to employees at Kuwait Hospital, aims to raise awareness about the importance of caring for their health and preventing chronic diseases through a group of different examinations related to the health of the heart, chest, nervous system, and kidney, liver and thyroid functions, in addition to a BMI test.

Commenting on this initiative, Group Chief Human Resources and Development Officer - Halah El-Sherbini, said: "At Borgan Bank, we believe that our personnel's health comes at the forefront of our priorities. Therefore, and as part of Borgan Bank's social responsibility and keenness to achieve sustainable health, we strive to promote the occupational health and wellness concept and preserve employees' health both inside and outside the Bank. In this context, the Human Resources Department constantly seeks to implement several programs dedicated to staff's health by providing medical instructions and advice through a range of structured educational activities aimed at raising individuals' awareness about preventive health concepts, further to assisting them in leading a healthy lifestyle and work in a healthy environment. Today, we are proud to launch this Wellness Initiative in collaboration with the pioneering Kuwait Hospital, which boasts a distinguished medical and nursing team, in addition to cutting-edge facilities boasting the latest medical equipment. Through this initiative,

we hope to be able to secure a safe working environment that supports employees and helps them succeed throughout their career journey."

Kuwait Hospital Chief Executive Officer, Alexander Jankuloski stated: "Our collaboration with Borgan Bank showcases that businesses in Kuwait recognize the importance of their employee's well-being. Borgan Bank is taking the lead by highlighting the welfare of their staff with different approaches such as employee support programs and awareness campaigns to name a few. We are supporting Borgan Bank in these important initiatives by providing evidence-based healthcare to all Borgan Bank employees."

Alexander Jankuloski also added "The employee health check-up initiative sets another milestone in our long-term journey with Borgan Bank. Our organizations are sharing the same values regarding employee health, well-being and safety. We are looking forward to more initiatives and stronger business alliance in the future with Borgan Bank."

Borgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its dynamic full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural and health driven initiatives. Borgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a leading Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the community.

Kuwait and Japan to launch commemorative stamps with Olympics

TOKYO: Commemorative postage stamps symbolizing friendship between Kuwait and Japan will be issued next month on the sidelines of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Kuwait Embassy said yesterday. The stamps feature photos of historical landmarks and sports from Kuwait and Nihonmatsu City, which will host the pre-training camp of the Kuwait Olympic teams, the Embassy said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

"It is an initiative to highlight the strength of friendship between Kuwait and Japan, especially on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the two countries," it said. "The Embassy and Nihonmatsu City in Fukushima Prefecture worked together to decide the design, photos and theme of the commemorative stamps," it said, adding that the project is supported by Japan Post Co. The 84-yen (USD 0.8) stamps come in sheets of 10, and their designs include Seif Palace, Liberation Tower and Kuwaiti athletes, as well as characteristic Japanese scenes of Nihonmatsu City.

Japan Post, which will keep all financial proceeds of the sale, plans to sell the stamps online and at major postal centers in Tokyo and other participating post offices, including those in Nihonmatsu City and its vicinity, according to the Embassy. The city, located about 200 km northeast of Tokyo, was registered as an "Arigato (Thank You) Host Town for Supporting Reconstruction" for Kuwait. Following a magnitude 9.0-quake and tsunami disaster that devastated the region in 2011, upon instructions by



the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait offered Japan a donation of five million barrels of crude oil worth about \$500 million, of which nearly 40 percent was allocated to Fukushima Prefecture to support its recovery effort. In addition, the late Amir donated \$3 million in reconstruction assistance to "Aquamarine Fukushima." "The rescheduled Tokyo 2020 Games will take place between July 23 and August 8 after being moved back a year in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. — KUNA

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After fire and floods, Aussie farmers suffer mouse plague

Children pay heavy price in Pakistan's mass HIV outbreak

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G7 pandemic pledges too little, too late

Experts warn more than 11 billion shots are immediately needed

GENEVA: The G7's vow to share a billion COVID vaccine doses with poorer nations is too little too late, according to the WHO and global health leaders, as experts warned yesterday more than 11 billion shots are needed. Faced with outrage over disparities in access to jabs, the Group of Seven industrialized powers pledged during a weekend summit in Britain to increase dose donations to over one billion.

"We welcome the generous announcements about donations of vaccines and thank leaders... but we need more, and we need them faster," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in a statement Sunday. While people in many wealthy nations are enjoying a return to a sense of normalcy thanks to high vaccination rates, the shots remain scarce in less well-off parts of the world. In terms of doses administered, the imbalance between the G7 and low-income countries, as defined by the World Bank, is 73 to one.

Many of the donated doses will be filtered through Covax, a global body charged with ensuring equitable vaccine distribution. Run by the WHO, the Gavi vaccine alliance and CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, it has to date shipped 85 million vaccine doses to 131 countries — far fewer than anticipated. Carl Bildt, the WHO's special envoy for the ACT Accelerator program to speed up production and access to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, said one billion doses was far from enough.

11bn doses needed

"To truly end the pandemic, our goal must be to vaccinate at least 70 percent of the world's population by the time G7 meet again in Germany next year," the former Swedish prime minister said on Twitter. "This can be done with the support of the G7 and G20, together. To do that, we need 11 billion doses." As well as dose sharing, the G7 anti-pandemic battle plan includes a series of engagements to avert future pandemics — slashing time taken to



MANILA: A health worker prepares a vial of Chinese Sinovac vaccine against COVID-19 disease inside a movie theatre turned into a vaccination center in Taguig City suburban Manila yesterday. —AFP

develop and license vaccines, to under 100 days, reinforcing global surveillance and strengthening the WHO.

Observers voiced skepticism at the willingness to follow through on the last point especially. "I will believe (that) point when the contributions to WHO are increased," tweeted Ilona Kickbusch, founding director and chair of the Global Health Centre in Geneva. Others stressed the need to quickly resolve

the issue of Covid vaccine patent protections, to boost production.

Full-fledged negotiations towards a possible suspension of intellectual property protections for Covid vaccines, as well as other medical tools needed to battle the pandemic, have just begun at the World Trade Organization after months of contentious debate. G7 leaders "say they want to vaccinate the world by the end of next year, but their actions show

they care more about protecting the monopolies and patents of pharmaceutical giants," lamented Max Lawson, Oxfam's head of inequity policy. Human Rights Watch agreed. "Focusing on vaccines and making charitable donations are not enough," Aruna Kashyap, HRW senior counsel for business and human rights, said. "The G7's failure to unequivocally support a temporary waiver of global intellectual property rules is deadly status quo." —AFP

'Unique' boat built by homeless Poles prepares to set sail

WARSAW: Docked in a river harbor in Warsaw next to coal storage and a rubbish tip, a steel-hulled sailing boat built by a group of homeless Poles is preparing for its maiden voyage.

The boat was christened on Saturday with the name "Father Boguslaw" after the priest who initiated the improbable project in 2006 with the aim of reintegrating homeless people back into society.

"The boat is finally alive!" its captain, Waldemar Rzeznicki, who has headed up the project, said as he hoisted a flag up the mast of the 17.8-metre (58-foot) long schooner. "Every boat has its soul, every boat is different. This one is really unique," he said. One of the project participants, Slawomir Michalski, 64, who is homeless and also spoke to AFP on a



WARSAW: Ship Captain Waldemar Rzeznicki stands in front of a steel schooner called 'Father Boguslaw' under construction at the courtyard of a homeless shelter run by Catholic Fathers in Warsaw. — AFP

previous visit in 2017, said the result was all the more remarkable for the lack of tools available.

"We didn't have the technical means normally used on shipyards like cranes or forklifts," he said.

"We had simple DIY tools: a cutting torch for the steel, some hammers, sheet metal shears, some grinders," he said. —AFP

Philippines to extend military deal with US

MANILA: The Philippines will extend a key military pact with the United States for another six months, its foreign minister said yesterday, after months-long negotiations between the two countries.

President Rodrigo Duterte told the United States in February last year he planned to axe the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), after Washington cancelled the visa of a close ally who led his internationally condemned war on drugs. It is the third time Duterte has prolonged the deal, which provides the legal framework for joint military exercises with the United States and is a key component of their decades-long alliance. "The president conveyed to us his decision to extend the suspension of the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement by another six months while he studies and both sides further address his concerns regarding particular aspects of the agreement," Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin said. —AFP



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International

Children pay heavy price in Pakistan's mass HIV outbreak

Authorities blame a single physician for causing the outbreak

RATO DERO, Pakistan: Since his son was diagnosed with HIV during a mass outbreak in Pakistan among babies and children, hard-up Shahzad Shar has often been forced to choose between food and medicine. His five-year-old was one of hundreds who tested positive in 2019 after a whistleblower doctor uncovered a scandal involving the reuse of needles in southern Sindh province. The number of patients quickly swelled and two years later the figure stands at more than 1,500, according to data from the provincial health ministry.

Pakistan's largest HIV testing and treatment center was established in the rural town of Rato Dero in the wake of the disaster, dishing out life-saving antiretroviral drugs. But affected families must cover further costs arising from the illness themselves.

"They tell us to go for further tests in private hospitals, but we don't have sufficient money," Shar told AFP, describing how his son continues to suffer from regular fever, abdominal and kidney pain. Around 30 other children are also HIV positive in their small village of Subhani Shar, just a few kilometers from Rato Dero.

Pakistan's public hospitals, located largely in cities, are often chaotic and inefficient, leaving rural families to rely on private clinics they can seldom afford that are often stuffed with un-

censed doctors. At least 50 children have died since they were diagnosed, said pediatric specialist Fatima Mir, from Aga Khan University in Karachi, who has analyzed the data—though she had expected the number to be higher given the malnutrition and poverty among families in the area.

Authorities blamed a single physician—a popular child specialist in Rato Dero—for causing the outbreak.

Muzaffar Ghangro is currently out on bail, with court hearings repeatedly pushed back, much to the anger of many families. He denies the charges laid against him, saying other doctors have pinned the outbreak on him because of his successful practice.

'Ruthless' malpractice

Poor infection control is rife across impoverished Pakistan, where doctors often re-use equipment to cut costs—out of necessity or greed. The doctor who first exposed Sindh's dirty needle scandal says little has changed since 2019. "Things are as bad as they were at the time of the outbreak," said whistleblower Imran Akbar Arbani, who called malpractice in the country "ruthless".

Arbani took his data on the outbreak to local media after discovering an alarming number of babies with HIV in Rato Dero, where he has a private clinic. He said authorities were quick to

react at the time, but that discipline has since slipped. "In the first three months, quacks and unauthorized medical practitioners were banned and their clinics were sealed, but they obtained clearance later on," he said.

Rafiq Khanani, a doctor and the president of the Infectious Diseases Society of Pakistan, said regulations were ineffective or routinely ignored. "The regulatory departments exist only on documents and in offices... practically, they are ineffective." In the wake of the scandal, the government banned the import of conventional syringes, insisting only on single-use auto-lock needles which cannot be re-deployed. But a Sindh health official who did not want to be named told AFP that many doctors were circumventing the ban and still buying the cheaper models.

'We are doomed'

At Rato Dero's HIV testing and treatment center, patients sit facing a television screen churning out health-care advice in the local Sindh language. A frail 20-year-old man sits silently with his father, waiting for the results of rapid HIV test. Pediatric specialist Fatima Mir said successful mass testing helped to identify victims of the crisis and slow down onward transmissions. But Pakistan now has to go beyond the vital antiretrovirals and offer more rounded



KARACHI: In this picture taken on March 29, 2021, pediatric specialist Fatima Mir speaks during an interview with AFP at Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi. —AFP

care to patients, Ayesha Isani Majeed, the head of the government's National AIDS Control Programme, said. As the sun sets in Subhani Shar, a mother sits with her daughter draped across her lap, suffering another bout of fever. Hakima Shar says she sometimes forgets to administer the drugs—which can control the virus and help prevent onward transmission—to her four-year-old, who often refuses to take them.

"We are very poor... I wake up with the sun and start working, so who else will give her the medicine regularly?" said the 25-year-old mother, who has also contracted the virus. Many families had never heard of HIV, but now it dominates their lives.

"The government doesn't provide us with antibiotics or multivitamins and we can't afford to buy them ourselves," she said. "We are doomed." —AFP

Historic lakeside villa spruced up for Biden-Putin talks

GENEVA: Tomorrow's Geneva summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin will take place in a plush 18th-century lakeside villa steeped in the Swiss city's history.

The Villa La Grange, set in Geneva's biggest park which slopes down to the shore, is well used to hosting showpiece events—but the Biden-Putin talks will rank as the most high-powered of them all.

The mansion, spruced up for the occasion, has played a part in landmark international agreements before, notably the first Geneva Convention. And words said on its lawns by a former world leader resonate today ahead of the US-Russia summit. "We can establish an even deeper and more effective relationship," said pope Paul VI in 1969.

Addressing a crowd of 70,000 in front of the villa, the pontiff evoked the opposing forces of love and hate and called for "generous peacemakers".

Lakeside location

The setting is spectacular. Views from the three-storey classical mansion sweep down over the Parc de La Grange, across Lake Geneva towards the United Nations and the Jura mountains beyond.

Spain reels after toddler, sister likely killed by dad

MADRID: Spanish rescuers were trawling the seabed for the body of a toddler in waters off Tenerife yesterday after investigators said they believed she — like her sister — had been killed by their father. The case has shocked Spain, and yesterday crowds demonstrated at town halls across the country to protest domestic violence after similar gatherings over the weekend. The girls, aged one and six, were reported missing on April 27 after being taken away by their father, Tomas Gimeno. Investigators fear he abducted and killed them.

On Thursday, the body of six-year-old Olivia was found at the bottom of the sea off Tenerife wrapped in a bag that was weighted down with an anchor. The investigating magistrate said it was "most likely" that Gimeno had killed both his daughters at home then dumped their bodies at a depth where they were unlikely to ever be found. In her nine-page statement, the magistrate said when Gimeno had taken the girls, he wanted "to kill them in a planned and premeditated manner".

Nuke arms decline stalls as nations modernize arsenals

STOCKHOLM: As nuclear nations commit to renewing and sometimes expanding their arsenals, a decline seen since the early 1990s seems to have stalled, with some signs of a numerical increase, researchers said yesterday.

"The reduction of nuclear arsenals that we have gotten used to since the end of the Cold War appears to be leveling out," Hans Kristensen, associate senior fellow at SIPRI's Nuclear Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme, told AFP. The amount of nukes

The villa has been a whirlwind of activity in preparation for the summit, with vehicles scurrying in and out of the park. The paint has been touched up and the chandeliers polished, while antique furniture has been rearranged to make way for the two presidents. The scene is set in the showpiece library: two wooden armchairs clad in red leather have been set either side of a globe, against a backdrop of brown and gold tones. Two imposing stone lions—freshly scrubbed down with pressure hoses—guard the main entrance gates to the 20-hectare park.

In the immaculately-manicured gardens, new turf has been rolled out to cover any bare patches.

During the summer, the gardens would typically be filled by picnickers. But the chances of anyone getting in and breaking out some Gruyere cheese and a bottle of local Genevois wine on Wednesday will be somewhat slim. The park has been closed off and ringed with barbed wire-topped steel fencing, while hundreds of troops and security officers will guard the site.

Villa a bibliophile's dream

The grand, classical villa was owned by Genevan patrician families and was ultimately bequeathed to the city. On rare occasions, the public can take guided tours that take in the library, reception rooms and bedrooms. The estate was created in the 1660s by the merchant Jacques Franconis. Marc Lullin, a banker, bought it in 1706 and three of his sons built the French-style mansion and its surrounding buildings between 1768 and 1773. Banker

"He aimed to inflict on his ex-partner the greatest pain that he could imagine, an inhuman pain," she said. On the day the girls went missing, Gimeno was seen loading several bags onto his boat, witnesses told investigators. An autopsy carried out on Friday morning found Olivia had died a "violent death", the court said, after a gag order was lifted over the weekend.

Monstrous act

The case has gripped Spain, where 39 minors have been killed since 2013 by their fathers or by a partner or former partner of their mothers. And so far this year alone, 18 women have been killed as a result of gender violence. The overall number of victims now stands at 1,096 since records first began on January 1, 2003, government figures show. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Friday "the whole of Spain is in shock" over the case, which has been passed to a Tenerife court specializing in gender violence.

The court magistrate said the worst was feared for Olivia's sister Anna. "Although only Olivia's body has been located so far the most probable hypothesis regarding Anna is, unfortunately, the same," she said.

The suspected abduction and murder of the two girls came a year after the girls' mother, Beatriz Zimmermann, broke up with Gimeno. He sent her

among the nine nuclear-armed states—the US, Russia, the UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea—totalled 13,080 at the start of 2021, a slight decrease from 13,400 a year earlier, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimated. However, this includes retired warheads waiting to be dismantled, and without them the combined military stockpile of nuclear arms rose from 9,380 to 9,620.

Meanwhile, the number of nuclear weapons deployed with operational forces increased from 3,720 to 3,825, the report said. Of these, some 2,000 were kept in a "kept in a state of high operational alert," meaning for launch in a matter of minutes. "We're seeing very significant nuclear modernization programs all around the world and in all the nuclear weapons states," Kristensen said. He added that nuclear states also seem to be



GENEVA: Cars ride past the Intercontinental hotel, Sunday in Geneva, ahead of the summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. —AFP

Jean Lullin, having been ruined by the French Revolution, sold it in 1800 to Francois Favre, a Geneva ship owner who made his fortune trading with the East from the French port of Marseille.

The Favre family transformed the house and park, adding the large library which contains some 15,000 books belonging to Francois' son Guillaume. The oldest volumes date back to the 15th century and the collection is especially strong in history, literature, and ancient languages. —AFP



MADRID: The girls, aged one and six, were reported missing on April 27 after being taken away by their father, Tomas Gimeno (right).

"offensive and insulting" messages after the breakup, especially when she found a new partner, the magistrate said.

"The defendant's desire was to leave his ex-partner in the dark as to the fate of Olivia and Anna," she wrote. In a searing open letter published on Sunday, the girls' mother wrote that it was "the most monstrous act a person can commit: killing their own innocent children". "When they told me the news, the world came crashing down on me, and as hard as it is, at least now I can mourn their loss," she wrote. —AFP

raising "the importance they attribute to the nuclear weapons in their military strategies."

This change can be observed in both Russia and the United States, which together possess over 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, Kristensen said, stressing it was too early to say if the new US administration under President Joe Biden would deviate from the strategy under his predecessor Donald Trump. "I think that the Biden administration is signaling quite clearly that it is going to continue the overwhelming main thrust of the nuclear modernization program that was underway during the Trump years," the researcher said, noting the program was started under Barack Obama.

The US and Russia continued to dismantle retired warheads, but both had about 50 more in "operational deployment" at the start of 2021 than a year earlier. —AFP



GENEVA: Witness of the meeting, former deputy editor-in-chief of the French-speaking Swiss Television Claude Smdja speaks in Versoix near Geneva in front of the "Villa Fleur d'eau" that hosted the first meeting between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. —AFP

Geneva summit stirs memories of 1985 Reagan-Gorbachev meet

GENEVA: Tomorrow's talks between US President Joe Biden and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin evoke vivid memories of the 1985 Geneva summit, when Cold War rivals Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev met for the first time. Despite the chilly November weather in the Swiss city, relations began to thaw between Washington and Moscow as the US president and the Soviet leader came face to face on neutral territory.

Now some 36 years on, Biden and Putin are set for decidedly less hopeful talks on the placid shores of Lake Geneva, with the echo of history surrounding them. Back in 1985, "the atmosphere was relaxed... They had both lined something up to seduce the other camp," said former AFP correspondent Didier Lapeyronie, who covered the Reagan-Gorbachev talks.

"At the same time, we were all aware that it was a historic moment."

Things got off to a bad start. Just before US president Reagan arrived at one of the summit locations, a Swiss soldier waiting in the ceremonial honor guard fainted, overcome by the bitter cold. Six years before the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, the 1985 Geneva summit focused on de-escalating the nuclear arms race between the two superpowers, and came with hopes of fostering better East-West relations. The three-day summit was covered by 3,500 journalists.

Nicolas Burgy, who was at Geneva Airport for AFP to report on the Reagans' arrival, recalls the sense of "joy" in the air. "There was a casual sort of feeling," he said.

Fireside chat

One of the most enduring pictures from the summit is one of the two most powerful men on the planet sitting beside a fireplace, smiling at each other from their armchairs—an image that conjures up the impression of a cozy fireside chat between two old friends. The conviviality extended to their wives Raisa Gorbacheva and Nancy Reagan, who chatted over tea under the gaze of photographers.

Marie-Noelle Blessig, charged with following the wives' program for AFP, remembers seeing Gorbacheva paying a visit to the United Nations' Geneva headquarters "to greet staff at the UN, where she was received with loud applause". Another sign of the thaw was the first handshake between Gorbachev and Reagan, which lasted seven seconds.

The historic moment took place in front of the Villa Fleur d'Eau, a late 19th-century mansion on the shores of Lake Geneva. The villa is currently up for sale.

The handshake took place before frozen photographers and reporters who had stood waiting in the garden in the bitter cold. As the Americans had chosen the large villa for day one of the talks, Reagan was there first to welcome Gorbachev, "seemingly in very good spirits", said Claude Smdja, a former deputy editor of Switzerland's TSR television, who witnessed the historic moment. —AFP

International

After fire and floods, Aussie farmers suffer mouse plague

Hordes of mice pouring through fields and devouring hard-earned crops

SYDNEY: After surviving years of crippling drought, farmers in eastern Australia are locked in a months-long battle with hordes of mice that are pouring through fields and devouring hard-earned crops. Farmer Col Tink uses a broom to skittle hundreds of roving mice toward a makeshift industrial trap—essentially a large tub of water where they drown.

It is a brutally simple attempt to slow the plague that has engulfed his farm—near the rural town of Dubbo—and thousands of other farms like it across eastern Australia. But Tink's efforts have barely made a dent. Mice continue to chew through grain and hay stocks while anything remotely edible remains under constant attack. Skin-crawling videos of writhing rodent masses have been shared around the world along with reports of bitten hospital patients, destroyed machinery and swarms running across roads en masse. The plague is the latest in a string of disasters to strike farmers in Australia. A years-long drought was followed by months of devastating bushfires from late 2019, before welcome rains became damaging floods in several regions. "My dad's still alive; he's 93, and it's the worst three years he'd ever seen in his lifetime, and I think it's probably the worst mouse plague he's seen too," said Tink, who mainly farms Brahman cattle. But the prospect of this plague continuing through the southern hemisphere's winter makes him fearful for preparations ahead of the next dry spell—which is always on the horizon. "If we don't get a real cold and fairly wet winter, I'm just a little bit worried what's going to happen in the spring," the 65-year-old said.

'Chronic' infestations

The outlook is not good, according to Steve Henry, a research officer at Australia's national science agency, the CSIRO. "When a mouse plague ends, they just disappear overnight," said Henry, who has been studying pest animals in Australia for nearly three decades.

"We're certainly not seeing that at the moment."

Mice are a feral pest in Australia, arriving alongside the first British colonists. The tiny rodent is almost perfectly adapted to exploit the natural boom and bust of agriculture in the Australian climate, meaning plagues



DUBBO: A mouse feeding on grains in a wheat hold on Col Tink's farmland in the New South Wales' agricultural hub of Dubbo. — AFP

are not uncommon. But numbers this year have been "just astronomical", according to 74-year-old Terry Fishpool, a grain producer from nearby Tottenham. Large numbers of rodents were reported as early as October, their population fuelled by a bumper crop after the worst drought in living memory. Bill Bateman, an associate professor from Curtin University in Western Australia, said giant mouse plagues seemed to occur once a decade, but climate change could make them more regular. "If we no longer get those cold winters, such that we are providing resources for mice all year round, then this is going to become a chronic thing rather than an acute thing," Bateman said.

'Napping mice'

With the rodents scurrying on, the government has announced millions of dollars in support and reached for a more potent poison, which one minister likened to "napping mice". Yet to be approved, bromadiolone works faster than the widely used zinc phosphide bait

but also stays in the system of dead or dying mice longer. Experts worry that it will potentially kill native wildlife who eat the poisoned mice.

"The use of second-generation rodenticides is an extremely worrying step," Bateman, who works in the school of molecular and life sciences, said.

"It's a very slippery slope." Extended use could create "a bank of this toxin" in the environment, killing natural predators and even risk poisoning humans through the food chain, Bateman said. "We are really going to be setting up trouble for ourselves in future, not just in terms of destroying our biodiversity but destroying our frontline defenses against any future mouse plagues."

Henry said correct use of double-strength zinc phosphide, baiting while planting and removing alternative food sources could help curb the numbers if they did spike after winter. But the focus on "quick fixes" also needed to shift to long-term solutions including more research into what triggers "monumental plagues", he said.—AFP

News in brief

Venice jewelry heist gang busted

VENICE: Italian police said yesterday that eight people had been arrested across Europe in connection with a dramatic robbery attempt of a jewelry store in Saint Mark's Square in Venice in 2017. The eight suspects, arrested in Austria, Estonia and Finland, belonged to an Estonian gang specialised in heists of luxury European jewelry stores, the Carabinieri police said. In March 2017, members of a gang of robbers set off smoke bombs in St Mark's Square as a distraction before targeting a jewelry store. But the attempted heist failed after a tourist warned nearby police on patrol, and the armed thieves escaped.—AFP

US journalist released in Myanmar

YANGON: A US journalist detained in Myanmar since March was released yesterday after charges against him were dropped, his lawyer said. US citizen Nathan Maung "was released this morning from Insein prison as the police withdrew the charges against him", and will fly back to the US today, his lawyer Tin Zar Oo told AFP. Maung, who founded local outlet Kamayut Media, had faced charges under a colonial-era law that criminalizes encouraging dissent against the military, she added. Earlier this month a Myanmar journalist working for another outlet was jailed for two years under the same law. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, triggering a mass uprising as large swathes of the population take to the streets.—AFP

Zambia's Kaunda hospitalized

LUSAKA: Zambia's founding father and former president Kenneth Kaunda has been admitted to hospital, his office said yesterday. In a terse statement, it said Kaunda, 97, "has been unwell and was admitted to... Maina Soko Medical Centre," a military hospital in the capital Lusaka. It gave no further details. Kaunda ruled Zambia for 27 years, taking the helm after the country gained independence from Britain in October 1964. The statement said Kaunda was asking Zambians and the international community to pray for him "as the medical team is doing everything possible to ensure that he recovers". Initially a popular leader, Kaunda became increasingly autocratic and banned all opposition parties.—AFP

NZ to apologize for 'racist' raids

WELLINGTON: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced yesterday she will offer a formal apology to New Zealand's Pacific community over "demeaning" police raids that targeted them in the 1970s. Ardern said the notorious "dawn raids" were carried out by police and immigration officials seeking to identify and deport visa overstayers. In addition, she said Pacific islanders were racially profiled, with officials subjecting them to random stop and search without justification. "They were routinely severe with demeaning verbal and physical treatment," Ardern told reporters.—AFP

Bolivia's Anez in pre-trial detention

LA PAZ, Bolivia: Bolivia's former acting president Jeanine Anez, arrested after coup allegations leveled by her predecessor and rival Evo Morales, denounced her status as a "political prisoner" in remarks posted to Twitter on Sunday. Writing on her birthday, Anez vowed from pre-trial detention that "they will not break my spirit, even if they continue to invent crimes to cover up their own." The ruling MAS party, she added in a handwritten note posted to her Twitter account, was keeping her as a "trophy of revenge." Anez was arrested in March on charges of terrorism, sedition and conspiracy over what Morales had claimed was a coup attempt against him. Her detention elicited widespread international condemnation.—AFP



YANGON: Protesters prepare to burn the flag of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping, as they take part in a flash mob demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday.—AFP

Junta trial of Suu Kyi gets underway

YANGON: The trial of deposed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi got underway yesterday, more than four months after a military coup, with junta witnesses testifying the Nobel laureate flouted coronavirus restrictions and illegally imported walkie-talkies. Near daily protests have rocked Myanmar since the generals' February 1 putsch. A mass uprising has been met with a brutal military crackdown that has killed more than 850 civilians, according to a local monitoring group.

The junta has brought an eclectic raft of charges against the Nobel laureate, including claims she accepted illegal payments of gold and violated a colonial-era secrecy law. Yesterday, the court heard a police force major testify that Suu Kyi broke coronavirus restrictions during last year's elections that her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide, her lawyer Min Min Soe said.

Another police major testified on separate charges accusing her of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, she added. Suu Kyi "paid keen attention" throughout the hearing, another member of her legal team, Khin Maung Zaw said in a statement.

Journalists were barred from proceedings in the special court in the capital Naypyidaw, but an AFP reporter said there was a heavy police presence outside. Suu Kyi's lawyers—who have struggled to gain access to their client—have said they expect the trial to wrap up by July 26.

"We are hoping for the best but prepared for the worst," Khin Maung Zaw told AFP ahead of the hearing. A separate trial is scheduled to start today over sedition charges she faces alongside ousted president Win Myint and another senior member of the NLD. If convicted of all charges, Suu Kyi, 75, faces more than a decade in jail. "It is a show trial motivated only by political reasons," Debbie Stothard, Coordinator of the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, told AFP. "Min Aung Hlaing is determined to lock up Aung San Suu Kyi for the rest of her life. If he could, he would probably charge her under every law available."

Cloistered icon

Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years under house arrest during the previous junta's rule before her 2010 release. Her international reputation diminished following her defense of military-led violence against Myanmar's marginalized Muslim Rohingya community.

But the coup has returned Suu Kyi to the role of cloistered democracy icon. On Thursday, she was hit with additional corruption charges over claims she illegally accepted \$600,000 in cash and around 11 kilos of gold. Her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw dismissed the new charges—which could see Suu Kyi hit with another lengthy prison term—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 last week. "That's one of the reasons to charge her—to keep her out of the scene." Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in the November poll won by Suu Kyi's NLD.—AFP

toms union and single market for goods—"is not a real partnership". "An imbalance and an instability is built in, that will fester and deteriorate," she warned. "Imbalance and instability in the context of Northern Ireland is a truly dangerous cocktail."

Fears of unrest

In early April, Northern Ireland-divided between pro-UK unionists and pro-Ireland nationalists—saw a week of rioting fuelled by anger over the protocol. At least 88 police officers were injured in scenes reminiscent of "The Troubles", the sectarian conflict over British rule of Northern Ireland, which ended in 1998.

There are fears unrest will reignite over the summer months, a traditional time of disruption in the province marked by hardline unionist marches. Europe has already threatened London with reprisals if it extends a grace period on checks on chilled meat products, in a row that overshadowed last weekend's G7 talks. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said he will do "whatever it takes" to protect UK territorial integrity, calling on Brussels to take into account the complexities and fragile peace in Northern Ireland.

China slams G7 'manipulation' after criticism

BEIJING: China yesterday accused the G7 of "political manipulation" after it criticized Beijing over its human rights record in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. In a communique after a three-day summit in England, G7 leaders slammed China over abuses against minorities in the Xinjiang region and pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, while US President Joe Biden called for Beijing to "start acting more responsibly in terms of international norms on human rights".

The Chinese embassy in the United Kingdom responded angrily yesterday, and accused the G7 of "interfering". "The Group of Seven (G7) takes advantage of Xinjiang-related issues to engage in political manipulation and interfere in China's internal affairs, which we firmly oppose," an embassy spokesman said in a statement.

The statement accused the G7 of "lies, rumors and baseless accusations". Human rights groups say China has rounded up an estimated one million Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang into internment camps, which Beijing says is to eradicate Islamic extremism.

"We will promote our values, including by calling on China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms" the G7 communique read. At their first physical summit in nearly two years, leaders of the seven nations announced a number of pledges on COVID-19 vaccinations, climate change, rights and trade. They also called for a new investigation in China into the origins of COVID-19 — prompting a response from the Chinese embassy that the work needs to be done in a "scientific, objective and fair manner", without agreeing to a new probe.

"The current epidemic is still raging around the world, and the traceability work should be carried out by global scientists and should not be politicized," the embassy said. The coronavirus first emerged in central China in late 2019, and the World Health Organization sent a team of international experts in January to probe its origins.

But their long-delayed report published in March drew no firm conclusions, and the investigation has since faced criticism for lacking transparency and access. The G7 also announced a new infrastructure fund which President Biden said would be "much more equitable" than China's massive Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese embassy statement complained in response that the "accusations against China on economic and trade issues in the communique are inconsistent with the facts and are unreasonable." —AFP

Parting shots

As first minister and DUP leader Foster, 50, vehemently opposed the Northern Ireland protocol, which enforces checks on goods arriving from mainland Britain to prevent them entering the EU by the backdoor via EU member Ireland. But she was powerless to prevent Johnson imposing it.

In April she was forced to announce her resignation by DUP colleagues who felt she took a soft stance against the new arrangements, which many unionists feel have driven a wedge between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Under terms of a power-sharing deal, Foster's resignation will see deputy first minister Michelle O'Neill, of pro-Ireland Sinn Fein, also step down. Both parties now have seven days to agree who will step back in to fill the leadership roles. The DUP have selected regional lawmaker Paul Givan—a Brexit hardliner—as their pick to replace Foster. But if the parties cannot agree to rule in tandem, a snap election will be called. There have been early signs that negotiations to replace Foster may be fraught by a long-running standoff over government provisions for Irish language speakers.—AFP

'Over and out': Foster quits as N Ireland leader

BELFAST: Arlene Foster formally stepped down as Northern Ireland's first minister yesterday, bringing further instability to the British-ruled province where tempers are already frayed over post-Brexit trading arrangements. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) politician called for cool heads to prevail but warned that the "Northern Ireland protocol" has seeded dangerous discontent.

"Politics in Northern Ireland, between the UK and Ireland, and the UK and the EU, is out of balance, an imbalance created by the protocol," she told lawmakers in the regional assembly at Stormont.

She said the protocol—which since the start of 2021 has effectively kept Northern Ireland in the EU cus-



BELFAST: Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Arlene Foster gives an interview after learning that Deputy Leader of the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) Nigel Dodds has lost his seat to Sinn Fein's new MP for North Belfast John Finucane at the count centre in Belfast, in the UK general election.—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021

Lebanon currency hits new low

Pound freefall continues amid economic crisis and increasing shortages

BEIRUT: Lebanon's currency hit a new low against the dollar on the black market yesterday, continuing its freefall in a country gripped by political deadlock, an economic crisis and increasing shortages.

The pound, officially pegged at 1,507 to the US dollar since 1997, was selling for 15,400 to 15,500 to the greenback on the black market, several money changers said. After hovering around 15,000 to the dollar in mid-March, the unofficial exchange rate dropped to between 12,000 and 13,000 later that month before soaring back up in recent days.

The latest plunge means the pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value on the informal market since October 2019, in what the World Bank has called one of the worst financial crunches worldwide since the mid-19th century. Lebanon has been without a fully functioning government for 10 months since the last one stepped down after a deadly port explosion in Beirut last summer.

Politicians from all sides have failed to agree on a line-up for a new cabinet even as foreign currency cash reserves plummet, causing fuel, electricity and medicine shortages.

In recent days, frustrated drivers have waited for hours in long car queues outside petrol stations to fill up their tanks. Pharmacies went on strike on Friday and Saturday in protest at the central bank allegedly failing to provide them with dollars as a preferable exchange rate so they could continue working. Electricity cuts have increased in length as the state struggles to secure enough fuel to operate

power stations.

People earning salaries in Lebanese pounds have seen their purchasing power drastically reduced as they battle to keep up with price hikes. The country, where more than half the population now live in poverty, is in desperate need of financial aid but the international community has conditioned any such assistance on the formation of a new government to launch sweeping reforms.

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

Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year, the currency lost around 85 percent of its value and poverty is devastating a country once seen as a beacon of prosperity in the region.

"The economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century," the report said. The latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor report, entitled "Lebanon Sinking: To the Top 3", said such brutal economic collapses are usually the result of war. The complete meltdown of Lebanon's economy during the past 18 months is widely blamed on corruption and mismanagement by the country's hereditary political elite.



BEIRUT: People exchange Lebanese pound and US dollar notes in Lebanon's capital. —AFP

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

Lebanon's ruling class has failed to act on the country's worst emergency in a generation, which was compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and a devastating explosion at Beirut port last August.

"The increasingly dire socio-economic conditions risk systemic national failings with regional and potentially global effects," the World Bank said. The International Monetary Fund has offered assistance but the country's political barons have failed to even form a government that could deliver the reforms on which foreign aid is conditioned. — AFP

Key developments in BoP of Kuwait for Q4 of 2020

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) published yesterday the preliminary data of the State of Kuwait's Balance of Payments (BoP) for 4Q 2020, and the revised data of 3Q 2020. The data revealed a surplus during 4Q 2020 of KD 3,546.4 million in the Current Account (that sums up receipts and payments on transactions between the domestic economy and other economies in terms of goods, services and income) against a surplus of KD 2,354.9 million during the previous quarter, i.e. an increase by 50.6 percent equivalent to KD 1,191.5 million.

This upturn is mainly attributable to the rise in the total value of receipts on the credit side of the Current Account by KD 1,251.0 million or 16.7 percent compared with the previous quarter, and the increase in the total value of payments on the

debit side of the Current Account by KD 59.5 million or 1.2 percent compared with the previous quarter.

Furthermore, preliminary data indicated a decline in the surplus of the Balance on Goods by KD 143.7 million or 11.4 percent to reach KD 1,113.4 million during 4Q 2020, against KD 1,257.1 million during the previous quarter. The Services Account (net value of services transactions between residents and non-residents that include transportation, travel, communications, construction, other services as well as government services and goods) recorded an increase in the deficit by KD 37.7 million or 4.5 percent to reach KD 878.9 million during 4Q 2020, compared with a deficit of KD 841.1 million during the previous quarter.

Regarding the Financial Account (recording transfers of financial assets

Summary of the Balance of Payments of the State of Kuwait (KD Million)

Item	3Q 2020	4Q 2020
Current Account, of which:	2,354.9	3,546.4
- Balance on Goods	1,257.1	1,113.4
Capital Account*	180.8	189.3
Financial Account**	-3,018.4	-2,890.6
Overall Balance	680.2	-0.9

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait.

* Negative numbers of Capital Account data indicate net capital outflows, while positive numbers indicate the opposite.

** Negative numbers of Financial Account data indicate capital outflows, i.e. an increase in external assets or a decrease in foreign liabilities. Positive numbers indicate the opposite.

and liabilities between residents and non-residents), the preliminary data indicate net capital outflows (growth in residents' net investments abroad) of KD 2,890.6 million during 4Q 2020 against net capital outflows of KD 3,018.4 million during the previous quarter.

As a result, the overall position of Kuwait's BoP recorded a deficit of KD 0.9 million during 4Q 2020 against a surplus of KD 680.2 million during the

previous quarter. From a broader sense, and taking into consideration the change in the net value of external assets of some institutions listed under "General Government" and changes in CBK's reserve assets, the BoP's overall position, in a broad definition, indicates a surplus of KD 993.5 million during 4Q 2020 against a surplus of KD 2,503.8 million during the previous quarter.

French nuke firm seeks to fix 'performance issue' at China plant

BEIJING: A French nuclear firm said yesterday it was working to resolve a "performance issue" linked to a gas build-up at a plant it part-owns in southern China following a US media report of a potential leak there. CNN reported earlier that the US government is assessing a report of a leak at the Taishan Nuclear Power Plant in populous Guangdong province after the French company, Framatome, warned of an "imminent radiological threat".

EDF, the majority owner of Framatome, said in a statement that it had requested an extraordinary meeting of the power plant's board "for management to present all the data and the necessary decisions". Framatome said in a statement to AFP that it is "supporting resolution of a performance issue" at the plant.

"According to the data available, the plant is operating within the safety parameters," the company said. EDF later said that there was an "increase in the concentration of certain noble gases in the primary circuit of reactor no. 1" at Taishan, referring to a part of the reactor's cooling system.

Noble gases are elements like argon, helium and neon which have low chemical reactivity. Their presence in the system "is a known phenomenon, studied and provided for in the reactor operating procedures," EDF said. David Fishman, manager at energy-focused consulting group The Lantau Group, said that the presence of noble gases could suggest the problem was caused by a cracked fuel rod. "When you have a cracked fuel rod... you get a small release potentially of fission materials from inside that cracked fuel rod into the cooling loop, where it wouldn't normally be," he said.

"Failed fuel or cracked fuel is a fairly normal and common-undesirably certainly-but not uncommon phenomenon in the nuclear fuel industry."

Not at 'crisis level'

Citing a letter from Framatome to the US energy department, CNN said the warning included an



The joint Sino-French Taishan Nuclear Power Station outside the city of Taishan in Guangdong province. — AFP

accusation that the Chinese safety authority was raising the acceptable limits for radiation outside the facility in order to avoid having to shut it down.

But a US official told the broadcaster that the administration of President Joe Biden believes the facility is not yet at "crisis level". The operator of the power station, state-owned China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN), said in a statement on Sunday evening that "the environmental indicators of Taishan Nuclear Power Plant and its surroundings are normal". It did not reference any leak or incident at the power station, which it said meets "the requirements of nuclear safety regulations and power plant technical specifications."

The International Atomic Energy Agency, a UN body, said it had contacted its counterpart in China regarding the issue. "At this stage, the Agency has no indication that a radiological incident occurred," the IAEA said in a statement, adding that it would share more information "as it becomes available".

AFP did not get an immediate response to a request for comment from either the Chinese foreign ministry or the Chinese nuclear power group.

If the problem is a cracked fuel rod, said Fishman, it would have to be logged by the Chinese nuclear

safety administration with a mitigation report to fix the problem.

What's more, "if (Framatome) were going to transfer over any information that they have gotten from working in the US, they would have to apply for an exemption... because CGN is on the US entity list," he added. "It is a no-fly zone for any US information, any information or data or technology or IP to go to China."

Powered up in 2018, the Taishan plant was the first worldwide to operate a next-generation EPR nuclear reactor, a pressurised water design that has been subject to years of delays in similar European projects in Britain, France and Finland. There are now two EPR power units at the plant in the city of Taishan, which sits close to the coastline of southern Guangdong-China's most populous province.

EPR reactors have been touted as promising advances in safety and efficiency over conventional reactors while producing less waste. Nuclear plants supplied less than five percent of China's annual electricity needs in 2019, according to the National Energy Administration, but this share is expected to grow as Beijing attempts to become carbon neutral by 2060. — AFP



BRUSSELS: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrives to pose for photos with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the NATO summit at NATO headquarters in Brussels Sunday. — AFP

World 'way off track' on climate: UK business lobby

LONDON: World efforts to tackle climate change are "way off track", the head of Britain's main business lobby group said yesterday after a G7 pledge to step up action. Tony Danker, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, also urged the UK government to speed up greener housing, energy and transport measures to help meet its carbon-slashing goal.

The assessment comes after the Group of Seven rich nations on Sunday vowed to deliver a "green revolution" that cuts emissions, halts and reverses biodiversity loss, and reaffirms their pledges to go carbon neutral by 2050. Britain, which hosted the weekend G7 leaders' summit, will also anchor the COP26 UN climate gathering in Glasgow in November.

"We've now got just under five months to go until the UK hosts COP26," Danker told the CBI's virtual climate conference. "We have what remains of this decade to fundamentally reshape the world economy, halve carbon emissions and limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees.

"The scale of this challenge has always been seismic... The world has no room for failure. The climate crisis is worsening and currently we are way off track."

The CBI also argued that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson must adopt a new buildings strategy to make homes more energy efficient, citing as an example the use of hydrogen boilers.

It called for more investment in offshore wind plus carbon capture and storage. "Put simply: the best way to inspire global action on decarbonisation is to lead the charge right here at home," Danker added. "Nothing less than unprecedented unstoppable action from the UK government, in partnership with us in UK business, will be enough.

"It's in our hands to set the world on an irreversible path to net zero by 2050." The 2015 Paris climate agreement aims to limit global temperature rises to less than two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to go down to 1.5 degrees. — AFP

Business

AUB announces successful issuance of \$600m AT1 Capital Mudaraba Sukuk

Total subscription orders for sukuk certificates exceeded \$1.8 billion

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced its successful pricing and issuance of \$600 million non-convertible AT1 Capital Mudaraba Sukuk, on the 9th of June 2021. The total subscription orders for the Sukuk certificates exceeded US\$1.8 billion, covering 3 times the targeted issue size, which is a clear indication of the confidence and trust of the investors in the Bank's solid performance as a leading Islamic financial institution in Kuwait. It also reflects the strong global confidence in the stable economic climate of the State of Kuwait in particular and the GCC in general.

In late May, AUB announced that it had obtained final approvals from the Kuwait Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) to issue securities (non-convertible certificates). At the time, the Bank has declared that the issue will be treated as AT1 Capital instrument, with the aim to enhance the capital base in line with Basel III requirements and CBK instructions issued to Islamic banks in this regard. These Sukuk are perpetual in nature, and are based on Mudaraba structure and fully compliant with the principles of Shariah. The Bank has determined the optional first call-date is five years of the settlement date. The Bank succeeded in offering the Sukuk at a fair and rewarding profit rate for the Sukuk holders of 3.875 percent p.a., distributable on semi-annual basis post the settlement date. The Bank's selection of the appropriate timing, size and terms of issue and the target markets are the success drivers of this issue, after hiring Citigroup, HSBC Bank, Standard Chartered Bank as Global Coordinators in addition

to their role with KFH Capital, KAMCO Invest, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank and Kuwait International Bank as Joint Lead Managers and Book Runners.

Unique position

On this occasion, Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf, Chairman of Ahli United Bank, said that the Bank's success in issuing Sukuk of this value after attracting sizable orders book in excess of 3 times of its targeted, nevertheless continued economic challenges and repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic, is clear evidence of the remarkable success achieved by AUB in various circumstances and reaffirms the quality of its assets, the experience of its executive management, the accuracy of planning and implementation, and the good reputation it has in the global markets, along with maintaining its unique position that it has gained based on its long history as the first bank to operate in Kuwait since its establishment in 1941, whereby managed to succeed further and progress over years.

He affirmed that the approval of the Bank's board of directors to issue these Sukuk reflects its confidence in the Bank's ability to achieve growth in its operating activities and achieve an increase in the Bank's financing portfolio, which confirms the positive outlook of the Board of Directors on achieving growth in operating activities and expansions.

Al-Mudhaf added: "I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude for the continuous support provided by the regulatory authorities, CBK and CMA, in Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Euronext Dublin and Nasdaq Dubai, for

their continuous support to the Bank, in issuing and listing these certificates which contributed in the execution of the transaction successfully as planned.

Notable success

Jehad Al-Humaidhi, the Acting Chief Executive Officer at AUB pointed out that this issuance is not the first in which the Bank has achieved notable success in recent years, as AUB had previously won the 'Sukuk Deal of the Year - Kuwait 2017 Award' from the prestigious International Finance Magazine for its debut issue of \$200 million AT1 Capital Sukuk, which was oversubscribed more than three times of its size through the high demand from investors in the Middle East, Asia and Europe. The underlying Sukuk was subsequently listed on the Irish Stock Exchange and on NASDAQ Dubai being the third Kuwaiti listing of its kind on NASDAQ Dubai reflecting the great confidence that the Bank receives from investors over the years.

Al-Humaidhi added: the oversubscription and such high turnout of investors from the GCC, Asia and Europe reflect the Bank's success in marketing the issuance and the series of marketing meetings preceded the Sukuk offering. A ratio of 70 percent of the subscriptions was received from GCC,



Anwar Al-Mudhaf

including Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in addition to an international turnout from Europe and the United Kingdom of 18 percent, and 12 percent from Asia and other regions.

Al-Humaidhi has further indicated that the investor's base was prudently diversified including financial institutions, companies, investment portfolios, asset & funds managers and investments from high net worth clients and private bankers. She emphasized that these Sukuk represent a good source of capital support for AUB, which diversifies the sources of funding and capital and boosts the bank's financing base, as well as achieving a balance between the different components of its capital, to continue its growth. The proceeds of the Sukuk will be deployed to support the expansion strategy adopted by the Bank. This issue enhances the capital adequacy ratio to highly positive levels. Undoubtedly, the implementation of this issue in this efficiency reflects the Bank's robust position and strength as a leading Islamic financial institution in Kuwait.

In conclusion, Al-Humaidhi said that the notable success achieved by Ahli United Bank in issuing these Sukuk, which came in the current year in which the Bank celebrates the 80th anniversary of its establishment as the first bank that operated in Kuwait in 1941 & its 50th anniversary since it became fully owned by the Kuwaiti government and the Kuwaiti people in 1971, is a proof of the Bank's ability to achieve continuity and successes, based on its long history and its ability to develop and looking ahead.

US father-son duo admit helping Ghosn flee Japan

TOKYO: An American father-son duo admitted to helping orchestrate former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn's audacious escape from Japan as they made their first appearance before a Tokyo court on yesterday. Former special forces operative Michael Taylor and his son Peter were extradited by US authorities over allegations that they and a third man, who remains at large, smuggled Ghosn out of Japan in a music equipment case as he awaited trial.

At the Tokyo district court, the pair did not contest the facts laid out by prosecutors in an indictment, effectively conceding their role in the saga. "Is there any mistake in what the prosecutor just read?" the judge asked each man in turn. Both replied no.

Michael Taylor, 60, was led in first to the courtroom, with his hands cuffed in front of him. He wore plastic slippers, dark trousers and a white shirt with no tie. His 28-year-old son was brought in after, with both men wearing face masks.

The pair face up to three years in prison if convicted of helping Ghosn currently an international fugitive living in Lebanon, which has no extradition treaty with Japan. The former auto tycoon was out on bail while awaiting trial on four counts of financial misconduct, which he denies, when he managed to slip past authorities onto a private jet, transit in Turkey and land in Lebanon.

The December 2019 escape was hugely embarrassing for Japanese authorities, and US prosecutors called it "one of the most brazen and well-orchestrated escape acts in recent history".

Black box

In court, prosecutors laid out again the almost cinematic details of the operation-including that Ghosn was hidden in a large case with air holes drilled into it to slip past security at an airport. As airport staff handled the black box, which was too big to X-ray, one joked that "maybe there's a young woman in there", according to the evidence listed by prosecutors yesterday.

Ghosn first hatched a plan to flee Japan six months before his escape, prosecutors said, contacting Michael Taylor using a secret mobile phone after being introduced by his wife Carole. Worried that security guards tailing him could disrupt his escape, he sent his lawyer to police to complain he was being stalked and have the detail reduced, prosecutors added. Prosecutors said Ghosn and his wife paid the Taylors for their help through an online ad company and directly, with public broadcaster NHK reporting that Peter received 144 million yen (\$1.3 million).

The Asahi Shimbun daily said the pair spent most of the money on preparations for the escape, including



This undated combination of photos released in March 2021 courtesy of Rudy Michael Taylor in the US shows his father, former US special forces member Michael Taylor (at right in both images) and his brother Peter (at left in both images), posing together years apart. — AFP

the costs of chartering a private jet, claiming that they were not paid for their help.

Ghosn at large

The Taylors had fought their extradition to Tokyo, claiming they could face torture-like conditions, and did not comment on their case after arriving in early March.

A third man, identified as George Antoine Zayek, is also accused of involvement in the escape but remains at large. Ghosn is still in Lebanon, where he was questioned last month by French investigators over a series of alleged financial improprieties. Among the allegations are improper financial interactions with Renault-Nissan's dis-

tributor in Oman, payments by a Dutch subsidiary to consultants and lavish parties organized at the Palace of Versailles.

The questioning took place with his defense team and a Lebanese prosecutor present. Ghosn was heard as a witness as he would need to be in France to be formally indicted. Others involved in the Ghosn case have faced legal proceedings, including his former aide at Nissan, Greg Kelly, who is also on trial in Tokyo for his alleged role in underreporting the tycoon's income.

And a Turkish court has sentenced two pilots and another employee of a small private airline to four years and two months in prison for their role in Ghosn's escape. — AFP

Planes, trains and boxes: Ghosn's audacious escape

TOLYO: Carlos Ghosn's 2019 escape from Japan, where he was awaiting trial, was virtually made for Hollywood, complete with private jets, a former special forces operative and a giant case to hide inside. But while the former auto tycoon is now safely ensconced in Lebanon, in one of his many homes, two of the men accused of helping him escape face trial in Tokyo.

The multi-millionaire was used to spending his life jetting around the world and was chafing under the restrictions of his bail in December 2019, just over a year after his arrest. He faced four charges of financial misconduct and a lengthy trial in a country where he claimed he was "presumed guilty." So as 2019 drew to a close, the former boss of Renault-Nissan made a break for it.

'Bullet train'

Ghosn's escape started with him simply walking out of his luxury central Tokyo residence on December 29. According to Japanese media, he met two US citizens in a nearby hotel and the trio took a shinkansen bullet train from Shinagawa, a major Tokyo hub, to Osaka in western Japan. The trip took around three hours.

"On the shinkansen journey, there were dozens of people in the carriage, but I was wearing a cap, a facemask and sunglasses. You'd have had to be a real expert to recognize me under all that," Ghosn wrote in a book published last year. The three men entered a hotel near Kansai International Airport, but security camera footage showed only the two Americans leaving, carrying "two big boxes"-with Ghosn apparently packed inside one of them.



TOKYO: Reporters wait for a bus believed to be carrying former US special forces member Michael Taylor and his son Peter, who allegedly staged the operation to help fly former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn out of Japan in 2019, arrives at the Tokyo district court in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP

It later emerged that oversized baggage being loaded onto private planes was not X-rayed at the airport because there were no machines big enough to scan them. Reports said holes were drilled into the case to ensure Ghosn could breathe. In his book, Ghosn said it was when he arrived on the tarmac at the airport that he "began to believe success was possible." "The sound of the plane was the sound of hope."

'Clandestine getaway'

The private plane whisked him to Istanbul, where he boarded a second private jet to Beirut. Two Turkish pilots and a Turkish airline employee would eventually be sentenced to four years and two months in prison for their role in helping Ghosn.

Two other pilots were acquitted in the case. While Ghosn initially declined to give details of his escape,

Stocks mark time looking ahead to Fed meet

LONDON: Stock markets steadied yesterday as investors marked time ahead of a meeting of the Federal Reserve this week that may provide fresh clues about prospects for higher interest rates as inflation soars. Wall Street dipped at the open of trading, with the S&P 500 coming off a record high. Europe's main indices nudged higher, after Tokyo rose in thin Asian trading owing to regional public holidays.

London investors brushed off the expected announcement yesterday from the UK government that it will delay the lifting of its remaining lockdown restrictions. The next potentially major moving event is the US Fed's two-day meeting that concludes tomorrow. "The Fed is largely expected to maintain its current level of monetary assistance and is again expected to reiterate its view that the current inflationary spike is a passing phase," noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. "Even so, there have more recently been suggestions that discussions on tapering relief are likely to be nearing the top of the agenda, even if this does not lead to imminent action."

Markets appear to have accepted Fed insistence that the inflation spike in the US and elsewhere will be temporary and that its ultra-loose monetary policies-including record low interest rates-will be maintained for the foreseeable future. There had been a worry that soaring prices would force the bank to taper its bond-buying scheme earlier than first thought.

Confidence among investors though remains high as vaccine rollouts, the easing of containment measures, central bank largesse and government stimulus provide support, with observers forecasting a rally that began in April 2020 will continue into next year.

On Sunday, leaders from the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed to start delivering one billion doses of COVID vaccines to poorer countries. The pledge fell far short of the 11 billion doses that campaigners say are needed to end a pandemic that has claimed nearly four million lives and wrecked economies around the globe.

Looking ahead to the Fed meeting, Bank of Singapore chief economist Mansoor Mohiuddin said the central bank is this week "likely to start discussing when it will begin slowing its quantitative easing (stimulus), given the US economy's strong rebound from the pandemic". But he expects it to wait "until as late as December before announcing it will start tapering in early 2022" as it awaits a stronger jobs market and steadier inflation.

Oil, bitcoin rally

Elsewhere yesterday, oil prices continued their run higher on stronger demand expectations, with Brent reaching \$73.64 per barrel-the highest level since April 2019. Bitcoin surged to within touching distance of \$40,000 for the first time in more than two weeks after Elon Musk said at the weekend that his Tesla company would accept payments in the unit again when it is mined using cleaner energy.

The electric car maker in February said that customers could use cryptocurrency, sending bitcoin surging, before Musk changed his mind citing environmental concerns. Bitcoins are produced by powerful computers that have to solve equations and consume huge amounts of electricity in the process. — AFP

Passport roulette

Jet-setting Ghosn held three nationalities: French, Brazilian and Lebanese, but under his bail terms his passports were meant to be kept locked up. After his escape, however, it emerged that Ghosn was allowed to access a second French passport in case he needed to prove his visa status while travelling in Japan-which was allowed under his bail conditions. Airport documents in Lebanon seen by AFP showed Ghosn entered the country on a French passport. — AFP

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait's GDP fell 8.9% in virus-hit 2020; consumers leading recovery

Oil output declines on lower demand and OPEC policy

KUWAIT: Kuwait's economy contracted by 8.9 percent in 2020, figures released by the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) show. This was the second consecutive decline after negative growth of 0.6 percent in 2019 and the steepest since the global financial crisis in 2009. In what was an extremely challenging year due to the coronavirus pandemic, both the oil and the non-oil sectors registered declines of around 8.8 percent in 2020.

In the quarterly dataset, growth in 4Q20 came in at -11.2 percent y/y, lower than the previous quarter's

percent, wholesale and retail trade dropped by 12.1 percent and telecommunications contracted by 6.8 percent. Construction, however, was the worst performing sector in 2020, declining 43.2 percent, with many projects understandably delayed.

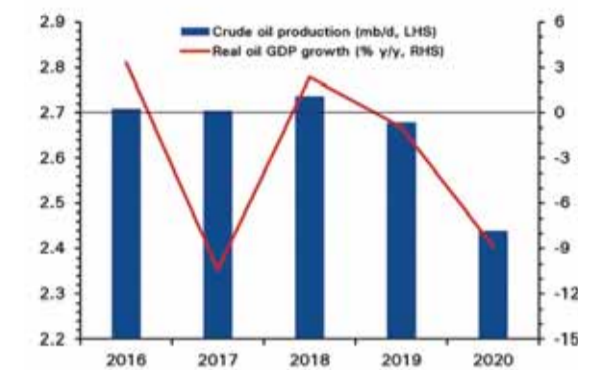
Were it not for the positive contribution of the largest non-oil sub-sector, public administration and defense, which grew by 1.4 percent y/y in 2020, the economic contraction in 2020 could have been even more marked. The other sub-sectors that posted real output gains were education, health and social work

achieved a commendable compliance rate of 101 percent in 2020, with crude output averaging 2.44 mb/d for the year as a whole. This reduction is reflected in the real oil GDP contraction of 8.9 percent y/y.

Consumer spending

The economic outlook has improved in recent months, with vaccination efforts stepping up and partial curfews eased. Businesses are seeing considerable pent-up demand from consumers. According to the most recent consumer spending figures provided by

Oil sector real GDP



Source: CSB, Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI), OPEC

- Kuwait's economy contracted by 8.9% in 2020, with pandemic-driven pressures including plunging oil demand and business closures generating similar-sized falls across both the oil and non-oil sectors.
- Oil output was restrained by OPEC+ policy, while on the non-oil side, manufacturing and trade were especially hard hit.
- The outlook for 2021 has improved, in tandem with the vaccination drive and greater mobility.

rate of -10.3 percent and still pressured by weakness in oil output linked to OPEC+ policy). However, growth on a quarter-on-quarter (q/q) basis was positive at 4.7 percent and for the second quarter in a row - the first time that has happened in two years.

Non-oil activity

For the non-oil economy, this was the most severe contraction in the annual data series available and the sharpest among GCC non-oil sectors last year. Indeed, real non-oil sector output was back at levels last seen in 2014. Services, manufacturing and trade were especially hard hit by the mobility restrictions put in place to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Of the largest non-oil sub-sectors, services (including real estate) declined by 7.6 percent y/y, manufacturing fell by 32.6

and household w/employed persons, which recorded the fastest growth (+7.1 percent y/y) since 2012. This was despite official labor force data showing a decline in domestic workers last year of 1.5 percent, which would chime with the broader fall in expatriate numbers caused by the pandemic.

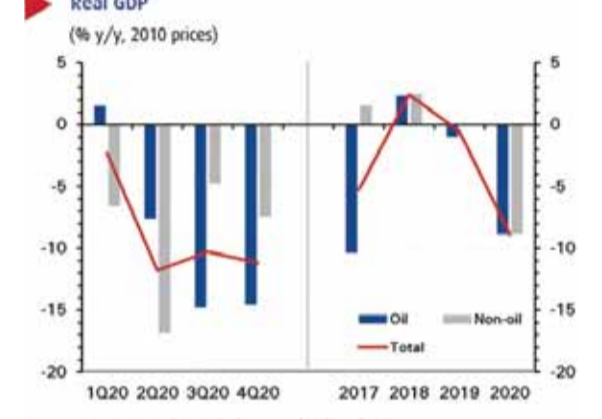
Oil output declines

Oil sector GDP declined for the second year in a row in 2020. With oil demand ravaged by the pandemic and prices plummeting to multi-decade lows last April, Kuwait, implemented a production cut agreement negotiated last April by OPEC+ to withhold supply and rebalance the market. Kuwait's average targeted output cut in 2020 was 0.56 mb/d, or a 20 percent reduction from a reference level of 2.809 mb/d. Kuwait

Knet, total spending in May skyrocketed by 137 percent to a record high of KD 2.25 billion, boosted by year-on-year base effects but also fundamental factors including loan repayment deferrals and reduced overseas travel. Moreover, the decline in project activity in 2020 looks to have abated, and could even be inching up with a backlog of projects that need action.

Underpinning the rebound will also be government spending, the lynchpin of the economy. The government's draft budget outlined an increase of nearly 7 percent in spending in FY21/22 (with capex +20 percent) and the rise in oil prices to above \$70/bbl if sustained would ease some of the pressure on public spending which would trickle down to higher private sector activity. Non-oil GDP could therefore rise by 4 percent this year, though this could be revised down if

Real GDP



Source: Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), Refinitiv

the pandemic persists, consumer spending cools and the government adopts a more cautious fiscal stance. Oil GDP, though, is projected to decrease further by about 1.0 percent in-line with Kuwait's OPEC+ output commitments. This will result in overall real GDP growth of 1.2 percent this year.



Raed Bukhamseen



Mohamed Khadiri

KIB extends a \$125m bilateral Murabaha financing facility to Zain

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) extended a \$125 million bilateral Murabaha financing facility to Atheer Iraq, the Iraqi subsidiary of Zain Group, for a tenor of 4 years. The proceeds were used to settle financing previously extended to enhance the capacity and quality of the subsidiary's network, modernize its infrastructure and strengthen its customer service.

Raed Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of KIB complimented both KIB and Zain Group on the successful closing of this financing and said: "We are delighted to have structured and arranged this Islamic facility for Zain Group, a major regional player in the Telecom sector. We look forward to continue supporting the group's growth, which is underpinned by its strong business model, management team and shareholders. This transaction supports the diversification of the Bank's financing portfolio." Bukhamseen added: "This transaction also underscores KIB capability of leading, arranging and accommodating large ticket transactions on a bilateral basis."

Commenting on the successful closing of this transaction, Mohamed Khadiri, General Manager of International Banking & Large Corporate Department said: "This is a significant transaction for KIB, which demonstrates our business focused culture, quick turnaround and collaborative approach with our customers. The new facility is well structured to suit the liquidity requirements of Atheer Iraq and clearly enhances our relationship with the entire Group." Khadiri added: "We are extremely proud to be a part of this milestone in Zain's financing agenda and I commend the hard work, effective collaboration and dedication that KIB and Zain teams have exhibited in the past few weeks into making this transaction come to fruition. We are very pleased to have Zain Group as one of our Large Corporate customers with whom we enjoy a long standing and mutually beneficial partnership."

Khadiri concluded by saying: "This deal adds to KIB's portfolio of noteworthy achievements and its strong track record in providing Sharia-compliant financing products and services, as well as financial advisory to the corporate sector. We will continue our efforts to pursue KIB's strategic objectives in order to strengthen and cement our position as a leading banking institution amongst local and regional banks, as we continue to fulfill the needs and requirements of our customers."

NBK intensifies awareness campaigns on risks of investing in virtual assets

KUWAIT: Underscoring its keenness to actively participate in promoting financial culture and raising awareness among various segments of society, and in line with its social responsibility, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to support the activities of "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign by intensifying awareness campaigns about the risks of dealing or investing in virtual assets or the so-called cryptocurrency.

Over the past period, the bank intensified its advertising materials and publications on all its social media pages, including discussions with experts and specialists, with the aim of increasing public awareness about the various risks they are prone to when investing in these high-risk assets.

This campaign comes in support of the Central Bank of Kuwait's efforts in taking the necessary measures to raise customers' awareness of the risks associated with dealing in virtual assets.

The campaign, in which NBK participates, highlights that dealing or investing in cryptocurrencies comes at a high risk, in view of the nature of these assets and the high fluctuation in their prices, in addition to that these currencies are not subject to the regulation or supervision of any authority in Kuwait, thus exposing speculators to heavy losses and frauds.

It is worth mentioning that virtual assets, known as "digital or crypto currencies", are not comparable to real currencies which are issued by a lawful state as a currency and as a symbol of sovereignty, and is regulated by state authorities such as central banks or monetary institutions, is considered and accepted as a store of value and legal tender, and serves as a reliable medium for exchange. Furthermore, states strive to protect their real currency and employ policies that guarantee relative stability of the exchange rate

Kaspersky discovers malicious apps disguised as game

KUWAIT: Recognized as the world's top-selling game of all time, Minecraft attracts the attention of enthusiastic players around the world but also draws the interest of fraudsters. Earlier, Kaspersky researchers discovered more than 20 applications advertised on app stores offering additional Minecraft features. Though these malicious apps were deleted from official stores, Kaspersky experts have found newly developed ones, which exploit the game to further fraudster's objectives.

Kaspersky researchers analyzed various apps, including those which are available for download on the Google Play store and claimed to be modpacks (user-created packages with additional gameplay elements) for the game. As a result, the company's experts found various malicious apps spreading malware or stealing social media credentials.

First and foremost, researchers discovered several apps distributing malware, software that bombards users with unwanted ads, disrupting the normal use of their devices. These applications do not even have to be open for advertisements to be shown at a fraudster's command. Moreover, these apps can load additional modules that allow its icon to be hidden, as well

against major world currencies. Central banks around the world warn against the risk of dealing in cryptocurrencies being prone to sharp fluctuations in their value over a short period of time, in addition to the difficulty to supervise them and follow up on relevant developments and provide any type of security for the systems/devices used by traders and speculators, in addition to lack of any institution or body that can control or regulate this market. Moreover, such assets pose a threat to the global financial system and to people's fortunes, especially since the transactions can be carried out through illegal/bogus wallets or organizations, which could lead and direct individuals' funds beyond the guarantees of official trading protocols/guidelines. These currencies are also offered by unidentified issuers, and traded under fictitious names, leaving wide room for illegal uses of funds, unauthorized transactions, and money laundering, since the assets are not under the control of any central authority, in addition to the threat of digital breaches and attacks.

Investment alternatives

Instead of undergoing such high risks, NBK provides customers with full-fledged financial solutions and innovative investment opportunities, including deposit accounts and mutual funds, which are safe ways to invest. Moreover, NBK Capital, the investment arm of the bank, offers SmartWealth, a digital investment that offers investors a best-of-breed solution in Kuwait for long-term investment savings.

SmartWealth's state of the art technology customizes customers' model portfolio based on their risk appetite, financial goals and aspirations. The simple and user-friendly registration process for this service enables them to have their own diversified portfolio of

global equities, fixed income, commodities and real estate baskets (ETF based).



'Let's Be Aware'

It is worth mentioning that "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), as part of the efforts to spread financial, credit and banking culture among banks' customers and the society, at large. The campaign covers many topics such as the process of borrowing, banking cards, familiarization with the rights of special needs customers, as well as advice related to cybersecurity and the protection of bank accounts. It also provides guidance regarding complaint submission mechanisms, and protection of customers' rights, and introduction of the functions of the banking sector and its role in promoting and developing the economy, so that all segments of society become more familiar with banking and financial transactions.

versions to the store - under different names and different developer accounts. This is why we strongly recommend installing a reliable security solution that will prevent the download of dangerous programs. Acting at this early stage will help you to bypass potential threats and focus on enjoying the game," comments Igor Golovin, security expert at Kaspersky.

Kaspersky team reached to Google and warned about malicious apps stored in Google Play.

To keep safe from malicious apps, Kaspersky experts also recommend:

- Do not download mods from suspicious sites, or pirated software. Attackers are well aware of people's craving for all things free, and they exploit it through malware hidden in cracks, cheats, and mods.
- Install an antivirus solution on your phone, like Kaspersky Internet Security for Android.
- Do not turn off your antivirus when playing. Kaspersky Security Cloud's gaming mode prevents the antivirus from consuming too many system resources during a game. It has no impact on performance or frame rate but still takes care of security.
- Reinstalling the browser or messing with the settings won't get rid of the malware. First the user needs to identify the malicious app. The device will display a full list of apps under settings, (Settings apps and notifications, show all apps). Delete the app from this list and the malware should be gone.
- Purchase games responsibly. Check the reputation of the application and distribution account before downloading a game.



as suddenly open a browser, app pages in Google Play and show YouTube videos, all of which interfere with the use of the smartphone.

Kaspersky researchers also found two such modpacks with basic functionality. In this version, the application also shows full-screen ads (including when the application is not running) but they cannot hide the icon and launch a browser, YouTube or Google Play. For additional monetization, the developers use the "in-app purchase" function.

There are also several other applications, which steal social media accounts. In one case, a fake ad network app and a fake client used for advertising on TikTok were available on Google Play. If a user entered their Facebook credentials, their account would then be stolen.

"Unfortunately, deleting applications from official stores does not always lead to victory over the malware. We see that the developers upload new modified

Lifestyle | Features



David Fitzpatrick with his Pekingese 'Wasabi' are seen after winning Best in Show at the 145th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at the Lyndhurst Estate in Tarrytown, New York. — AFP photos



A Pekingese "Wasabi" is seen during the judging before winning Best in Show at the 145th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.



A Chow Chow in the benching area at the 145th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at the Lyndhurst Estate in Tarrytown, New York.

Wasabi the Pekingese named Westminster's 'Best in Show'

The Westminster Dog Show crowned a Pekingese named Wasabi its "Best in Show" Sunday, in the culmination of a reworked pandemic edition of the competition missing its usual pooch-loving crowds. Normally held in February, the show was delayed and moved from its home in the heart of New York City to a country estate due to COVID-19. Spectators were kept away and it was the show's first time being held outside Manhattan, but the singular passion of the event, now in its 145th year, was unchanged: dogs.

Three-year-old Wasabi was crowned best in show from a pack of seven group winners which also included Mathew, a French bulldog; Connor, an Old English sheepdog; and Striker, a Samoyed.



Pink the Cocker Spaniel during the 8th Annual Masters Agility Championship.

Bourbon the whippet came in second. Speaking a day earlier when Wasabi won the toy group, his owner and handler David Fitzpatrick—who also won "Best in

Show" in 2012 — lauded his pooch's "charisma, movement and showmanship." "He's in his prime and he just looks wonderful," he added.

The event, an annual celebration of purebred dogs from across the spectrum in size, shape and fur types, brought together over 2,000 candidates from more than 200 breeds. Dogs are judged on the basis of how well they stack up against breed characteristics as set by the American Kennel Club. Breeds are assessed not just in terms of how they move, but whether their facial expressions show what is deemed proper vigilance or merriment. — AFP



A Brussels Griffon is groomed in the benching area at the 145th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at the Lyndhurst Estate in Tarrytown, New York.

Microsoft bolsters video game line-up as Xbox turns 20

Microsoft unveiled Sunday a batch of new titles for Xbox at the world's premier video game trade show, including award-winning sensation "Hades" and long-time hit "Halo". The Xbox maker showed off 30 new games coming to its console, which in November will celebrate two decades on the market. "Our team strives to make Xbox a place where you'll find the greatest games, the most dedicated developers, and the most passionate community," unit chief Phil Spencer said during a streamed event on the second day of a virtual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3).

Microsoft revealed a coming take of beloved "Halo", along with new creations such as science-fiction action title "Starfield" and a vampire-battling adventure called "Redfall" from Bethesda Softworks. Microsoft recently-acquired

Bethesda Softworks, the maker of hits including "Fallout" and "Elder Scrolls." As trailers depicted tense battles and the games' rich graphics, Microsoft stressed that all but a few would be available for play at its subscription Xbox Game Pass service. The company also highlighted titles that will be exclusive to Xbox, which competes with rival consoles Sony PlayStation and Nintendo Switch.

Award-winning "Hades" from San Francisco-based Supergiant is coming to Xbox as well as PlayStation, the independent studio said Sunday. "Hades" has so far only been available for play on personal computers and Switch. "Hades", which snagged five honors this year at Britain's prestigious BAFTA Games Awards, is a "dungeon crawler" that challenges players to fight their way through the underworld. The line-up of new titles comes as Microsoft works on software and a plug-in device to let people play Xbox video games on internet-linked televisions without need of consoles. "As a company, Microsoft is all-in on gaming," chief executive Satya Nadella said in introducing the plan last week. Microsoft has been playing on the strength of its Xbox unit as it vies with Luna and Stadia cloud gaming services run, respectively, by Amazon and Google. —AFP



In this file photo a staff member plays a game in front of an oversized mock-up of Microsoft's Xbox controller at a flagship store of SK Telecom in Seoul. — AFP

Dancing like there's no corona: First German nightclub reopens

For techno enthusiast Philipp Koegler, it almost felt like a normal Saturday night again as he joined 200 fellow revelers at "Distillery", the first German nightclub to reopen since the start of the pandemic. "Tonight, there are no rules," the almost 30-year-old told AFP, whipping off his mask on his way to the dance floor. Despite more than a year of closures forced by the coronavirus, it didn't take long for the thumping beats, low

lights and buzzing crowds to reawaken the much-missed club atmosphere. "It feels like I've come back after being away on vacation for a week," Koegler beamed.

But of course there are some rules to restarting the party, even in Germany where coronavirus infections have declined steadily in recent weeks as the pace of vaccinations has picked up. The Distillery club in the eastern city of Leipzig, which bills itself as the oldest techno venue in Germany's former Communist east, is taking part in a pilot project supported by scientists from the Max Planck institute and the local university hospital. Just 200 club-goers are allowed in instead of the usual 600 and each person must take two different kinds of coronavirus tests earlier in the day, with entry granted only if they test negative both times.

Once inside, the masks can come off and revelers don't have to socially dis-

tant. Each participant also agrees to being re-tested a week later, to uncover potential infections despite the precautions taken. Organizers hope the project can serve as a blueprint for further club reopenings to help the hard-hit sector back on its feet after a devastating year. Although several venues in Germany experimented with open-air parties, club-goer Konny said it "just isn't the same". "In the club, you're in a different world," she said.

Growing influence

Distillery manager Steffen Kache expressed pride at being the first club in the country to reopen indoors. "Everyone is jealous," he told AFP. Kache said that if there has been an upside to the pandemic closures, it was that politicians had woken up to the social and economic importance of Germany's vibrant club culture. Lawmakers last month agreed to reclassify nightclubs as cultural institu-

tions rather than entertainment venues, putting them on a par with theatres and museums to provide more protection and tax benefits. Germany's nightlife capital Berlin alone-home to iconic clubs Berghain, KitKat and Tresor-usually attracts tens of thousands of foreign visitors each year who generate over a billion euros in revenues.

Many observers fear that when the pandemic dust has settled, not all of Germany's clubs will have survived the lengthy shutdowns. The collaboration with local authorities that made Distillery's pilot project possible was "unthinkable before the crisis", Kache said, and evidence of a "reconciliation" between underground club culture and the political establishment. He said he hoped the next step would be "the nationwide reopening of cultural spots and clubs, without Covid restrictions". — AFP



In this file photo actor Ned Beatty (right) and wife Sandra Johnson (left) arrive at the Paramount Pictures premiere of the film "Shooter" at the Mann Village Theatre in Westwood, California. — AFP

Oscar-nominated actor Ned Beatty dies aged 83

The prolific and Oscar-nominated character actor Ned Beatty, known for roles in "Network", "Superman" and "Toy Story 3," died on Sunday aged 83. "Ned passed away from natural causes Sunday morning, surrounded by his family and loved ones," Shelter Entertainment Group talent manager Deborah Miller said. "Ned was an iconic, legendary talent, as well as a dear friend, and he will be missed by us all." The Kentucky native made his big-screen debut in the 1972 film "Deliverance."

That film, in which Beatty won attention for his performance in a humiliating rape scene, started a film career which would continue until 2013. Other productions on his long list of credits include "Superman," "All the President's Men," and the acclaimed TV series "Homicide: Life on the Street." Younger movie fans will recall his 2010 turn as the menacing

teddy bear Lotso in "Toy Story 3," which was nominated for best picture at the Oscars.

Lee Unkrich, who directed the film, tweeted that it "was a joy and an incredible honor to work with him." "Thanks, Ned, for bringing Lotso to life - both his good side and his not-so-good side," he added. "We'll miss you." It was Beatty's role in "Network" that won him his first and only Oscar nod, for best supporting actor, a performance that included a memorably cynical monologue on dollars, cents and "the primal forces of nature". Tweeting after news of Beatty's death broke, the actor and director Seth Rogen called it "one of the greatest monologues ever in a movie." Alex Winter, who starred in the "Bill & Ted" films, called Beatty "one of the greats." — AFP

New Zealand's Ardern pans mosque attacks film amid backlash

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday criticized a planned movie about her response to the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks as poorly timed and focused on the wrong subject. The US-backed film "They Are Us" has sparked an intense backlash among New Zealand Muslims, with community leaders slamming the project for pushing a "white saviour" narrative. Ardern said the attacks-when a white supremacist gunman ran amok at two mosques during Friday prayers, killing 51 and seriously injuring another 40 — remained "very raw" for many New Zealanders.

She said filmmakers had not consulted her about the movie, which is set to star Australia's Rose Byrne as the center-left leader. "In my view, which is a personal view, it feels very soon and very raw for New Zealand," Ardern told TVNZ. "And while there are so many stories that should be told at some point, I don't consider mine to be one of them—they are the community's stories, the families' stories." One of the movie's producers, Philippa Campbell, quit the project in the wake of Ardern's comments, saying she regretted the shock and hurt it had caused.

"I now agree the events of March 15, 2019, are too raw for film at this time and do not want to be involved with a project that is causing such distress," she said in a statement. Ardern won widespread praise for her empathetic and inclusive handling of the attacks, the worst mass shooting in modern New Zealand history, including wearing a scarf when meeting mourners.



'Not your story'

The movie's title references a line from a speech she gave in the immediate aftermath of the atrocity when she pledged to support the Muslim community and tighten gun laws. A petition from the National Islamic Youth Association calling for the production to be shut down has gathered more than 60,000 signatures. The association said the proposed film "sidelines the victims and survivors and instead centers the response of a white woman".

It said the Muslim community had not been properly consulted about the project, which has been scripted by New Zealand writer Andrew Niccol. "Entities and individuals should not seek to commercialize or profit from a tragedy that befell our community, neither should such an atrocity be sensationalized", association co-chair Haris Murtaza said. Muslim poet Mohamed Hassan said the filmmakers needed to focus on members of the community that bore the brunt of the attacks, not use them as props in a feel-good story about Ardern. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

'Quiet Place' again tops N America box office, edging 'Heights'

Paramount's frightening "A Quiet Place: Part II" returned to first place in North American theaters this weekend, as the much-ballyhooed film version of Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical "In the Heights" fell short of expectations, industry analysts said Sunday. "Quiet Place," directed by John Krasinski and starring his wife Emily Blunt, took in an estimated \$11.6 million for the three-day weekend as Hollywood continued to edge back toward normality, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.



US/British actress Emily Blunt and husband US actor John Krasinski

While that take was well below pre-pandemic levels for a box office topper, "Quiet," in its third week, nonetheless became the first post-Covid film to top the \$100 million mark domestically. Warner Bros.' energetic feel-good musical "In the Heights"—Jon M. Chu's cinematic adaptation of the musical by "Hamilton" creator Miranda—took in \$11.4 million. "Heights" thus fell short of early estimates that it might hit \$15 million to \$20 million, its in-theater total hurt no doubt as it debuted simultaneously on the HBO Max streaming service. With an ensemble cast led by Anthony Ramos and Corey Hawkins, "Heights" tells the story of the dreams and challenges facing young Latinos in New York's Washington Heights neighborhood.

Another new release, Sony's family-friendly "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway," placed third at \$10.4 million. A mixed live-action/animation, it features the voice of James Corden in the title role. In fourth spot was last weekend's box office leader "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It," at \$10 million. This latest chapter in the Warner Bros. horror franchise again features Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga as paranormal investigators pitted against demonic nastiness.

And in fifth spot was Disney's family-friendly "Cruella," at \$6.7 million. The live-action film stars Emma Stone as the puppy-hating title villain. As Hollywood struggles to shake off its long, painful pandemic hangover, grosses continue to lag behind previous years. Key factors: lingering hesitancy among some moviegoers—particularly older people—competition from streaming services and closures affecting many theaters in Canada.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

"Spirit Untamed" (\$2.5 million)
"The House Next Door: Meet the Blacks" (\$1 million)
"Wrath of Man" (\$615,000)
"Queen Bees" (\$328,000)
"Spiral" (\$305,000)—AFP

Two rare Javan rhino calves spotted in Indonesia

Two Javan rhinoceros calves have been spotted at an Indonesian national park, offering a rare sighting of one of the world's most endangered mammals. The pair—ranging in age from three months to one year—were caught on footage snapped by camera traps in March at Ujung Kulon national



This handout shows one of two rare Javan rhino calves that were caught on video in the Ujung Kulon National Park, raising hopes for the longer-term survival of the endangered species. — AFP



Thai beauty queens Miss Universe Thailand 2020 Amanda Obdam (center), Miss Universe third runner-up Praewwanich Ruangthong (left) and Miss Universe Thailand 2019 contestant Patrapong Wang (centre right) hand out food boxes made by Michelin-starred chefs to children in the Klong Toei slum area of Bangkok yesterday.



A young resident of the Klong Toei slum community holds a food box made by Michelin-starred chefs in Bangkok.



Miss Universe Thailand 202, Amanda Obdam (left), hands food boxes made by Michelin-starred chefs to residents.

Bangkok slum gets Michelin-starred meals from Thai beauty queen

Surrounded by children in a Bangkok slum, Miss Universe Thailand handed out lunch boxes prepared by Michelin-starred chefs yesterday—a project to help some of the capital's worst COVID-hit communities. The kingdom is currently battling a third wave of coronavirus—an outbreak that authorities traced in April to a nightlife district frequented by Bangkok's uber-rich and politically connected. The government slapped restrictions on businesses and public spaces—much to the chagrin of restaurants already battered by a year of on-off pandemic shutdowns.

Even Michelin-starred ventures are feeling the brunt, and concierge company The Silver Voyage Club is working to bring their ultra-luxe meals to some of Bangkok's hardest-hit communities, said founder Jakkapun Rattanapet. Part of the "Food for Fighters" project, Bangkok's world-class chefs are paid up to 100 baht (\$3.20) per lunch box—which are then donated to communities where high rates of clusters have emerged. Klong Toei—Bangkok's largest slum—has emerged in this third wave as a hotspot, because most of its working-class residents are not able to social distance or work from home.

'The kite is going down'

Yesterday, families stood in long queues waiting to receive 500 meals made by top Bangkok chefs from Miss Universe Thailand Amanda Obdam. "We need to get rid of that (inequality) gap



Residents of the Klong Toei slum community queue for food boxes made by Michelin-starred chefs.

because there are so many people still struggling while the rest are living an elite life," she told AFP, in between taking selfies with fans. "I'm very grateful to be here," she said. "I hope they enjoy what they receive today."

Among the offerings was pasta with a spicy tom yum chicken flavor, said chef Thaninthorn "Noom" Chantrawan—who heads the Michelin-starred restaurant Chim by Siam Wisdom. It is "a mixture of comfort food and a mixture of a food that you don't get to eat too often". Despite his restaurant having to temporarily close

because of COVID, he said he was luckier than most because he could still keep his staff. "The restaurant industry is very affected and we try to fight, but the chance is thin," he said. "The government needs to do better."

So far, some 50,000 restaurants nationwide have shuttered during this outbreak, said Taniwan Koonmongkon, president of the Thai Restaurant Association, which has caused a loss of jobs for over half a million people. "In the first two waves, the kite could still fly with the thread, but this third wave has seen the



Miss Universe Thailand 2020 Amanda Obdam (right) learns to cut starfruit for food boxes to be distributed to the poor, in the kitchen of Chin By Siam Wisdom restaurant in Bangkok.

thread cut," Taniwan said. "The kite is now going down." Food for Fighters founder Panchana Vatanasathien—a restaurateur herself and had started her project initially to help hospital workers—was far blunter. "I have no hope for the government," she said as kitchen staff worked rapidly around her to prepare the meals before they were ferried to Klong Toei in Silver Voyage Club's luxury sedans. — AFP



A chef from several Michelin-starred restaurants prepares ingredients for food boxes to be distributed to the poor, in the kitchen of Chin By Siam Wisdom restaurant.



Miss Universe Thailand 2020 Amanda Obdam (left) hands a food box made by Michelin-starred chefs to a young girl in the Klong Toei slum area of Bangkok. — AFP photos

Socialism gets Indian wedding, Communism and Leninism attend

Even little Marxism didn't miss out when Socialism got married in southern India last weekend with his big brothers Communism and Leninism in attendance. All are the progeny of A. Mohan, a district secretary of the Communist Party of India in Tamil Nadu state where left-wing ideology still burns red-hot. "My first son was born during the fall of the Soviet Union and everywhere in the news I was reading that this was the end of communism," Mohan told AFP. "But there is no end for communism as long as the human race lives on, so I named my first-born Communism," he said.

His next two sons were named Leninism—whose five-month-old son Marxism also attended the nuptials on Sunday—and Socialism, the groom. Pictures of the invitation to the wedding, embossed with hammer-and-sickle emblems, have gone viral on social media. Socialism's bride meanwhile is P. Mamata Banerjee, named by her grandfather after a firebrand left-wing politician in West Bengal. The fact that this other Banerjee ended several decades of communist rule in 2011 in the eastern

state to become chief minister isn't spoiling the party.

India leaned more towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and names like Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky and even Pravda—the name of the USSR's state newspaper—are not unheard of, particularly in the south. Tamil Nadu's current chief minister is M.K. Stalin, named by his father in honor of the Soviet communist dictator just days before he died in Russia. Mohan said that there was nothing unusual about his sons' names—some of his "comrades" gave their children names such as Moscow, Russia, Vietnam and Czechoslovakia.

But he admitted that his boys, especially Communism, were sometimes teased at school. One hospital refused to admit Communism when he was three years old. "They were scared of the name Communism and initially I faced a lot of troubles. But over time, things smoothed out," he said. All three sons, now in their 20s, are fellow members of the local communist party, and Leninism named his son after none other than Karl Marx. "Now I am waiting for a grand-daughter from one of my sons, who I will name Cubaism," Mohan added. — AFP



P. Mamata Banerjee (left), named by her grandfather after a left-wing politician in West Bengal, with groom named Socialism pose for a photograph during their wedding in the southern Indian city of Salem. — AFP

Sports

‘Everything is possible’: Djokovic eyeing Golden Grand Slam

PARIS: Novak Djokovic has set his sights on the Golden Grand Slam of all four majors and the Olympic title, insisting: “Everything is possible”. The world number one captured a second French Open and 19th Slam with a 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 win over Greece’s Stefanos Tsitsipas on Sunday. It allowed him to become the first man in the Open era, and only third in history, to claim all four Grand Slam titles on multiple occasions.

Now he has targeted being the third man to complete a calendar Grand Slam after Don Budge in 1937 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969. On top of that, he also wants the Olympic gold medal to complete the Golden Grand Slam. “Everything is possible. Definitely in my case I can say that what I’ve been through in my career, in my life, this journey has been terrific so far,” said Djokovic. “I’ve achieved some things that a lot of people thought it would be not possible for me to achieve. So everything is possible, and I did put myself in a good position to go for the Golden Slam.”

The Golden Slam has never been achieved by a man while, in the women’s game, only Steffi Graf in 1988 has swept all four majors and Olympic gold in the same year. In Graf’s case, Olympic gold came in Seoul. For Djokovic, the opportunity will come in Tokyo later this summer.

“Obviously his goal and our goal is to win the Olympics and then win the Grand Slam. That would be the absolutely top of this year,” said Djokovic’s longtime coach Marian Vajda. “But it’s still far away from us. We have to still focus on the next one. But overall he’s set up for this year. His

priority is Wimbledon, Olympics and US Open. I think that says all.”

Djokovic is already halfway to a calendar Slam having secured a record ninth Australian Open in February. Next up is Wimbledon, where he is the defending champion, Olympics and then a bid to win the US Open for a fourth time. “As much as Novak is healthy, and he’s healthy right now, he’s in great shape, I think he has the ability to win the Grand Slam for this year. I’m pretty sure,” added Vajda. “I think it is much more than possible. He loves to play in Wimbledon and US Open.”

However, Djokovic has been at this juncture before, winning in Australia and Paris in 2016 but coming up short at the Rio Olympics, Wimbledon and the US Open later in the year. “I was in this position in 2016 as well. It ended up in a third-round loss in Wimbledon,” added Djokovic recalling his shock exit to Sam Querrey at the All England Club five years ago.

Djokovic now has nine Australian Opens, five Wimbledon, three US Opens and two French Opens. He has also collected 36 Masters, a Davis Cup and has spent more time at world number one than any other player. But for two sets on Sunday, he was thoroughly outplayed by 22-year-old Tsitsipas before the Greek’s challenge fell apart.

Djokovic left the court after the first two sets to compose himself just as he had done in his come-from-behind wins over Lorenzo Musetti and 13-time champion Rafael Nadal. “My guardian angels are there. I have my special corner. It’s a secret. I can’t reveal the secret. It’s been working for me pretty well,” he said. “Paris



PARIS: Serbia’s Novak Djokovic poses with the trophy in front of the Eiffel tower yesterday during a photo call, a day after winning the Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament. —AFP

fell, Djokovic is the king of tennis” and “Novak is the king of the world” read front-page headlines of Blic and Vecernje Novosti daily newspapers in Serbia. “With this victory Novak

Djokovic made history, becoming the only player in the Open era to have won each of the Grand Slam tournaments at least two times,” added state-run RTS television. —AFP

Stradivarius and Dettori Golden Boys: Gosden

LONDON: Stradivarius receives “quite a lot of fan mail” his trainer John Gosden told AFP which is sure to become a flood if he equals Yeats’s record of four Ascot Gold Cups (2006-09) on Thursday. The Gold Cup is the flagship race of the five-day Royal Ascot meeting, which will welcome 12,000 spectators per day compared to none last year due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdown.

Gosden could not be happier with his old warrior, who is bidding for a fifth successive success at Royal Ascot as he won the Queen’s Vase in 2017 before his three consecutive Gold Cups. Gosden - whose other stable star Palace Pier bids to get him off to a dream start in Tuesday’s Queen Anne Stakes - says he sees similarities between Stradivarius and his 50-year-old superstar jockey Frankie Dettori.

“They are a couple of old boys who get on rather well,” Gosden told AFP by phone on Sunday. “The two of them are not quite yet sitting in their deck chairs staring out to sea on Brighton seafront. They are good athletes despite their combined ages. Stradivarius is a seven-year-old full horse and I can assure you Frankie is a full horse.”

Advantage Kiwis but India ‘not worried’: Pujara

NEW DELHI: India’s players are positive ahead of the World Test Championship final against a New Zealand side primed for the encounter after a successful series in England, said batsman Cheteshwar Pujara. Friday’s final in Southampton comes after two years of Test series to determine the world’s top two teams.

The Blackcaps are coming off a confidence-boosting 1-0 Test series win over hosts England while Virat Kohli’s men played their last competitive match at the

“They are a pretty professional pair, though, I would say Stradivarius’s behavior is like Frankie at 28 when he was going to discotheques.” Stradivarius arrives at his fiefdom on Thursday having earned just shy of £3 million (\$4.2 million) with 17 victories in his 27 starts. “I am very, very pleased with him,” said Gosden. “He could put up a huge performance though they forecast rain from Wednesday into Thursday which does concern me as it will blunt his turn of foot (acceleration).”

Gosden says Stradivarius’s popularity stems from being a character. “He is seen rather like old jumpers who go on for years,” said Gosden. “There is a following for the Cup races. He is a character, plus a chestnut with four white socks. He deserves the fame. He gets quite a lot of fan mail believe it or not. It is all down to his owner/breeder Bjorn Nielsen who has tried always to breed a Derby winner but has ended up with a legendary Gold Cup horse.”

‘Very on the ball’

Stradivarius and Palace Pier give Gosden a powerful enough presence at the meeting - “our (flat racing) big week of the year even if the season is not yet at the halfway point” - and is delighted they and other equine stars like sprinter Bataash will be cheered on this time round. “There are a lot of people who are passionate about racing and are prepared to go through the lateral flow testing process (for coronavirus) each day to attend,” he said. “I admit it was rather surreal sitting in the grandstand at Ascot eating your sandwich out of a



ASCOT: In this file photo taken on June 18, 2020 Frankie Dettori celebrates holding up three fingers after he and horse Stradivarius won The Gold Cup race on day three of the Royal Ascot horse racing meet. —AFP

brown paper bag and drinking your coffee with no one around you.”

Should either Palace Pier or Stradivarius prevail it will not be just Gosden welcoming them back as winning trainer but also his son Thady who has stepped up from being his assistant for the past five years. “He (Thady) survived that sentence and it was a natural progression for him,” said 70-year-old Gosden. “He is very on the ball and a big big help to me. It has also been from my point of view quite inspiring to work with my son who comes up with far better ideas than his old dad.” —AFP

end of March. “We are not worried about that,” Pujara said about New Zealand’s recent Test series in England. “We will try and focus on these 10 to 12 days which we have for our preparation,” the batsman said in a video shared on the Board of Control for Cricket in India’s (BCCI) website. “If we utilize these days well I feel that our team will be up for the final.”

New Zealand drew the first Test at Lord’s before winning the second match in Birmingham on Sunday. India’s players staged an intra-squad practice game on Friday and Saturday at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton after undergoing quarantine both at home and in England. “When it comes to finals we will give our best and we know that our team has the potential to do well and win the Championship,” Pujara said.

Pujara, who has played county cricket in deteriorating condition after the operation.

A panel of 20 medical experts convened by Argentina’s public prosecutor said last month that Maradona’s treatment was rife with “deficiencies and irregularities” and the medical team had left his survival “to fate”. The panel concluded he “would have had a better chance of survival” with adequate treatment in an appropriate medical facility. Instead, he died in his bed in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighborhood, where he was receiving home care.

‘I did my best’

The others under investigation are Maradona’s psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov, 35, psychologist Carlos Diaz, 29, nurses Ricardo Almiron, 37, and Dahiana Madrid, 36, nursing coordinator Mariano Perroni, 40, and medical coordinator Nancy Forlini, 52. Over two weeks from Monday, they will appear one by one before prosecutors, accompanied by defense lawyers, to reply to the allegations against them.

The hearings, postponed from last month due to

England, said acclimatizing to the fickle weather conditions will be key to India’s success in the final. “Playing in different conditions in a single day here is the most challenging part for a batsman because if it rains you go off the field and then suddenly it stops raining and you start again,” said Pujara. “So there are breaks in between and this is where you need to understand and accept the challenge. Mentally you have to be strong; your concentration needs to be up to the mark.”

India’s star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is expected the best from an upbeat New Zealand side that has performed well under the testing English conditions. “I expect a very well-planned and well-knit New Zealand team to come at us,” Ashwin said. “Having played two Tests, they will definitely come in with an advantage. So we have to adapt to that.” —AFP



Leopoldo Luque

a spike in Coronavirus cases in Argentina, will end with Luque, 39, on June 28. A judge will then decide whether the matter should go to trial in a process expected to last months, even years. All seven accused are prohibited from leaving the country, and risk between eight and 25 years in prison if convicted. —AFP

Djokovic, Federer, Nadal: Who’s the greatest of them all?

PARIS: Novak Djokovic’s French Open triumph, which made him only the third man to win all four majors twice and took him halfway to a rare calendar Grand Slam, has reignited the debate over who is the greatest male player of all time. The 34-year-old Serb wrapped up his second Roland Garros title and 19th Slam trophy with victory from two sets down over Greece’s Stefanos Tsitsipas, 12 years his junior.

It was a triumph built on the foundations of his epic semi-final win against 13-time champion Rafael Nadal, only the Spaniard’s third loss in Paris in 16 years. Now Djokovic is just one Slam away from the record of 20 jointly-held by Nadal and Roger Federer. “We have to start talking about the greatest of all time,” former world number one Mats Wilander told Eurosport.

Seven-time major winner and former number one Justine Henin added: “When Djokovic, Federer and Nadal play at their best, it’s Novak who probably stands out.” Djokovic added the 2021 French Open to his 2016 triumph in Paris and is the first man in 52 years to claim all four majors twice and third overall after Rod Laver and Roy Emerson. He also has a record nine Australian Opens, five at Wimbledon and three US Opens and has won six of the last seven Slams he has contested. Seven of his 19 Slam wins have come since he turned 30 and he has time on his side.

Djokovic is a year younger than Nadal and has the best part of six years on Federer. Should Djokovic defend his Wimbledon title and triumph again in New York, he would become only the third man after Don Budge in 1937 and Laver, in 1962 and 1969, to complete the calendar Grand Slam. Not surprisingly, the mood in the Djokovic camp after Sunday’s 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 win over Tsitsipas was buoyant.

‘Everything is possible’

“Everything is possible,” said Djokovic when asked if he could also become the first man to complete the Golden Slam of all four majors plus Olympic gold in the same year. “As much as Novak is healthy, and he’s healthy right now, he’s in great shape. I think he has the ability to win the Grand Slam for this year. I’m pretty sure,” added longtime coach Marian Vajda. “I think it is much more than possible.”

His victory on Sunday meant Djokovic, who was also two sets down to Lorenzo Musetti in the last 16, was only the third man to win a Slam title after twice coming back from such a deficit. The last man to achieve it was Ted Schroeder at Wimbledon in 1949. Before that, it was Henri Cochet at Wimbledon in 1927. It is not just at the Slams where Djokovic is tightening his grip on the race to be crowned the sport’s greatest. Djokovic has 36 Masters titles, the same as Nadal.

However, he is the only man to have captured all nine of the series and the only one to have won all of them twice. He has spent more time as world number one than his two main rivals with his 325th week at the top starting Monday. Djokovic was also the first of the ‘Big Three’ to break the \$100 million prize money barrier. Sunday’s win took him to the brink of \$150 million. —AFP

Biarritz risk sanctions after pitch invasion

PARIS: Biarritz are facing an inquiry by prosecutors over a mass pitch invasion by rugby fans flouting COVID distancing rules after their derby win over Bayonne on the weekend. The government’s top regional

authority said Sunday it was weighing sanctions against Biarritz for several alleged infringements of coronavirus restrictions, including the pitch invasion.

It said that the 5,000-fan limit was “obviously exceeded” for the Saturday evening contest in Aguilera de Bayonne stadium. It also accused the club of failing to systematically check that fans had a new COVID health pass and of flouting a ban on take-away alcohol sales in the stadium. Biarritz countered that they had implemented “all the measures at its disposal to

respect its health obligations” and that “there was no disturbance of public order”.

“The pitch invasion was the occasion for a joyful moment shared by people who were vaccinated and/or showed a negative COVID test before entering the stadium,” club president Jean-Baptiste Aldige said in a statement. He called it “a happy interlude that was good for everyone in this stressful period”.

Biarritz were left rejoicing after the Basque club secured a return to the top flight of French rugby following a nail-bit-

ing play-off final against neighbors Bayonne that ended in a penalty kick tiebreak. The post-match party after the evening game sparked new calls for the government to lift France’s coronavirus curfew now that people are again allowed to attend large sporting events.

Last week, the government pushed back the curfew from 9:00 pm to 11:00 pm, with a promise to lift it completely on June 30 if a dramatic drop in infections seen recently continues. But bars and restaurants are urging it to end the restrictions sooner, saying

the curfew will prevent them profiting from a highly anticipated France-Germany Euro 2020 football clash on Tuesday night.

The match is in Munich but Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu said over the weekend that no curfew exemption was planned so that fans could gather and watch the game together in bars. An exception was allowed however for the epic French Open semi-final Friday between Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, when the government permitted fans to remain in the stadium past 11 pm. —AFP

Sports

Neymar helps Brazil cruise to Copa win over COVID-depleted Venezuela

BRASILIA: Star forward Neymar netted a penalty and created a second as hosts Brazil eased to a 3-0 victory over a coronavirus-depleted Venezuela on Sunday in the opening match of the 2021 Copa America. Centre-back Marquinhos opened the scored midway through the first half and Gabriel Barbosa sealed the Group B win a minute from time.

In a tournament already delayed a year and moved from its original hosts Argentina and Colombia due to the pandemic, it was fitting that the coronavirus should take center-stage right up to the tournament kick-off. Played in front of an empty Mane Garrincha stadium in Brasilia due to COVID-19 restrictions, Brazil made light of the continent's minnows, who arrived with a makeshift side missing eight players ruled out after testing positive for coronavirus the day before.

Venezuela called up 15 emergency replacements but could still only name seven out of a possible 12 substitutes due to a lack of available players. "It's not just being without key players, we didn't have time to prepare better for this team," complained Venezuela's Portuguese coach Jose Pesceiro. The game went ahead and, predictably, reigning champions Brazil were well on top.

"The three points are important. We had to start well regardless of our rivals having players out," said Brazil captain Casemiro. Following a minute's silence to remember Covid victims, Richarlison was denied from close range by Venezuela's goalkeeper Joel Graterol early on before the forward flicked a header wide from a corner.

Centre-back Eder Militao was also off target with a header while Graterol did well to hold a Danilo volley from distance. Venezuela produced little going forward but Jose Martinez did have the Brazil defence backpedalling with a dangerous burst before winning a cor-

ner that came to nothing. Brazil took the lead on 23 minutes when Richarlison flicked on a Neymar corner that deflected into Marquinhos's path inside the six-yard box, allowing the centre-back to bundle home. Richarlison had a goal ruled out for offside while Neymar incredibly fired wide from 12 yards out as Brazil threatened to put the game to bed before half-time.

Neymar turns creator

It was more of the same after the break as substitute Alex Sandro from distance and Richarlison with a header both shot over the bar. Neymar somehow failed to turn home a cross-cum-shot from Gabriel Jesus from three yards out but on 64 minutes he doubled the lead from the penalty spot. Yohan Cumaná clumsily brought down Danilo in the box and Neymar sent Graterol the wrong way from 12 yards.

The hosts took their foot off the gas but Neymar kept probing and was denied a second by Graterol following a mazy run and shot from inside the box. Neymar then created the third, rounding Graterol before crossing for Gabriel Barbosa to chest home from barely a yard out. "He's developed the ability to create. Right foot, left foot, he's become an unpredictable player," Brazil coach Tite enthused about Neymar.

Edwin Cardona scored the only goal of the game as Colombia held on under second half pressure to begin their Group B campaign with a 1-0 win over Ecuador - who thrashed them 6-1 the last time the sides met in a World Cup qualifier in November. Colombia's goal was a thing of beauty with Cardona taking a short free-kick to Juan Cuadrado, who chipped the ball into the box for Miguel Borja to head down into the path of Cardona to volley home.

It was initially disallowed for offside but a VAR



BRASILIA: Brazil's Neymar (center) and Venezuela's Bernaldo Manzano (right) struggle for the ball during their Conmebol Copa America 2021 football tournament group phase match at the Mane Garrincha Stadium on Sunday. —AFP

review showed that while three Colombian players were beyond the defensive line, Cardona and Borja were onside. Ecuador came close to a second half

equalizer through Pervis Estupinan but Colombia goalkeeper David Ospina brilliantly tipped his free-kick around the post. —AFP



DENVER: Deandre Ayton #22 of the Phoenix Suns scores on a slam dunk against the Denver Nuggets in Game Four of the Western Conference second-round playoff series at Ball Arena on Sunday. —AFP

Suns sweep Nuggets, Bucks roll over Nets

LOS ANGELES: Chris Paul and Devin Booker combined for 71 points as the Phoenix Suns completed a four-game sweep of the Denver Nuggets on Sunday to reach the NBA semi-finals for the first time in 11 years. Paul scored 37 points and Booker finished with 34 points and 11 rebounds as the Suns beat the Nuggets 125-118 to capture the Western Conference second round series 4-0. "I have been waiting for this for a very long time," said Booker. "A lot of people say I haven't played meaningful basketball. This is my time to prove it."

The Suns used a balanced attack to overpower the Nuggets and league MVP Nikola Jokic, who was slapped with a flagrant foul and ejected from the game in the third quarter. Jokic finished with 22 points and 11 rebounds. "They beat us. They whipped our butts," said Jokic. "We have to hold our heads up. If someone beats you, accept it and try to get better." "The whole season was great until (the) last four games."

The Suns will play either the Los Angeles Clippers or the Utah Jazz for a spot in the NBA finals. "We showed what you can do when you come together as a team," said Paul. Mikal Bridges scored 14 points, Deandre Ayton had 12 points and Jae Crowder had 10 rebounds for the Suns. Will Barton had 25 points, Michael Porter scored 20, Monte Morris finished with 19 and Facu Campazzo 14 in the loss.

Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo poured in 34 points and grabbed 12 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks evened their Eastern Conference second round series with a 107-96 rout of the Brooklyn Nets, who lost Kyrie Irving to an injury. Antetokounmpo delivered his best performance of the postseason, shooting 14-of-26 from the field and scoring 12 points in the third quarter for the Bucks, who have won two straight at home to level the best-of-seven series at two games each.

"This says a lot," Antetokounmpo said. "I am really proud of this team. We keep playing together. We put ourselves in a position to win two more games." Game five is Tuesday in Brooklyn. Khristian Middleton chipped in 19 points as the Bucks made 44.3 percent of their shots and hit 16 threes in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of 16,000 at Fiserv Forum.

Their improved perimeter shooting comes after they had managed to make only 22 percent from three-point range in the first three games. Antetokounmpo said their goal is to win at least one of the next two on the road. "We will try to get one from Brooklyn," he said. Kevin Durant finished with 28 points and 13 rebounds but the Nets struggled offensively after Irving exited the game in the second quarter and did not return.

Irving injured his right ankle with just over six minutes left in the first half after he stepped awkwardly on Antetokounmpo's foot. Initial x-rays were negative but Irving was expected to see team doctors again yesterday. "I thought he got hit. When he went to the locker room they said he sprained his ankle. But we got to keep focusing on ourselves," Antetokounmpo said. Irving scored 11 points on five of 11 shooting in 17 minutes before getting hurt. In the first eight games of the postseason, Irving averaged 24.1 points. —AFP

Titmus misses 200m free world record as McKeown flies

ADELAIDE: A sizzling Ariarne Titmus clocked the second fastest 200m freestyle in history yesterday, narrowly missing the 12-year-old world record, while Kaylee McKeown swam the year's quickest 200m medley as they ramped up Olympic preparations. It was an incredible effort by Titmus, who touched in 1min 53.09sec, more than a second better than American superstar Katie Ledecky this season and just outside Federica Pellegrini's world record 1:52.98.

That mark, set by the Italian at the 2009 world championships, came in the era of super-suits, making the Australian's swim on day three of the Olympic trials in Adelaide even more remarkable. "It's pretty crazy. That record is very old and no one really has been close to breaking it in a long time," said Titmus, who posted the second best time ever over 400m,

behind Ledecky, on Sunday. "I knew that tonight if I swam the way that I wanted to race I had a 1:53 in me. I was pretty nervous, but last night's (400m) swim gave me confidence."

Emma McKeon went out hard and led through 100m before Titmus turned on the afterburners to storm home. The versatile McKeon, who had already booked her ticket to Tokyo in the 100m butterfly, ended second in 1:54.74 to also qualify. "I definitely gave it everything I had," said McKeon, whose time was the fourth fastest this year.

A day after smashing the 100m backstroke world record, McKeown backed up by touching in 2mins 08.19secs in the 200m medley, the fastest this year ahead of American rival Madsyn Cox. "I didn't get much sleep. But you have to come back this morning (for the heats) and tonight, I wouldn't have it any other way, we're racing tough," said McKeown. "There was some pressure off because we knew I had made the team, but that doesn't mean that we give up on the rest of our races. It's just heads up, bums down and give it our best."

Tessa Wallace finished second but outside the tough qualifying standard set by Swimming Australia. To



ADELAIDE: Ariarne Titmus reacts after winning the women's 400m freestyle final, setting a new Australian and Commonwealth record, during day two of the Australian Olympic swimming trials on Sunday. —AFP

make the team for Japan, Australian athletes must match or better the time needed to make the final at the 2019 world championships. McKeown will also swim the 200m backstroke in Adelaide, with American Regan Smith's world record on the line. —AFP

Hackett says abusive coaches must be banned

ADELAIDE: Australian swimming great Grant Hackett demanded yesterday that abusive coaches be banned after complaints about "misogynistic perverts" and as new claims of "degrading" conduct emerged. The former Olympic champion called the allegations shocking and said the sooner those at fault were "weeded out" the better.

"We need to be supporting young girls, we need to be supporting young boys that are in the sport and progressing," Hackett, considered one

of the greatest distance swimmers ever, told Channel Nine. "And we need to make sure that none of this stuff takes place because it is extremely disappointing to hear it."

Swimming Australia has pledged to set up an independent female panel to investigate after complaints last week about "misogynistic perverts" by dual Olympic silver medalist Maddie Groves. The target of her comments was not clear, but Groves pulled out of the ongoing Australian Olympic swimming trials.

Former elite swimmer Jenny McMahon, a Commonwealth Games gold medalist who is now a senior academic at the University of Tasmania, yesterday claimed the sport had long suffered from a "degrading and abusive" culture. She said she had spent 14 years interviewing hundreds of swimmers and coaches, uncovering a pattern of

"toxic" coaching habits. "It's a patriarchal, male-dominated culture, with a guru fixation - it's dysfunctional," McMahon told The Australian newspaper. "It looks like all smiles, gold medals and PBs (personal bests) to the outsider, but it leaves a trail of broken athletes and coaches when they do not conform and perform."

Hackett, who won the 1,500 m freestyle at both the 2000 Sydney Olympics and in Athens four years later, said it was disturbing to hear. "The people that are partaking in that sort of behavior, they need to be weeded out of the sport. We need to get rid of those people and we need to be progressing this sport forward," he said. But he added that he believed it was only a "few people" and overall "you've got a very positive culture, you've got a very supportive culture". —AFP

Kalisz grabs first spot on US swimming team

OMAHA: Chase Kalisz punched his ticket to the Tokyo Olympics Sunday, winning the men's 400m individual medley at the US swimming trials in a sizzling 4min 09.09sec with retired superstar Michael Phelps cheering him on all the way. Kalisz, silver medalist in the event at the 2016 Rio Games, edged ahead of 19-year-old challenger Carson Foster on the breaststroke leg and held on through a furious closing freestyle leg that saw Jay Litherland overtake Foster on the final lap to finish second in 4:10.33 and secure a chance to improve on his fifth place finish in Rio.

It was a devastating outcome for Foster, who pushed hard through the opening butterfly and backstroke and at the halfway stage had a two-second lead on the field. "I knew my race plan. I knew Carson was going to take it out fast (but) I know where I need to

be to make my move off the breaststroke," said Kalisz, who became the second-fastest performer in the world this year behind Japan's Daiya Seto - who clocked a 4:09.02 at the Japanese championships in April.

After he and Litherland exchanged a hug, the veterans consoled Foster. And as Kalisz gave an on-deck TV interview he got a hug from former training partner Phelps, who was in the stands for the opening night of the eight-day meeting. He said Phelps, whose world record of 4:03.84 set in 2008 still stands, had long been a source of advice and support in tackling the daunting 400 IM.

"Apart from Jay Litherland he's the man training partner in my career," Kalisz said of Phelps, adding it was "awesome he's at trials". Kalisz's time was his fastest since 2018. He didn't qualify for the 400m final at the 2019 world championships, when he was battling a shoulder injury. "I don't want to say I wasn't prepared last year, because I was," Kalisz said. "But I'm 27 now. My body needs rest a lot more than it ever has."

The first night of competition also produced a first-time Olympian in 19-year-old Emma Weyant, who rallied from third at the 300m mark to win the women's



OMAHA: Chase Kalisz of the United States reacts after competing in the Men's 400m individual medley final during Day One of the 2021 US Olympic Team Swimming Trials at CHI Health Center on Sunday. —AFP

400m medley in a world-leading 4:33.81. Weyant powered past Hali Flickinger and Melanie Margalis, Flickinger earning a spot on a second Olympic team with a runner-up finish in the second-fastest time in the world this season: 4:33.96. —AFP

US breaststroker King fears pandemic enabled dopers

OMAHA: US breaststroke star Lilly King, an outspoken critic of swimming's efforts to control doping, says she fears the coronavirus pandemic has enabled cheaters heading into the Tokyo Olympics. "Definitely concerning, but especially with COVID," King the 100m breaststroke gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Games and world record-holder at 50 and 100m, said as she prepared for the US Olympic swimming trials that started Sunday.

"I would definitely say some of the countries

that have not been as trusted are probably taking advantage of the time that they had without testing," said King, who launched her trials campaign yesterday in the 100m breaststroke. "I know that I have been tested over 20 times in the past year, so I know the Americans are being well taken care of," King said. "But I think, unfortunately, the Americans can control what they can control, but the rest of the world I'm not so sure."

King has long been a critic of doping in the sport and international governing body FINA's doping control efforts. After winning the 100m breaststroke final in Rio, the then-19-year-old King refused to shake hands with Russian silver medalist Yuliya Efimova, who had served a 16-month ban for taking a banned steroid. While their rivalry has become less hostile, King says she still objects to racing against those who have served

bans - and would do so even if they are from the United States.

"My stances are clear," she said. "I don't think people should be cheating. I don't know what the repercussions for doping bans should be. I think that's up to the organizations. But I don't want to race people who are cheating, who have served bans."

USA Swimming president and chief executive Tim Hinchey also voiced concerns that a "black-out" on anti-doping measures in some areas during the pandemic, when competition shut down and lockdowns that limited travel and face-to-face contact disrupted out-of-competition testing. But he expressed optimism that FINA, under the guidance of newly-elected president Husain Al-Musallam, was moving in the right direction. —AFP



Germany with questions to answer ahead of France clash at Euro 2020

MUNICH: World champions France open their Euro 2020 campaign today against an embattled Germany team eager to rediscover their best form in the first clash of two traditional European heavyweights in this year's tournament. Didier Deschamps' France head to Munich for the Group F game with a feud brewing between forwards Kylian Mbappe and Olivier Giroud but are still the title favorites, while the Germans are struggling and under pressure.

After 15 years in charge, their coach Joachim Loew will step down after the European Championship and wants to forge a mentality "like 2014" when his squad "pulled together" to win the World Cup. The French need no reminding of Brazil, where they bowed out in the quarter-finals when a Mats Hummels header sealed victory for Germany at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.

The French got their revenge when Antoine Griezmann scored both goals in a 2-0 semi-final win at Euro 2016 before the hosts lost to Portugal in the final. France won the last meeting between the neighboring countries in 2018 when Griezmann again scored both goals to seal a 2-1 Nations League win in Paris.

Germany face a tough start to Euro 2020, with a match against holders Portugal four days after the France game before finishing their group campaign against Hungary. Tension is already bubbling in the French squad after Giroud, who scored twice off the bench in a 3-0 friendly warm-up win over Bulgaria, complained about the passes he received, which Mbappe took to heart.

It promises to be a heated match after Chelsea defender Antonio Ruediger admitted Germany may need to be a "little dirty" to counter the French attack. "Germany have good, young players and I don't believe they are as weak as they were," said France's Bayern Munich defender Benjamin Pavard.

Germany wary of France front three

Loew, 61, is desperate to land Germany a record fourth European title and enhance his reputation, dented after his side failed to get out of their 2018 World Cup group. Three years after that debacle in Russia, Loew must hope his shaky defense can cope with France, who could name a fearsome front three of Mbappe, Griezmann and the re-called Karim Benzema. The Germans are expected to play with a 3-5-2 formation in an attempt to counter France's obvious threat.

But Germany have conceded 20 goals, keeping just three clean sheets, in their last 13 matches. Loew has assured fans that his players will wear the shirt "with pride". "(We will) have to go through hell and be capable of suffering if we want to achieve something. We will give everything," he said. Germany reached at least the semi-finals of every major tournament from the 2006 World Cup to Euro 2016, but the last three years have been bleak.

After the World Cup disaster, they finished bottom of their 2018-19 Nations League group, were thrashed 6-0 by Spain last November and slumped to a 2-1 home defeat by minnows North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying in March. "The blows of the last three years have left their mark," admitted



Thomas Mueller



Kylian Mbappe

center-back Hummels, who along with Thomas Mueller has been recalled after Loew reversed his 2019 decision to axe the pair.

Bayern's Joshua Kimmich says the team are

seeking redemption from their own fans. "We have only disappointed people over the last few years," he conceded. "We can't always hide and say that we have a lot of quality. Now it's up to us." —AFP

'Phenomenal' Sterling sets tone for England

LONDON: Gareth Southgate says "phenomenal" Raheem Sterling has set the tone for England's Euro 2020 campaign after the Manchester City forward silenced his doubters in Sunday's 1-0 victory against Croatia. Southgate's side made a positive start to their bid to win the European Championship thanks to Sterling's second-half strike at Wembley.

With England laboring to break down resolute Croatia, it was Sterling who latched onto Kalvin Phillips' exquisite pass to fire home from 10 yards. Sterling's first goal in a major tournament after a series of flops on the biggest international stages could not have come at a more vital moment. Failure to win their Group D opener, which looked a distinct possibility until Sterling scored, would have been a setback for England.

Sterling would also have endured fresh questions about his form if England had flopped after his lackluster end to the season with City. When Sterling was named in Southgate's starting line-up, there were some who claimed it was a mistake to pick him instead of Jack Grealish. The critics pointed to Sterling's tame display in City's Champions League final defeat against Chelsea and his long spells on the bench for the Premier League champions.

But Southgate is a firm believer in Sterling's qualities and his faith was rewarded as the 26-year-old tore into Croatia to prove his point. Ignoring the sweltering temperatures, Sterling set the tempo in England's high-energy opening, then came to the rescue when they were running out of ideas after the interval. "He's been a reliable performer for us for a long period of time,"



Raheem Sterling

Southgate said. "We can't have all the burden of scoring on Harry Kane's shoulders. We need the wide players to chip in."

"I'm delighted for him as he went quite a few tournament matches without scoring before today. He set the tone with his pass to Phil (Foden) early on today. His work without the ball was phenomenal, positionally and his desire to track."

The 'Football's coming home' anthem belted out by England's fans during the post-match lap of honour carried extra meaning for Sterling. Linked with a move away from City after scoring once in his last 16 appearances at the end of this season, Sterling found comfort in his return to north London, where he grew up just a few miles from Wembley. "It's a great feeling for me playing at Wembley, not far from where I grew up as a young boy and seeing the stadium being built," Sterling said.

"There are a lot of different reasons I haven't scored for my club and that's totally irrelevant now. I'm here with England, I'm enjoying my football and that's the most important thing. I just tried to focus and come into this tournament with a clear head. I know what I can bring to the team and it's as simple as that." —AFP

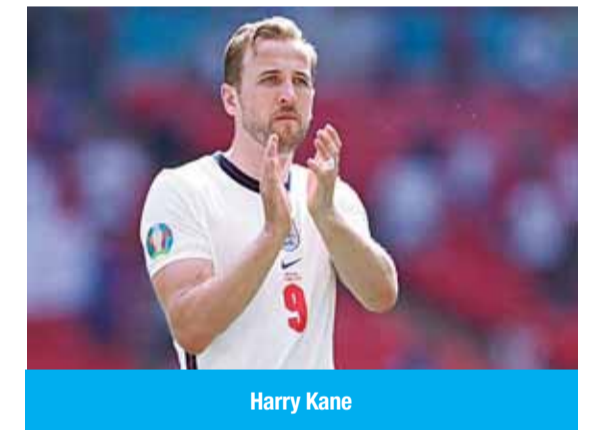
Kane impressed as England's new gen cope with pressure

LONDON: Harry Kane says England's new generation passed their first test with flying colors after Gareth Southgate's side kicked off their Euro 2020 campaign with a 1-0 win against Croatia. Southgate has infused England's squad with a vibrant crop of emerging stars and Kane was relieved to see them cope with the pressure of playing in a major tournament for the first time.

While the experienced Raheem Sterling grabbed England's second-half winner at Wembley on Sunday, Kalvin Phillips, Declan Rice, Phil Foden, Mason Mount and Tyrone Mings played their part in the vital victory. Those five are all new to the unique demands of playing for England during a tournament, with the additional burden of having to live up to the expectations of the home fans at Wembley.

England captain Kane was especially impressed with Leeds midfielder Phillips, who provided the assist for Sterling's strike as the Three Lions won their opening game at a European Championship for the first time. "He has been brilliant," Kane told beIN Sports. "He has just come off the back of a shoulder injury as well. He has been good in training and working hard to be fit for the first game. Obviously he was selected and did a fantastic job and there were a few guys out there playing their first game for England in a major tournament and they did their country proud."

Southgate raised eyebrows with his decision to play right-back Kieran Trippier on the other side of the defence, while he left in-form playmaker Jack Grealish on the bench, with Ben Chilwell and Jadon Sancho absent from the matchday squad. But Kane



Harry Kane

backed Southgate and said everyone would have to play their part if England were to become European champions for the first time.

"That is why he is doing his job and the fans are debating. That is part of football," he said. "We have got a great squad and you can understand everyone has got their own opinions on who should play. But we had a great team performance and it is important we use the whole squad throughout the tournament. It isn't going to be the same team every week."

Tottenham striker Kane finished as top scorer in the Premier League this season and won the 2018 World Cup Golden Boot. But he was unable to make an impact against Croatia before he was replaced by Jude Bellingham late on. Kane often dropped deep in a bid to dictate play from midfield, yet could not exert his usual influence.

"It has always been a part of my game," he said. "Sometimes when I drop deep it allows space for the wingers or the midfielders to run in behind. "It is always about doing my bit for the team. If it means dropping deep, I will drop deep. If it means staying high, I will stay high." —AFP

Szalai, Hungary's breakout prospect

BUDAPEST: Euro 2020 outsiders Hungary's prospects in a daunting Group F may largely depend on RB Leipzig duo Peter Gulacsi and Willi Orban keeping stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Kylian Mbappe at bay. But a new defensive stalwart has come on board in Fenerbahce's Attila Szalai, 23, a regular fixture in the Hungary team since making his debut under coach Marco Rossi in 2019.

With Hungary's most creative player Dominik Szoboszlai - also at RB Leipzig - out through injury, Szalai told Hungarian media he "expects to be busy" tackling star-studded opponents. The modest Magyars face title holders Portugal (June 15) and world champions France (June 19) in the Puskas Arena

in Budapest, before taking on Germany in Munich (June 23). "But we want to cause a surprise, and win at least a point, or better still several points," the powerful center-back, who can also play on the left, said in an interview.

Tall and broad-shouldered, his career has ascended swiftly from humble beginnings. Still playing for lowly Hungarian side Mezokovesd just two years ago he moved first to Cypriot side Apollon Limassol in June 2019, before joining Turkish giants Fenerbahce last January. Quickly established as a fan favorite at the Istanbul club, Szalai, who likes to roam forward and join set-pieces, scored three goals in 22 appearances this season.

"It would be the greatest day of my life if I scored a goal for the national team," said Szalai. The defender's "seamless transition from Cyprus to the Turkish top tier has been impressive," Hungarian football journalist Gergely Marosi told AFP. "He has also stood out

with commanding performances for Hungary, has a good chemistry with defensive partner Willi Orban, and proved he can hold his ground against tough opposition," said Marosi.

The Magyars take an 11-game unbeaten run into their opener against Portugal, in large part thanks to solidity at the back. "If Szalai doesn't get injured or his frankly amazing development does not stall, a 'top five' league career is definitely possible," Marosi told AFP. "Making another step up this summer might be moving too early, but he can test himself against the world's best forwards now," he said.

With La Liga champions Atletico Madrid and Sevilla already expressing interest, as well as Premier League sides West Ham and Leicester, Szalai will be keenly watched at Euro 2020. "Every player wants to play in the three biggest leagues in the world, so like everyone else, I have dreams like this. I want to play at the highest level possible," said Szalai. —AFP



Attila Szalai

Ronaldo ready for 'perfect' Euro debut in front of full house

BUDAPEST: Ronaldo said yesterday he was looking forward to beginning Euro 2020 in front of a packed Puskas Arena against Hungary as he prepares to lead defending champions Portugal in their search for a repeat triumph. At 36 years old Ronaldo is set take the field in front of 68,000 fans in the Hungarian capital on Tuesday in what should be Portugal's simplest match in a tough Group F alongside Germany and world champions France.

"It's perfect. I wish every single venue could host a

full house. It's great for viewers and players, but sadly it's not up to us to decide," said Ronaldo. "We know the pandemic has its influence. I wish we could always play before a full house." Portugal have lost Joao Cancelo from their squad to Covid-19 after the Manchester City right-back tested positive for the virus on Sunday, but Ronaldo says the team are not worrying about the pandemic.

"We don't talk about COVID because we're tired of it. It's a sad situation but we're focused... Nothing will shake us... We're just focused on playing. I think the team is ready, physically and emotionally. The players are young but that doesn't stop us from dreaming. I know all the players are ready."

The Portugal captain is set to become the first person to play in at least one match at five European Championships, and also has another record in sight. He needs just five more goals to equal Iranian Ali Daei's all-

time mark of 109 international goals, a feasible target at this summer's tournament should Portugal go deep.

"I'm not the same player I was 18 years ago, 10 years ago, five years ago... you keep adjusting," said Ronaldo. "I'm more mature, if a player wants to play for many years he needs to learn how to adapt. From 18 to 36 years old I've learned to adjust and adapt, and I've always been able to win personally and collectively."

A win over the Magyars would go a long way to ensuring Portugal qualify for the next round at least as one of the tournament's best third-placed teams as coach Fernando Santos targets two Euro titles in a row with a talented squad. "Right now we think we have what it takes to win the cup," said Santos. "There are very good opponents, seven or eight teams are playing to take the trophy home, and there are dark horses who also think they have a chance. The only difference is that we hold the title." —AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo

Scotland stunned by Czechs' Schick

GLASGOW: Scotland's long-awaited return to a major international tournament was ruined by Patrik Schick's slick finishing as the Czech Republic won 2-0 at Hampden yesterday to move top of Euro 2020 Group D. Schick's header just before half-time opened the scoring, but it was his stunning strike from just inside the Scotland half after the break that will live in the memory as one of the all-time great European Championship goals.

After a 23-year wait to qualify for a major tournament, Scotland's hopes of making more history by getting out of the group for the first time now look slim. Steve Clarke's men face England next on Friday at Wembley before hosting World Cup finalists Croatia at Hampden on June 22. Playing in front of fans at Hampden for the first time since November 2019 with 12,000 in attendance, Scotland made a nervous start.

David Marshall was the hero of penalty shootout wins over the Zionist entity and Serbia to qualify and was needed early on to turn Schick's powerful effort at the near post behind. The hosts were desperately missing the driving runs and poise on the ball normally provided by Kieran Tierney on the left side of a back three. Clarke has settled on a 3-5-2 to make way for two of the Premier League's best left-backs in the same team.

Without the Arsenal defender, Liverpool's Andy Robertson was his side's biggest threat with a series of rampaging runs. His cross was turned narrowly wide by Lyndon Dykes at the near post before the Scotland captain was denied a moment to remember by Tomas Vaclik. Robertson burst onto Ryan Christie's pass but his shot that was headed for the top corner was tipped over by the Sevilla goalkeeper.

A cagey game of few chances burst into life after Schick's towering leap put the visitors in front three minutes before half-time. Scotland were slow to react after initially clearing a corner and the Bayer Leverkusen forward rose highest to flick home Vladimir Coufal's cross. Marshall was called into action to make two quick saves from Schick and Vladimir Darida in an explosive start to the second-half.

But twice Scotland were inches away from level-



GLASGOW: Czech Republic's forward Patrik Schick (right) scores his team's first goal during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group D football match between Scotland and Czech Republic at Hampden Park yesterday. — AFP

ing when Jack Hendry's dipping effort came back off the crossbar before Vaclik clawed away a mishit clearance from Tomas Kalas. However, the home side were stunned by a moment of brilliance from Schick on 52 minutes as he spotted Marshall off his line from halfway and bent in an incredible shot

from just inside the Scotland half.

Chances continued to come and go for Scotland as Stuart Armstrong's shot was deflected onto the roof of the net and Vaclik's outstretched leg denied Dykes from close range. But it was Schick who had the best opportunity late on to complete a memo-

orable hat-trick when he fired too close to Marshall. Beating old rivals England would more than make amends for the Tartan Army's disappointment, but Scotland now have a mountain to climb if they are to prevent their long-awaited adventure ending in familiar fashion. — AFP



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