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V O L V O

Fully vaccinated residents can return to Kuwait from Aug 1

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Local

PHOTO OF THE DAY

Seif Palace was built in 1904 from local materials such as clay, rocks, limestone, wood and metals taking on an Islamic architectural style by using arches and Islamic decorations. — File photo by Ahmad Alfaiakawi / KUNA



We Still Have Time To Change

IN MY VIEW

By Nejouad Al-Yagout

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It is disconcerting and alarming that so many people in our society are distressed. Women are distressed for many reasons, ranging from fear of violence and harassment to the fact that there is not a single female representing our society in parliament. Expatriates are distressed because they face daily abuse and discrimination in a country that seems hellbent on getting rid of them, discarding its heritage of values. Locals are distressed because of the increased corruption, lawmakers without a vision, and projects that never see fruition due to antiquated bureaucratic procedures. The stateless are distressed because they have fought in our military, protected us in the police force, are loyal to this country (their country), yet are still considered outsiders, and a “problem” that nobody seems able to solve.

Lawmakers are distressed because they cannot see eye to eye on anything and are constantly battling one another. Environmentalists are distressed because after hours of beach cleaning and raising awareness of the damage being done, they return the next day to another shore strewn with plastic, glass bottles, and cigarette butts, and yet another section of the sea polluted with dead fish floating to the surface. Activists are distressed because there are foreign workers who are being exploited, some employees who are not paid on time, and many international staff members who have worked for decades in a company but whose jobs are on the line. Artists are distressed because, unlike other countries, they cannot make a living through their art. And families are distressed

because drug intake and divorce rates are increasing.

People are so distressed that whenever there is a holiday, they are on the first flight out, escaping to another destination. And for those who cannot afford to travel constantly, there are back-up plans to retire elsewhere, migration possibilities to discuss with the family, and money to save rather than spend—just in case what appears to be inevitable (if we continue along this course) happens.

But even with so little to celebrate, hope lives and breathes within each of us. And we can bring that hope into fruition. But we have to engage ourselves first. And it is the locals who have to do the work. Anyone else may get imprisoned or deported or fired or berated or threatened. Yes, it is the duty of locals to do this. Together. One citizen at a time.

We can create a Kuwait that will be a haven for locals and residents alike, for lawmakers, for men, women, children, the environment, for the stateless, and for all; a Kuwait which will top lists of happiness for all its inhabitants. But we have to admit we have a serious problem. We have to admit that our happiness index is in dire need of replenishment. We have to admit that love, harmony, kindness, unity and inclusivity are in low supply. We cannot get angry or offended when our faults are brought to the surface. What is required is self-reflection and humility to be able to transform ourselves and our country. We have to be willing to change in order to dissolve who we have become today. Because who we are today is in desperate need of transformation.

When we return to the humility and hospitality of our ancestors, when we live from the goodness of our forefathers and foremothers who cherished morality, when we stop acting as though we are superior, entitled; when we insist on the rights of everyone living here, when we stop destroying our environment, when we educate people on reckless driving, when we no longer fire or abuse people because of their nationality, we will be able to witness Kuwait rise like a phoenix from the ashes. This becomes a possibility when we

reward residents for their loyalty and commitment to Kuwait, when we treat their elderly as our own elderly, when we live with one another in harmony and respect. This also becomes a possibility when we create laws that apply to anyone living here, local or otherwise. When we fulfill the vision of our foreparents and build a society in which our legacy is not a sense of entitlement but a universal code of superior moral conduct, we can rise. When we continue to find ways to purify our minds and hearts, we will create a Kuwait which benefits all. When we remember that oil does not last forever and we focus on other ways to ensure a stable future, Kuwait will rise.

We still have time to ensure women are protected and respected. We still have time to make amends to our non-Kuwaiti brothers and sisters. We still have time to protect the sea, the earth, the desert of our country. We still have time to build more libraries and cultural centers in our country and encourage people to read and share knowledge not just random facts and social media videos. We still have time to travel, not just for entertainment and to satiate our material longings, but also to expand our awareness and to learn about other cultures and connect with human beings across the globe. We still have time to focus on education and work ethic. We still have time to give the stateless benefits and citizenship. We still have time to give foreigners who have lived here for generations the right to buy property in our country. We still have time to vote women into our parliament and to ensure that any member we vote in, male or female, is humanitarian and charitable. We still have time to integrate “others” into our society. We still have time to treat all residents equally, rather than admire some and look down on others depending on their nationality or status. We also still have time to treat fellow citizens equally, ridding ourselves of various superiorities and the arrogance of bloodlines, which have no place in society.

The fact that the word “change” exists signifies that change can be implemented.

Kuwait Times

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Local

PHOTO FEATURE



Exploring the Bait Al-Othman Museum

After months of closure, museums in Kuwait reopened this week to crowds of visitors. One of the most popular is the historical Bait Al-Othman Museum. Located on Abdullah Al-Othman Street in Hawally, the museum aims to document the pre-oil era of Kuwait's history and culture.

Inaugurated in 2013, Bait Al-Othman was renovated by the Kuwait Heritage

Team, which has preserved noteworthy and historical artifacts of the country in its beautifully refurbished rooms. The museum is built in traditional Kuwaiti-style architecture with big courtyards and wooden ceilings, doors and windows. Its parking lot is full of old cars from the Historical, Vintage and Classic Cars Museum of Kuwait.

— Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Local

Friday, June 18, 2021



The museum has rare historical items and antiques from old Kuwaiti houses. Various handicrafts and Kuwaiti dhow models are also on display. Other items include old movies and memorabilia of Kuwaiti companies such as Kuwait Oil Company and Kuwait

Airways, with outfits and pictures of the old airport on display.

The museum's visiting hours are Mornings: 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and Afternoons: 4:30 pm to 8:00 pm. It is open daily except on Friday mornings. The entry fee is KD 1.



Local



Lifelong residents told to go home

By Ben Garcia

George's father arrived in Kuwait in 1977. He worked for 44 years in the shipping industry and retired in March 2021. George and his brother were raised here, completed high school here and returned back to Kuwait after obtaining degrees in India. They both live here with their families and have no one back in India. But now George's family faces a terrible dilemma. The father who first built their life in Kuwait, and the mother who raised him and his brother here, may not be allowed to stay.

When George's father retired, George and his brother tried to transfer both parents' visas to dependent visas. Kuwait private sector law prohibits work for residents after 65 years of age. But residents may sponsor their elderly parents in some cases. However with the pandemic in full swing, the Public Authority of Manpower has effectively stopped the transfer of work to dependent visas, especially for the elderly.

"In early March, I tried my best to get them a visa. I was only able to get a short term visa extension for a few months. Instead Farwaniya Immigration insists that my parents, who have lived almost their whole adult lives in Kuwait, should be sent back to India," he said. "I went to the immigration and literally begged for their dependent visa, but they rejected my pleadings. I was very disappointed because they did not even bother to listen to my parents' request. They told us to leave Kuwait, let our parents go back to India," George told Kuwait Times.

"If they are back in India during this time of pandemic who will take care of them? My brother and I are both in Kuwait working and no one is available to look after them. At least we want to show our respect and our gratitude to our parents during the remaining days of their lives. But we are being compelled by the immigration policy to send them back to India," he said.

"The whole lives of my parents were spent in Kuwait. They were once a contributing part of the workforce in Kuwait and now that they are old and unable to work because of age, we must send them away?"

The rules and policies regulating residents' stay in Kuwait fails to take into consideration long time residents who might spend their entire working life here.

All residents — those born and raised here, those whose entire families are here, those with businesses and those who just came to this country recently for short term contracts — are treated the same when it comes to visas. They must be sponsored by a local company, work or be under a dependent visa, and these visas must be renewed annually.

There are more than 3 million foreign residents living and working in Kuwait. Over the last several years a growing backlash against foreigners has played out, with increasingly xenophobic statements by members of parliament and government policies aimed at reducing the foreign population. A government effort to Kuwaitize the civil service has also led to the mass firing of foreigners working in the public sector. There are an estimated 365,000 expats stranded abroad due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, of which 147,000 with legal residency permits that have now expired.

Kuwait also recently implemented a rule prohibiting the renewal of work visas for residents aged 60+ without a college degree. As a consequence, they are expecting to lose more than 50,000 residents from this age category.

Real stories: Residents over 60 worried about life after Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

Majeed Abdulsattar arrived in Kuwait when he was 11 years old in the early 1960s. He's spent almost his entire life in this country, working, building a family, making a home. Now at 62-year-old, the Iranian resident worries that this may be his last year here.

The Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) issued a decree last year halting the renewal of work visas (article 18) for residents in the private sector who are 60 years or old and who do not hold a university degree.

"I've spent my whole life here and can't imagine leaving now. Kuwait is my home and I hope the authorities will change this decision soon," Abdulsattar told Kuwait Times.

Abdulsattar is just one of around 56,000 people who will be forced to leave the country due to their age. Some of them may be able to transfer their visas to article 21 (dependent) if their children are living and working here. But many may be stuck with no other option and will be forced to leave their jobs and their life in Kuwait.

When Abdulsattar heard of this decision, he was saddened. His wife and six children live in his village in Iran and he is their sole supporter. He has a daughter in Kuwait, who is married and a housewife. After spending over 50 years in Kuwait, it's very hard for him to build a new life back home, and it's impossible to find a job in this late age.

Abdulsattar works as a driver in a private company, earning KD 230 a month. He describes the situation there as very hard, with even his married daughters depending on his support. When he renewed his residency last July, his

employer told him he won't be able to renew his residency next year due to the new PAM regulations.

There are many other similar cases.

Sundus, 60, has resided in Kuwait for more than 40 years with her husband, who is 63. They don't have children, and they both sell vegetables from a small stall in Souq Mubarakia. In a very depressing video on a TV channel, she said that she hopes to get sick along with her husband and die and be buried in Kuwait, rather than being forced to leave the country, as she and her husband have nobody in their home country of Iraq.

From the business owners' point of view, they are forced to release their employees who have reached the age of 60. And now in the present situation of the pandemic and the closure of the country, no new employees are allowed to enter, and many employers face problems with hiring skilled staff.

Since PAM issued this decision last year, it has been criticized many times, not only in the media, but by businesses and even members of parliament. Many different statements have been made by PAM officials that amendments may come soon to provide a solution or cancel the decision.

One of the suggested solutions is to pay KD 1,000 annually in health insurance for this category of employees. But this doesn't seem very realistic, as the majority of these employees work in low-paid jobs and won't be able to pay this amount annually. Also, their employers won't agree to pay this exorbitant amount in most cases.

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Local

Kuwait Airways resumes weekly flights to London

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways resumed commercial flights to London yesterday, with one flight per week. "Our first flight to London yesterday reached the complete seating capacity of the Boeing B777-300," Acting CEO Essa Al-Haddad said.

"The Boeing B777-300 provides full entertainment through the latest technology, which makes the flight real fun, especially in the Royal and Business classes. Also, delicious meals are served according to international health procedures. The crew is wearing facemasks and using sanitizers for the passengers' safety during the flights," added Haddad.

These health procedures are important for resuming commercial flights that stopped due to the pandemic. "The pandemic negatively affected the aviation sector worldwide. Kuwait Airways is ready to fully operate its commercial flights to all destinations. London is one of the most important destinations, especially for stu-

dents, medical treatment passengers and tourists," he added.

Passengers can book their tickets through various channels. "Our clients can visit Kuwait Airways' offices at The Avenues mall, Ministries Complex and Farwaniya office to access all our services. They can also call our hotline 171, download the app or visit our website. They can also visit our office at Baker Street in London," stressed Haddad.

Kuwait Airways also applies all health measures set by the health ministry and civil aviation. "These include total disinfection of aircraft after each flight, in addition to disinfection of all transport machines, buses and baggage transport vehicles. Furthermore, all Kuwait Airways staff respect social distancing and remind passengers to follow health precautions," he concluded.

The Boeing B777-300 wide-body aircraft is used for long- and medium-distance flights. It has 334 seats, including eight seats in Royal Class, 36 seats in Business Class and 290 seats in Economy Class.



KUWAIT: Passengers check in yesterday as Kuwait Airways resumed commercial flights to London. — KUNA



BEIRUT: Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan honors Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer yesterday. —KUNA

Lebanon commends Kuwait's donations

BEIRUT: Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan yesterday commended Kuwait's humanitarian donations during crises. This was stated while signing an agreement to provide COVID-19 vaccines with Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer in the presence of Kuwait's Ambassador to Lebanon Abdulaal Al-Qinaei, as part of the vaccination campaign to immunize the society, which also includes Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

In a press conference held after signing the deal, Hassan praised what Kuwait offers through KRCS in terms of continuous help during crises experienced by people in Lebanon. KRCS allocated half a million US dollars to provide Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, which will benefit the Lebanese people, as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

Meanwhile, Sayer told KUNA that this is a precedent for international humanitarian organizations because the world is lacking vaccines for everyone, so they thought about the forgotten refugees. He thanked the Lebanese health ministry which provided vaccines to refugees. Kuwait is making every effort to enhance the humanitarian situation of various members of society, he underlined. — KUNA

Kuwait, Egypt launch initiative to support talented media people

CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and chairman of Egypt's Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) Karam Gabr agreed to launch an initiative to support talented media people from the two countries. This came on Wednesday during a meeting between the two officials in Cairo, in the presence of Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Al-Thuwaieth and the minister's delegation.

The minister described Kuwaiti-Egyptian media relations as "very distinguished". He underlined the importance of the media in strengthening bonds with all Arab countries, mainly Egypt. He noted that the media is crucial for overcoming challenges facing the Arab world through raising youth awareness on risks facing their countries.

Meanwhile, Gabr hoped cooperation between Kuwait and Egypt in the next period would have an impact on media policies of the two countries. He also expressed his hope for increasing dialogue and sharing views on different issues that serve the common interests. He called for overhauling conventional media outlets, noting that the Arab world is facing challenges from e-media, particularly social media.

Thuwaieth stressed the importance of launching an Egyptian-Kuwait media forum to share views and expertise on all levels, pointing to a media legacy in all media and cultural institutions of the two countries. He urged developing creativity and communication between Egypt and Kuwait, and investing in youth capabilities for a better future. In addition, the two sides agreed on forming a team to start setting a working paper and a strategy for the initiative. — KUNA

GCC urges Iraq, UN to complete maritime demarcation with Kuwait

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministerial council called on Iraq and the UN Wednesday to complete the demarcation of maritime border with Kuwait after the marker 162. In its final statement of the 148th session hosted by Riyadh, the council renewed its support to Security Council resolution no. 2017 of 2013 regarding referring the issues of Kuwaiti missing persons, properties and archives to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The council said that it looks forward to Iraq's continued cooperation to guarantee progress in these dossiers.

GCC member states agreed on Wednesday that common challenges lie ahead some four decades after the bloc's inception, highlighting the countries' "intertwined fates". The GCC has "risen to prominence" given its growing contributions towards global peace and security, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al-Zayani said as he chaired bloc-wide talks on a foreign ministerial level with his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah among the participants.

He chronicled the bloc's most notable accomplishments, saying member states should not "rest on their laurels" but strive for greater achievements that would help bring common aspirations to fruition. On the bloc's primary concerns, he said the Palestinian issue takes precedence over other matters, emphasizing the ultimate goal of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He recalled a gathering of GCC leaders in the historic Saudi city of Al-Ula earlier this year, which yielded a resolution to a dispute between Qatar and Gulf states, hailing the event as a "significant show of Gulf solidarity and unity". The Bahraini foreign minister shored up support for a Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Iran-allied Houthi group, saying the bloc supports all measures Riyadh takes to preserve its security and stability in the face of the "Houthi onslaught." — KUNA

Local

Fully vaccinated residents can return to Kuwait from Aug 1

Unvaccinated people cannot enter malls, cafes, salons from June 27

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday decided that fully vaccinated expats who have valid residency in Kuwait can return to the country from August 1, lifting a five-month ban as part of efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic. In a series of decisions at an extraordinary meeting, the Cabinet also said starting from June 27, unvaccinated people will not be allowed to dine at restaurants and cafes, enter malls exceeding 6,000 square meters in area, health clubs and salons. Entry is allowed to people who have received two doses of a COVID vaccine or at least 14 days after taking one dose.

The Cabinet also decided that Kuwaiti citizens will not be allowed to leave the country from August 1 unless they have been fully vaccinated, excluding young children, pregnant women and those who have health conditions. Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem told an online press conference that expats can return to the country provided they have received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines or one shot of the Johnson & Johnson jab.

Returning expats must produce a PCR test showing a negative result taken within 72 hours of arrival and should undergo a seven-day home quarantine, during which another PCR test must be taken. However, home quarantine can end sooner than seven days if the second PCR test shows a negative result.

Mazrem said that further details on the mechanism of the return of expats and measures at the airport will be announced in coming days. The decision means many expats can now leave Kuwait for their home countries and plan to come back on August 1 and onwards. He reiterated that issuance of visit visas is still suspended. Mazrem called on people to use either the Kuwait Mobile ID or Immune applications to prove they have received the two vaccine doses.

The spokesman said the Cabinet has not eased timings of malls and restaurants, which will still shut doors at 8:00 pm, and this will continue indefinitely. Mazrem said the Cabinet yesterday discussed the detection of an unspecified number of cases the Delta variant of



KUWAIT: Passengers are seen in the arrival hall of Kuwait International Airport in this Jan 2, 2021 file photo. — Xinhua

COVID-19, previously known as the Indian variant, but provided no further details on the number of cases discovered.

The Cabinet has not decided on any further

restrictions to combat the new variant. Kuwait has been witnessing a spike in the number of new coronavirus cases, which exceeded 1,300 daily in the past week.

Dust storm blankets Kuwait



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive along a highway during a dust storm yesterday. Visibility levels in some areas dropped to less than 100 meters. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: The first mangoes have fruited on a mango tree planted by Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George on Aug 15, 2020 in the India House garden in the Indian Embassy compound.



Myanmar dissidents evade junta with life on the run

First astronauts arrive at China's new space station

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HONG KONG: Apple Daily Chief Operations Officer Chow Tat Kuen (2nd R) is escorted by police to a waiting vehicle from the offices of the local Apple Daily newspaper in Hong Kong yesterday, after Hong Kong police arrested the chief editor and four executives. — AFP

HK police raid pro-democracy newspaper

Apple Daily's five executives arrested, seize \$2.3 million assets

HONG KONG: Hong Kong national security police conducted a fresh raid on the pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily yesterday, arresting five executives and carting off computers in the latest blow to the outspoken tabloid. The paper and its jailed owner Jimmy Lai have long been a thorn in Beijing's side with unapologetic support for the financial hub's pro-democracy movement and scathing criticism of China's authoritarian leaders.

More than 500 officers conducted a dawn operation which authorities said was sparked by articles Apple Daily had published "appealing for sanctions" against Hong Kong and China's leaders. It is the first time the content of media reporting has sparked arrests under the city's new national security law.

In a message to readers, Apple Daily warned that Hong Kong's press freedoms were "hanging by a thread" but the paper vowed to "stand tall". Its union described the operation as a "wanton violation of press freedom" that "displayed how much police power has inflated under the national security law".

Police said the five executives were arrested for collusion with a foreign country or external elements "to endanger national security". "They have overall responsibility for the content, style and principles of news reporting," senior superintendent Steve Li told reporters. Authorities also seized HK\$18 million (US\$2.3 million) in Apple Daily assets, the first time a national security law seizure order has been made directly against a Hong Kong media company, rather than an individual.

'Ominous'

Hong Kong is historically a major international media hub but its press freedom ranking has slipped dramatically in recent years. Secretary for Security John Lee declined to say which articles breached the security law or whether those who shared the articles online, bought Apple Daily or its shares might be at risk. "Everyone must decide for themselves," he told reporters.

"Our actions are not targeting press freedom or journalistic work," he added. "We target perpetrators who would use journalistic work as a

tool to engage in acts that endanger national security." Sharron Fast, a lecturer at the University of Hong Kong's journalism school, described Lee's comments as "ominous and incorrect". "It is precisely the role of a journalist in a free society to report on political views, even those that might be unwelcome," she told AFP.

Among the arrested executives were chief editor Ryan Law and CEO Cheung Kim-hung who were both led into the building in handcuffs. Hong Kong's stock exchange said trading in shares of Next Digital—the publisher of the newspaper—had been halted. After the raid, reporters returned to a semi-gutted newsroom with the paper saying 38 computers were taken away as well as hard drives and reporter notepads. A photographer, who gave just a nickname KT, said the latest operation had "created terror for every Apple Daily staff". "If I get arrested for reporting the news, I will have no regrets," he told AFP. Executive chief editor Lam Man-chung, who was not among those arrested, told AFP that staff would "try all our best to publish newspapers for tomorrow".

Crackdown

The security law is the spearhead of a sweeping crackdown on Beijing's critics in Hong Kong since 2019's huge democracy protests. It has criminalised much dissent, given China jurisdiction over some cases and awarded authorities a suite of powerful new investigation powers. Those convicted face up to life in prison and the majority are denied bail after arrest.

Yesterday's raid was the second on Apple Daily in less than a year. The tabloid's billionaire owner Lai, 73, was charged with collusion after hundreds of officers searched the paper's newsroom last August. He is currently serving multiple jail sentences for attending various protests. Beijing has made no secret of its desire to see the paper's voice tamed, with state media routinely describing Lai as a "traitor" and a "black hand". Last month, police used the national security law to freeze Lai's bank accounts and his majority shares in Next Digital. Until yesterday's raid, authorities had left the company's assets alone. It is unclear whether Apple Daily will now be able to pay its staff. — AFP

International

Today's presidential vote a 'serious' contest: Iran

Ultraconservative headed for presidency as rivals pull out

TEHRAN: On the eve of Iran's presidential election, expected to hand victory to the ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi, the candidate-vetting Guardian Council insisted yesterday that "the political contest is serious." "The media and the people have testified that this is a good competition," said the head of the 12-member council, Abbas Ali Kadkhodae, a day before almost 60 million voters are asked to head to the ballots.

Three televised debates between the seven candidates, all men, who were approved by the unelected body of jurists and clerics, had shown that "the political competition is serious," Kadkhodae told a news conference. The vote today will choose a successor to Iran's moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who cannot run again now after serving two consecutive four-year terms, and who leaves office in August.

Turnout is expected to be low in a country where many have been demoralized by years of painful economic crisis that was brought on by a crippling US sanctions regime and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. "I left my main job because I could not pay the rent for my shop, and my (former) employees are now jobless," lamented Tehran resident Nasrollah, who said he had been a car mechanic for 47 years.

"I have no money. All families are now facing an economic problem. How can we vote for these people who did this to us? It's not right."

'No political views'

The election comes as Tehran holds renewed talks with world powers to revive a battered 2015 nuclear deal, which the United States unilaterally withdrew from three years ago under then president Donald Trump. Ultimate power in Iran lies with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but the president has significant influence on issues from industrial policy to foreign affairs.

Many voters were dismayed however when a field of almost 600 hopefuls for the presidency was reduced to just seven candidates by the Guardian Council. Among the prominent figures barred from running were former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, who demanded that the council "officially and publicly disclose all the reasons" for his disqualification.

Rouhani later said he had urged greater "competition" in a letter to the supreme leader, who acknowledged that some candidates had been treated "unjustly" as "they and their families were accused of false things", without giving names. The field was further reduced Wednesday



TEHRAN: A banner of ultraconservative Iranian cleric and presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi, is pictured in Tehran, yesterday on the eve of the Islamic republic's presidential election. — AFP

day when three of the seven candidates dropped out, shortly before the election campaign ended at 7 am (0230 GMT) yesterday.

The only reformist left in the race against Raisi and two other ultraconservatives is the rel-

atively low-profile central bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati. Kadkhodae said yesterday that the candidates were vetted according to "the electoral law" and that "the Guardian Council has no political views". — AFP

Palestinian teen shot by Zionist army succumbs

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: A Palestinian teenager died yesterday of gunshot wounds inflicted the day before, when the Zionist army opened fire during clashes in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Ahmed Zahi Dawoud, 16, was shot in the head Wednesday in the village of Beita, near Nablus, the ministry and Nablus hospital, where he was taken for treatment, said. The area has seen regular protests against illegal Zionist settlement expansion on Palestinian land.

On Wednesday, the Zionist army said a soldier had opened fire after he "spotted dozens of Palestinians" approaching troops as they "were securing the area of Givat Eviatar", south of Nablus. "One of the Palestinians ran towards the soldier and hurled a suspicious object at him, which exploded adjacent to the soldier," the army said in a statement, adding there were no soldiers injured.

"In response, the soldier operated to stop the suspect by firing into the air, and then by firing towards him. A hit was identified." Asked by AFP, the army gave no



RAMALLAH: A Palestinian demonstrator returns a tear gas canister fired by Zionist forces during a demonstration near the Jewish settlement of Beit El near Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

further details.

Official Palestinian news website Wafa said Dawoud was the fourth Palestinian killed near Beita in a month. Hundreds of mourners gathered in the village for his funeral yesterday, an AFP journalist reported. The West Bank has been occupied by Zionist forces since the Six-Day War of 1967 and, excluding annexed east Jerusalem, some 475,000 Zionist settlers now live alongside around 2.8 million Palestinians.

A Palestinian woman was also shot

dead by Zionist troops on Wednesday, after what the army said was an attempt to ram occupation forces with her car and attack them with a knife. Wafa identified the woman as Mai Afana, 29, from the town of Abu Dis, just outside Jerusalem. On Wednesday afternoon, Palestinian militants again launched incendiary balloons from Gaza, hours after Zionist retaliated for earlier launches. The violence in Gaza was the first between Zionists and Hamas since a ceasefire took effect on May 21, ending 11 days of heavy fighting. —AFP

Burkina Faso holds talks on security crisis

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: Burkina Faso yesterday launched a two-day huddle gathering governing and opposition parties to discuss the country's worsening jihadist insurgency.

The initiative, launched by President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, coincides with a surge of attacks in the impoverished Sahel country. On June 5, at least 132 people were killed in overnight attacks on Solhan, near the border with Mali and Niger—the bloodiest single-day toll in the six-year-old emergency. Local sources put the tally at 160 dead.

Opening the talks, Kabore hit out at the "odious human massacre carried out by terrorists." "The situation calls for our utmost commitment in this crucial phase in the life of the nation," he said.

Around 40 people are taking part in the talks, staged in the presidential palace in the capital Ouagadougou. More than 1,400 people have died and around a million have fled their homes since 2015, when jihadists from Mali took their campaign into Burkina and Niger.

The two Sahel states are among the poorest in the world, burdened by poorly-equipped armed forces and a long history of political volatility. The round table will also discuss the holding of local elections scheduled for 2022, the coronavirus pandemic and national reconciliation, Kabore said. He vowed to "implement collective conclusions... (that emerge) from frank, open and democratic debate." —AFP

International

Far-right leader Le Pen aims for strong showing in French regional polls

Eyes firmly set on the presidential polls in April and May next year

PARIS: French far-right leader Marine Le Pen has been touring the country ahead of regional elections this weekend, upbeat about her party's prospects as she tries to steer it further into the mainstream. Her National Rally (RN) party has focused on security, immigration and extremism in its campaign-issues at the centre of the country's current political debate that have forced candidates across the spectrum to lay out their agenda.

"We're at the political heart of the country," Le Pen boasted at a campaign stop in the town of Saint Chamond in southeastern France earlier this month. The regional vote, which was delayed because of Covid, is being closely watched as the last political test before next year's presidential election.

As a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic ebbs in France, surveys show that crime and terrorism are among the leading priorities for French people. Recent events have kept the issues in the headlines: from several fatal attacks on the police this year to the beheading of a teacher in the street in late 2020 by a radical Islamist, which supercharged a longstanding debate about integration and Islam.

The government of President Emmanuel Macron has pushed new legislation to combat violence and extremism, while the centre-right Republicans opposition has also sought to position itself as the true party of law and order. Ahead of the vote, which takes place over two consecutive weekends, Le Pen has made no apologies for focusing her campaigning on national policy issues such as crime and policing. She has her eyes firmly set on the presidential polls in April and May next year, which surveys currently show could come down to a duel between her and Macron, in a repeat of the 2017 election.

Uncertain outcome

The regional vote will see new assemblies elected for mainland France's 13 regions and 96 departments. Analysts caution against trying to extrapolate too much from the results that in many cases will be driven by local dynamics, limiting how much they should be seen as indicators for the larger political picture.

But the outcome will inevitably shape the narrative in the coming weeks, particularly with regard to the strength and electability of Le Pen, as well as the state of Macron's enfeebled party, the Republic on the Move (LREM). Predictions are difficult because of the complicated two-stage electoral system, an abstention rate that could reach 60 percent and the impact of tactical voting, which usually sees mainstream parties gang up to keep the far-right out of power.

A survey by the Ipsos and Sopra Steria groups on June 12 showed RN candidates leading in six of the 13 mainland regions in the first round, but they might end up losing all of the run-off votes, as they did last time in 2015. "What would be great for her (Le Pen), and would spark some momentum in the pre-presidential campaign, would be if the National Rally won a region," Stephane Zumsteeg from the Ipsos polling firm told AFP.

Though far-right politicians run some towns and villages, the RN has never led a region, which would give it a budget of billions of euros and powers over schools, transport and economic development. The one most likely to tip is the southeastern Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, where the RN is fronted by Thierry Mariani, a former minister who defected from the centre-right Republicans party in 2019.

Macron's LREM is seen winning one region at best, but



TOULON: French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party's leader and member of parliament Marine Le Pen (R) shares a laugh with RN top candidate in Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur (PACA) for the upcoming regional elections Thierry Mariani (L) during a press conference in Toulon. —AFP

Zumsteeg says this might not affect the president whose personal poll ratings have risen recently. "Macron has succeeded in not linking his destiny to the image of his party," he said. Antoine Bristielle, a public opinion expert at the left-leaning Jean-Jaures Foundation, believes the vote will likely serve as another step in the normalisation of the once-fringe far right. "You can see that it's not so much that the ideas of the National Rally are more popular or are more accepted by French society," he told AFP. "It's that the party no longer scares people enough to spark a wave of opposition." —AFP

Guinea to declare end to Ebola epidemic

DAKAR: Guinea will announce an end to its Ebola epidemic this weekend, the health minister said yesterday, hailing the rapid response to the second outbreak of the disease in the country. Speaking during a webinar hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), Health Minister Remy Lamah said the viral epidemic will be declared over on Saturday—barring the discovery of new cases.

"The availability of epidemic treatment centres built across the country has allowed us to quickly treat suspected and confirmed patients," he said. Guinea, a poor West African nation of 13 million people, announced an Ebola outbreak on February 14.

It was second such outbreak in the country since the devastating 2013-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which left 11,300 dead in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ebola causes severe fever and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding. It is transmitted through close contact with bodily fluids, and people who live with or care for patients are most at risk. Guinea reacted quickly to this year's outbreak, however, building on its previous experience of fighting the disease.

Among other measures, the country launched an Ebola vaccination campaign this year with the help of the WHO. Mashediso Moeti, the WHO's regional director for Africa, said during the webinar that Guinea had contained Ebola and prevented it from spreading abroad "thanks to new innovations and lessons learned". Lamah also said that unlike in the past, health workers treating Ebola patients did not contract the disease. —AFP

Al-Qaeda in Yemen kidnaps six security officers: Official

DUBAI: The Yemeni branch of Al-Qaeda has kidnapped six government security personnel, an official said yesterday, the first incident of its kind in years in a country where years of conflict has created a security vacuum. A security official with the internationally recognised government, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP that five officers had been seized in the southern province of Shabwa during a mission on Tuesday.

"They were lured by people claiming to belong to local tribes and in need of help," he told AFP. "They fell into the trap, and it turned out these people belonged to the terrorist organisation." The official said a sixth officer was snatched by the militants on Wednesday and "taken to an unknown location".

Years of setbacks including a two-decade US

drone campaign have weakened the once-mighty Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). But with the government and Huthi rebels focused on their battle for the northern city of Marib, capital of an oil-rich governorate of the same name, the militants are seizing the opportunity to regenerate.

Fighting around the city since February is creating a security void that is being exploited by the jihadists, observers warn. Marib city is the last northern stronghold of the government which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The Huthis control the rest of the north after years of conflict which has plunged Yemen into the world's worst humanitarian crisis. In March, a Yemeni intelligence official told AFP that the Marib battle "could be ending the maximum pressure campaign that almost wiped out" AQAP.

The group also has a bloody track record outside Yemen—it attacked the French satirical publication Charlie Hebdo in 2015, killing 12 and showing its ability to strike far from home. The United States, which considers AQAP the terror group's most dangerous branch, has carried out a campaign of drone strikes against its fighters in Yemen since soon after the 9/11 attacks. —AFP

International

Moscow hails Putin, Biden's commitment to arms control

Russia ready for further dialogue if US is willing: Putin

MOSCOW: The Kremlin was guarded about future dialogue with Washington yesterday, a day after the first face-to-face meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Joe Biden.

The two leaders met in Geneva on Wednesday to ease soaring tensions between Moscow and Washington, with relations at their lowest since the end of the Cold War. Putin said Russia was ready to continue the talks provided Washington was also willing to do so. "We are ready to continue this dialogue to the same extent as the American side is," Putin said in televised remarks. The Russian leader said the meeting was "quite friendly" and that he and Biden "were able to understand each other on key issues".

Putin said the US president was a "professional" and "you have to be very attentive when working with him so as not to miss something". "So what that he sometimes confuses things," Putin said. "His press secretary is a young, educated, beautiful woman—she herself constantly confuses things," Putin said, referring to White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

"It is not because she is poorly educated or has a bad memory, just when people think that some things are secondary they don't focus too much attention on them," he said. Putin said

"Americans think that nothing is more important than themselves".

Significant achievement

After talks that lasted more than three hours, the leaders issued a brief statement agreeing to start dialogue on nuclear arms control, a key issue after Biden's predecessor Donald Trump withdrew from a bilateral arms accord with Russia. Yesterday, the joint statement was hailed by senior Kremlin officials. "Even though it's a very short text, the joint statement on strategic stability realizes the special responsibility of our two countries not only to our people but to the whole world," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a radio interview yesterday. Earlier yesterday, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said the rejection of the possibility of a nuclear war by the two sides was a "significant achievement". Since the extension of the New START nuclear treaty under Biden, "this is Washington's second step in restoring common sense and a responsible approach to key aspects of international security," Ryabkov told *Kommersant* business daily.

New START is the last remaining arms reduction pact between the two nuclear states that hold more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear



GENEVA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left), US President Joe Biden (second left), Russian President Vladimir Putin (second right) and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (right) pose for press ahead of the US-Russia summit at the Villa La Grange, in Geneva Wednesday. — AFP

weapons, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington had all but broken down since Biden took office, with tensions high over a long list of disputes, from cyberattacks and election meddling to human rights violations. While Putin described the Geneva summit as "construc-

ive", there were no concrete announcements apart from an agreement to bring back respective ambassadors, who both returned home earlier this year. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said yesterday that Russia's ambassador Anatoly Antonov is expected to return to Washington next week. —AFP

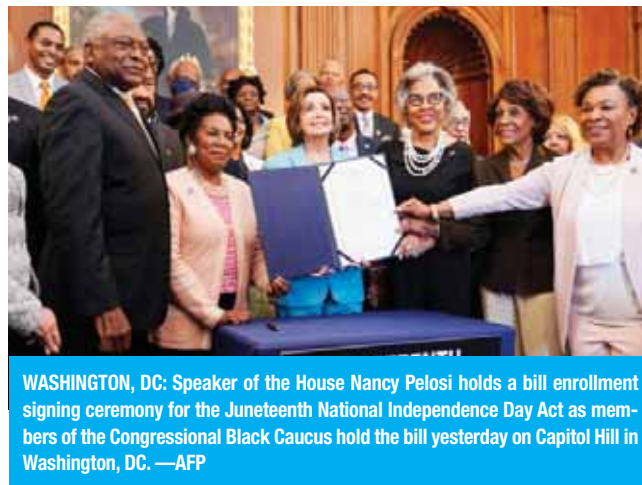
US Congress votes to make Juneteenth, end of slavery, a holiday

WASHINGTON: The House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to create a federal holiday commemorating Juneteenth, which until now has been the unofficial fete marking the end of slavery in the United States. The measure cleared the Senate by unanimous consent Tuesday after a Republican in the chamber ended his objection. With the House passing it in a 415-14 vote, the bill now heads to President Joe Biden for his signature.

Most US states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or officially observe the day, but the bill passed by Congress would make Juneteenth the 12th US federal holiday—and the first new one in 38 years. The commemoration has taken on renewed resonance over the past year with millions of Americans confronting the country's living legacy of racial injustice.

"Juneteenth is as significant to African Americans as it will be to Americans because we too are Americans, and it means freedom," House Democrat Sheila Jackson Lee told her colleagues, describing slavery as "America's original sin." Juneteenth National Independence Day is commemorated on June 19 to celebrate the day in 1865 when the last enslaved African Americans learned that they were free.

A Union Army general in Galveston, Texas—where president Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 had yet to be enforced nearly three years later—announced that slavery was abolished in Texas and across the country. "This day reminds us of a history much stained by brutality and injustice, and it reminds us of our responsibility to build a future of progress for all, honor-



WASHINGTON, DC: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi holds a bill enrollment signing ceremony for the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act as members of the Congressional Black Caucus hold the bill yesterday on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. —AFP

ing the ideal of equality that is America's heritage, and America's hope," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

Lawmakers broke into applause and cheers when the bill passed. Jackson Lee, who represents a Texas district, and the state's senior US Senator John Cornyn, a Republican, will be in Galveston on Juneteenth to mark the historic occasion.

"There's no better time than the present, particularly given the strife we've seen, the level of distrust, for example, between law enforcement and the communities they serve, than to acknowledge our nation's history and to learn from it," Cornyn told reporters. "Acknowledging and learning from the mistakes of the past is critical to making that progress and becoming a more perfect union." Democrats and Republicans have struggled to unite on legislative issues in recent months and years, with political divisions impacted by debates over race, immigration and other social issues. —AFP

Texas OKs public gun-carrying without permit

WASHINGTON: Governor Greg Abbott signed into law Wednesday a bill that allows Texans to carry firearms in public without a permit, the latest in a series of measures expanding gun rights in conservative US states.

The law, which was passed in the Republican-dominated state Senate and House of Representatives last month, will allow anyone 21 years or older who is not barred from possessing a firearm to carry one in public without a permit. HB1927 argues that both the United States and Texas constitutions allow citizens to bear arms and that therefore there should be fewer barriers to being able to carry such weapons.

Proponents of the law, which will go into effect September 1, call such a measure constitutional carry. Abbott is set to preside over a ceremonial signing of the law on Thursday morning, according to the Texas Tribune newspaper. Abbott previously indicated he would sign the bill if it passed the state's legislative houses. "This is something that 20 other states have adopted and it's time for Texas to adopt it, too," Abbott told local radio station WBAP in April.

But opponents, including state and national Democrats, say more lenient rules on guns could lead to more violence. They cited mass shootings in the state's capital Austin last week that left one person dead and 13 injured and a 2019 gun massacre at a Walmart in El Paso in which 23 people were killed and 23 others injured. —AFP

International

Ivory Coast ex-leader Gbagbo heads home after war crimes acquittal

Laurent's homecoming will be a key test of stability in Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN: Former president Laurent Gbagbo was returning to Ivory Coast yesterday for the first time in nearly a decade, after he was cleared of crimes against humanity and his once-bitter rival welcomed him back in the name of reconciliation. Gbagbo left the country in humiliation in 2011, after his refusal to accept electoral defeat sparked a conflict that ended in his arrest and transfer to The Hague.

The 76-year-old's homecoming will be a key test of stability in Ivory Coast, the world's biggest cocoa producer and the wealthiest country in francophone West Africa. Gbagbo boarded a commercial flight to Abidjan from Brussels yesterday morning, his spokesman Justin Katinan Kone, told AFP.

The Belgian capital has been his home since the International Criminal Court (ICC) acquitted him in a shock decision in 2019. An appeal against the ruling failed in March, paving the way for his return. He was ousted in April 2011 after around 3,000 people died in the months-long conflict that followed his refusal to accept electoral defeat at the hands of Alassane Ouattara, the current president.

'We're ready'

Today, Gbagbo has been recast in the role of statesman, called upon to help national reconciliation after elections last year left scores dead. Ouattara, 79, has facilitated his return, issuing his rival with a diplomatic passport and promising him the rewards and status due to ex-presidents. Ouattara is letting Gbagbo use the presidential salon at Abidjan airport upon arrival, and tents will be set up for dozens of notables to hail his return.

He will then travel through the city to the Attoban neighbourhood, where his old campaign headquarters are located, according to a statement from his Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) party. His motorcade is scheduled to pass through several areas where crowds of supporters are expected to gather to cheer him on.

Young people carrying the national flag were seen walking on the road towards the airport early yesterday, many from a poor district of the city. "We're ready," a woman said, wearing a T-shirt with Gbagbo's face on it.

"We want to see him to believe it," said another supporter, wearing a shirt that read "Gbagbo acquitted, thank you, Lord." His party had been in discussions with the government about the scale of the celebrations, with the government preferring a more discrete event. But a spokesman for Gbagbo told AFP there had been no instructions from the government to restrict gatherings.

'The lion is back'

In his home region of Gagnoa, where he is a cult figure, Gbagbo's face has been emblazoned on caps, T-shirts and colourful kaftans proclaiming "The Lion of Africa Is Back." Preparations have been underway for Gbagbo's return in his hometown Mama, where they call him "father".

Joseph Goli Obou, a 71-year-old traditional chief clad in a gown bearing Gbagbo's face, said: "I am getting the whole village swept." However not everyone is overjoyed at his return. Groups representing the victims of the 2010-2011 post-election violence have condemned the "impunity" he has received and say they plan to protest in Abidjan.

They also point to a 20-year jail sentence Gbagbo was given in absentia for "looting" the Central Bank of West African States during the conflict. Authorities have already hinted that this sentence will be lifted. First elected in 2000, Gbagbo's tenure was marked by division and rebellion in the former French colony nation once seen as a beacon of stability in West Africa.

Elections that should have been held in 2005 were postponed six times until 2010, when he lost to Ouattara. Conflict erupted, leading



ABIDJAN: Women gesture as they hold a cloth bearing the face of former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo in Yopougon, a popular district of Abidjan, yesterday. —AFP

to his arrest in April 2011 and transfer to the ICC in November that year. His party insists he is returning in peace. In March, it took part in legislative elections, ending a decade-long boycott of the ballot box.

"The wounds are still open... and the authorities are worried that Gbagbo will stir up the crowds again, which is one of his hallmarks," said Rinaldo Depagne, a researcher at the International Crisis Group think tank. But attention has also turned to a rising Islamist threat after jihadists killed four soldiers near the border with Burkina Faso.

"Above all else, we must form a sacred union" to unite "our efforts to confront the terrorists," prominent pro-Ouattara writer Venance Konan said in a newspaper editorial this week. —AFP

worker Sophie Petronin. Dardar is suspected to have been one of the armed men who mutilated three people at a market in Tin Hama in northern Mali on May 2, cutting off their hands and feet, according to local sources. According to the UN's Mali mission, MINUSMA, the armed men were suspected of belonging to EIGS.

French wind-down

Dardar's arrest will come as welcome news for France, after President Emmanuel Macron promised in February to step up efforts to "decapitate" jihadist groups in the Sahel region. France, the former colonial power in all three "tri-border" countries, is pursuing a strategy of targeting the leaders of militant groups.

Its military presence in the semi-arid Sahel, Operation Barkhane, recently called for the elimination of a high-ranking fighter of the Al-Qaeda group in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an adversary of EIGS in the area. Baye Ag Bakabo was responsible for the kidnapping and death of two French RFI journalists, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, who were murdered in northern Mali in 2013.

Macron recently announced that France will wind down its 5,100-strong Barkhane force, which has battled jihadists in the Sahel for the past eight years. He said earlier this month that he sees France's future presence as being part of the so-called Takuba international task force in the Sahel, in which "hundreds" of French soldiers would form the "backbone".

It would mean the closure of French bases and the use of special forces who would be focused on anti-terror operations and military training, he said. But Macron's plans have fuelled fears that certain areas of the Sahel, in particular northern Mali, will pass completely into the hands of jihadist groups, as local authorities appear unable to restore their grip on the region. —AFP

Ex-mayor jailed for 8 years over Mexican journalist's murder

MEXICO CITY: A former mayor in northern Mexico has been condemned to eight years in prison for his involvement in the 2017 murder of journalist Miroslava Breach, prosecutors said Wednesday. A court in Chihuahua state handed down the sentence on Tuesday to Hugo Amed Shultz, the ex-mayor of Chinipas who was arrested in December.

He was ordered to pay damages and make a public apology to the victim's family for his role as an accomplice, the prosecutor's office said in a statement. Investigators said Amed Shultz, a member of the conservative National Action Party (PAN), provided information to the organized crime group that carried out the murder, which drew international condemnation. Juan Carlos Moreno, also known as "El Larry," was convicted of being the "intellectual author" of the murder and sentenced to 50 years imprisonment last August. Mexico is regularly rated by watchdog Reporters Without Borders as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Breach, who covered the country's drug war, is one of more than 100 journalists who have been murdered in Mexico since 2000. —AFP

France arrests 'high-ranking' jihadist in Mali

PARIS: French forces in Mali have captured a man they describe as a "high-ranking fighter of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara" (EIGS), the French military said Wednesday. Dadi Ould Chouaib, also known as Abou Dardar, was arrested on June 11 in the flashpoint "tri-border" region between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, the site of frequent attacks by jihadist groups, the military said in a statement.

He was carrying "an automatic weapon, a night vision telescope, a combat vest, a telephone and a radio", but surrendered without resistance. He was located during a helicopter sweep as part of a joint mission between troops from France's Barkhane operation and Nigerien forces. Niger's army said in a statement late Wednesday that the joint operation, launched on June 8, had led to a clash Tuesday with "armed terrorists" which left a Nigerien dead and "12 terrorists neutralised".

The term "neutralised" is used to mean "killed" in West African military contexts. Dardar was formerly a member of the Al-Qaeda-linked Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), many of whose fighters joined EIGS. First arrested in 2014, he was handed over to Malian authorities.

But he was one of around 200 jihadist prisoners released in October 2020 in exchange for four hostages, including French aid

International

First astronauts arrive at China's new space station

'Foreign astronauts are certainly going to enter Chinese space station one day'

JIUQUAN: The first astronauts arrived at China's new space station yesterday in the country's longest crewed mission to date, a landmark step in establishing Beijing as a major space power. The trio blasted off on a Long March-2F rocket from the Jiuquan launch centre in northwest China's Gobi desert, and their craft docked at the Tiangong station around seven hours later, where they will spend the next three months.

State broadcaster CCTV showed a live feed from inside the spacecraft during the journey, with the three astronauts lifting their helmet visors after it reached orbit as one smiled and waved at the camera. Another floated a pen just off his lap in zero-gravity as he browsed the flight manual.

Around seven hours after lift-off, space officials confirmed that the craft had docked with Tianhe, the core module of the country's new space station. The Shenzhou-12 craft has "successfully docked with the forward port of the core module" of the Tiangong station, said the China Manned Space Agency, as state TV showed live footage. At a ceremony before blast-off, the three astronauts, already wearing their space suits, greeted a crowd of supporters and space workers, who sang the patriotic song "Without the Chinese Communist Party, there would be no new China".

Space life

The mission's commander is Nie Haisheng, a decorated air force pilot in the People's Liberation Army who has already participated in two space missions. The two other members are also members of the military.

The Tianhe module of the space station has separate living spaces for each of the astronauts, a "space treadmill" and bike for exercise, and a communication centre for emails and video calls with ground control. It is China's first crewed mission in nearly five years. Huang Weifen of the China Manned Space Program said the astronauts will perform two spacewalks during the mission, both lasting around six or seven hours.

She also said the trio will wear newly-developed spacewalk suits. The launch represents a matter of huge prestige in China, as Beijing prepares to mark the 100th anniversary of the ruling Communist Party on July 1 with a massive propaganda campaign. To prepare for the mission, the crew underwent more than 6,000 hours of training, including hundreds of underwater somersaults in full space gear.

The Chinese space agency is planning a total of 11 launches through to the end of next year, including three more manned missions that will deliver two lab modules to expand the 70-tonne station, along with supplies and crew members. China's space ambitions have been fuelled in part by a US ban on its astronauts on the International Space Station, a collaboration between the United States, Russia, Canada, Europe and Japan. It is due for retirement after 2024, even though NASA has said it could potentially remain functional beyond 2028. Tiangong will be much smaller than the ISS, and is expected to have a lifespan of at least 10 years. China has said it would be open to international collaboration on its space station although it has yet to give specific details.

Zhou Jianping, chief designer for the space pro-



GOBI: A journalist looks at a photo of astronaut Nie Haisheng during a press conference about China's first crewed mission to its new space station, at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi desert in northwest China. —AFP

gramme, said "foreign astronauts are certainly going to enter the Chinese space station one day". "There are a number of countries that have expressed a desire to do that and we will be open to that in future," he said. Beijing said in March it was also planning to build a separate lunar space station with Russia, and this week the two countries issued a "roadmap" for potential collaboration opportunities. —AFP

then, we are against the Lofven government now," Ebba Busch, party leader of the Christian Democrats, told a press conference.

Moderate Party leader Ulf Kristersson echoed this sentiment in a post to social media. "Our opinion is very clear, this government should never have taken office," Kristersson wrote in a post to Facebook.

Speaker of the house, Andreas Norlen, confirmed in a statement the vote would be held on Monday. Sweden's minority government, took power in 2019 after months of political struggles to secure support for a government following the 2018 election. To secure power it inked a deal with two centre-left parties, and was propped up by the Left Party.

The deal included liberal market reforms, including a government inquiry into allowing landlords to freely set rents for new apartments. Several of these reforms have irked the Left Party, and after multiple calls on the government to abandon the "market rents," party leader Nooshi Dadgostar said earlier yesterday that they were looking for support among other parties for a vote of no confidence.

"Someone has to stand up for Sweden's tenants," Dadgostar told a press conference adding that it wasn't an "easy announcement". Speaking in parliament, Lofven responded by saying it was "not responsible" to call for the vote. Lofven has announced a press conference of his own at 4 pm. —AFP

Security should have tackled Manchester bomber: Inquiry

LONDON: Security teams at Britain's Manchester Arena "should have prevented or minimised" the impact of the 2017 terror attack at an Ariana Grande concert that killed 22 people, a public inquiry found yesterday. The attack, as concert-goers were leaving the show, was perpetrated by 22-year-old Salman Abedi, a Mancunian of Libyan descent.

In a report examining security measures at the venue in northwest England, inquiry chairman John Saunders said Arena operator SMG, security provider Showsec and British Transport Police all missed opportunities to either prevent or mitigate the attack, which took place on May 22, 2017. "The security arrangements for the Manchester Arena should have prevented or minimised the devastating impact of the attack," he wrote. "Salman Abedi should have been identified on 22nd May 2017 as a threat by those responsible for the security of Arena and a disruptive intervention undertaken. "Had that occurred, I consider it likely that Salman Abedi would still have detonated his device, but the loss of life and injury is highly likely to have been less," he added. —AFP

Sweden govt set to lose confidence vote: Parties

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's minority government could be toppled next week after a group of four parties in parliament announced yesterday they would back a no confidence vote, potentially triggering a snap election. The far-right Sweden Democrats party announced it was calling for a motion of no confidence for Monday after the Left Party earlier warned it would seek a similar move over a dispute on rent controls for newly constructed apartments.

"There is now a majority in parliament that wants to dismiss the prime minister," Henrik Vinge, parliament group leader for the Sweden Democrats, told a press conference. Vinge said they hoped the government would fall a year ahead of the next general election.

Both the conservative Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats followed suit, securing a parliamentary majority for the no confidence motion against the government of Social Democrat Prime Minister Stefan Lofven.

"We were against the Lofven government when they took power. We were against the Lofven government

International

'No regrets': Myanmar dissidents evade junta with life on the run

More than 850 people have been killed since the coup

BANGKOK: Burner phones, safehouses, sheltering with rebels and months away from loved ones — Myanmar anti-coup activists have been driven underground by a brutal crackdown but have no regrets about choosing life on the run. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the armed forces ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in February, plunging the country back under military rule after a 10-year experiment with democracy.

The power grab triggered a massive uprising which the junta has sought to quell with mass arrests and bloody crackdowns. Some — like longtime activist Thinzar Shunlei Yi — had always known they might have to leave their home and family in order to keep up their battle against the regime. "It's something I expected in my life as an activist," she told AFP by phone from a hidden location.

The 29-year-old is among the hundreds of social media-savvy fugitives — social influencers, celebrities, activists and journalists — wanted by the junta for disseminating information that "causes fear". "When (the coup) happened, we found that many people were on the run," she said.

"We didn't expect that we would have an uprising like this and ordinary people would become protesters and activists." But for Ko Ko —

not his real name — the life of a fugitive was something much harder to imagine. Just months ago he was working full-time at a government hospital on Myanmar's COVID response.

"Everything has changed," said the 30-year-old doctor, who now organises covert tele-medicine consultations for anti-coup protesters too afraid to go to military hospitals. Moving frequently to avoid arrest, Ko Ko said he "stopped counting the days" after Myanmar's Thingyan New Year festival in April — a period usually spent celebrating with family.

Always on guard

Myanmar's medical workers were among the first to join a nationwide anti-junta movement, which grew to bring hundreds of thousands to the streets. By March, Ko Ko was training civilians to give first aid as the junta crackdown on dissent grew bloodier.

But increasing raids on makeshift trauma centres and mass arrests of healthcare workers were a wake-up call. "If they found me, what would they do to my family?" he recalled thinking. Two days after Armed Forces Day in March — the single deadliest day since the coup, with more than 100 people killed across the country — Ko Ko decided to leave his wife and parents.

After two weeks slipping furtively from house



DOOPLAYA: This handout photo from the KNU Dooplaya District taken and released yesterday shows a protester holding a sign during a demonstration against the military coup in Dooplaya district in Myanmar's Karen state. — AFP

to house, he fled to territory controlled by a rebel group near the border with Thailand. Always on alert, he carries a burner phone with a fake Facebook account in case authorities stop him. "Every minute that I hear a car stop out front or

if there's a loud voice, I always go out and check," he told AFP. He is currently working to source supplies for a makeshift hospital he and other doctors are setting up — a vast departure from his life just four months earlier. —AFP

Dolphins, turtles killed by fire-ravaged ship: Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Dozens of turtles and dolphins were killed by intense heat and chemical poisoning from a container ship that burned for almost two weeks off Sri Lanka, authorities said yesterday. The Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl has been partially submerged off the island nation's coast since early June after an onboard blaze released tonnes of plastic raw materials that swamped local beaches.

Wildlife officials said 48 dead turtles and eight dolphins, as well as many small fish, had washed up on the country's western and southern beaches in recent weeks. "To see these images of dead turtles and dolphins is very distressing for our people," Environment Ministry Secretary Anil Jasinghe told reporters in Colombo.

"The carcasses that washed up soon after the fire had clear signs of burns from the intense heat of the ship." Jasinghe said preliminary reports also suggested that chemical poisoning was behind more recent discoveries of dead turtles. Autopsies were being conducted to finalise the causes of death, he added.

Authorities were also probing the death of a 30-foot (nine-metre) blue whale off the Jaffna peninsula about 400 kilometres (250 miles) north of Colombo. The whale washed up on the islet of Kayts on Tuesday, officials said.

The burnt out ship was known to be carrying 81 containers of hazardous chemicals, including 25 tonnes of nitric acid,



KAYTS: This picture taken June 15, 2021, shows volunteers checking the carcass of a blue whale that washed ashore at the island of Kayts, in the northern Jaffna region, as dozens of turtles and dolphins were killed by intense heat and chemical poisoning from a container ship that burned for almost two weeks off Sri Lanka. — AFP

when it caught fire. Officials have said about 1,200 tonnes of plastic pellets and other debris scooped from beaches are being stored in 45 shipping containers.

They have also warned of the impact of microplastic pollution from the country's "worst marine disaster". Sri Lanka is seeking \$40 million in damages from the ship's operators X-Press Feeders. Environmentalists are suing the government and X-Press Feeders for allegedly failing to prevent the disaster. Sri Lankan police have launched a criminal probe against the ship's captain, chief engineer and chief officer. — AFP

Siberian tiger kills worker at South African game park

PORT ELIZABETH: A worker at a game park in South Africa has been killed by a Siberian tiger, which leapt over an electric fence, killing him instantly, police said yesterday. The incident occurred on Wednesday at the privately-owned, 120-hectare (300-acre) Seaview Predators Park, about 30 kilometres (18 miles) from Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth.

Police spokeswoman Priscilla Naidu told AFP that a 50-year-old man was repairing an electric fence at one of the enclosures when a tiger leapt over, killing him on the spot. Police "are investigating," she said. The park named the employee as David Solomon, who had been working at the park for 15 years.

He was walking along a passageway between enclosures when he came under attack from the tiger, named Jasper. "David attempted to climb the fence of another enclosure to get to safety and was pulled off the fence," it said in a statement.

"It would appear that Jasper broke David's neck when he pulled him off the fence." The tiger then jumped into another enclosure, fought with another tiger and killed it, the park said. In 2015, an American volunteer in her 20s survived an attack at the park by a two-year-old Siberian tiger.

Tigers are not native to South Africa, but there are around 1,500 in captivity in the country, according to a global animal rights charity, Four Paws. "They have no legal protection in the country... it subsequently makes it easier for breeders to import, breed or keep tigers in captivity," Fiona Miles, its Africa director, said. — AFP

International

Pandemic sparks surge in Hong Kong 'devil's breath' cash drugging

Crime figures from last year showed 26 percent increase in robberies

HONG KONG: A spiked drink, a puff of dust, missing memories, and an empty bank account. Hong Kong's entertainment district Wanchai has been battered by a coronavirus-driven collapse in tourism and as times get desperate, several men have seen their night out turn into a nightmare. It took days for Stuart to recall a crucial memory. But after speaking with another victim, it suddenly came flooding back.

A woman trying to spark a conversation outside a bar, and then a man approaching with a determined look in his eye. "I thought he was going to punch me but he just blew something in my face," he recalled. "I laughed. But that was it. No memories after that." It was a breakthrough for Stuart who, like the other victims interviewed for this piece, asked to use a pseudonym.

He had been trying to figure out why post-match drinks with his cricket buddies in Wanchai, a popular hangout for white-collar foreign workers, had turned into one big blackout following his encounter outside the bar. Hours were missing alongside HK\$80,000 (\$10,300) — taken in six separate transactions from nearby ATMs. "It was a joint account with my missus and we have a baby on the way," the 36-year-old Brit, who moved to Hong Kong 18 months ago, told AFP. "Police said maybe I was just drunk, but why would I empty that account? It wouldn't be worth my life doing that."

Opportunistic crime

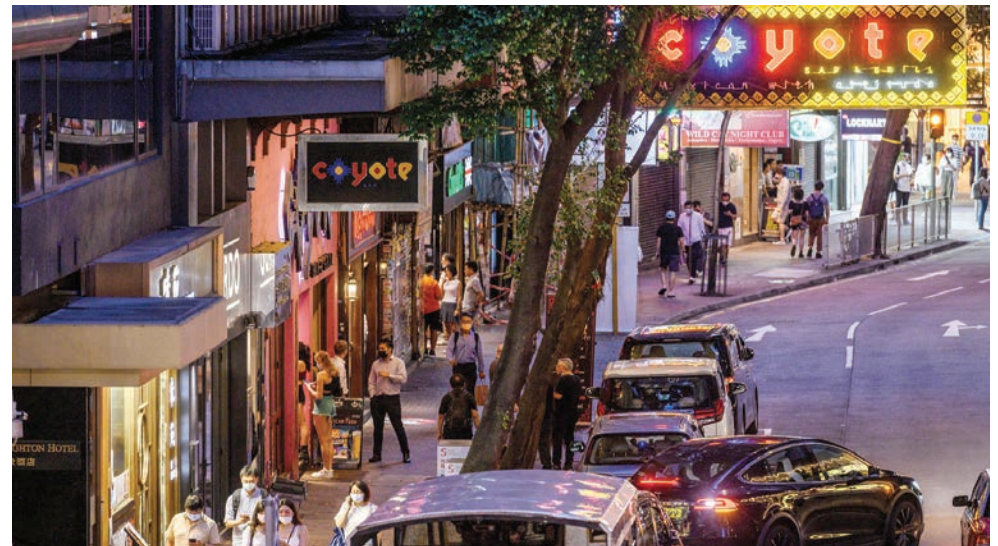
WhatsApp groups used by Wanchai bar owners and regulars have lit up in recent months

with similar stories. Most targets have no memory and awake to find accounts emptied by scammers who have drugged their unwitting victims — largely by tampering with their drinks — to keep them pliable and obtain their pin numbers. Victims have dubbed the scam "Devil's Breath" attacks — technically the nickname for the powerful anti-nausea drug scopolamine but in this case used more as a catch-all descriptor. Spiked drinks have previously posed a small risk in Hong Kong, a largely safe city, but the pandemic has exacerbated the issue.

"It's become a huge problem," one bar owner, who declined to be named, told AFP, saying multiple regulars had become victims. "The police are up and down here all night, checking our licenses, making sure we abide by pandemic restrictions. But this seems to be something they just don't, or won't, tackle," he added.

The jump in cases tracks with a general rise in opportunistic crime as Hong Kong experiences its worst recession in decades. Crime figures from last year showed a 26 percent increase in robberies, a 237 percent jump in blackmail and an 89 percent rise in deception.

The latter two categories include phone and online scams, which have filled local media in recent months. Cybercrime was up 55 percent last year. In a series of pandemic-themed reports the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime detailed how the coronavirus has transformed crime trends. Widespread lockdowns and travel restrictions, for example, have made break-ins and international drug smug-



HONG KONG: This picture taken on June 9, 2021 shows a general view of bars and local businesses in the popular entertainment district Wanchai in Hong Kong. —AFP

gling harder but the pandemic has been a boon for human trafficking, extortion, counterfeiting and cybercrime.

Police and bar owners in Hong Kong say the vast majority of robberies are carried out by teams of sex workers, an already vulnerable group, sometimes with the help of male accomplices. "We've all struggled during the pandemic and that includes the girls," another Wanchai bar owner said. "That doesn't excuse the crime,

but it helps explain why."

Three people interviewed by AFP, including Stuart, reported the robberies but said it was a struggle to get officers to treat them as victims. "When I reported it, the officer sighed and said he already had some 90 case files on his desk," recalled James, a 41-year-old British school teacher who had HK\$64,000 lifted from his account. "I was like 'Well now you have 91 cases mate'." — AFP

Diarrhoea kills four on Bangladesh Rohingya island

COX BAZAAR: Bangladesh officials said yesterday they have contained a diarrhoea outbreak which has killed four Rohingya refugees and infected 1,500 others on an island camp that has alarmed rights groups and the UN.

Bangladesh has shifted 18,000 refugees to the low-lying Bhashan Char from cramped settlements on the mainland.

But many of those relocated say they were coerced, and that health and other facilities on the silt island, in an area frequently hit by deadly cyclones, are poor.

Officials and Rohingya sources said the diarrhoea broke out early this month after the first heavy monsoon rains. At least four people have died over the last two weeks, two officials on the island told AFP, including a 20-year woman and three children.

Rahat Tanvir Anwar, a doctor from the sole 20-bed clinic at the island, said at least 1,550 people — nearly 10 percent of those on the island — had been infected and some 600 needed hospital treatment.

"The situation has improved. We have added 10 more beds in the hospital to treat patients. Yesterday, there are only 14 diarrhoea patients in the hospital," he told AFP.

A regional health chief said the outbreak was contained after

authorities quickly distributed 33,000 water purification tablets and 35,000 doses of oral rehydration solution.

"We have also imparted quick health education to them so that they don't drink any water other than the one extracted from deep tube wells," said Masum Iftekhar, the local district health chief.

One Rohingya man on the island, who declined to be named, said that doctors only gave his three-year-old son saline solution, and told him to take the boy home.

The doctor "told me to buy the medicine from a pharmacy. But it takes money to buy medicine. Where can I get money? Later, I went to a pharmacy. But there is no medicine there. My baby is still sick," he told AFP.

Saad Hammadi from Amnesty International blamed the "hurried relocation of thousands of Rohingya refugees to the island without letting rights and humanitarian groups carry out independent assessment of the conditions on the island".

The UN said earlier this month that although the island "has some potential", people on the island needed "access to meaningful livelihood opportunities, skills development, education, health and access to cash to facilitate their daily lives".

Bangladesh has rejected the allegations that Rohingya have been relocated forcibly and says conditions on the island are much better than on the mainland, where 850,000 refugees are crammed into camps. Authorities plan to eventually move 100,000 of them to Bhashan Char.

Most of the Rohingya living in Bangladesh fled a brutal military offensive in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 that UN investigators concluded was executed with "genocidal intent". —AFP

Baby found in box floating on Ganges

NEW DELHI: Indian police said yesterday they have launched an investigation after a newborn baby was found alive and well in a wooden box floating on the Ganges river.

The inside of the box was lined with red cloth and contained images of Hindu gods as well as a horoscope giving the date and time of the girl's birth and name, Ganga — the Hindi word for the holy river.

The child, thought to be around a month old, was recovered earlier this week in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh by a man in a boat in bushes at the river's edge.

"It is difficult to ascertain how long she had been floating in the river. The boatman heard a sound coming from the box and that's how he found the baby," local police official O.P. Singh told AFP.

"The baby is fine and is currently receiving medical attention. The government will take care of everything," Singh said. "We are trying to figure out where she came from." — AFP

International

Japan lifting virus emergency one month before Olympics

Number of infections nationwide has declined since mid-May

TOKYO: Japan's government yesterday approved lifting Tokyo's virus emergency just over a month before the Olympics, but set new restrictions that could sharply limit fans at Games events. The state of emergency in place in Tokyo began in late April and largely limits bar and restaurant opening hours and bans them from selling alcohol.

That measure will now end in the capital and eight other regions on June 20, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced. It will stay in place in Okinawa. "The number of infections nationwide has been declining since mid-May and the situation in terms of hospital beds is steadily improving," he said. "On the other hand, in some regions, there are signs that the fall in the number of infections is slowing," Suga added.

In place of the emergency, the government will implement so-called "quasi-emergency" measures in Tokyo and six other areas until July 11. The measures will slightly relax the rules on alcohol, allowing sales until 7:00 pm, but still asks restaurants and bars to shut at 8:00 pm. Crucially, with just five weeks until the pandemic-postponed Games open, Tokyo is likely to maintain strict limits on the number of spectators allowed at large events.

The current state of emergency allows only 5,000 people or 50 percent of venue capacity, whichever is smaller. And on Wednesday, the government approved an upper limit of 10,000 spectators for areas not under any restrictions. Those rules are likely to guide Olympic organisers when they decide in the coming days how many domestic fans, if any, will be allowed to attend. Overseas fans have already been banned from the Games for the first time, and organisers said they would wait to rule on domestic spectators until the emergency was lifted.

Possible ticket lottery

The issue is controversial. While cases in Japan have fallen from their fourth wave peak, some medical professionals fear that crowds of Olympic spectators could fan a new surge. A report expected soon from some of the government's top medical advisers will argue holding the Games without fans would be safest, national broadcaster NHK said yesterday.

The experts will urge that additional rules are imposed if spectators are allowed, NHK said. Japan has seen a comparatively small virus outbreak, with slightly over 14,000 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. But just over six percent of the population is fully vaccinated so far.

Given the likely restrictions, Olympic organisers have given up on selling any more tickets and are weighing a lottery system to determine which ticketholders will be able to attend events, Kyodo news agency reported. Millions of tickets were sold in Japan last year before the postponement, and while several hundred thousand applications for refunds were processed after the Games were postponed, the number of ticketholders is still likely to exceed any spectator caps at many events.

With just over a month until the Games open, organisers are attempting to build confidence that the biggest international event since the pandemic began will be safe for participants and the public. Newly updated virus rulebooks released this week warn athletes they could be expelled from the Games if they violate requirements like mask-wearing and daily testing.

Organisers say more than 80 percent of athletes will be



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (L) and Shigeru Omi, President of the Japan Community Health Care Organization, attend a news conference at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

vaccinated and they will be barred from interacting with the Japanese public. Recent polls have suggested a slight shift in public opposition to holding the Games, with more now in favour of it going ahead than cancelling it.

Previous surveys that offered postponement as an option tended to show most Japanese preferred either another delay or cancellation. —AFP

Japan to issue vaccine passport for travel abroad

TOKYO: Japan said yesterday it will make a vaccine passport available from next month for Japanese travellers, as governments around the world experiment with ways to relaunch tourism and business trips. "We are preparing to issue a certificate of vaccination for those who need one... when they visit foreign countries," top government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told reporters.

The certificate will be paper-based rather than digital and will be issued by local governments from sometime next month, he said. The European Union is working on a digital vaccine passport for this summer so it can welcome back badly needed tourists, and some EU countries plan to introduce certificates at the national level.

The EU version will feature information on whether a person has been vaccinated, or had the virus, tested negative, and recovered. Last month, Washington said it was also considering special documentation for vaccinated Americans who want to travel abroad. But the idea is controversial in some places, with conservative US states like Florida and Texas rejecting the idea of vaccine travel documents as a violation of peoples' basic rights. —AFP

Death toll rises as monsoon floods hit Bhutan, Nepal

THIMPU: At least a dozen people have been killed in Bhutan and Nepal and several others are missing as torrential monsoon rains hit the region, triggering landslides and inundating homes, officials said yesterday. The annual monsoon season is crucial to replenish water supplies across South Asia, but it also causes death and destruction.

Ten collectors of cordyceps — a fungus valued for its alleged aphrodisiac properties — died when their remote mountain camp north of Bhutan's capital Thimpu was washed away early Wednesday. Five others were injured and were in a stable condition in hospital, officials said. Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering offered his prayers and condolences and said a rescue team had been sent to the site.

"I urge everyone across the country to avoid visiting or camping by the riverside, and to be cautious of such possible mishaps during (the) monsoon," he added in a message on Facebook. In Nepal, the bodies of two Chinese workers were recovered yesterday from Sindhupalchok near the capital Kathmandu, taking the total death toll from floods in the district to three.

Their bodies were found more than a hundred kilometres from where they had initially been swept away by the overflowed Melamchi River, officials said. Thirteen others are still missing while hundreds more were displaced from their



SINHUPALCHOK: This general view shows houses submerged in flood waters in Sindhupalchok, some 70 km northeast of Kathmandu, after heavy monsoon rains caused the overflowing of the Melamchi River. —AFP

homes, they added. "We still see possibilities of rescuing alive those who are missing, because some of them could be taking shelter in safer places," Arun Pokharel, the local district chief, told AFP.

More than 70 people have been rescued so far. But rescue efforts have been hampered by telecommunication failures in the area, Pokharel added. The number of deadly floods and landslides has increased in recent years in Nepal. Experts say climate change and more road construction could be triggering the deadly disasters. More than 200 people were killed in landslides and floods during last year's monsoon season in Nepal. —AFP



Friday Times Lifestyle

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net

A man bathes outdoors during a hot summer day in Ajmer, in the Indian state of Rajasthan.— AFP

**Socially distanced robots serve
Makkah holy water ahead of hajj**

See Page 25

**FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT****Student Art Competition - 2021**

Advertising and Marketing Manager Taleb Kanjo (left) and Rania Al-Rashed, one of the jury members (right) present an award to the first winner, Shadan Alawadhi (center) in the special needs category. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

1st Winner

Painting by first winner, Shadan Alawadhi

Students express their creativity under the theme 'Frontline Heroes of Kuwait'

Special needs category

By Ben Garcia

Shadan Alawadhi bagged the first prize in the Kuwait Times painting competition in the special needs category. The competition was held under the theme 'Frontline Heroes of Kuwait'. Students were asked to draw frontline heroes to thank them for their valuable contribution and role during the coronavirus pandemic.

More than 3,000 students from 75 schools participated in the largest art competition for students in Kuwait under a strategic partnership with Zain Telecom sponsored by Huawei, Al-Bahar and Unilever. The competition aimed at

encouraging students to showcase their artistic skills by portraying the 'Frontline Heroes of Kuwait'.

Shadan spent an entire day figuring out her strategy. She said her ultimate goal was to win, so she did some planning and executed it to get the top prize. "I thought about the global nature of COVID-19 and put it together in one drawing," she said. "I experimented with various drawings and styles, and finally submitted my third drawing. I wasn't wrong. I came first for the drawing, which was exactly my goal," she said.

Shadan, 18, has an autistic condition. Her mom described her as a very intelligent and purpose-driven child. "If she

wants something, she will do her best to get it. Her dream is to become a fashion designer. She is also a great artist. She dedicated her drawings to her uncles, since two of her uncles died of the virus during the first wave," Shidu Alawadhi told Kuwait Times. "We will invite our close family members to celebrate with us the painting competition win," she said.

Shadan drew a figure representing several races of people of various nationalities. "In my drawing you can see the frontliners, but they are of different colors to signify that we are all fighting a deadly battle regardless of our race. I put some dark spots on the side to represent the virus," she explained.

25-year-old Mousa Abdul-Aziz Hassan from Nibras Ideal School bagged the second prize. He started drawing when he was six years old, first on sand, then on the home carpet. He is considered autistic, but is very talkative and participative. "I work as an assistant teacher at my school. During the pandemic we stopped school, so I miss our students," he said.

Mousa wants to be a computer game master one day. "I started researching about games and am learning from daily interactions with people who are into games. One day I will be able to create games of my own; I am sure of that," he said.

Ali Al-Harfouche, Division Manager -



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FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition - 2021



Rania Al-Rashed, one of the jury members (left), Advertising and Marketing Manager Taleb Kanjo (second left) and Ahmad Jasem Abul Jafar, Sponsorship and Events Professional, External and Internal Relations - Zain Kuwait (right) present an award to the second winner, Mousa Abdul-Aziz Hassan (center) in the special needs category.

2nd Winner



Painting by second winner, Mousa Abdul-Aziz Hassan

Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar Food and Consumer Products Company LLC, said: "We are supporting such an endeavor because this is the best thing - to encourage the new generation to be part of the mainstream and be an economic

force in the future. This social activity is just one of many of our CSR initiatives, a way of returning the favor to the community. We are glad to be part of it as always," he said.

The competition began on Feb 14 and

ended on March 31, 2021. It was open to students of all private and government schools. All artworks were hand drawn and not computer generated. The competition was open to students aged 6 to 18 years in the categories of 6-8 years, 9-11

years, 12-14 years, 15-18 years and special abilities. The judges are professionals in their field - Amina Ahmad Al-Shiban and Rania Al-Rashed. Kuwait Times thanks all students who participated in this event.

3rd Winner



Painting by third winner, Hamad Khaled Al Ajmi

4th Winner



Painting by fourth winner, Mohammad Feras Al Ebaid



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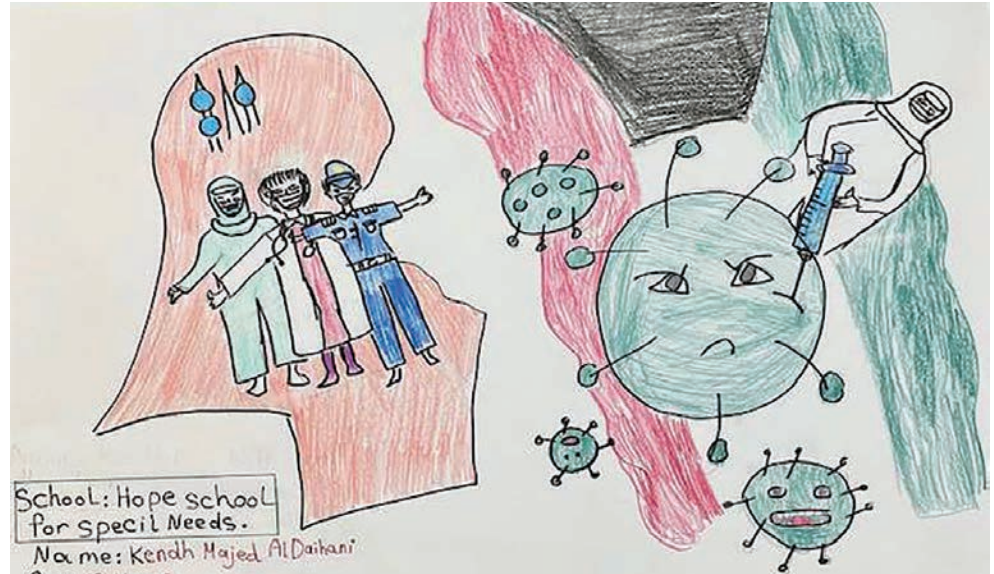
FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition - 2021



Rania Al-Rashed (left) and Ali Al-Harfouche, Division Manager-Agencies - Al-Bahar Group (right) present an award to the fifth winner, Kendh Majed Al Daihani (center) in the special needs category.

5th Winner



School: Hope school for special Needs.
Name: Kendh Majed Al Daihani
Age: 12 years
Address: Alandous block @ street @ house number 227
Email: hananhanini@yahoo.com
Phone number: 55555334

Painting by fifth winner, Kendh Majed Al Daihani



Group photo shows Kuwait Times advertising team, (from left) Advertising and Marketing Manager Taleb Kanjo, Rachele De Leon, Executive Secretary, Rania Al-Rashed, Rasha Al-Adawi, Media Coordinator and Jinse Jose, Marketing and PR Executive.



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FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

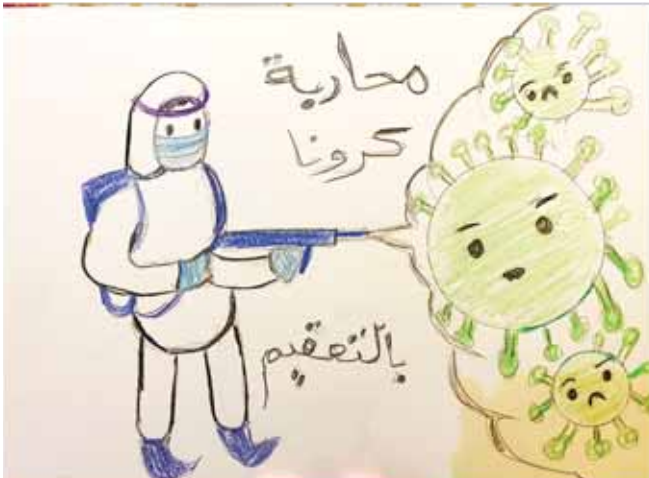
Student Art Competition - 2021



23

Friday,
June 18, 2021

Paintings of the other participants: **Special Needs**



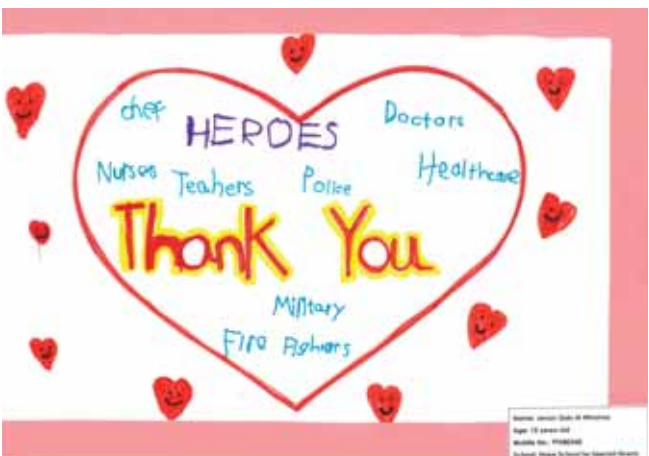
Aysha Salah Johar, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 15 years



Essa Al-Harbi, Dasman Bilingual School - 11 years



Mariam Ahmed Zeiab, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 20 years



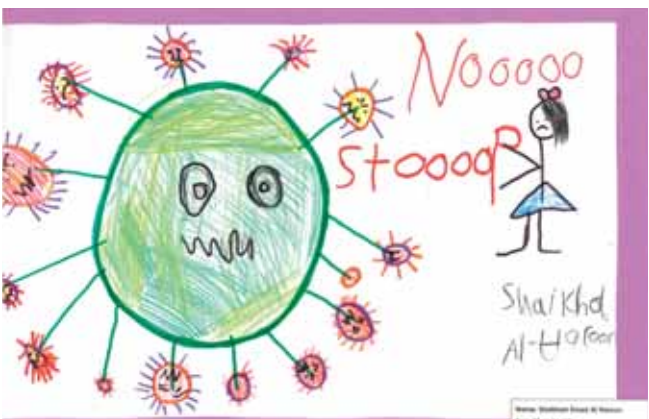
Jenan Qais Al Mhanna, Hope School - 12 years



Naif Abdullah Al-Mutari, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 14 years



Youssef Yaaqoub Al-Moutairy, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 16 years



Shaikhah Emad Al-Haroon, Hope School - 12 years



Mohsen Ali, Hope School - 11 years



Yousef Mohamed, Dasman Bilingual School - 11 years



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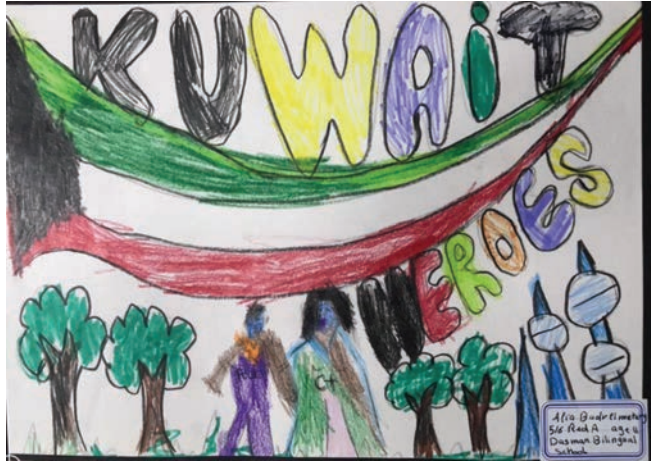




FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition - 2021

Paintings of the other participants: **Special Needs**



Alia Bader, Dasman Bilingual School - 11 years



Fatema Zayed Nasser, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 13 years



Loura Bander Al-Anazi, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 10 years



Mariam Abdullah Al-Selali, Al-Nibras Ideal School - 10 years



Mohamed Nasser, Dasman Bilingual School - 12 years



Mohamed Elmahdy, Dasman Bilingual School - 12 years



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Lifestyle | Feature

Crowds back at Disneyland Paris as France breathes easy

France savored a fresh sense of freedom yesterday as people were allowed to remove face masks when outside for the first time since last autumn and Disneyland Paris welcomed visitors after an eight-month COVID hiatus. The easing of coronavirus rules came as authorities hailed a rapid decline in new cases on the eve of summer holidays, raising hopes for a more vibrant and relaxed tourist season. "I'm happy, it frees us a little bit," said Aicha Drame, a student in the capital, where roughly half of pedestrians on many busy streets enjoyed the new-found freedom. "We're getting back to normal and it feels good," she told AFP.

The nationwide curfew of 11 pm will be lifted

ahead of schedule on Sunday, the government announced Wednesday, reinforcing a sense that France's vaccination drive is starting to pay off. Health Minister Olivier Veran said 60 percent of adults have now received at least one COVID jab, and youths 12 and over are now eligible as well. But he urged people to continue wearing masks outdoors, in particular in crowded areas. "It doesn't mean you can't wear it, if you want to protect yourself," he told BFM television.

Miriam Rofael, an American lawyer visiting from California, continued to wear a mauve mask that matched her top as she crossed a bridge over the Seine. "I trust the science and I trust that I'm protected," she said, but

acknowledged that "It is easier if it's hot, not to have to wear it." Camille Wodling, a photographer, was not only savoring the sun at a table outside a cafe. "Seeing strangers without a mask, you want to stop and take a good look at their face. And then you see smiles, it's good to see people smile," she said.

Showtime

Mickey and Minnie Mouse led the reopening party for hundreds of families at Disneyland Paris, Europe's biggest tourist attraction, which has been shut since October 30. For the past weeks one of the park's conference centers has served as a mass COVID vaccination site. As costumed park employees danced and sang, others walked through the crowds carrying reminders to keep at least one meter (three feet) from others. Masks remain required wearing as well, even on the vast boulevards stretching between rides, and attendance has been capped for now.

"I've really been looking forward to the opening of Disney, the joy, seeing people smile again—there are still masks but it's really, really great to be here," said Cynthia Castanier, who made the journey from the eastern suburbs of Paris. For Lea Leroux, who lives in Paris, it was the perfect day to rediscover "the magic of Disney, this world all its own." "It's incredibly important for everyone—we need to get back to life almost as normal, with some changes maybe but we need to be here," she said. — AFP

Socially distanced robots serve Makkah holy water ahead of hajj

Robots began handing out bottles of sacred water in Makkah this week in preparation for a socially distanced hajj pilgrimage in Islam's holiest city, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Saudi Arabia announced on Saturday that 60,000 residents vaccinated against the coronavirus would be able to perform the July pilgrimage—a number up from last year but drastically lower than in normal times. Some 2.5 million Muslims from around the world participated in 2019.

Officials hoping to prevent any coronavirus outbreaks rolled out the small black-and-white robots on Sunday, each loaded with three shelves of water bottles, as a few devotees helped themselves with a mixture of bafflement and amusement. "The aim of these robots is to provide personal services without any human contact," said Bader Al-Loqmani. He manages water from the sacred spring of Zamzam which emerges in Makkah's Grand Mosque, built around the Kaaba, the black cubic building towards which Muslims around the world pray. — AFP



A picture shows a smart robot used for the first time at the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Makkah, supplying worshippers with bottles of Zamzam water to reduce direct contact with staff as a measure to prevent COVID-19 infections during the yearly hajj pilgrimage. — AFP

Yemen fishermen hit jackpot with million-dollar find in whale's belly

For Yemeni fisherman Fares Abdulhakeem and his friends, the day was like any other as they headed out to sea to earn a living in the war-torn country—until they hit the jackpot in the belly of a whale. Abdulhakeem related how he was among 35 fishermen who stumbled upon a floating sperm whale carcass in February, about 26 kilometers (16 miles) off the coast of the southern city of Aden. He said they dragged the dead mammal back to shore, where they sliced it open and struck "floating gold", or ambergris, a rare substance formed in the whale's digestive system which is used in

making perfume.

The 127-kilogram (280-pound) lump of ambergris was sold to an Emirati businessman for more than \$1.5 million—an unimaginable sum for many living in what the UN says is one of the world's poorest countries. Some of the money was used to help those in need in the community, while the rest was split among the group of fishermen. Yemeni fishermen have traditional knowledge that ambergris—a waxy substance used to stabilize the scent in perfumes—can be found in sperm whales, but actually coming across one is a vanishingly rare event. The discovery has transformed their lives. "I head out to sea every day in search of my daily catch, and on one of those days we found a dead whale. It turned out to be whale full of ambergris," Abdulhakeem said.

'Our lives changed'

"From one moment to another, our lives changed," he told AFP. "There are those who bought boats, others built or fixed their houses. I built my house, I built my future... the circumstances here are already difficult." Salim Sharf, another one of the fishermen, said the discov-

ery has allowed him to "lay foundations for the future". "We are simple people, fishermen looking for our catch every day. If you found your catch for the day, you thank God. Suddenly, the Most Merciful gave us this," he told AFP. Life is not easy in Yemen, where millions have been pushed to the brink of famine amid a years-long civil war.

The country has been embroiled in a bloody power struggle since 2014 between the government-supported by a powerful Saudi-led military coalition and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The United Nations says Yemen is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis as its civil war rumbles on, with tens of thousands killed, millions displaced and two-thirds of its 30-million population dependent on some form of aid. For Abdulhakeem and the group of fishermen, it is back to the sea. "This ocean I will never do without. The love for the sea runs in my veins," Abdulhakeem said. "The sea is a better neighbor to you than a king," he said, reciting a popular Yemeni saying. — AFP

This file photo shows the entrance of the Walt Disney Studios in Disneyland Paris, in Marne-la-Vallée, east of Paris. ©AFP



This picture shows a replica of Ancient Egyptian figurines, fabricated at the Egyptian government's Konouz (Treasures) factory reproducing replicas of Ancient Egyptian items, at El-Obour city, east of the capital Cairo. — AFP photos

EGYPT SOUVENIR MARKET PINS HOPES ON TOURISM RESURGENCE

Piramids, Tutankhamun masks, Nefertiti busts — Egypt's souvenir-makers are pinning their hopes on a new lease of economic life, after tourism was battered by the coronavirus pandemic. In the shadow of the magnificent Giza Pyramids, Eid Yousri manufactures polyester Pharaonic figurines from a humble workshop erected on the roof of his family home. "We've lost nearly 70 per-

cent of our business," he told AFP, lamenting the plunge in visitors to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Before the pandemic, "we had about 15 workers-compared to five today," he said, noting that even the remaining staff were not full-time.

He sells his products from as little as 20 Egyptian pounds (about \$1.30, or one euro) to 200 pounds. Hundreds of small business

owners and artisans have been forced to mothball much of their activity, choked by cancelled flights and movement restrictions around the world. Yousri hopes that foreign tourists are lured back to Egypt in the latter part of the year, "especially Americans", with some groups from the US expected in September. In 2019, the last full year before the pandemic struck, tourism made up about

12 percent of Egypt's GDP.

After a long period of political instability dented earnings, revenues from the sector reached \$13 billion that year. But in 2020, a year when Egypt had initially eyed a further rebound to \$16 billion, takings collapsed to \$4 billion. In a recent interview with AFP, Tourism Minister Khaled El-Enani welcomed a partial recovery in visitor numbers. Around



Technicians craft replicas of Ancient Egyptian statues being fabricated at the Egyptian government's Konouz (Treasures) factory reproducing replicas of Ancient Egyptian items, at El-Obour city.



A man walks past a shop selling replicas of Ancient Egyptian statuettes, figurines, and canopic jars at the Khan El-Khalili bazaar area.



A replica of a sandal found at the tomb of Tutankhamun, fabricated at the Egyptian government's Konouz (Treasures) factory reproducing replicas of Ancient Egyptian items.

Lifestyle | Feature

Friday, June 18, 2021



Eid Yosri, 32, an Ancient Egyptian artefact replica craftsman and seller, poses for a photo with a mini sarcophagus of his own creation at his workshop in the district of Nazlet El-Semman near the Giza Pyramids Necropolis.



A replica of an Egyptian chariot, fabricated at the Egyptian government's Konouz (Treasures) factory.



A man walks past a shop selling replicas of Ancient Egyptian statuettes, figurines, and canopic jars at the Khan El-Khalili bazaar area.

500,000 have flown in monthly since April this year, more than double the number in January and up from an average of just 200,000 tourists per month in 2020.



A technician paints a replica of an Ancient Egyptian statue being fabricated at the Egyptian government's Konouz (Treasures) factory.

'Smart marketing exercise'

On the other side of town, in the narrow and labyrinthine alleys of Khan El-Khalili in Islamic Cairo, tourist Caroline Bucher is on the hunt for "locally made" products to bring back home to her native Dominican Republic. "We're looking for handmade and quality souvenirs, that are about local culture," she told AFP. "It has to be a memory of the trip."

In a souvenir market that was for many years flooded by cheap Chinese imports, the government is seeking to meet demand for

quality products sought out by tourists like Bucher. On the eastern outskirts of Cairo, a new antique reproduction factory has since March been preparing to capitalise on the much hoped for post-pandemic era. The factory, named Konouz (treasures in Arabic), produces furniture, statuettes and paintings that retrace four major periods of Egyptian heritage: Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic. Reproductions, in 1:1 scale or miniaturized, are accompanied by an official government-issued certificate of authenticity. The vast 10,000 square meter (approximately 107,650 square foot) factory is run by Hisham Sharawi, a retired general, who supervises around 150 workers, painters, cabinetmakers, sculptors and designers.

"We opened a gift shop at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization" in April, he told AFP. Other Konouz gift shops will open at museums and key archaeological sites later on. "When tourists come back, we will be ready," pledged Ahmed About Gheir, who is also working on the 'Made in Egypt' initiative. Government-driven investment under the scheme totals 80 million Egyptian pounds and focuses on quality production.

In 2015, the ministry of industry prohibited "the imports of goods and products of a popular art nature", including "models of Egyptian Antiquities" as a protective measure to safeguard its home-grown crafts industry from cheaper foreign competition. Most of the factory's replica objects are cast in polyester, plaster or metal. Specialized machines give a "final touch" to the replicas before they are painted by hand or covered with gold leaf.

But the cheaper items created under the initiative also risk crowding out local craftsmen who are unable to produce in such high volumes. Items at Konouz range from a small amulet selling for 50 Egyptian pounds to a three-meter statue setting back customers thousands of pounds. Tourism expert Elhamy al-Zayat calls the government initiative a "smart marketing exercise". But he warned against flooding the replica goods market. "You mustn't produce too much, otherwise it loses value," he noted. — AFP



A technician crafts a replica of an Ancient Egyptian statue.



Tourists walk past shops selling copper and stained-glass lamps at the Khan el-Khalili bazaar area in Egypt's capital Cairo.

Kids Page

Word Search

An Apple a Day

Word Search

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



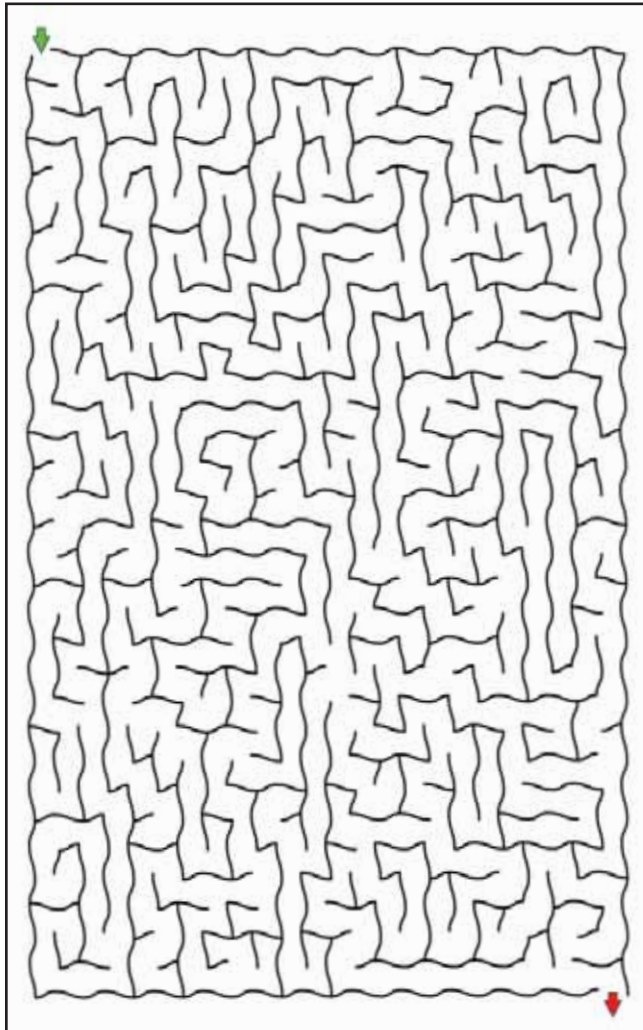
- Applejack
- Baked
- Brown Betty
- Butter
- Cake
- Candied
- Caramelized
- Chips
- Cider
- Cobbler
- Crisp
- Danish
- Dried
- Dumpling
- Eve's Pudding
- Fritter
- Juice
- Pie
- Sauce
- Soda
- Strudel
- Tarte Tatin
- Turnover



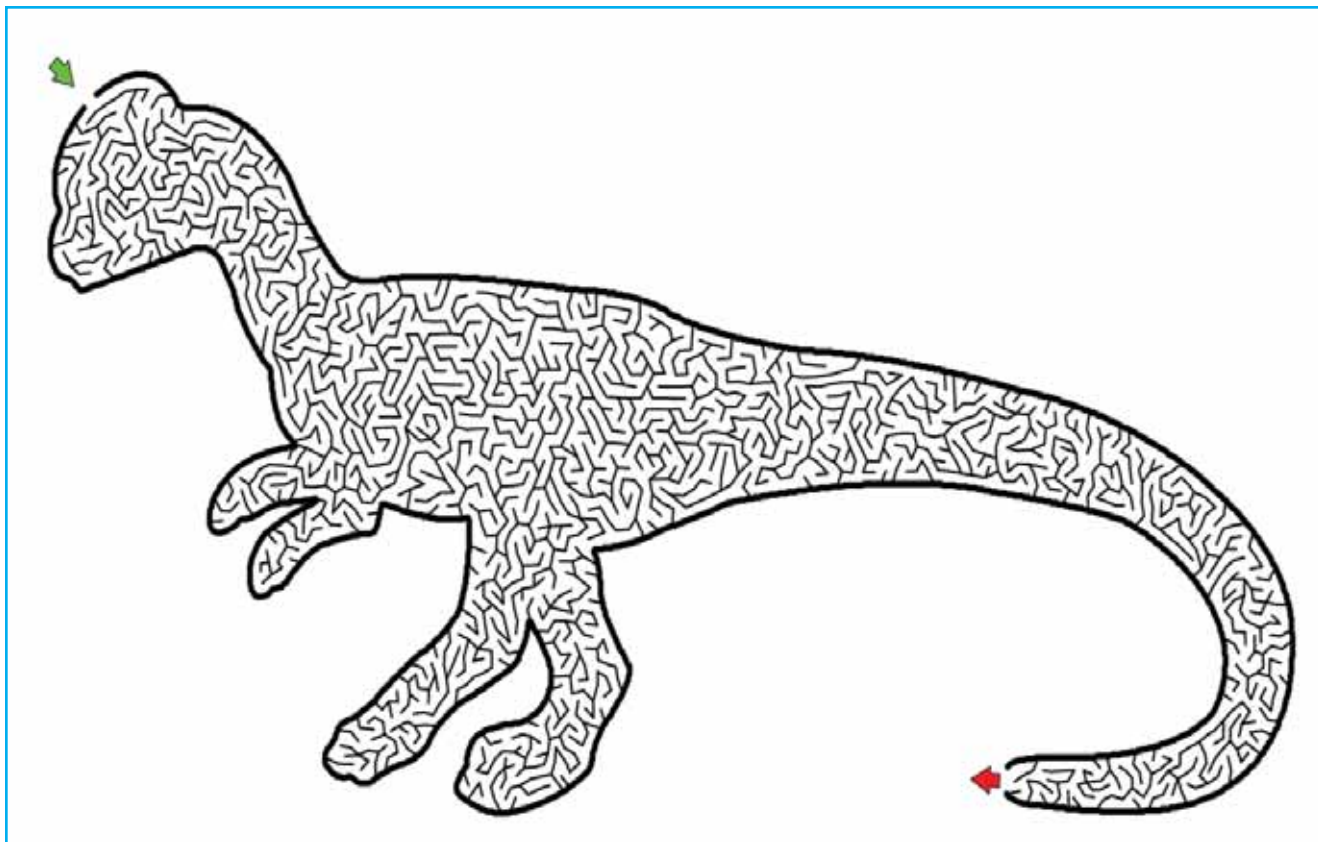
Color It



Kids Mazes



Find the way



Word Scramble

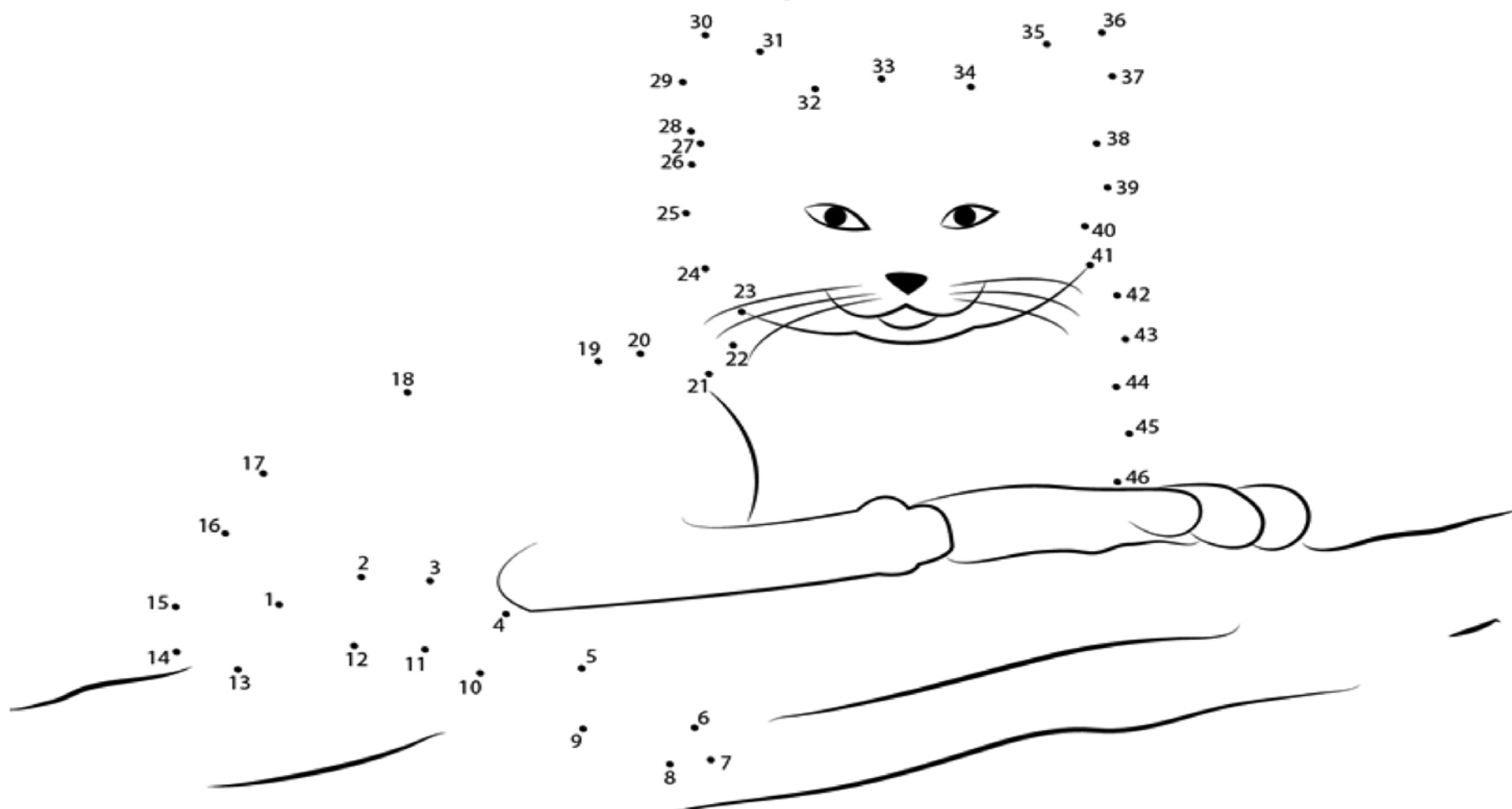
Back to School Scramble



Everything was almost ready to start the new school year but the labels for the classroom got jumbled. Can you unscramble the letters to form the names of 24 things you might find in your classroom? Watch out, one of the objects is formed from two words.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| IRCAH _____ | CRTOLUALCA _____ |
| FGAL _____ | RRAMEK _____ |
| BKOENOTO _____ | KACKCBAP _____ |
| CDLNARAE _____ | ROSSSICS _____ |
| REEARS _____ | CKALH _____ |
| LSARTPE _____ | OLCKC _____ |
| EGLU _____ | CATEEHR _____ |
| IRFLEAAMR _____ | MSOACPS _____ |
| CNLEPI _____ | ENDUSTT _____ |
| KSED _____ | GLEBO _____ |
| OASOCBEK _____ | NIBDRE _____ |
| TXOKBTOE _____ | APPRE _____ |

Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2021

31 Microsoft gives more power to chief Nadella with board election**32** Major banks, airlines hit in new global online outage**33** Fed downplays inflation fears, officials see rate hikes in 2023

TOULOUSE, France: An Airbus A330-800 aircraft takes off from Toulouse Blagnac airport, near Colomiers. Britain and the US have suspended retaliatory tariffs levied during a 17-year dispute over state aid for European planemaker Airbus and US rival Boeing, London announced yesterday.—AFP

UK, US reach deal over Airbus-Boeing row

Britain, US suspend retaliatory tariffs during 17-year dispute

LONDON: Britain and the US have suspended retaliatory tariffs levied during a 17-year dispute over state aid for European planemaker Airbus and US rival Boeing, London announced yesterday. The moves came in the wake of a similar long-term deal between the European Union and US unveiled Tuesday.

The Airbus-Boeing dispute, the longest-running in the history of the World Trade Organization, has seen damaging retaliatory tariffs slapped on products such as French wines, Scotch whisky and US wheat and tobacco. Both sides have now finally agreed “to suspend retaliatory tariffs for five years”, the British government said in a statement.

The agreement followed talks between Britain’s International Trade Secretary Liz Truss and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai. “Today’s deal

draws a line under an incredibly damaging issue,” said Truss. She added that it meant the UK could now focus on taking its “trading relationship with the US to the next level”, as Britain seeks to strike a post-Brexit free-trade agreement with the world’s biggest economy. Truss added that the two countries would also work “more closely to challenge unfair practices by nations like China and using the power of free trade to build back better from the pandemic”.

President Joe Biden and the EU earlier in the week also agreed a long-term truce in the Airbus-Boeing feud as they seek to put aside disputes and deal with rising challenges from China. The EU is trying to clear the slate of trade disputes to consolidate a more friendly phase and jointly tackle other issues, which include also curbing big tech and handling Russia. Britain resolved its dispute

separately having formally departed the EU at the start of the year.

Chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association Karen Betts called the truce “very good news” for the sector. She noted however that American whiskies remain subject to tariffs on entry into the UK and EU owing to a separate dispute on steel and aluminum. “We hope these tariffs can also be resolved quickly,” Betts said in a statement. The Airbus-Boeing dispute had meanwhile hit other industries such as cashmere, machinery and food.

“This deal will support jobs across the country and is fantastic news for major employers like Scotch whisky and sectors like aerospace,” Truss said. “We took the decision to de-escalate the dispute at the start of the year when we became a sovereign trading nation, which was crucial to breaking the deadlock and bringing the US to the

table.” Following Brexit, the UK has struck free-trade agreements with the likes of the EU, Japan and Australia.

The deal with Australia, announced Tuesday, was seen as low-hanging fruit however, ahead of more difficult talks with the United States and other major economic powers. And the UK finds itself caught in a dispute with major EU member France over post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Protocol, signed separately from the Brexit trade deal agreed in December, is supposed to see checks on goods heading into the province from mainland Britain. The arrangement effectively keeps Northern Ireland in the European customs union and single market that the UK left in January, to stop unchecked goods going to the bloc via neighboring EU state Ireland. — AFP

Business

Microsoft gives more power to Nadella with board election

Nadella strengthens his grip on pioneering US technology firm

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft on Wednesday named chief executive Satya Nadella as chair of its board, strengthening his grip on a pioneering US technology company he rejuvenated for a new age.

Nadella was unanimously elected head of the Microsoft board of directors, where he will guide the agenda “leveraging his deep understanding of the business to elevate the right strategic opportunities and identify key risks,” the company said in a post. Nadella, who took over from Steve Ballmer in February 2014, made Microsoft more relevant in a new tech world led by mobile-focused rivals such as Apple and Google. When Nadella took the reins as chief of Microsoft, some feared the technology giant was becoming a dinosaur. Nadella is credited with bringing new energy to the company, founded in 1975, and long focused on packaged software for personal computers.

Early in his tenure, Nadella ordered a massive reorganization, cutting some 18,000 jobs—or 14 percent of the workforce—under a plan aimed at simplifying the corporate structure and integrat-

ing the mobile division of Finland’s Nokia. Nadella, 53, made a priority of cloud computing, which has become a lucrative growth engine at the tech giant based in the Washington state city of Redmond.

Microsoft next week is to unveil a new generation of its Windows operating system, which market trackers say powers nearly three-quarters of the world’s desktop computers. Microsoft built its empire on software such as Windows and Office—licensed to computer makers or sold in packages for installation on machines in homes or workplaces.

Under Nadella, Microsoft has put more focus on renting software and services hosted at datacenters in the computing cloud, bulking up its Azure platform. The era of the personal computer was rocked by the rise of smartphones and tablets, but saw a revival of sorts during the pandemic as people geared up homes for remote work, school and play. Microsoft’s board on Wednesday also announced a quarterly dividend of 56 cents per share, which will be paid out in September. —AFP



In this file photo, Microsoft CEO Satya Narayana Nadella speaks. Microsoft Wednesday named chief executive Satya Nadella as chair of its board. — AFP

Big Tech critic takes lead US regulatory spot

SAN FRANCISCO: A prominent advocate of breaking up Big Tech firms began her first full day as the head of a key US regulatory agency on Wednesday, ramping up the potential for antitrust enforcement. Lina Khan was sworn in as chair of the Federal Trade Commission after the Democrat nominated by President Joe Biden was confirmed by the US Senate.

“It is a tremendous honor to have been selected by President Biden to lead the Federal Trade Commission,” Khan said in a release. “I look forward to working with my colleagues to protect the public from corporate abuse.”

Biden named Khan, an associate professor of law at Columbia University’s law school, to the post in March in a move suggesting an aggressive posture on antitrust enforcement.

Khan was confirmed Tuesday in a Senate vote of 69 to 28, with all the opposing votes cast by Republicans. The FTC has authority over some mergers and antitrust policy.

“This is a big win for consumers and the public interest,” said Charlotte Slaiman, of consumer advocacy group Public Knowledge. “The strong bipartisan vote in her favor is both confirmation of her impeccable credentials and of the bipartisan interest in holding Big Tech accountable.”

Khan previously served as counsel to the US House of Representatives subcommittee on antitrust, which last year released a lengthy report suggesting grounds for breaking up giants such as Facebook,



WASHINGTON: In this file photo FTC Commissioner nominee Lina M Khan testifies during a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington. — AFP

Google, Amazon and Apple. She also authored a 2017 paper entitled “Amazon’s Antitrust Paradox,” which outlined the growing dominance of the e-commerce and tech giant, which some say helped shift sentiment on antitrust. Khan worked in the office of FTC member Rohit Chopra and was legal director at the Open Markets Institute, a think tank which has been highly critical of the Silicon Valley giants.

Early this year, Tim Wu, another Big Tech critic, was appointed to an economic advisory post in the White House. Khan heads up the FTC amid a growing backlash against tech behemoths that have dominated key economic sectors and seen their influence grow during the pandemic.

Lawmakers and policymakers have in recent years been mulling the decades-old “consumer welfare” standard of antitrust enforcement, which allows for a largely hands-off approach for big firms as long as prices are not impacted. Critics say this approach has allowed Big Tech firms to grow unchecked with unprecedented power over key sectors of the economy. — AFP

Apple warns EU law ‘risks destroying iPhone security’

PARIS: The EU’s proposed new rules to rein in tech giants risk undermining the security of the iPhone, Apple chief Tim Cook warned Wednesday. The European Union last year unveiled tough draft rules targeting tech giants like Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook that could shake up the way Big Tech does business. Cook, speaking at the VivaTech convention for startups in Paris, took aim at some of the rules that target online “gatekeepers” such as Apple which controls which apps can be installed on its phones and tablets.

He said current proposals “would force side load-

ing on the iPhone, and so this will be an alternative way of getting apps onto the iPhone.”

Side loading would allow iPhone users to install apps directly from publishers, something they cannot currently do. The restriction that iPhone owners may only buy apps from Apple’s App Store, where commissions run up to 30 percent, is at the heart of a lawsuit between the tech giant and Epic Games, the publisher of the popular Fortnite video game.

The EU also pushed forward with charges against Apple over the App Store, saying the company used it to squeeze out rivals. Apple has countered that restrictions on downloading apps are essentially to protect consumers from dangerous software. Cook warned Wednesday that the proposed EU rules “would destroy the security of the iPhone, and a lot of privacy initiatives that we’ve built into the App Store.” He said that some parts of the draft EU rules “are not in the best interest of the user”. —AFP

FB’s AI software able to dig up origins of deepfake images

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook scientists on Wednesday said they developed artificial intelligence software to not only identify “deepfake” images but to figure out where they came from.

Deepfakes are photos, videos or audio clips altered using artificial intelligence to appear authentic, which experts have warned can mislead or be completely false. Facebook research scientists Tal Hassner and Xi Yin said their team worked with Michigan State University to create software that reverse engineers deepfake images to figure out how they were made and where they originated.

“Our method will facilitate deepfake detection and tracing in real-world settings, where the deepfake image itself is often the only information detectors have to work with,” the scientists said in a blog post.

“This work will give researchers and practitioners tools to better investigate incidents of coordinated disinformation using deepfakes, as well as open up new directions for future research,” they added. Facebook’s new software runs deepfakes through a network to search for imperfections left during the manufacturing process, which the scientists say alter an image’s digital “fingerprint.”

“In digital photography, fingerprints are used to identify the digital camera used to produce an image,” the scientists said. “Similar to device fingerprints, image fingerprints are unique patterns left on images... that can equally be used to identify the generative model that the image came from.”

“Our research pushes the boundaries of understanding in deepfake detection,” they said. Microsoft late last year unveiled software that can help spot deepfake photos or videos, adding to an arsenal of programs designed to fight the hard-to-detect images ahead of the US presidential election. The company’s Video Authenticator software analyzes an image or each frame of a video, looking for evidence of manipulation that could be invisible to the naked eye. — AFP

Business

Major banks, airlines hit in new global online outage

Problem traced to US-based tech provider Akamai

SYDNEY: Major banks and airlines were among businesses hit by a fresh global online outage yesterday, with the problem traced to US-based tech provider Akamai. An hour-long blackout hit a number of US airlines and several Australian financial firms as well as other companies dotted around the world, with angry customers unable to access websites and mobile apps.

"We are aware of the issue and actively working to restore services as soon as possible," an Akamai spokesperson told AFP. American, Delta, United and Southwest airlines were among those affected, while the issue appeared to be more prolonged in Australia—where problems struck mid-afternoon as much of the world slept. Australia's largest financial firm Commonwealth Bank told AFP that it and many of the country's major lenders had been hit.

The outages, which began around 2.10 pm Sydney time (0510 GMT), also hit Australia's postal service and Virgin Australia. The airline said in a statement that it "was one of many organizations to experience an outage with the Akamai content delivery system". A spokesperson for ANZ bank told AFP the incident was "related to an external provider" but that "connectivity was restored quickly and the most impacted services are back online".

Banks in New Zealand and the Hong Kong Stock Exchange also reported problems with their web platforms. It is the latest incident to draw attention to the stability of economically vital online platforms and the key role that a handful of mostly unknown compa-

nies play in keeping the web running. Last week US media and government websites, including the White House, New York Times, Reddit and Amazon were temporarily hit after a glitch with cloud computing services provider Fastly.

Fastly offers a service to websites around the world to speed up loading times for websites.

Akamai offers a range of similar IT products designed to boost online performance and security. The Cambridge, Massachusetts-based company refused to comment on what product the problem came from, but one of the affected firms reported it used Akamai for "IT network authentication".

Among the services Akamai provides are platforms that prevent DDoS attacks—an often crude cyberattack that knocks websites out by peppering them with requests for data. "Our priority is restoring service as quickly as possible. We will share additional information as it becomes available," an Akamai spokesperson said.

A series of high-profile hack-for-ransom attacks have also left corporations around the world jittery over cybersecurity risks, although there was no indication the latest problems were caused by malicious actors. Colonial Pipeline was briefly shuttered after an attack in May, and JBS, the world's largest meat producer, was forced to stop operations in the United States and Australia. Both firms reportedly paid ransoms to get operations back up and running.

The issue of cybersecurity was at the top of the agenda when US



Major banks and airlines were among businesses hit by a fresh global online outage yesterday, with the problem traced to US-based tech provider Akamai.

President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin met in Geneva on Wednesday. Washington believes hackers who have extorted hundreds of millions of dollars from Western governments, companies, and organisations operate from Russian soil. — AFP

NBK provides fridges to drive-thru vaccination center at Jaber Causeway

KUWAIT: In support to the Ministry of Health and the Kuwait Red Crescent Society's (KRCS) efforts in facing COVID-19, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) provided fridges to the drive-thru vaccination station on the southern island of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway. NBK Volunteers will tour around to ensure that water is delivered on daily basis to the donated 20 fridges in collaboration with Aqua Gulf.

This initiative is a part of the NBK's donation to Kuwait Vaccination Centers in different governorates. On this occasion, Talal Al-Turki, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager expressed his sincere appreciation to the national efforts in providing support to face the COVID-19 pandemic. "Since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, NBK continued to fulfill its social responsibility and support to the government efforts".

Al-Turki added, "NBK is a key supporter of the current vaccination efforts". Previously, NBK provided fridges to five different vaccination centers in addition to Kuwait International Fair Grounds in Mishref Area.

NBK's donation also included Golf Carts to provide free rides for elderly patients and people with disability from and to the parking area as well as shelters to the outdoor waiting areas at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Kuwait International Fair Ground, Mishref.

"Throughout the bank's history, we have been committed to meeting our responsibilities towards society and to support the efforts of governmental institutions and civil society for the farewell of our community", he noted. It's worth mentioning that in response to the pandemic, NBK donated KD1 million to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to purchase medical devices and ventilators in addition to deploy a field hospital fully equipped with the latest medical equipment, an ICU, a medical laboratory, a radiology center, and a fully-equipped pharmacy.

NBK maintains its leading position among the private sector institutions through its commitment to fully support social programs in the areas of healthcare, childcare, social, environmental, sports and education.



Talal Al-Turki

Huawei launches all-new Huawei Band 6 in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei yesterday announced the newest member of its Huawei Band Series, Huawei Band 6. With consumers increasingly demanding more from their wearable devices, the new Huawei Band 6 has been greatly enhanced in terms of health and fitness monitoring, design and battery life to provide a smartwatch-like experience at the friendlier price point of a smart band.

The Huawei Band 6 will be available on Huawei's official website and across select retailers in Kuwait starting from 17 June 2021 and priced at KD 17.900. It will be available in four different color variants of Graphite Black, Amber Sunrise, Sakura Pink and Forest Green.

All-day SpO2 monitoring

Health monitoring features are one of the most popular features for smart band users. Thanks to the hardware modules optimized, based on the Huawei TruSeen™ 4.0 and new smart power-saving algorithm, the Huawei Band 6 now supports All Day SpO2 monitoring. It monitors users' health and generates an alarm when the blood oxygen level is low, helping them take swift action and manage their health more proactively. Huawei Band 6 also provides continuous, real-time, and accurate heart rate, sleep and stress monitoring. It will also alert the user if the resting heart rate is too high or too low.

1.47-inch fullview AMOLED display

Huawei Band 6 is Huawei's first smart band to include a 1.47-inch AMOLED FullView Display with a 64 percent screen-to-body ratio, meaning it can display more information while remaining stylish. Huawei Band 6 comes with a 1.47-inch AMOLED FullView Display with a resolution of 194x368 and 282PPI for vivid content. The colorful screen



display provides users with greater clarity of information and gives workout and health data in a more user-friendly display ratio. Users can easily swipe up and down, left and right, just like using a smartphone touchscreen.

Two-week battery life

Supported by a high-efficiency chipset and smart power-saving algorithms, the Huawei Band 6 enables continuous heart rate and sleep monitoring with a 14-day battery life for uninterrupted use. On top of this, the Huawei Band 6 supports fast charging via a magnetic charger. One five-minute charge can sustain the smart band for two days of typical use. Weighing only 18g, the Huawei Band 6 is a remarkable piece of kit.

A new lifestyle

The fitness features of Huawei Band 6 also bring a whole new experience to users. The 96 workout modes include 11 professional workout modes such as indoor and outdoor running, cycling, and rope skipping, and 85 more customized modes, including fitness, ball games, and dancing types, offering wide coverage of workout tracking. The Huawei Band 6 adopts Huawei-developed Huawei TruSport™ professional exercise algorithm to deeply analyze users' exercise capabilities based on multi-dimensional parameters such as heart rate variability data and exercise data, providing them with scientific assessment and suggestions on their exercise capabilities.

Business

Fed downplays inflation fears, officials see rate hikes in 2023

US policy-makers warn risks to economic outlook remain

WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell once again tried to assuage fears of rising US inflation, even while a majority of central bank officials now believe interest rates will increase in 2023. While widespread vaccinations have allowed the United States to rebound faster than previously expected from the COVID-19 pandemic downturn, the Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) cautioned that "risks to the economic outlook remain" in a statement following its two-day meeting.

But amid the accelerating rebound, Fed officials appear to have grown more hawkish, with 11 of the 18 committee members now expecting at least two hikes of the benchmark lending rate in 2023, according to updated quarterly economic projections. The March forecasts showed only seven officials expecting rate liftoff in 2023, but seven now expect one as soon as next year.

However, Powell stressed that those projections "do not represent a committee decision or plan." Markets and analysts have been closely watching FOMC meetings in recent months as they weigh fears that the Fed's stance on rising prices is too passive, which could allow an upward price spiral that would force the central bank to aggressively raise rates and crush economic growth. Powell again tried to ease those worries, stressing that officials stand ready to alter policy if they see signs

inflation moved "materially and persistently beyond levels consistent with our goal."

Unmet goals

However, the FOMC said it will not begin to withdraw the stimulus measures implemented at the start of the pandemic until progress is made on reducing unemployment and keeping inflation above their two percent goal. And since inflation has lagged the bank's target for over a decade and unemployment remains at 5.8 percent, achieving "substantial further progress is still a ways off," Powell told reporters in his press conference following the meeting.

He warned that the "recovery is incomplete" and improvement has been "uneven," with employment in hard-hit sectors well below pre-pandemic levels. But some economists remain skeptical the Fed can manage the policy dilemma smoothly, and US stock markets lost ground, with the Dow dropping 0.8 percent. "Certainly, some of the rise in inflation is temporary, but as we have argued, risks are rising that underlying inflation pressures are mounting," said Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets.

Tapering bond buying

The Fed officials' median forecast for annual inflation this year increased to 3.4 percent from the previous 2.4 percent in March, but they see the rate



LOS ANGELES: People walk and take photos on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. While widespread vaccinations have allowed the United States to rebound faster than previously expected from the pandemic downturn, the FOMC cautioned that "risks to the economic outlook remain." —AFP

slowing to 2.1 percent in 2022, according to the projections. Committee members also boosted their growth outlook to seven percent from 6.5 percent. On inflation, Powell said, "What we are seeing in the near term is principally associated with reopening of the economy, and not with a tight labor market or tight resource constraints."

Those temporary effects should "stop, and in fact it would reverse over time," he said. However, "we are not sure" about the timeframe. The consumer price index jumped to five percent for the 12 months ended in May, but Powell attributed that to "a perfect storm of strong demand and limited supply" for things like used cars. —AFP

NZ economy returns to pre-virus levels

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's economy posted better-than-expected growth of 1.6 percent in the first quarter of 2021, official data showed yesterday, with analysts saying activity was back at pre-coronavirus levels. The expansion in January-March this year exceeded forecasts of a 0.5 percent rise and reversed a 1.0 percent contraction in the final quarter of 2020.

Statistics New Zealand said the figures meant the economy grew 2.4 percent in the 12 months to the end of March, driven by spending on hospitality and big-ticket retail goods such as televisions and cars. New Zealand has largely contained the coronavirus, with no recent community transmission and just 26 deaths in a population of five million, allowing minimal day-to-day restrictions.

While there was a brief recession in mid-2020, Kiwibank chief economist Jarrod Kerr said surging domestic activity had more than made up for declines recorded in sectors such as tourism and international education. Kerr said a booming housing market was fuelling construction, which rose 6.6 percent in the quarter. "The economy has confidently returned to pre-COVID levels," he said.

"We've more than dodged a double dip recession. We've outrun it. We're spending and building our way out of the hole that COVID created." Kerr said the strong figures meant the central bank, which has held its base rate at a record low of 0.25 percent since March 2020, would likely look at easing monetary policy by May next year. —AFP

Ryanair, UK airports sue govt over COVID travel rules

LONDON: Irish no-frills airline Ryanair and Manchester Airports Group (MAG) are to launch a legal challenge against the UK government over its COVID traffic-light travel restrictions.

The legal action seeks greater transparency in how destinations are classified within the system, according to MAG, which manages Manchester and London Stansted airports. Britain's COVID risk system ranks destinations as green, amber or red, to determine quarantine and testing requirements when travellers return.

However, the recent reclassification of Portugal from green to amber-sparked sector-wide anger.

The lawsuit is backed by a number of other airlines, a MAG statement said. "Recent developments suggest that the government is now unwilling to open up international travel by putting low risk countries on the green list," MAG chief executive Charlie Cornish was quoted as saying.

"For most countries, the traffic light seems to be stuck on amber for no obvious reason, despite having prevalence rates much lower than the UK." He added that the government was not being "open" and needed to provide more clarity to enable the sector to plan ahead and travellers to book with confidence. Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary decried the system as a "complete shambles".

"This go-stop-go-stop policy is causing untold damage to the aviation industry and frustrating and upsetting millions of British families," said O'Leary.

"We call on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to explain the scientific basis behind this system that the government seem to make up as they go along."

'Havoc'

Under the current rules launched last month, Britons heading to low-risk "green" countries and territories simply take a virus test before and after they travel. But those going to amber or red destinations must quarantine for 10 days after they return to Britain—in hotels for red-list arrivals—and take several COVID-19 tests. The British government advises against travel to amber-listed countries unless for a limited number of exceptional reasons, which does not include holidays.

Meanwhile, only travellers who have British or Irish citizenship or residency rights can enter from red-list countries. Earlier this month, the travel sector reacted with fury after Portugal was unexpectedly shifted from green to amber.

The move left no European Union nation on the green list. The UK-based World Travel and Tourism Council declared last week that the government must scrap the system, which it says has "wreaked havoc" among consumers and businesses, adding this would save hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Meanwhile the government said yesterday that it will "consider the role of vaccinations" for inbound travel. That could potentially open up travel to popular summer hotspots like Spain, France and Italy, which are all on the amber list.

"Decisions on our traffic light system are kept under constant review, and based on a range of health factors," said a government spokeswoman. "Recognizing the strong strategic rationale and success of the vaccine program, we have commenced work to consider the role of vaccinations in shaping a different set of health and testing measures for inbound travel." —AFP

Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Yusufi have changed my name to Yusuf Ali Amjerawala s/o Tayeb Ali and now I would be known as Yusuf Ali Amjerawala s/o Tayeb Ali. Address: 251, Masakin Saifiya, Bijalpur, Indore, M.P (India). **(C 0608) 18-6-2021**

henceforth be known as Mohamed Hanif Jabar Shadiq. **(C 0606) 17-6-2021**

I, Jayas Sandip S/O Sandip Kumar holder of Indian Passport No. S5772173 issued at Kuwait on 19/04/2018 & Civil ID No. 318032201907, have changed my name from Jayas Sandip to Jayas Kumar in all my dealings and documents. I will be known by name of Jayas (given name) and Kumar (sur name). **(C 0605) 16-6-2021**

I, Sahul Mohamed Jabar Shadiq, S/o, Mohamed Hanif, born on 05.03.1959, (Native Place: Pallapatti, Karur District), residing at No. 111/1E, Dindigul Road, Pallapatti, Pallapatti Bazaar & Post, Aravakurichi Taluk, Karur District - 639 207, shall

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot and Dusty with fresh to strong at times north westerly wind with speed of 40 - 70 km/h .

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

WEATHER WARNING			Strong Wind and Dust	
STATION	MAX EXP	MIN REC	SFC. CHART 17/06/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	44 °C	31 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	43 °C	32 °C		
ABDALY	44 °C	30 °C		
JAHRA	44 °C	30 °C		
SALMIYAH	40 °C	31 °C		
AHMADI	42 °C	33 °C		
NUWAISIB	45 °C	29 °C		
WAFRA	44 °C	30 °C		
SALMY	42 °C	26 °C		
JAL ALIYAH	43 °C	28 °C		

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	06/18	Hot with a chance for rising dust	45 °C	31 °C	NW	20 - 50 km/h
Saturday	06/19	Hot	46 °C	31 °C	NW	15 - 38 km/h
Sunday	06/20	Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas	47 °C	30 °C	NW	12 - 42 km/h
Monday	06/21	Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas	47 °C	30 °C	NW	15 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	03:13
Sunrise	04:49
Zuhr	11:49
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:49
Isha	20:22

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	45 °C
MIN. Temp.	33 °C
MAX. RH	23 %
MIN. RH	04 %
MAX. Wind	N 71 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

Sports

Controversial Copa America fails to captivate host Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: Driving by his neighborhood stadium, Paulo Torres takes his eyes off the road long enough to look the familiar venue over in disbelief. "What? Messi is going to play here?" Like many Brazilians, the Rio de Janeiro ride-hailing app driver has not been paying much attention to the Copa America, even though their normally football-mad country is standing in as emergency host of the pandemic-battered South American championships.

Neymar and the "Selecao" are vying to win Brazil's second straight continental title, and global superstars including Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Arturo Vidal are all slated to play. But the Copa America has largely failed to captivate Brazil, overshadowed by the desperate rush to replace original co-hosts Argentina and Colombia, sponsor withdrawals, political polarization and COVID-19. Torres, 39, is a case in point.

A football fan, he has lived his whole life in the neighborhood where the Nilton Santos Olympic Stadium sits, but did not know Messi's Argentina were making their tournament debut there against Vidal's Chile Monday. "I didn't even know there was a match, let alone that Messi was playing here. Caramba! That's crazy, right?" he said. Not that it would have made much difference. With matches being held in empty stadiums because of

COVID-19 - still raging in Latin America - Brazilians are watching them on TV just like everyone else, if at all.

COVID blues

The majority of Brazilians - 54 percent - are against holding the tournament in their country, according to an online poll by market research firm Offerwise. Three sponsors - Mastercard, beer giant Ambev and alcoholic beverage company Diageo - pulled their branding from the tournament. It has been a rough ride for this edition of the Copa America, the world's oldest international football tournament.

Originally scheduled for 2020, it was delayed 12 months by the pandemic. It nearly had to be called off again when Argentina and Colombia fell through as hosts because of a surge of COVID-19 in the former and violent anti-government protests in the latter. President Jair Bolsonaro gave his blessing two weeks before last Sunday's opening match for Brazil to stand in.

But the move is hugely controversial, given that Brazil is also reeling from COVID-19, which has claimed nearly half a million lives in the country, second only to the United States. The decision has been swept up in politics in a Brazil deeply divided over Bolsonaro, who has fought lockdowns, pushed ineffective

medications and refused offers of vaccines against COVID-19.

COVID-19 has meanwhile arrived for the Copa as feared. Three days into the month-long tournament, Brazil's health ministry reported 27 cases among players and staff from the 10 participating teams, and 26 among service providers contracted for the four-city event. Brazil played their opening match against a COVID-decimated Venezuela forced to call up 15 emergency replacements. Unsurprisingly, the defending champions won 3-0.

'Not the same'

The contrast with the 2014 World Cup and even the 2019 Copa America in Brazil is stark. In Brasilia, where the opening match was played, it was difficult to find any fans at all. Henrique Chavari, 38, was one of the few who had left home to cheer on Brazil. He watched the match in a bar. "They're playing the Euro 2020 right now with fans in the stadiums, because Europe is way ahead of us on vaccination," he said. "Here, we have to watch the Copa America on TV. You can't even compare it. It's just not the same without that human warmth." Neighborhoods in Rio and Sao Paulo that normally erupt in cheers when the home team score were conspicuously quiet Sunday. The kickoff match lost out to a musical reality show in TV ratings. Part of the issue may be



BRASILIA: In this file photo taken on June 13, 2021, view of the ball before the start of the Conmebol Copa America 2021 football tournament group phase match between Brazil and Venezuela at the Mane Garrincha Stadium. —AFP

disenchantment with the Brazilian national team. The five-time world champions' current lineup does not command the reverence of yesteryear.

"Romario, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, that generation of players got us so excited, they made us want to watch them play. Today it's a bunch of players who have some talent but whose main interest is making money," said Torres. "I always used to take a break from work to watch the 'Selecao,'" he said from behind the wheel. "Now I'm not interested." —AFP

Lawyer says docs 'killed' Maradona via negligence

SAN ISIDRO, Argentina: A lawyer for a nurse under investigation in the death of Argentine football great Diego Maradona said Wednesday that doctors killed him through negligence. "They killed Diego," attorney Rodolfo Baque told reporters after his client, nurse Dahiana Gisela Madrid, was questioned by prosecutors. Maradona died of a heart attack last November at the age of 60, weeks after undergoing brain surgery for a blood clot.



Phil Mickelson

Madrid, 36, is one of seven people under investigation for manslaughter after a board of experts looking into Maradona's death found he had received inadequate care and was abandoned to his fate for a "prolonged, agonizing period". Baque insisted it was the doctors treating Maradona while he recovered from the brain operation, not his client, who were to blame for the soccer legend's death.

He said Maradona was being treated for heart trouble but at the same time was on psychiatric medication that sped up his heart rate. Also, Maradona fell while in the hospital, and when Madrid asked to have a CAT scan done on him, an aide to Maradona refused, arguing that if the press found out it would look bad, Baque said. —AFP

Mickelson turns 51 with Slam quest in focus at US Open

LA JOLLA: Phil Mickelson celebrated his 51st birthday on Wednesday by making final preparations for the US Open as the six-time major winner chases more golf history starting yesterday at Torrey Pines. Mickelson became the oldest major champion last month with a shocking victory at the PGA Championship. The left-hander will be the oldest in the field of 156 teeing off at the 7,652-yard, par-71 oceanside layout.

"It's a unique opportunity because I've never won a US Open," Mickelson said. "I have a chance to prepare properly and I wanted to put in the right work. I've shut off a lot of the other stuff to where I can kind of focus in on this week and really give it my best chance to try to play my best." Mickelson would complete a career Grand Slam by winning the US Open, joining a select group that includes Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Gene Sarazen. But he has a history of heartbreak in the event with a record six runner-up finishes, most recently at Merion in 2013. Mickelson, who grew up only a few miles from Torrey Pines, remains a popular bet at 50-1 odds after his historic triumph at Kiawah Island. "To come into this event as the most recent major winner is special," Mickelson said.

World number 30 Mickelson has won three US PGA events at Torrey Pines but none since a 2001 renovation. That's why he spent the past two weeks re-learning the details of a course he once knew like the back of his hand. "I've played out here a bunch since the redo, but I really haven't spent a lot of time to learn the nuances," Mickelson said. "I put a lot of time in on the greens. I



Phil Mickelson

needed to kind of relearn and see the breaks and know what the ball does on these greens." Mickelson teed off on the 10th hole yesterday in a Southern California trio with Max Homa and fourth-ranked Xander Schauffele. Fans won't see a first-round group that features feuding rivals Brooks Koepka, a four-time major winner, and defending champion Bryson DeChambeau. They were placed on opposite ends of the start list, Koepka in the fifth group off the 10th tee in the morning and DeChambeau in the fifth group off the first tee in the afternoon.

A video of Koepka showing his disdain for a loud-talking DeChambeau from last month's PGA sparked the spat, which has extended into social media. "I hope on the weekend we can play against each other and compete," DeChambeau said. "It would be fun and would be great for the game." World number one Dustin Johnson, last year's Masters champion, could be overtaken in the rankings if number two Justin Thomas or Spain's third-ranked Jon Rahm win the US Open. —AFP

Sports

Top-seeded Sixers, Jazz on the brink after Hawks, Clippers win

LOS ANGELES: The top-seeded Philadelphia 76ers and Utah Jazz were left on the brink of elimination from the NBA playoffs on Wednesday as the Atlanta Hawks and Los Angeles Clippers notched against-the-odds victories on the road. In Philadelphia, Trae Young scored 39 points as Atlanta overturned a 26-point second-half deficit to lead the Hawks to a 109-106 defeat of the Sixers in their Eastern Conference semifinal clash.

The Clippers-rocked by an injury to star Kawhi Leonard earlier Wednesday - then toppled the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City by 119-111 to seize a 3-2 lead in their best-of-seven Western Conference series. The results left the Sixers and Jazz one defeat away from elimination as they prepare to travel to Atlanta and Los Angeles for their respective game sixes.

Encouraged by a raucous home crowd, the Sixers appeared to be poised to claim a 3-2 advantage against the Hawks as they raced into a big lead in the second half. But a magnificent Atlanta offensive performance led by Young saw the Hawks steadily chip away at the deficit. Young nailed a floater to cut the Sixers' lead to 104-102 before drawing a foul to earn three free throws which he promptly drained to give the Hawks their first lead of the game at 105-104 with 1:26 remaining.

Danilo Gallinari's fadeaway put Atlanta 107-104 ahead and the Sixers' fate was sealed when Joel Embiid missed two late free throws that could have put Philadelphia back within striking distance. The Hawks can clinch a series victory in front of their home fans on Friday when game six heads back to Georgia. "We just kept fighting," Young said afterwards. "We have confidence in each other. We're a great group, good to be around. "We all love you to each other's company and

it shows on the court and we never stopped believing until the final buzzer."

'It's on all of us'

That belief has left the fifth-seeded Hawks now on the brink of a place in the Eastern Conference finals, a remarkable turnaround for a team that axed head coach Lloyd Pierce on March 1. Philadelphia, who piled on 38 points in the first quarter alone, were led by Embiid with 37 points while Seth Curry had 36 points. No other Philadelphia player made double figures. "We struggled down the stretch," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said.

In Salt Lake City, Paul George was the hero as the Clippers stunned the Jazz to move within one win of the Western Conference finals. The Clippers' day began with news that Kawhi Leonard faces missing the remainder of the series - and possibly the postseason - after suffering a knee injury in game four.

But George responded with a masterful 37-point display which included 16 rebounds and five assists. Marcus Morris added 25 points while Reggie Jackson chipped in with 21. "This was the biggest game of the postseason, especially being down our best player," George said afterwards. "We knew coming into this, we had to play together, we had to step up. We did a great job playing collectively." George praised his teammates for soaking up an early barrage from Utah, who opened up a 10-point lead in the second quarter. "We didn't overreact," George said. "They came out hot. Good thing about it was we were able to weather the storm." The series now returns to Los Angeles on Friday, where a win for the Clippers will see Utah eliminated. "We just got to go into it with the mindset that we



SALT LAKE CITY: Royce O'Neale #23 of the Utah Jazz drives into Reggie Jackson #1 of the LA Clippers in Game Five of the Western Conference second-round playoff series at Vivint Smart Home Arena on Wednesday. —AFP

don't want to come back to Utah," George said. Bojan Bogdanovic led Utah's scorers with 32 points, while Donovan Mitchell was held to 21, making just four from 14 attempts from three-point range. —AFP

Cricket's David and Goliath face off in Championship final

SOUTHAMPTON: India face New Zealand in the inaugural World Test Championship final today in a match that could have a profound influence on cricket globally. New Zealand are battle-hardened thanks to a 1-0 series win against England completed on Sunday with a dominant eight-wicket win at Edgbaston after a draw at Lord's.

"Ideal preparation, having two Test matches against England in these conditions," said experienced New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor ahead of the five-day match in Southampton, on England's south coast. "Couldn't think of anything better." The Blackcaps, who won in Birmingham despite making six changes, are set to welcome back captain and star batsman Kane Williamson and pace spearhead Tim Southee.

Many cricket fans around the world would be happy to see New Zealand, a country with a population of around five million, compared with India's 1.3 billion, win a major global title after their agonizing Super Over loss to England in the 2019 50-over World Cup final at Lord's. There is also widespread admiration for the way a well-balanced side has made the most of slender resources. India have not played a competitive game since the end of March and have had to make do with an intra-squad practice match while undergoing quarantine. But they proved their strength in depth when an injury-hit side recovered from the humiliation of being dismissed for 36 in the first Test in Australia to win a four-match series 2-1 with a sensational chase in Brisbane in January - and that without inspirational captain Virat Kohli. —AFP

Big screen beckons for Tonga's toned Olympic flagbearer

WELLINGTON: As he counts down the days to his third straight Olympics, Tonga's famously chiseled flagbearer Pita Taufatofua is also contemplating offers for a career in movies and documentaries. Taufatofua captured world attention when he appeared at the opening ceremony of the 2016 Rio Olympics topless and glistening with coconut oil, while enthusiastically waving the banner of his tiny Pacific nation.

He racked up 45 million Twitter mentions within hours, then went on to repeat his chest-bearing feats at the opening of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games, despite freezing conditions. The 37-year-old is unsure whether COVID-19 restrictions will prevent him from performing his trademark routine in Tokyo but says he has no qualms about participating in the event during a global pandemic.

"I'm just happy to be going," Taufatofua told AFP on a video call. "I know there hasn't been much hope in the last 18 months and there's going to be a lot of challenges in Tokyo that will make it a different type of Games. But I believe it's going to bring people together and be one of the greatest Games of all time."

The taekwondo athlete says it's been a "crazy" ride since becoming an online sensation in 2016 with his opening-ceremony stunt. Two years later, he qualified as a cross-country skier in Pyeongchang, even though he had only seen

snow once before commencing training. The Brisbane-based athlete strapped planks of wood to his feet to simulate skiing in the sweltering Australian heat, and only qualified after a mad dash along avalanche-hit roads in Iceland to make his final event.

His original plan for Tokyo was to kayak in the K1 200m sprint, making him the first Olympian to compete in three different Games in three different sports. But there were teething problems for the novice paddler, including troublesome winds pushing his kayak around so that he was facing the wrong way at the starting line on his competitive debut. Pandemic border closures blocked the avenues to last-minute kayaking qualification, but his taekwondo skills were enough to earn him a place in Tokyo.

Despite his kayaking effort falling flat, Taufatofua said he had no regrets. "I have to push through even if it means embarrassment," he said. "If it means facing the wrong way in a race, coming last in multiple races that's OK, just to show people they can have a go." Such underdog exploits have, perhaps inevitably, caught the attention of Hollywood and Taufatofua said there had been no shortage of big-screen offers. —AFP



Pita Taufatofua

McKeown, Titmus sizzle as Australian trials wrap up

ADELAIDE: Kaylee McKeown capped a perfect build-up to the Tokyo Olympics with the year's fastest 200m backstroke at the Australian trials yesterday, while Ariarne Titmus fired another warning to American great Katie Ledecky. The 19-year-old McKeown, who smashed the 100m backstroke world record this week, set a new Commonwealth mark of 2 mins 04.28 secs as she counts down to Japan and a crack at three individual gold medals.

Titmus has also been red-hot, clocking the second-fastest time ever in the 200m and 400m freestyle in recent days, events in which she will go head-to-head with Ledecky in Japan. She sent another message to her rival in the 800m, cruising to a new Australian record 8:15.57, with only the American superstar better this year. McKeown has been scintillating all season and was unstoppable again yesterday, the final day of the six-day trials in Adelaide.

She was under US star Regan Smith's world-record pace for much of the race before slowing at the death, but still clocked the year's best. Emily Seeborn, the 2015 and 2017 world champion, was second in 2:06.38 as she readies for a fourth Olympics, having also qualified in the 100m back. "It definitely

hurt a lot in the last 15... it's been a long week," said McKeown, who has also qualified for the 200m individual medley, where she owns the world's best time this season. "After the 100m backstroke it definitely took the pressure off and I just came out tonight and gave it my best."

Titmus admitted that backing up from the 200m was hard work. "It's definitely tough after a 200m, I mean being a sprinter for a day and then having to come up to the 800 and try and reassess how I'm going to swim the race," she said. "But I'm really happy that I could do a PB (personal best). I'll look back at how the race went and see what I can improve on for Tokyo."

Elsewhere, Emma McKeon, another strong multiple gold medal contender, added a fourth individual event to her Tokyo programme when she won the 50m freestyle in a sizzling 23:93. She will also swim the 100m and 200m, along with the 100m butterfly and relays in Japan, owning world-class times in all events this year.

Veteran Cate Campbell matched McKeon in going under 24 seconds to book her spot in the splash and dash. The only other swimmer to breach the magic mark this year is the Netherlands' Ranomi Kromowidjojo. Matthew



ADELAIDE: The selected Australian Olympic swimming team poses for photos after the Australian swimming trials yesterday. —AFP

Temple announced himself as a serious medal prospect in the 100m butterfly, touching in a new Australian record 50:45, the world's second-quickest this year. David Morgan (51:67) was second, with both men qualifying.

Pop star turned swimmer Cody Simpson made the final but finished last in 52:94. It was nevertheless an incredible achievement after only returning to the pool competitively last

year following a 10-year absence. "Just to be out here racing with the best butterflyers in the country is pretty awesome," said Simpson, who has made three albums and publicly dated celebrities Miley Cyrus and Gigi Hadid. Jack McLoughlin, who had already made the grade for the 400m and 800m freestyle, added the 1500m to his demanding Olympic schedule, touching in 14:52.69. —AFP

'Catalyst for change': Malaysian swimmer opens up about abuse

KUALA LUMPUR: A former Malaysian national team swimmer says she hopes to become a "catalyst for change" after her taboo-breaking decision to open up about alleged sexual assault by a coach. Cindy Ong's story is the latest to cast a harsh spotlight on physical and sexual abuse in sport, and follows a litany of complaints from fellow swimmers, gymnasts and ice-skaters.



Cindy Ong

But her move to go public is a particularly rare and difficult one in a country where social conservatism often discourages people from speaking out. Now 37, she told AFP how the abuse began with the coach inappropriately touching her in her early teens. He also harassed her several years later after she returned from studying overseas.

"A lot of grooming went on over the years," said Ong, who remains a successful swimmer, winning five gold and two silver medals at the 2019 FINA World Masters Championship in South Korea. "He made me think that he was interested in me. He said things like 'I will wait for you.'" Ong said she felt powerless to stop the coach with the national team, who is about 15 years older than her. Reporting him to sports authorities or the police did not cross her mind. —AFP

Ledecky locks up 200m, 1,500m Olympic berths

OMAHA: Katie Ledecky powered through a punishing and unprecedented double at the US Olympic swimming trials Wednesday, winning the 200m and 1,500m freestyles to keep building her Tokyo program. Little more than an hour after winning the 200m free, Ledecky returned to win the 1,500m in 15min 40.50sec, shaving five-hundredths of a second off her previous best this year. "I think I managed it pretty well," Ledecky said. "Took care of business, was happy with how my 1,500m felt."

Ledecky launched her night by adding the 200m to the 400m free victory she claimed on Monday, giving herself a chance to defend two of the four titles she won in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Trailing Allison Schmitt at the halfway mark, Ledecky surged home to win in 1min 55.11sec with Schmitt, the 2012 Olympic gold medallist, second in 1:56.79 to book a trip to Tokyo.

Schmitt, who hung on for second by just one one-hundredth of a second ahead of Paige Madden, became just the fifth American woman swimmer to qualify for four Olympics, joining Jill Sterkel, Dara Torres, Jenny Thompson and Amanda Beard. She got a congratulatory hug from her friend and onetime teammate Michael Phelps.

Ledecky had no time to savor the victory. She was quickly back in the warm-down pool, then off to the 200m medal ceremony, eating a banana on the way and "walking slowly so I wouldn't exert any more energy than I needed to." It's the toughest double Ledecky will face as she targets the 200m, 400m, 800m and 1,500m freestyles in Tokyo, but she's just glad she has a chance at the 1,500m, which has only been added to the Olympic program for women this year.



OMAHA: Katie Ledecky of the United States reacts after competing in the Women's 1500m freestyle final at CHI Health Center on Wednesday. —AFP

"We're making history tonight and we will be in Tokyo," said Ledecky, who has twice tackled the 200m-1,500m double at the World Championships, winning gold in both in 2015 and 200m silver and 1,500m gold in 2017. "I'm just so grateful that we have the mile in now and I've spoken about the equity that we finally have there, and I think that's a big step," added Ledecky, who was presented with her medal by Janet Evans.

Evans held the 1,500m freestyle record from March 1988 through June 2007, but was never able to contest the event at the Olympics. "Hopefully we can do her proud in Tokyo," Ledecky said. Ledecky was pleased with what she called a "well put-together swim" that saw her finish 10.66sec ahead of runner-up Erica Sullivan. "I didn't die off or feel like I was hurting too bad at the end there."

In other finals Wednesday, Zach Harting won the men's 200m butterfly in 1:55.06, grabbing the Olympic berth that eluded him in 2016, when he finished seventh at the trials. "Coming here and not making the team wasn't an option," said Harting, who now will spearhead the US challenge in an event once owned by Phelps. "I don't know if I could have handled it, so the easiest thing to do was make the team and that's what I did." —AFP

Sports

Denmark's Eriksen to have defibrillator implanted

COPENHAGEN: Danish star Christian Eriksen, who suffered a cardiac arrest during his country's Euro 2020 opener last weekend, will have a heart defibrillator implanted, the Danish Football Union (DBU) announced yesterday. In a scene that shocked the sporting world and beyond, the 29-year-old Inter Milan midfielder suddenly collapsed on the field in the 43rd minute of Denmark's Group B game on Saturday against Finland in Copenhagen.

Medical personnel administered CPR as he lay motionless on the field as some 16,000 fans in attendance watched. This continued for about 15 minutes before he was carried off the pitch and rushed to hospital, and it was later confirmed that he had suffered cardiac arrest. "After Christian has been through different heart examinations it has been decided that he should have an ICD (heart starter)," the Danish football body said in a statement on Twitter.

The device, which is an improved variant of a pacemaker, is "necessary after a cardiac attack due to rhythm disturbances," it added. Like a conventional pacemaker, the device sends out electrical impulses when the heart rate is too slow, in order to avoid a cardiac arrest. In addition to this function, it can also

treat a rhythm that is too fast.

DBU provided no details on the potential consequences for the 29-year-old Inter Milan player's future career, and encouraged people to give Eriksen and his family "peace and privacy". Players, such as Dutchman Daley Blind, have been able to resume their careers after being fitted with the device. Eriksen "has accepted the solution" and it had also been "confirmed by specialists nationally and internationally who all recommend the same treatment," DBU said.

'Damn, I'm only 29'

The announcement of the medical procedure comes hours before the kick-off to Denmark's next match against Belgium, where a tribute to the Danish number 10 is scheduled to take place in the 10th minute of the match, with fans planning a minute's applause in support of Eriksen. The former Premier League player might even be able to hear it from his bed as Rigshospitalet where he has been for the past five days is barely a kilometer as the crow flies from 'Parken', the Danish national stadium in Copenhagen.

Coach Kasper Hjulmand has even noted that

Eriksen has a view of the stadium from his window. German doctor Jens Kleinfeld, who treated Eriksen on the pitch, revealed in an interview with the Funke media group that Eriksen regained consciousness after the use of an emergency defibrillator. Kleinfeld said he looked at the Inter Milan midfielder and asked him, "Well, are you back with us?" Eriksen answered, "Yes, I am back with you" and, "Damn, I'm only 29 years old," the doctor said.

After the dramatic scenes the Danes' second game of the Euros will be an "emotional" return to the pitch, Hjulmand said Wednesday. "We expect to have incredible support from our fans and from the whole country," Hjulmand said at a press conference. "We have to be ready for that and use this energy in a positive way," he added.

After their defeat against Finland, who scored in the second half after the game was resumed on Saturday, a loss against Belgium, ranked number one by FIFA, would severely damage their chances of moving forward to the knockout stages. Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku, who scored twice in their 3-0 win over Russia, said the players would kick the ball out of play for the minute's applause. —AFP



COPENHAGEN: Denmark's football player Christian Eriksen is photographed at Rigshospitalet on June 15, 2021. —AFP

News in brief

Ramos says goodbye to Real Madrid

MADRID: Sergio Ramos broke down in tears, saying leaving Real Madrid was one of the most difficult moments of his life as he bid farewell yesterday after 16 years at the club. The defender played 671 games for Real Madrid and will be remembered as one of the club's greatest ever players, having won five La Liga titles and four Champions Leagues. The 35-year-old, who struggled for fitness and form last season, was unable to agree an extension to his contract and will become a free agent on July 1. Ramos and Real Madrid president Florentino Perez delivered short speeches in a presentation room at the club's training ground, with Ramos' family in the audience. "The moment has come, one of the most difficult in my life, because you are never ready to leave Real Madrid," Ramos said. —AFP

Buffon returns to Parma after 2 decades

MILAN: Goalkeeping legend Gianluigi Buffon has returned to Parma two decades after leaving the Italian club who were relegated last season. "He is back where he belongs, he is back home. Superman returns," the club said on Twitter along with a short video in which 43-year-old Buffon said: "OK Kyle (Krause) I'm in. I'm back." Club owner Kyle Krause replied: "Great news, welcome home." Buffon holds the record for Serie A matches played with 657, since his first with Parma in 1995 as a 17-year-old. Since then, Buffon has played just one season in Serie B when Juventus were demoted in 2006-2007 for the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal. The former World Cup winner announced last month he was leaving Juventus, the club he had played for since moving from Parma in 2001, apart from one season with Paris Saint-Germain in 2018-2019. —AFP

Li Tie has China dreaming of World Cup again

SHANGHAI: China are still a long way from the football superpower they crave to be, but under Li Tie they have offered a glimmer of hope to fans scarred by years of disappointment. China have won four matches in a row with the former Everton midfielder as coach - albeit against lower-ranked opponents including minnows Guam and Maldives - and on Tuesday reached the decisive third stage of qualifying for the Qatar 2022 World Cup. China may yet fail to make only a second World Cup finals appearance, but the 44-year-old Li turned around a qualifying campaign which was in big trouble when Italian World Cup-winner Marcello Lippi quit in November 2019 after defeat to Syria. More than that, Li - who permanently succeeded Lippi in January last year - has got Chinese fans dreaming again.

"Chinese football has broken its promise countless times before," journalist Ma Dexing, who has been following the national side for 30 years, wrote for Titan Sports. "The team really deserves the pride of the Chinese people this time!" Ma said that Li's squad, who were bolstered by four naturalized players, deserved extra credit because they had come through a qualifying stage which was upended by the coronavirus. China were supposed to host all four matches but after smashing Guam 7-0 they were forced to play the remaining three in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, following an 11th-hour change because of the pandemic. Ma, who was in Sharjah, called this Chinese team more united than before and The Paper in Shanghai praised Li's decisive decision-making. Li, who previously worked as an assistant to Lippi and coached Chinese Super League side Wuhan Zall, has "high emotional intelligence", The Paper said, and good man-management skills. It cited how twice in press conferences he jumped to the defense of key forward Wu Lei, who appears to be out of favor at Spain's Espanyol.

Li, who won more than 90 caps for China as a player, said after defeating group leaders Syria 3-1 on Tuesday that "we didn't play at such



Li Tie

a high level for quite a long time". Li wants to line up some high-quality opponents for friendlies before the next stage of qualifying, with Japan, South Korea, Australia and Iran among those also trying to reach the 2022 World Cup from Asia. "Only by playing against strong teams can we really improve ourselves," state media quoted him as saying.

China are ranked 77th in the world, sandwiched between Curacao and Panama, and have reached the World Cup only once. In 2002 they lost all three group games and failed to score a goal. But under football-fan President Xi Jinping they have ambitions to host and even win a World Cup by 2050. Beating Guam, Maldives, Philippines and Syria over the past fortnight, scoring 17 goals and conceding one, puts China nowhere near becoming world champions.

But recovering to reach the next stage of qualifying in style represents progress for a team long lambasted as a national embarrassment and who in the last couple of years lost at home to Uzbekistan and Thailand. Underlining the intense interest in the national side, Li's men were trending on the Twitter-like Weibo after the victory over Syria. —AFP

Sports

Italy cruise into Euro 2020 last 16 as Wales close on knockouts

PARIS: Italy became the first team to reach the knockout stage of Euro 2020 as midfielder Manuel Locatelli scored twice in a 3-0 win over Switzerland in Rome on Wednesday, while Wales moved to the brink of joining them by beating Turkey. The Azzurri, now unbeaten in 29 matches and having won their last 10 games without conceding a goal, sit first in Group A and are guaranteed a top-two finish and last-16 berth.

"We played well, we wanted to win at all costs," Italy coach Roberto Mancini told RAI. "They started well, it was not easy to win a second game in five days." Mancini's men, looking to win Italy a second European title after their sole success in 1968, host Wales in their final group game on Sunday, with top spot up for grabs.

A new star shone for Italy at the Stadio Olimpico, where they had brushed aside Turkey 3-0 in the tournament's opening match last week, as Sassuolo's Locatelli scored twice before Ciro Immobile's late third. Captain Giorgio Chiellini had an early effort ruled out by VAR for handball, before the 36-year-old defender was forced off with what appeared to be a high injury.

But the hosts always looked the more dangerous side and took the lead in the 26th minute. Locatelli played a wonderful volleyed pass to his Sassuolo teammate Domenico Berardi on the wing, who powered to the byline and picked out Locatelli for a simple tap-in. The three points and a place in the knockout phase for the fourth straight European Championship were all but

secured less than seven minutes after the interval, when a flowing move ended with Locatelli driving a left-footed shot into the bottom corner from outside the box.

Immobile had wasted a couple of earlier chances but did grab his second goal of the tournament in the 89th minute, curling a low effort past Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer. Switzerland will now likely have to beat Turkey in Baku on Sunday to reach the next round.

Impressive Wales see off Turkey

After drawing 1-1 with the Swiss in their opening Group A game, Wales now have four points from two matches after goals from Aaron Ramsey and Connor Roberts saw off a disappointing Turkey 2-0. "You'd like to think so, but we'll have to wait and see," said Wales captain Gareth Bale when asked if his team had done enough to get through. "If you'd offered us four points at the start we would've bitten your hand off."

Senol Gunes' side, roared on by the majority of the crowd in Azerbaijan, have lost both of their games without scoring and face a mountain to climb if they are to qualify. Wales, semi-finalists five years ago, should have won more convincingly, but wasted several chances including a second-half penalty which was blazed over by Bale.

Up to 4,000 Turkish fans travelled for the game, including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but Wales immediately were on the front foot and Ramsey wasted two excellent chances early on. He made no mistake three minutes be-



BAKU: Wales' midfielder Joe Morrell (left) is challenged by Turkey's midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu at the Olympic Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

fore the break, though, chesting down Bale's pass and slotting home. Bale, whose future at Real Madrid is uncertain, won a penalty just after the hour mark but was uncharacteristically wayward from the spot.

Robert Page's Wales grabbed the second goal their performance deserved in stoppage time, as Bale danced through and teed up Roberts to sweep into the net. In the first match

of the day, Russia defeated neighbors Finland 1-0 in Saint Petersburg courtesy of Aleksei Miranchuk's goal just before half-time to pick up their first points in Group B. It blows open the section after Russia lost 3-0 to Belgium in their opening game at the weekend. Finland had beaten Denmark 1-0 in Copenhagen on Saturday, a game completely overshadowed by Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest. —AFP

Southgate's perfect Euro 2020 start gives England momentum

LONDON: Gareth Southgate won over an English public who were skeptical about his ability to lead the Three Lions with a run to the World Cup semi-finals three years ago and is already silencing his critics at Euro 2020. For the first time at a European Championship, England are off to a winning start as Southgate's bold selection paid off in a 1-0 win against Croatia on Sunday.

Next up is a fixture against Scotland today, with the chance to book their place in the last-16 with a game to spare. Southgate's team selection for the opener caused a social media storm before kick-off as Raheem Sterling retained his place ahead of Aston Villa captain Jack Grealish despite a poor end to his season at Manchester City.

Kalvin Phillips's inclusion alongside Declan Rice in midfield and the decision to start Kieran Trippier at left-back also raised eyebrows. But those calls proved inspired as Phillips set up Sterling for the only goal, while Trippier helped keep a clean sheet. "I don't think there would be one person in the 65 million English population who would pick that team today," said former

Manchester United captain Gary Neville, who played with Southgate at Euro 96.

"I thought he managed that game unbelievably today. I think Southgate is our greatest asset. The clamor was to go with Grealish but he didn't even bring him off the bench. He's had seven or eight tournaments as a coach, U21s and as a player, I feel very comfortable with him as a manager."

Southgate's lack of a stellar coaching CV at club level has counted against him in the eyes of his doubters. His three years in charge at Middlesbrough ended in relegation from the Premier League in 2009. But he rebuilt his reputation in three years as England's under-21 manager between 2013 and 2016, fostering relationships with a number of his now-senior internationals such as Sterling, Harry Kane, Marcus Rashford, John Stones and Jordan Pickford.

That personal touch is a major strength of the 50-year-old as an international manager. He has consistently spoken out on behalf of his players on issues of racism and social media abuse, most recently resolutely defending his side's decision to keep taking the knee ahead of matches at the Euro despite boos from some fans and pressure from leading politicians to abandon the gesture.

"He's great to talk to. He's always putting his arm around the players, which is important," said Phil Foden, who at 21 is playing his first major tournament. —AFP

Scotland's 'wee superstars' can become heroes

LONDON: Scotland's return to the major tournament stage may be off to a slow start, but a visit to Wembley to face England offers Steve Clarke's men the chance to write themselves into folklore for generations to come. A 2-0 defeat by the Czech Republic at Hampden on Monday leaves Scotland realistically needing to avoid defeat against the Three Lions to maintain hopes of making it out of the group stage for the first time.

On paper there appears a gulf in class for Clarke's side to bridge against the side ranked fourth in the world, who harbour ambitions of conquering Europe for the first time. But no game means more to Scotland than beating the old enemy. The Scottish sides of 1967 and 1977 are still fondly remembered for victories at Wembley in the old British Home Championship.

Doing so at their first major tournament for 23 years would make the Scottish players legends back home. "The English media would have you believe the gap is humongous," said Aston Villa midfielder John McGinn on Wednesday. "It's up to us on Friday to prove that wrong." McGinn is one of a batch of proven Premier League players in Clarke's squad that have

helped guide Scotland back from the wilderness in international football. Andy Robertson has won the Champions League and Premier League at Liverpool, Scott McTominay has established himself as a regular at Manchester United and there are hopes Arsenal's Kieran Tierney could be fit to return from injury. "We've got a population of five million, they've got a population of 55 million," added McGinn. "They've got worldwide superstars throughout their team so we're always going to be underdogs, but we've got a few wee superstars ourselves."

'Hold our own'

In total 14 of the 26-man Scotland squad ply their trade in England. Rather than be starstruck by their more illustrious opponents, McGinn believes many of the Scottish team have already proven they can go toe-to-toe with the best England has to offer. "We compete against the majority of these guys week in, week out and we seem to hold our own," added the 26-year-old. "We know if we play to our capabilities we'll give England a lot of problems." If Scotland are to pull off the upset of the tournament so far, Clarke has a number of big decisions to make. Tierney's return would be a huge boost as his presence on the left side of a back three was badly missed with and without the ball against the Czechs. Despite never starting a previous international, there is also a clamor for Chelsea's Billy Gilmour and Nathan Patterson of Rangers to be thrown in at the deep end after impressing in pre-tournament friendlies. —AFP



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