



3 KRCS opens three wards at Wardieh Hospital in Beirut



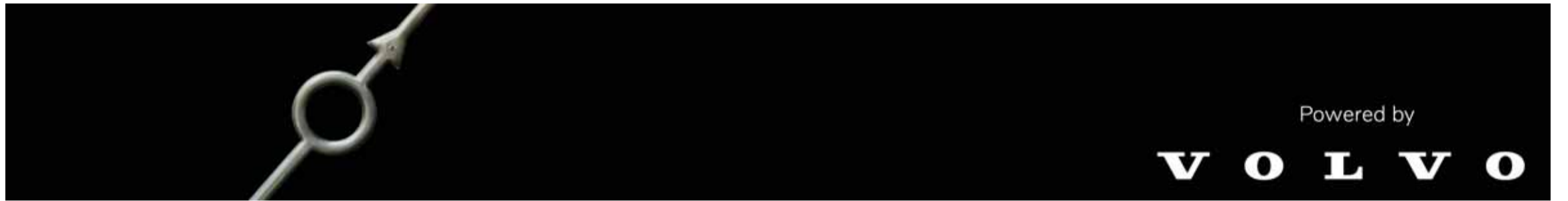
5 Women migrants reduced to sex slaves in Libya 'hell'



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13 Fever clinic, COVID kits: Tokyo 2020 shows off Olympic Village



Opposition, Cabinet, pro-govt MPs set for major showdown

Speaker calls for special Assembly session to approve state budget

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday invited MPs for special sessions to approve the state budget for the 2021/2022 fiscal year, but opposition lawmakers vowed not to allow the sessions to be convened before the prime minister accepts to be grilled, setting the stage for a major showdown.

Ghanem said he received a motion by 15 MPs, all of them pro-government, requesting special sessions to debate and approve the state budget, adding that he set the sessions for tomorrow and Wednesday. Opposition MPs immediately responded by rejecting the invitation, insisting they will not allow any sessions to be convened unless HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah accepts to be grilled.

Leading opposition lawmaker Shuaib Al-Muwaizri invited the opposition bloc, consisting

of 31 MPs, for a meeting late yesterday to discuss the situation regarding the invitation to hold the special sessions. Opposition MPs have been refusing to allow sessions to be held in protest against a decision by the house to postpone grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022. The opposition insists that the decision is illegal and not in line with the constitution.

Opposition MPs have resorted to sitting in seats reserved for Cabinet ministers, prompting the ministers to boycott the sessions and forcing the speaker to call off those sessions. The Assembly has effectively held only a handful of sessions since its election in December due to lingering disputes between the government - backed by the speaker and around 16 MPs - and the opposition bloc.

Ghanem warned yesterday that failure to approve the budget will block new jobs and cause a delay in housing projects, which are very

essential for citizens. He added it will also block any increase in the budget for the year. Deputy speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi said citizens should not be made to pay for the ongoing political wrangling. He also warned that HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince are aware of the developments "and those who think they will remain quiet are mistaken", without elaborating.

MP Hamad Al-Harashani launched a scathing attack on opposition lawmakers, accusing them of plotting against the regime and the constitution. But a number of opposition MPs insisted they will not allow the session to take place unless the prime minister is grilled, and refuted claims by pro-government MPs that not approving the budget will block spending.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari recalled previous statements by the government that new jobs and wages will not be affected by not approving the budget. MP Saud Al-Mutairi asked: "How can we

approve the budget, giving the government the right to spend billions of dinars, and still not be able to question ministers?"

MP Mohammad Al-Mutair said: "We will not approve the budget for a government that we cannot hold accountable. What if they steal the budget?" MP Obaid Al-Wasmi accused the government and its supporters of misleading the public, adding that preventing the session aims at not allowing the government to control a budget without accountability.

Frequent rows between the Cabinet and Assembly have led to successive government reshuffles and dissolutions of parliament over the decades, hampering investment and reforms in the state. Dissolution of the Assembly could also be difficult, as according to the Kuwaiti constitution, parliament must approve the state budget for the current term to end before the summer break.

News in brief

Emirates to fly from India again

DUBAI: Aviation giant Emirates said yesterday it will resume flights from India from next week, after Dubai lifted a ban imposed when coronavirus cases spiked. The UAE suspended all flights from India - including for transit passengers - in April in an effort to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. "We will resume carrying passengers from South Africa, Nigeria and India... from June 23," Emirates said. — AFP

Lanka troops 'humiliate' Muslims

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's military launched an investigation yesterday after social media posts showed armed soldiers forcing Muslim civilians to raise their hands in the air while kneeling on a road in the town of Eravur as a punishment for flouting lockdown rules. Local residents said they considered the order to be degrading and humiliating, while officials acknowledged that troops had no power to mete out such punishments. — AFP

Rocket targets Iraq base

BAGHDAD: A rocket yesterday targeted an Iraqi airbase hosting American troops, a security source told AFP, the latest in a series of attacks the US blames on Iran-linked militias. The assault on the Ain Al-Assad base came as pro-Tehran groups hailed the election of ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi as the new Iranian president, with some saying it reflected the "failure" of America's "pawns" in the region. — AFP

Saudi intercepts 10 drones

RIYADH: Saudi air defenses on Saturday intercepted and destroyed 10 drones fired at the kingdom by Houthi rebels in Yemen, state media reported. The official Saudi Press Agency reported that seven of the drones targeted regions in southern Saudi Arabia. Three targeted the Khamis Mushait region, also in the south and home to military installations, it said. — AFP

5 dead in Belgium school collapse

ANTWERP: Five building workers were confirmed dead Saturday a day after a school construction site partially collapsed in the Belgian city of Antwerp. The last two bodies were pulled out the rubble on Saturday afternoon, Antwerp's fire department said, meaning that all the missing victims were now accounted for. — AFP

China gives billionth jab, Brazil reels

BEIJING: China yesterday announced it had administered its one-billionth shot in the world's biggest coronavirus inoculation drive as Brazil's death toll from the pandemic passed 500,000. The global death toll from COVID-19 is now more than 3.8 million and many nations are still battling outbreaks, but vaccine drives in some countries are allowing activities that were unthinkable a few months ago.

China's vaccine milestone comes after the number of shots administered globally passed 2.5 billion on Friday, according to an AFP count from official sources.

But the Asian giant's vaccination efforts initially got off to a slow start after a successful fight against the

Continued on Page 2

Indians throng markets after COVID surge

NEW DELHI: A few weeks ago, New Delhi's crematoriums were operating around the clock dealing with COVID-19 victims. Now the Indian capital's shopping malls and markets are buzzing again. But doctors are worried that India is letting its guard down again, just like in January and February before a devastating coronavirus surge that led to a near-collapse of the healthcare system.

Clutching a bag of clothes as she shopped with her new husband at Delhi's busy Select City Walk mall, Surili Gupta said she was "fed up being cooped up inside". "I needed this break, for how long you can remain locked up?" the 26-year-old sales executive told AFP as she waited for a table at the mall's packed food hall. "The coronavirus is not going any time soon, so one has to learn to live with it. I am sure with the vaccinations and all, we will be fine."

Behind her, a big weekend crowd chatted and laughed over Indian dosas and Chinese noodles, paying scant regard to public announcements reminding them about social

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Clerical power wanes in Saudi religious reset

RIYADH: Muezzins issuing high-decibel calls to prayer have long been part of Saudi identity, but a crack-down on mosque loudspeakers is among contentious reforms seeking to shake off the kingdom's austere image. Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest Muslim sites, has long been associated with a rigid strain of Islam known as Wahhabism that inspired generations of global extremists and left the oil-rich kingdom steeped in

conservatism.

But the role of religion faces the biggest reset in modern times as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, spurred by the need to diversify the oil-reliant economy, pursues a liberalization drive. Chipping away at a key pillar of its Islamic identity, the government last month ordered that mosque loudspeakers limit their volume to one-third of their maximum capacity and not broadcast full sermons, citing concerns over noise pollution.

In a country home to tens of thousands of mosques, the move triggered an online backlash with the hashtag "We demand the return of mosque speakers" gaining traction.

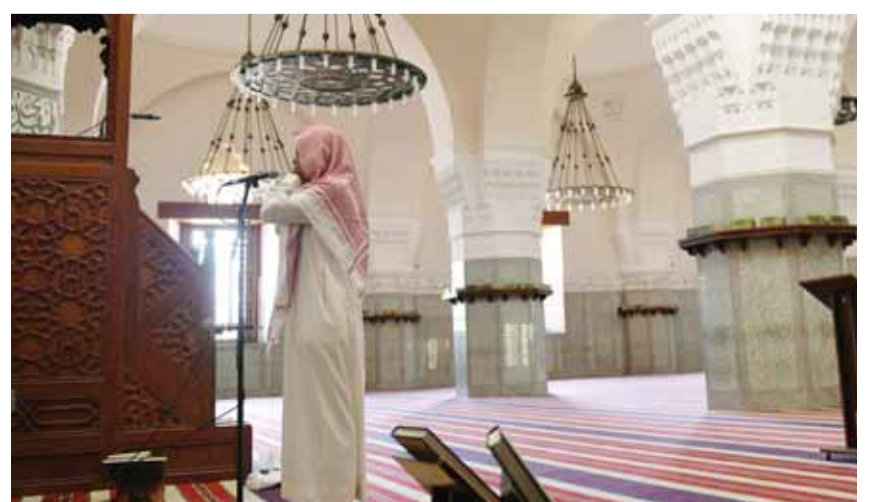
Continued on Page 2



RIO DE JANEIRO: A protestor secures a Brazilian flag next to roses placed by an NGO on Copacabana beach in memory of Brazil's half a million COVID-19 victims yesterday. — AFP



NEW DELHI: People throng Sarojini Nagar market for shopping after authorities eased a lockdown on Saturday. — AFP



JEDDAH: In this file photo taken on April 28, 2020, Imam Mohammed, muezzin of the Jaffali Mosque, calls for prayer. — AFP

Local

Amir receives top state officials at Bayan Palace



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



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Nazaha Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-

Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness received Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State

for Nazaha Enhancement Abdullah Youssef Al-Roumi. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled yesterday at Bayan Palace. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday

a cable of condolence from Lebanese President Michel Aoun over the demise of Sheikh Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir replied with sincere appreciation for the President's honest sentiments, wishing him further health and wellbeing. — KUNA

Clerical power wanes in Saudi...

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It also sparked calls to ban loud music in restaurants, once taboo in the kingdom but now common amid liberalization efforts, and to fill mosques in such large numbers that authorities are forced to permit loudspeakers for those gathering outside.

But authorities are unlikely to budge, as economic reforms for a post-oil era take precedence over religion, observers say. "The country is re-establishing its foundations," Aziz Alghashian, a politics lecturer at the University of Essex, told AFP. "It's becoming an economically driven country that is investing substantial effort in trying to appear more appealing - or less intimidating - to investors and tourists."

In the most significant change that began even before the rise of Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia neutered its once-feared religious police, who once chased people out of malls to go and pray and berated anyone seen mingling with the opposite sex. In what was once unthinkable, some shops and restaurants now remain open during the five daily Muslim prayers. As clerical power wanes, preachers are endorsing government decisions

they once vehemently opposed - including allowing women to drive, the reopening of cinemas and an outreach to Jews.

Saudi Arabia is revising school textbooks to scrub well-known references denigrating non-Muslims. The practice of non-Muslim religions remains banned in the kingdom, but government advisor Ali Shihabi recently told US media outlet Insider that allowing a church was on "the to-do list of the leadership". Authorities have publicly ruled out lifting an absolute ban on alcohol, forbidden in Islam. But multiple sources including a Gulf-based diplomat quoted Saudi officials as saying in closed-door meetings that "it will gradually happen".

"It's not an exaggeration to say that Saudi Arabia has entered a post-Wahhabi era, though the exact religious contours of the state are still in flux," Kristin Diwan, of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP. "Religion no longer has veto power over the economy, social life and foreign policy."

In another shift, observers say Saudi Arabia appears to be turning its back on global issues affecting fellow Muslims, in what could weaken its image as the leader of the Islamic world. "In the past its foreign policy was driven by the Islamic doctrine that Muslims are like one body - when one limb suffers the whole body responds to it," another Gulf-based diplomat told AFP. "Now it is based on mutual non-interference: 'We (Saudi) won't talk about Kashmir or the Uyghurs, you don't talk about Khashoggi'." — AFP

mon sense," said Robert Almeida, a 50-year-old photographer marching in Rio. "There is no explaining this, it is surreal."

In India, there were also fears that people were not taking the COVID threat seriously enough, just a few weeks after crematoriums were operating around the clock dealing with virus victims. Doctors are worried that India is letting its guard down again too early as shopping malls and markets buzz with customers once more.

The pandemic is also casting a shadow over the Tokyo Olympics, which will start in just over a month. A member of the Uganda Olympic team tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in Japan Saturday, officials said. The nine-strong party, including boxers, coaches and officials, are just the second team to arrive in Japan after the Australian women's softball squad on June 1.

It was the first positive COVID test among Olympic arrivals from overseas, according to Japanese media. "I heard the person has been isolated based on regulations," Hidemasa Nakamura, the Tokyo 2020 Games delivery officer, told reporters, renewing a pledge to take strict measures against infections.

Authorities in many countries continue to wrestle with crowds flouting coronavirus rules on social distancing and mask-wearing. In France, five police officers were injured as they broke up a 1,500-strong illegal rave, authorities said, with one partygoer losing a hand. Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd, who defied an 11 pm coronavirus curfew on Friday in an area around a race course in Brittany. There were "very violent clashes" when 400 police intervened that lasted more than seven hours through the night. "It was war," said Flo, a 22-year-old who attended. — AFP

9 children among 10 killed in fiery Alabama crash

MIAMI: Nine children and an adult were killed in a fiery multi-vehicle crash on an Alabama highway as heavy storms lashed the southeastern US state, a county coroner confirmed yesterday. Saturday's crash on an interstate highway near the city of Greenville involved at least 15 vehicles and may have been caused by aquaplaning under heavy rains, Butler County coroner Wayne Garlock told AFP.

The dead included a father and daughter in an SUV, and eight occupants of a van carrying children

from a county-run "girls ranch" that included foster children, local media reported. "This was probably the most horrific accident in Butler County history," Sheriff Danny Bond told the a.com website.

He said at least two of the vehicles involved were 18-wheel trucks, and that four or five other people had suffered nonfatal injuries. Northbound and southbound traffic on busy Interstate 65 were halted for hours, but both had reopened yesterday, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency tweeted. "Our hearts are heavy today. Our ranch has suffered great loss... Please send prayers our way," tweeted the Tallapoosa County Girls Ranch.

The van in the accident was one of two bringing children, none older than 17, back from a Girls Ranch outing to nearby Gulf Shores, a.com reported. The other van was unscathed. The girls ranch serves as a foster home for children abandoned or from abusive families. — AFP

Indians through markets after...

Continued from Page 1

distancing and wearing masks. A couple queuing at a popular burger joint squabbled, masks hanging from their faces. Mall staff performed perfunctory temperature checks and reminded people to sanitize their hands.

Not far away, shoppers thronged the open-air warren of shops and stalls at Lajpat Nagar market, bargaining for scarves, bangles and cheap cosmetics. There was lively trade for food vendors, who sold kulchey-chholey - flatbread served with spicy chickpeas - and other favorites to punters, masks dangling as they ate. "I would not have come today but it was very urgent," Prerna Jain, 21, a college student who had come with her mother, told AFP. "My cousin is getting married and I needed to buy some stuff. I know it's not yet safe but what can I do? This (event) is equally important."

Delhi, a megacity of 20 million people, saw horren-

dous scenes in April and May when coronavirus cases went through the roof, as they did across the country. Crematoriums ran out of space, burning bodies day and night, as gasping patients died outside hospitals, unable to get beds, oxygen and drugs. India's death toll more than doubled to more than 330,000, according to official figures. Many experts suspect the true toll is over a million.

The surge was blamed on new virus variants but also on the government having allowed massive religious festivals, state elections and crowds at cricket matches. Now, the surge is over and Indian authorities are loosening lockdowns, letting people work and shop again. On some days in Delhi now, there are no funerals for COVID-19 victims, down from 700 a day during the recent peak.

Sandeep Budhiraja, medical director at Max Healthcare in the capital, said he was surprised at people's short memories. "People are just behaving as if nothing happened just about two, three weeks back. And this is... amazing," Budhiraja told AFP. But while this will likely lead to a sharp rise in cases, for a new "explosion" a new virus variant would have to take hold, he said. A new variant, "Delta-plus", has been identified, which appears more transmissible and more resistant to treatment, he added. — AFP



NEW DELHI: People eat at a food court at a mall after authorities eased a lockdown on Saturday. — AFP

China gives billionth jab...

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virus left little sense of urgency to get jabbed. A lack of transparency and previous vaccine scandals have also led to resistance among many residents.

Authorities have set an ambitious target of fully vaccinating 40 percent of China's nearly 1.4 billion people by the end of this month. Some provinces are offering vaccines for free to encourage people to roll up their sleeves. Residents in central Anhui province have been given free eggs, while some living in Beijing have received shopping coupons.

China's success against the virus stands in stark contrast to Brazil, which on Saturday became the second nation after the United States to surpass half a million COVID-19 deaths. Vaccination efforts have been slow with only 11 percent of the Brazilian population inoculated, as a third wave of infections spreads through the nation.

Far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who previously hit out at vaccines, has promised to immunize the entire population by the end of the year - something specialists consider unlikely. He has been criticized for downplaying the illness from the outset, opposing lockdown measures and plugging unproven medical treatments.

On Saturday, thousands of Brazilians again took to the streets to protest against his handling of the pandemic. "His position on COVID and his denialism are absurd. He has abandoned reality and com-

Local

Kuwait calls for supporting refugees around the world



This handout photo released by Kuwait Red Crescent Society shows people collecting aid during a campaign organized by KRCS to aid Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.



This handout photo released by Kuwait Red Crescent Society shows refugees collecting aid during a campaign organized by KRCS.



This handout photo released by Kuwait Red Crescent Society shows KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer (left) during a campaign to aid Syrian refugees.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) called yesterday for supporting refugees around the world, providing them with protection, health, educational and social care. In a statement to the press marking World Refugee Day, KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, said Kuwait's contribution to helping refugees around the world was clear by responding to humanitarian crises in various parts of the world to alleviate the suffering of millions of refugees. Assistance provided by Kuwait via governmental and non-governmental institutions confirms the importance of its role in international humanitarian work to serve refugees all over the world, he added in a statement. KRCS works with the refugees for better living and future, especially for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Rohingya in Bangladesh, Sayer said.

With the increase in the number of refugees

around the world, the human suffering they are experiencing exacerbated, Sayer added, as he called organizations and authorities in the world to quickly establish a specialized body to spread awareness among the refugees. Sayer stressed KRCS, through its partners in Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, is ready to provide support for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and to continue providing support to the displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh.

Kuwait fund's contributions

The State of Kuwait has been a major contributor to humanitarian aid, coordinating with UN agencies and organizations working in humanitarian, refugees and human rights affairs to help those in need around the globe. Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has been at the

forefront in executing humanitarian initiatives to provide quality assistance to refugees, offering 106 grants with a total of \$1.304 million up until fiscal year 2019-20.

The fund, in a report marking the 50th World Refugee Day, said the humanitarian contribution was part of Kuwait government's international obligations to help refugees who were forced to flee their homes because of wars and conflicts. It said it offered assistance to Palestinian, Iraqi, Syrian, Yemeni and Myanmar's refugees in host countries, in addition to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Bangladesh. The fund, it said, initiated solid partnerships with UN agencies and national organizations to improve living and health conditions of people in need.

Housing and education

Citing examples of the contributions, KFAED

said it funded a UNHCR project to improve infrastructure of housing facilities of Syrian refugees in Iraq's Kurdistan region and in Lebanon. It also financed projects of UN Palestinian refugees agency (UNRWA) in Gaza Strip, which included construction of schools. It co-financed a campaign to raise awareness against coronavirus inside Syria.

KFAED, it added, contributed to cancer treatment centers in Lebanon and Jordan. It joined hands with Kuwait Red Crescent Society to offer logistical assistance to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The aid included building 1,200 housing units and 1,200 packages, which included blankets, kitchenware and solar power lights, in addition to constructing schools, mosques and health centers. Kuwait also hosted international conferences to help people in Syria and Iraq, during which donors pledged billions of US dollars. — KUNA

KRCS opens wards at Hospital Wardieh in Beirut

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer opened yesterday wards at Wardieh Hospital in Beirut, which KRCS helped restore after it was damaged by a massive explosion of Beirut Port in August 2020. Sayer opened three wards 10 months after the start of renovation work. Representative of the People's Committee for Fundraising in Kuwait Tareq Al-Salem Al-Mutawa and Head of KRCS's mission in Lebanon Dr Musa'ad Al-Enezi participated in the ceremony. At the ceremony, a documentary was shown about the moment of the explosion and what the hospital was exposed to. Sayer affirmed KRCS' keenness to pay great attention to the health sector, because it constitutes the primary need in crises and disasters. After the explosion, many hospitals in Beirut lost their ability to treat the injured and provide medical services to others, which rushed them to provide them with



BEIRUT: Dr Hilal Al-Sayer (left) and Tareq Al-Mutawa cut a cake during a ceremony to celebrate the reopening of wards at Wardieh Hospital in Beirut. — KUNA photos

support, he said.

Meanwhile, Mutawa said that KRCS immediately took the initiative to collect donations from philanthropists to complete this humanitarian work. In turn, Nicola Al-Aqqi, head of the hospital, said that after the explosion, they were in a state of loss and confusion, then witnessed Kuwait standing by Lebanon's side which gave them hope and strength. She pointed out

that the wards that are restored returned to the best of what they were, re-equipped with good technology. The affected hospitals also delivered medical equipment and health materials that were transported through an air bridge that Kuwait began to set up the day after the explosion, which transported through 18 Kuwaiti Air Force planes more than 820 tons of needs to Lebanon. — KUNA

Increasing refugee numbers require int'l support: GCC

RIYADH: The unusual increase in the number of refugees due to wars and conflicts requires support from the international community, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf said. The GCC countries' distinguished stances are always supportive to the regional and international peace, he added in a speech marking World Refugee Day, which falls on June 20 every year. He emphasized GCC's support to alleviate the suffering of refugees, indicating that Gulf nations are the highest ranked in offering humanitarian and rescue aid. GCC nations

are looking forward to spreading peace all over the globe, so that refugees would be able to go back to their homelands, Hajraf said. He praised efforts exerted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as by hosting and donors' countries, he affirmed. Hajraf stressed on GCC countries' commitment in offering the required protection and basic life needs to refugees, especially during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic time, which only worsened their life and deepened their suffering. — KUNA



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf

stc recognizes Tarahom Volunteer Team for their contributions

KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of stc Maziad Al-Harbi on behalf of stc, honored the members of the Tarahom Volunteer Team in appreciation of their vital role and continuous contribution to the community. The recognition came in a message of gratitude during a recognition ceremony, highlighting the team's successful achievements over different initiatives that brought the two organizations together over the past years.

On this joyous occasion, Harbi commended the actions taken by the Tarahom Volunteer Team's management through a heartfelt speech in which he acknowledged the series of campaigns and teams that stc collaborated with. The collaborative partnership aided in successfully implementing stc's Ramadan campaigns in 2020 and 2021, as well as the Kuwait desert clean-up 'Subiya' initiative. To commemorate the volunteers for their humanitarian acts during the special occasion, stc distributed certificates to acknowledge all their hard work and dedication.

stc released a statement indicating that this step stems from the Company's commitment and strategy to support the Kuwaiti society through various humanitarian and goodwill initiatives. This also reflects the strong and successful relationship shared between the two organizations in driving the community and preserving the local environment.

In this regard, stc stated that it had recently launched a community-based campaign titled, "Today_We_Can", in collaboration with the Tarahom Volunteer Team, for the second year in a row. The campaign consisted of two different initiatives that focused on spreading joy and happiness to the hearts of various members in the local community throughout the holy month of Ramadan.

The company also partnered with the Tarahom



Chief Executive Officer of stc Maziad Al-Harbi and Danah Faisal Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc in a group photo with the public relations team at stc and the Tarahom Volunteer Team.

Volunteer Team in the "Let's Clean" campaign. The initiative was marked as the largest of its kind desert clean-up in Kuwait and took place in the Subiya area during the beginning of the winter camping season. The event was considered a significant one as the Subiya area serves as a prime destination for families for camping and experiencing a range of leisure activities.

stc, as well as several small to medium sized enterprises, governmental institutions, private companies, and volunteers, participated in the Tarahom Volunteer Team's Subiya initiative to properly dispose of all waste materials left in the desert. Collectively, 1,375 participants managed to collect over 10 tons of matter that was placed in over 2,500 waste disposal bags.

Meanwhile, Danah Faisal Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "While leisure activities are essential to achieving a healthy lifestyle balance, we must not lose sight of the importance of preserving our environment and reducing the output of harmful waste. Having said that, we are determined to support our society through various humanitarian initiatives, which is where the Tarahom Volunteer Team's role comes into play by organizing and implementing such activities in collaboration with stc."

Jasem extended stc's gratitude and appreciation towards the Tarahom Volunteer Team for the effort they placed forth to successfully achieve the objec-



KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of stc Maziad Al-Harbi honors the Tarahom Volunteer Team.

tive set out under stc's Ramadan campaign. Additionally, she thanked the team for their leading role in organizing the desert clean-up initiative, and for their resilient dedication towards making the local community a better place.

Jasem concluded that the recognition ceremony, attended by stc's CEO, reflects the core values that stc stands by with the aim of achieving sustainable and effective results. stc will continue to organize initiatives, participate in activities, and launch campaigns that empower the community and support a sustainable lifestyle despite the unprecedented circumstances faced today.

Kuwait reports 25 COVID deaths in three days

KUWAIT: Kuwait has announced 25 deaths related to the novel coronavirus over a three-day period, while the daily infected cases' rate continued to register high numbers. The Ministry of Health on Saturday reported 11 new COVID-19 deaths and 1,497 infections over the previous 24 hours, putting total fatalities at 1,862 and the caseload at 337,371. Kuwait had reported nine and five deaths, in addition to 1,658 and 1,646 new cases on Friday and Thursday, respectively.

Total recoveries have reached 318,419 after 1,388 patients recovered during the same period, the ministry said on Saturday. Recoveries on Friday and Thursday reached 1,386 and 1,427 respectively. Moreover, 17,090 patients in total were receiving healthcare, including 209 at intensive care units as of Saturday, the ministry added. This is up from 16,992 patients, including 202 in ICUs announced on Friday, and 16,729 patients, including 196 in ICU's announced on Thursday.

In a measure to curb the spread of the virus, the Cabinet had announced Thursday that unvaccinated people will not be allowed to dine at restaurants and cafes, enter huge malls exceeding 6,000 square meters in area, health clubs and salons. Entry is allowed to people who have received two doses or at least 14 days after taking one dose. Kuwait had last week announced the detection of an unspecified number of the delta variant of the coronavirus. Kuwait has been witnessing a spike in the number of new coronavirus cases which exceeded 1,300 for over a week.

Local

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Kuwait Airways resumes flights to Paris, Malaga, Sarajevo

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) announced yesterday resuming flights to Paris, Malaga and Sarajevo as part of a strategy for gradual restoration of regular operations. The KAC said in a press statement it would organize three flights to Paris per week on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays as of July 7. There will be two flights per week to Malaga on Sundays and Thursdays effective July 4 and two flights per week to Sarajevo on Saturdays and Wednesdays starting June 30.

The corporation had announced last week relaunching flights to London with a single trip a week. On June 15, it started staging three flights per week to Bodrum on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. And on June 18, it began organizing three flights a week to Trabzon on Sundays, Mondays and Fridays, in addition to the regular flights to Istanbul.

Moreover, the national carrier announced two flights per week to Tbilisi on Mondays and Fridays, in addition to several summer tourism destinations. The corporation has affirmed its readiness to restore full operations of commercial flights in line with approval of the health authorities and resumption of air navigation in other countries. — KUNA



Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture showing Al-Maqsab Gate, one of five remaining gates of Kuwait's old 'Soor' or wall, in Kuwait City. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

V4 integration an example of successful cooperation



KUWAIT: Ambassadors of the V4 (Visegrad Group) countries are seen during a ceremony at the Polish embassy in Kuwait to mark the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the grouping.



Visitors at an exhibition showcasing the history of the V4 nations.

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Poland to Kuwait Pawel Lechowicz held a gathering of V4 (Visegrad Group) ambassadors at the Polish embassy in Kuwait last week to mark the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the grouping. On February 15, 1991, the presidents of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia - to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration.

The Visegrad Group Jubilee took place during the Polish Presidency, which began on July 1, 2020. A short and impressive video presentation of each of the four countries was made to the select gathering at the Polish chancery and guests were able to see the great progress made by the V4 nations during the past 30 years.

The Visegrad Group was established as an alliance of originally three, later four countries for the purpose of

furthering their European integration as well as advancing their military, economic and energy cooperation with one another. The Visegrad Group reflects the efforts of the four Central European countries - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia - to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration.

Addressing the gathering Ambassador Pawel said that the annual presidency coincided with an unprecedented crisis in the world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The pandemic has put the functioning of societies to a severe test," he said.

"The motto of V4 cooperation during the Polish Presidency was 'Back on track', and our goal of building the image of the Central European region and V4 as a flexible and constructive partner remains an ongoing task.

Dialogue is essential in these difficult times. Gestures of solidarity and goodwill also count. The next country to hold the presidency in the V4 Group is Hungary."

Ambassador Pawel further elaborated that the V4 countries exchange information and develop priority programs in order to better cooperate in an increasing number of areas. An important basic principle is that, within the EU, the V4 carry more weight as an alliance than they would as individual countries.

V4 and GCC comparison

In spite of the differences of the countries' economic potential and geographical differences, there are certain similarities in the cooperation between V4 countries and GCC states:

- Shared cultural and historic backgrounds: Influence of Western

Christianity (Roman Catholicism), experience of II World War and post war communist regimes in V4 Group. Arab-Islamic roots of GCC states, as well as balancing influence between colonial powers (Ottoman Empire, UK).

- Social and economic level of development: GCC economies are based on oil extraction and exports. V4 countries transitioned from socialistic methods of centrally controlled economies to the ideas of free market and freedom of entrepreneurship.

- Goals: GCC seek new, other than oil-based development route for their economies. V4 Group states, as a major manufacturer of goods in Europe (heavy industry, automotive, agriculture) seek advancement to the high income - high productivity categories.

An exhibition was also on display showcasing the history of the V4 nations.

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Flames spread to five houses in Jaber Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT: Four fire teams battled a blaze that erupted in a house under construction in Jaber Al-Ahmad yesterday. Strong winds also helped flames spread to four other nearby homes, Kuwait Fire Force said. No injuries were reported as firemen managed to evacuate the buildings before successfully extinguishing the fire. KFF explained. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



Drugs found in rice container

KUWAIT: Customs officers at Shuwaikh Port foiled an attempt to smuggle nearly 17 kilograms of shabu (methamphetamine) hidden in rice sacks in a food supplies' container arriving from Iran yesterday. The operation came less than 24 hours after a similar case in which customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle 5.4 kilograms of shabu in a shipment of candy bars.





Downtown Chicago emerges from pandemic — hobbled by crime wave Page 6

Taleban: 'Islamic system' only way to Afghan peace, women's rights

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TEHRAN: A woman holds a poster of Iran's newly-elected president Ebrahim Raisi, with text in reading "government of the people, strong Iran", as supporters celebrate his victory in Imam Hussein square in the capital late Saturday. —AFP

Iran's ultraconservatives hail Raisi win

Media in Iran welcomes 'the dawn of a new era'

TEHRAN: Iran's ultraconservatives yesterday hailed the election victory of their candidate Ebrahim Raisi, after Washington charged the vote was unfair.

Raisi, 60, won Friday's election in which more than half the voters stayed away after many political heavyweights had been barred from running and as an economic crisis driven by US sanctions has battered the country. An austere figure from the clerical establishment, Raisi takes over from the moderate incumbent Hassan Rouhani, who must leave office in August after eight years in power.

Raisi is seen as close to the 81-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who holds ultimate political power in Iran.

"The Dawn of a New Era," read the jubilant front-page headline of the conservative Resalat daily, welcoming the 62 percent win by Raisi, the head of Iran's judiciary. Raisi was congratulated by Russia, Turkey and several Gulf states, and by Iran's regional allies including

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Raisi's victory had been widely anticipated after the Guardian Council, made up of 12 clerics and jurists, had approved just seven candidates, all men, out of a field of almost 600 hopefuls. Iran's moderate Jomhuri-e Eslami daily highlighted that conservatives had now cemented their hold on power, from parliament and the Guardian Council to the court system and armed forces.

Using a touch of irony, its editorial said that "we, the people of Iran, owed the conservative faction a homogeneous government" and "the people have delivered".

'Epic' turnout

Turnout reached 48.8 percent, a record low for a presidential poll since Iran's 1979 revolution ousted the US-backed monarchy.

The ultraconservative Kayhan daily argued the voter participation was "epic" considering the economic crisis,

COVID pandemic and the "enemy's propaganda", referring to boycott calls from Iranian opposition groups abroad. The Resalat daily welcomed the change from the Rouhani administration which it said has been dogged by political infighting and occupied with "fruitless domestic and foreign challenges".

Rouhani's landmark achievement was the 2015 deal with world powers under which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. That deal has however been hanging by a thread since then-US president Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and launched a "maximum pressure" campaign to diplomatically and economically isolate Iran.

While Iran has always denied seeking a nuclear weapon, Trump charged it was still planning to build the bomb and was destabilizing the Middle East through armed proxy groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Since US President Joe Biden took office this year, talks involving Iran and the remaining parties to the accord —

Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia — have resumed in Vienna, with the US taking part indirectly.

'Anti-Western views'

Raisi has said Iran should keep negotiating with the aim of ending the punishing sanctions that have largely cut the country of 83 million off from global markets and financial systems. The US State Department said after Raisi's election win that Washington would continue talks over Iran's nuclear program, working with its allies and partners.

A spokesperson charged however that "Iranians were denied their right to choose their own leaders in a free and fair electoral process". Analysts for think-tank the Eurasia Group said Raisi's election win would likely not derail the ongoing Vienna talks to salvage the nuclear deal. But they warned that "his hardline, anti-Western views are a sharp break from the more moderate stances of Rouhani and will have a significant impact on Tehran's relationship with the outside world". —AFP



FORT LAUDERDALE: Police officers and others assisting two people lying on the ground after being hit by a pickup truck during a Pride parade in Wilton Manors, near Fort Lauderdale, Florida Saturday. —AFP

One killed as truck hits crowd at Florida Pride parade

FORT LAUDERDALE: The driver of a pickup truck slammed into a crowd gathering for a Pride parade Saturday in south Florida, killing one man and injuring another, authorities said. While the truck appeared to be taking part in the procession, it was not immediately clear if the crash was a deliberate assault or an accident. Police detective Ali Adamson said officials were evaluating all possibilities.

The incident happened at the start of the Wilton Manors Stonewall Pride Parade and festival, an LGBTQ celebration in a town near Fort Lauderdale. The white pickup truck was lined up with other floats for the parade when it accelerated and ran into pedestrians before crashing into a plant nursery. Local 10 News said. The driver was later taken into custody. Two adult men were transported to a medical center where one later died. Adamson told reporters in a televised press briefing. The other remains hospitalized but is expected to survive, she added.

The driver and the victims are members of the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus, according to a statement from the group's president Justin Knight, who called the incident an "unfortunate accident". "Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the unfortunate accident that occurred when the Stonewall Pride Parade was just getting started," he said in the statement. —AFP

Women migrants reduced to sex slaves in Libya 'hell'

TRIPOLI: For Aisha, sexual slavery was something you only heard about happening to others in television reports, until she found herself locked in a living "hell" in Libya.

"I had left a nightmare only to fall into hell," said the migrant from Guinea, lured to the North African country that criminal gangs have turned into a den of racketeering. Aisha fled her home country after five miscarriages: for her in-laws and the neighborhood, she was either sterile or a witch.

But the young woman was simply diabetic. "I just wanted to disappear from my country," said Aisha, a graduate in hotel management.

She contacted a former classmate who appeared to have made a life for herself in neighboring Libya and who lent Aisha money to join her. "I didn't even see the country. As soon as I arrived, I was locked up, I was a slave. She brought men to me and she got the money."

Locked in a room with a toilet, she only saw the "friend" who had duped her when she was brought in food, "like a dog". "The men came drunk. I'd rather not remember it," said Aisha, still trembling. "I thought my life was over."

After three months, a Libyan man took pity on her, threatened her captor and put Aisha on a bus to Tunisia with 300 Libyan dinars (\$65) in her pocket. After her diabetes was treated, she even gave birth to a baby girl late last year. She now dreams of Europe, but returning to Libya is out of the question. —AFP



Aisha, a migrant from Guinea plays with her daughter at a park in the southeastern Tunisian town of Medenine. —AFP

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International

Downtown Chicago emerges from pandemic - hobbled by crime wave

Businesses ecstatic with reopening of America's third-largest city

CHICAGO: Businesses in downtown Chicago that survived the pandemic-related economic slump and two spasms of looting last summer should be ecstatic with the reopening of America's third-largest city. Yet, many are battling a new hardship—a surge in crime that is keeping customers, and their money, away.

"I've never felt more unsafe than I do now," said Steve Burrows, a 48-year-old attorney who has called Chicago home his entire life. "I work downtown so I'm here every day during the day but I won't come down here at night or on the weekend." If people like Burrows, suburbanites and the millions of tourists who normally visit the lakefront city stay away, Chicago businesses will feel the impact as many are still trying to emerge from the tumult of the last 16 months.

Roseanna Ander, founder and executive director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, stresses that the uptick concerns gun crimes and other types of violent crime—also experienced by other cities around the United States. "The truth is nobody knows exactly what is driving the increase," Ander said.

But it's clear the pandemic added to many existing social problems. "It exacerbated everything, it magnified everything," she said.

'Our city is safe'

Chicago is experiencing crime in areas that had generally been considered safe, like the Magnificent Mile commercial district and Tony Oak Street, where last August rapper FBG Duck was shot dead in broad daylight. Violent crime is up in the city in every category. Carjackings, about half committed by juveniles, are happening all over Chicago, while expressway shootings are at levels never seen before with 93 so far this year versus 39 at the same time last year, according to police.

In downtown, much of the lawlessness has been blamed on youths who have come to the area on weekends the last two months, causing havoc by tipping over planters, robbing pedes-

trians and committing assaults—incidents that business owners say are keeping customers away.

Yet Mayor Lori Lightfoot is optimistic. On Tuesday, a day Chicago experienced its third mass shooting in three days, she called for more federal help to stem the flow of illegal guns but also struck a positive tone. "The reality is our city is safe. I stand by that," said Lightfoot.

City Council member Raymond Lopez, a frequent Lightfoot critic, said she's living in "fairytale land" and blasted her recent changes that banned most police car chases and limited foot chases of suspects. "The police need to catch criminals. They need to stop planting flowers and building community gardens and start catching people committing crimes. No longer allowing them to run after criminals—they already can't drive after them. What's next, no longer being allowed to handcuff them?"

Lopez also said Chicago is getting a bad reputation that is detrimental to its economic recovery, with a quarter of the city's budget based on revenue from tourism and hospitality. "When the national mood at the mere mention of our name that Chicago is too dangerous to go to, no one will want to come here."

The city's police department has asked the University of Chicago Crime Lab to analyze the violent crime wave. Crime over the Memorial Day weekend in May, the traditional start of the US summer, was down significantly this year—as the police department ordered officers to work 12-hour shifts, cancelled days off and stepped up patrols downtown.

But offenses surged again after officers returned to normal shifts, prompting the police department to return this weekend to the stepped-up presence. It's not clear how long that policy will stay in place, police spokesman Russ Rosenoff said.

'Scary'

For Jackie Jackson, 49, and Janel Jackson, 27,



CHICAGO: Beachgoers walk by a Chicago Police officer monitoring the beach from his car in the North Avenue Beach area in Chicago, Illinois, Friday. —AFP

a mother and daughter who own three Kilwins ice cream shops in Chicago, including one on Michigan Avenue that was looted last summer in violence stemming from protests against police abuses, the crime downtown is causing shops to close early in prime summer season. "People want to go out and have fun at 7 pm but safety comes first," Janel Jackson said. "Having to close up so early because no one is downtown affects us tremendously."

With people wary of going for something like an after-dinner ice cream, it's hitting the bottom line.

"Everyone is concerned, it's definitely an

issue we should be focused on because it's all about guests in beds and diners in seats. We want people feeling safe when they come to visit our great city," said Sam Toia, head of the Illinois Restaurant Association. Although Jackie Jackson believes in Chicago's business potential, crime has her making a five-year plan to get out.

"I don't carry a purse anymore... I don't go into any parking lots. I can't go through a drive-thru because I'm so afraid. I don't wear jewelry. I can't live. I can't wait to get me a little lake house and sit on the front porch and sip iced tea someplace and live happily ever after because this is scary." —AFP

Body found in Belgium is likely missing rogue soldier

BRUSSELS: A body found yesterday in eastern Belgium is probably that of a soldier suspected of extreme-right views who went missing after stealing arms from a military base and threatening public figures, prosecutors said. "According to the first elements of the investigation, it is Jurgen Conings," a statement said.



Jurgen Conings

"The cause of death is probably, according to initial findings, attributable to suicide by firearm," the statement added, though this would be confirmed at a later date. Hundreds of police and army personnel were deployed last month on the hunt for Conings, 46, after his abandoned vehicle was found in the area near the Dutch border with four rocket launchers inside.

Conings, who reportedly served in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, was believed to remain armed and dangerous after he was suspected of stealing weapons from a military base where he worked as an instructor. The discovery was first reported after a town mayor yesterday said he had found the body during a bike ride in a forest near where Conings's car had been found last month.

"During my mountain bike tour this morning, in a part where few people come, I smelled a strong corpse odor," Johan Tollenaere of the eastern town of Maaseik, told VRT news. "I immediately thought of Jurgen Conings and notified the police. They found the body," he said.

The manhunt dominated newspaper headlines in the country, with some labelling Conings the "Belgian Rambo" after the 1980s action film starring Sylvester Stallone. Among the people Conings had threatened is Marc Van Ranst, a leading virologist who has become a target for conspiracy theorists, COVID-skeptics and the Flemish far-right in Belgium during the coronavirus crisis. With Conings still at large, Van Ranst and his family had been moved to an undisclosed location.

"My thoughts go out to the relatives and children of Jurgen Conings. For them this is very sad news, because they lose a father, a relative or a friend," Van Ranst tweeted. The affair has been an embarrassment for the government as it was later revealed that Conings was on a watch list for his far-right views and had access to weapons.

He also drew support online with Facebook shutting down a page supporting Conings, which had garnered 45,000 members in just a few days.

Defense Minister Ludwige Dedonder decried the online backing for the fugitive—condemning in particular support coming from within Belgium's armed forces. —AFP

Surgeons to reconstruct face of boy after hyena attack

SANDTON, South Africa: Plastic surgeons in South Africa are preparing to reconstruct the face of a nine-year-old Zimbabwean boy mauled by a hyena in an attack last month. Rodwell Khomazana lost his nose, left eye, most of his upper lip, bits of his forehead and other parts of his face when he was attacked during a night-time church service outside Harare on May 2.

Doctors in one of the city's main public hospitals did the best they could to patch him up and stabilize his condition, but lacked the resources to fully repair his ravaged face.

Unable to afford specialized surgery only available abroad, his mother contacted medics in neighboring South Africa, who agreed to operate on him for free in a private Johannesburg clinic.

"When she mentioned the story of this poor child mauled by a hyena I couldn't say no," plastic surgeon Ridwan Mia told AFP earlier this week. Rodwell was flown to Johannesburg on Saturday

and greeted by hospital staff singing South Africa's national anthem.

Many wore white T-shirts printed with "Team Rodwell" and a drawing of the boy. They clapped and cheered as he was wheeled into the building, a green hooded sweater pulled over his head and his face covered in white bandages. A peephole had been cut over his right eye, through which he watched cartoons on a smart tablet.

'Huge injury'

Mia and his team will perform exploratory surgery today, after which they will schedule a complex operation expected to last around 20 hours. They will use tissue from other parts of his body to reconstruct his jaw, nose, mouth and cheeks. He will also be fitted with a prosthetic eye.

"Unfortunately he will have multiple scars on his face," said Mia. "What we are hoping to do is a procedure where we minimize... the scarring," he explained. Rodwell "will never have a completely normal, unscarred face," he warned. "But we want to give him something that will at least allow him to be functional and enjoy the things that other kids do."

Donations will cover the costs of hospitalization, which is expected to last at least a month with sev-



SANDTON, South Africa: Rodwell Khomazana (center), 9, is taken out of an ambulance on a gurney at the Mediclinic Sandton Hospital in Sandton Saturday. —AFP

eral touch up procedures. A hotel has offered to accommodate the child's mother during that time.

Mia said left over money would be used for therapy to help Rodwell overcome trauma. He noted psychological support would be particularly important for him to accept his new eye. Doctors hope Rodwell will eventually "feel like a normal boy again", Mia said. "Unfortunately the harsh reality is we are dealing with a huge injury." —AFP

Former UK speaker Bercow slams PM, defects to Labour

LONDON: The colorful former speaker of Britain's House of Commons John Bercow said he has left the Conservatives to join the opposition Labour Party, saying the country is "sick of lies" under Prime Minister Boris Johnson. In an interview with the Observer newspaper published on Sunday, the former MP said the Conservative Party under Johnson was "reactionary, populist, nationalistic and sometimes even xenophobic".

Bercow, who stepped down as speaker in October 2019 after 10 years, said he joined the Labour Party a few weeks ago because he shared its values. "I am motivated by support for equality, social justice and internationalism. That is the Labour brand," he told the Observer.

"The conclusion I have reached is that this government needs to be replaced. The reality is that the Labour Party is the only vehicle that can achieve that objective. There is no other credible option."

In an interview with Sky News,

Bercow insisted his decision was "not personal against Boris Johnson". But in scathing comments, he said Johnson had "only a nodding acquaintance with the truth in a leap year" and the way he treated parliament "with contempt" was "lamentable".

Bercow also told The Observer the prime minister was "a successful campaigner but a lousy governor", criticizing policies such as cutting the international aid budget.

'Sick of lies'

"I don't think he has any vision of a more equitable society, any thirst for social mobility or any passion to better the lot of people less fortunate than he is. I think increasingly people are sick of lies, sick of empty slogans, sick of a failure to deliver," he told the Observer. Bercow also directed a jibe at health minister Matt Hancock, widely criticized for his handling of the pandemic, telling Sky: "I would buy him at my valuation and sell him at his and realise a healthy profit in the process".

On the other hand he described Labour leader Keir Starmer as "an honest, decent person". He denied suggestions that he was angling for a peerage from



LONDON: In this file photo, UK Parliament Speaker John Bercow speaks in the House of Commons in London on the European Union (EU) Withdrawal Act 2018 Motion. —AFP

Labour after the Tories denied him this.

"There has been no barter, no trade, no deal whatsoever," he told Sky News. Bercow served as a Conservative MP for Buckingham for 12 years before being elected speaker in 2009, becoming the

youngest person to hold the role for 100 years. The post of speaker is politically impartial and the holder is expected to resign from their party on appointment. Bercow told Sky News he did not rejoin the Conservative Party afterwards. —AFP

Biden goes to church after abortion challenge

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden went to church Saturday in his hometown a day after US Roman Catholic bishops issued a challenge to him over his support for abortion rights.

Biden and first lady Jill Biden spent time at St. Joseph

on the Brandywine church in Wilmington. They also visited the church graveyard where the president's first wife Neilia, son Beau and infant daughter Naomi are buried. Biden, 78, is a devout Catholic who attends mass at least once a week, and he supports the landmark 1973 US Supreme Court decision affirming a woman's right to an abortion.

On Friday US bishops agreed to draft a statement on the meaning of holy communion which could potentially be used to deny that sacrament to the American leader. The eucharist, also known as holy communion, is among the most sacred rituals in the Catholic Church and there have been calls from some conservative church leaders to deny

the sacrament to politicians who support abortion rights.

Biden on Friday seemed to dismiss the possibility that he could be denied communion. "That's a private matter and I don't think that's going to happen," he told reporters. It is up to each local bishop to decide who receives communion in their diocese. In 2019, a priest at a Catholic church in South Carolina refused holy communion to Biden because of his stance on abortion. The Catholic News Service reported in May that the Vatican had warned US bishops to proceed cautiously with policies designed "to address the situation of Catholics in public office who support legislation allowing abortion, euthanasia or other moral evils." —AFP

International

Taleban: 'Islamic system' only way to Afghan peace, women's rights

Mullah Baradar insists group is committed to peace talks

KABUL: The Taleban said yesterday they remain committed to peace talks but insisted a "genuine Islamic system" in Afghanistan was the only way to end the war and ensure rights—including for women.

Talks between the militants and the Afghan government have been deadlocked for months and violence has surged across the country since May when the US military began its final withdrawal.

Fears are also growing that if the Taleban return to power they will reimpose their harsh version of Islamic law, under which girls were banned from school and women accused of crimes such as adultery were stoned to death in stadiums. Despite the rise in violence, Taleban co-founder and deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar said yesterday that the group was committed to the peace talks. "Our very participation in the negotiations... indicates openly that we believe in resolving issues through (mutual) understanding," Baradar said in a statement.

He said the only way to end the conflict in Afghanistan was to establish an Islamic system after the departure of all foreign forces. "A genuine Islamic system is the best mean for solution of all issues of the Afghans," Baradar said.

His statement acknowledged the fears in Afghanistan and abroad about the kind of system that would emerge—and its impact on women—saying that fell "within the ambit of the intra-Afghan nego-

tiations". Baradar also assured that the rights of all Afghans including women would be accommodated in that system, according to "the glorious religion of Islam" and Afghan traditions.

'Taleban destroying Afghanistan'

But many fear that the Taleban's interpretation of rights will clash with the changes that have happened in Afghan society since 2001. In May, a US intelligence report said the gains made over the past two decades on women's rights would be rolled back if the militants returned to power. As the US military presses ahead to meet the September 11 deadline to complete the troop withdrawal, the Taleban have fought daily battles with government forces and claim to have captured 40 districts. The growing fear and uncertainty about the future have forced many Afghans to try and leave, including thousands of men and women who fear reprisals because they worked with foreign forces. Baradar called on Afghan youths to not leave the country, and also stressed that the Taleban would ensure that minorities, humanitarian organizations and diplomats had nothing to fear.

The recent losses faced by government troops have forced President Ashraf Ghani to change his defense and interior ministers. On Saturday, he announced the changes and called on the Taleban to make a choice between peace and enmity with the



KABUL: A street vendor waits for customers along a road in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

government. "If they choose enmity then the people will respond to them decisively," he said late on Saturday in a statement issued by the palace.

Ghani blamed the Taleban for starting the war and accused them of failing to come up with a

plan to establish peace. "As officials of a legitimate government, we are committed to all the humanitarian laws in the war, but the Taleban are violating these laws and are destroying Afghanistan," he said. — AFP

Ethiopia's election board 'confident' despite vote worry

ADDIS ABABA: Twice delayed, hobbled by the coronavirus pandemic, violent insecurity, and planning chaos, Ethiopia's electoral board says it is ready for today's crucial vote and assures it will be credible. "We're actually very confident about it," the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) spokeswoman Solyana Shimeles said.

It is not optimism shared by all, with serious doubts remaining over the vote Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed promised would be the most competitive yet in Africa's second-most populous nation. Voting will not proceed on June 21 in about one-fifth of the country's 547 constituencies due to unrest and logistical problems.

Those constituencies will mostly vote in September, but no ballot is scheduled in Tigray, a war-torn region of six million. In some areas where voting will proceed, opposition boycotts have further undermined claims of inclusivity and competition.

The majority of national parliamentary seats up for grabs in Abiy's native Oromia—the country's most populous region—are being contested by a single candidate, election data shows. Solyana said just three of Ethiopia's 49 registered parties were not contesting the poll, and about 9,500 candidates were running at a national and regional level-

more than any previous ballot. "We hope this is going to be a better one, a participatory one, and a credible one," she said.

Setbacks

NEBE was overhauled when Abiy rose to power in 2018 on the back of anti-government protests, vowing to open up political space after years of iron-fisted rule. The appointment of Birtukan Mideska—a high-profile former judge and exiled opposition leader—to head a revised, independent board was seen as evidence of Abiy's commitment to democratic reform.

Nationwide elections were delayed almost year due to the coronavirus pandemic, and rescheduled for June 5. But organizing a smooth election is a tall order at the best of times in Ethiopia, a vast and rugged country of 110 million hamstrung by poor infrastructure. NEBE lacked resources and needed tens of thousands of staff. The timetable fell behind and a new date was scheduled for June 21.

But problems still linger just days before the vote, observers say. On Friday, Birtukan wrote to Abiy saying federal assistance with transport and other logistics would be needed to ensure the election went off without a hitch. "NEBE is working 24 hours in full capacity," she wrote.

One diplomat in Addis Ababa, who



ADDIS ABABA: Electoral officials carry voting material at a polling station in Addis Ababa yesterday. — AFP

asked to remain anonymous, said: "NEBE is committed and willing, but it is challenging. Whether this translates into being ready for sound elections is another matter."

Doubts

Analysts say the logistical problems that have dogged preparations could prove troubling when it comes to counting the ballot. "The NEBE leadership is trying really hard to do what they can but they're working in a difficult environment and have huge delivery challenges", said an election expert in Addis Ababa who asked to remain anonymous.

The vote will be monitored by five foreign observer missions and thousands of civil society workers. The

EU will not send a team after a disagreement with the government over the terms.

And the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a government-affiliated but independent body that has investigated state excesses, was barred from observing the vote. "Our mandate enables us to deploy and monitor the human rights aspect of the elections," the commission's director of communications Aaron Maasho told AFP, adding talks with NEBE were ongoing.

Endalkachew Girma, a 35-year-old voter in Addis Ababa, recognized NEBE had tried to make this vote fairer. "But like past ballots, I do not think this election will be historic or credible" he said. — AFP

Scholar speaking out on China's crackdown on intellectuals

BEIJING: In a small, book-strewn apartment in Beijing's outskirts lives one of the last Chinese academics who refuses to be silenced by the ruling Communist Party's relentless crackdown on intellectuals. Wu Qiang, 50, once had an enviable career as political science lecturer at the elite Tsinghua University.

But he was dismissed in 2015 after conducting fieldwork at the Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong a year earlier. "This caused shockwaves at Tsinghua. I was cut off and they thought I was a troublemaker," he said, adding that the university instead gave an "obscure technical reason" for his dismissal. Since then, Wu continues to speak to foreign media despite a nationalistic climate that is increasingly hostile towards outside views.

He also filed a labor lawsuit against Tsinghua earlier this year. "I am still protesting against Tsinghua's illegal dismissal, just like how I am still resisting in my thoughts and my comments on politics," says Wu, a stocky, energetic man who rattles through Chinese Communist Party history as his cats weave between his feet. "It is very important not to stop speaking out. You need to comment on politics and society; that's how you participate in it," he said.

He remains an anomaly. Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China's vibrant intellectual circles gradually fell silent as Party critics were arrested, fired from their institutions or forced to flee abroad. "Ten years ago, perhaps every weekend in every corner there would be a large number of salons and meetings (in Beijing)," he said.

"But now, this wonderful scene does not exist anymore... everyone always talks about one issue when we meet: who's disappeared or been detained recently. Everyone is waiting to see who will be next." In a sign of the sweeping changes to come, a leaked 2013 internal communique-known as Document No. 9 — warned against promoting



Former Tsinghua University lecturer Wu Qiang lost his job after doing fieldwork on the Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong. — AFP

"false ideological trends" such as constitutional democracy, civil society and press freedom.

It has been likened to a gag order for universities. Intellectuals, NGOs, civil rights lawyers and liberal media were the first in line to be targeted by successive state-backed purges of dissent, which reached a peak in the 2015 nationwide "709 crackdown" when over 300 lawyers and human rights activists were arrested. In the past year alone, influential business tycoon Ren Zhiqiang was jailed for 18 years and legal scholar Xu Zhangrun was detained and sacked from Tsinghua after writings that criticised Xi's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Meanwhile, former Central Party School professor Cai Xia fled to the US and was expelled from the Party last summer, after a recording of a lecture surfaced in which she likened Xi to a "mafia boss".

The silencing of dissent comes as China, having successfully tamed the coronavirus, flaunts an unprecedented level of confidence on the global stage, sparring with Western countries who view it as a strategic threat. The ruling Chinese Communist Party is also about to celebrate 100 years since its founding with triumph. — AFP

French far-right eyes gains in regional polls

PARIS: France went to the polls for the first round of regional elections yesterday that could see Marine Le Pen's far-right party make gains and step further into the political mainstream. The election will see new assemblies elected for mainland France's 13 regions and 96 departments, with Le Pen's National Rally (RN) tipped to win at least one region for the first time in what would be a major coup.

Le Pen is not standing as a candidate, but she has been campaigning hard ahead of presidential elections next year that surveys show could end up being a close race between her and centrist President Emmanuel Macron. "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," Stéphane Zumsteeg from the Ipsos polling firm told AFP.

Though far-right politicians preside over a handful of towns, running a region with a budget of billions of euros and powers over schools, transport and economic development would lend it the sort of legitimacy that Le Pen craves, analysts say. The one most likely to tip is the southeastern Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur-home to Marseille, Saint-Tropez and Cannes — where the RN is fronted by Thierry Mariani, a former minister who defected from the centre-right Republicans party. Voting began at 08:00 am (06:00 pm nationally). The election will be held over two consecutive Sundays, with a second run-off vote on June 27 necessary unless parties win more than 50 percent in the first round.

Analysts say that results in many regions will be driven by local dynamics and a high abstention rate, limiting how much they should be seen as indicators for the larger political picture in France. 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). — AFP

News in brief

Eswatini youth stage rare protest

MANZINI, Swaziland: Police in Eswatini on Saturday clashed with a rural demonstration demanding democratic reforms in Africa's last absolute monarchy, an AFP reporter said. Around 500 youth gathered in a village in the kingdom's Manzini district to demand the right to vote for their own prime minister, currently appointed by King Mswati III. They burned tyres, blocked roads and chanted political slogans as they marched through the village, calling on the king to lift a longstanding ban on political parties. An AFP reporter at the scene said police fired stun grenades and live bullets at the protest—a rare event in rural areas, which tend to support the monarchy. In 2019, the country was rocked by a series of strikes by civil servants who accused the monarch of draining public coffers at the expense of his subjects. — AFP

Italy's Berlusconi combative

ROME: Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi said yesterday that he was doing better after repeated hospital stays in recent months and would remain active in politics. "Fortunately I'm doing better, but the doctors won't let me take part in public events yet. Nevertheless, I promise to be with you soon," the 84-year-old told a meeting of his Forza Italia party by phone, according to media reports. Berlusconi's four hospital stays this year—most recently in May—were prompted by complications from his coronavirus infection in 2020. — AFP

Separatists kill 2 soldiers in Cameroon

DOUALA, Cameroon: Two soldiers and a civil servant were killed in separate attacks in Southwest Cameroon, officials said Saturday, the latest violence in a bloody independence struggle by English-speaking rebels. Two soldiers were killed in one incident, in Nguti commune on Friday, the prefect of Koupe-Manengouba, Jean-Marie Tchakui, told AFP. "There were three soldiers. Two were killed on the spot," said Tchakui. "And one was able to escape although he was wounded". "Our two soldiers died while on their way back from guarding a factory shut down due to threats by secessionists," he added. — AFP

War crimes trial of ex-Kosovo rebel

THE HAGUE: The war crimes trial of former Kosovo rebel leader Salih Mustafa will take place in September, the court trying him announced Saturday. Mustafa, a former commander with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), will be the first person tried by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, which has also charged the former president of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci. Mustafa has been charged with the murder of a prisoner, the torture and cruel treatment of at least six imprisoned civilians, as well as arbitrary detention during the 1998-99 conflict. — AFP

W Africa states to keep watch on Mali

ACCRA, Ghana: West African states said on Saturday they will carry on monitoring events in Mali following a coup before lifting its suspension from a regional bloc. Bamako has announced a new civilian government and promised to adhere to a roadmap to elections early next year, after the coup in May led by Colonel Assimi Goita. He had already led a coup last August with other army officers to oust elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita after weeks of mass protests over corruption and the long-running jihadist conflict. — AFP

MONDAY, JUNE 21, 2021

Business

Boursa Kuwait rings the bell in support of refugees on World Refugee Day 2021

Initiative in collaboration with UNHCR

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait rang the bell to support refugees during World Refugee Day 2021, in collaboration with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. The stock exchange also lighted up its building in blue, which are the colors of the UNHCR logo, to raise awareness of the plight of refugees and the forcibly displaced and shed light on the role that the private sector can play to accomplish goal 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Naser M Al-Sanousi



Dr Samer Haddadin

The compassionate initiative forms part of Boursa Kuwait's efforts to create a lasting meaningful impact on the communities where it operates as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy.

An international day designated by the United Nations to honor refugees around the globe, World Refugee Day has been commemorated each year on June 20 since 2001. The day celebrates the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution, and shines a light on the rights, needs and dreams of refugees, helping to build empathy and understanding for their plight and mobilize resources to enable them to thrive. This year, World Refugee Day is marked under the theme, "Together we heal, learn and shine."

Commenting on the event, Naser M Al-Sanousi, Director of Marketing and Communication at Boursa Kuwait, said, "The number of refugees and forcibly displaced persons around the world at the end of 2020 has exceeded 80 million, a large percentage of which are under the age of 18, which is a record number, especially in light of this pandemic stricken time. Boursa Kuwait joins UNHCR today, ringing the bell for World Refugee Day in support of every person who has been displaced by wars and conflicts across the world."

Dr Samer Haddadin, Representative of the UNHCR Office in Kuwait, also spoke on this occasion, saying: "World Refugee Day recognizes the strength, courage, and resilience of millions of refugees who have been forced to flee often struggle to access the most basic of needs, such as food, shelter, education and medical facilities. We work together with refugees, partners and communities every day to help them access these services and look towards brighter futures."

Considered to be one of the key contributors to the UNHCR around the world, Kuwait has donated over \$430 million to the UN Refugee Agency over the past ten years.

Dr Haddadin added, "We have often used the example of Kuwait as a role model other countries can emulate, as it has long been a contributor to the UNHCR. I would like to extend my gratitude to the State of Kuwait, its institutions and its people for their support over the years, which has undoubtedly helped improve the lives of millions of refugees around the world."

Boursa Kuwait's partnership with the UNHCR to ring the bell on World Refugee Day is the embodiment of the company's sincere desire to raise awareness to the importance of helping those who are in need and have been deprived of their right to live with dignity. This initiative will contribute to greater awareness of the importance of helping the victims of wars, conflicts and persecution build better futures for themselves, and is in line with Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability initiatives among the three pillars of the

return of the Boeing aircraft, which was grounded for 20 months in the US following two fatal crashes.

'Diplomatic and commercial tool'

While China remains dependent on Airbus and Boeing aircraft for now, the country's ambitions to have its own fleet are clear. "The aeronautics industry is both an instrument of growth and a diplomatic and commercial tool that allows them to have a very comprehensive foreign policy in foreign markets," said Michel Merluzeau, analyst at AIR, an industry consultancy.

"The Chinese have the technological and industrial skills to make an airplane, there's no doubt about that," he told AFP. "The Chinese are ambitious. They're very reasonable. They know it will take time," he said. "They don't want to take on Airbus and Boeing in 2025."

The C919 was built with US and European help. Only 14 of the aircraft's 82 suppliers are Chinese, according to Kennedy. The wings and fuselage are Chinese but manufacturers in the country have yet to master the skills of building engines or airplane electronic equipment.

"They prepare their industry to meet domestic needs, it would be inferior products but at least it would be national," Aboulafia said. The airplane is heavier than the US and European aircraft, making it less fuel efficient and thus more expensive to operate.

From duopoly to 'triopoly'

But COMAC is racking up customers. The company says it has 815 orders from 28 clients, most from Chinese airlines—though few are confirmed orders. China Eastern Airlines was the first company to make a firm order in March for five aircraft. Huang Jun, professor at the school of aeronautic science and engineering of Beihang University, said the C919 will not be a game changer.

But it may be cheaper than its rivals and create an "ABC pattern" in China, with Airbus, Boeing and COMAC operating in the country. "We just hope we can join this market and occupy a certain market share," Huang said. For Airbus chief executive Guillaume Faury, COMAC "will progressively become a decent player". "So we will grow probably from a duopoly to a 'triopoly'" by the end of the decade for single-aisle aircraft, he said. — AFP



KUWAIT: The stock exchange building is lighted up in blue to raise awareness of the plight of refugees yesterday.

Environment, Education and Community as well as Goal 17 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR), industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other com-

panies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and integrating sustainability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange. As part of the strategy, Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for nongovernmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, environmental protection as well as safety and preventive measures against COVID-19.

Airbus-Boeing truce and a common rival

WASHINGTON: While the United States and Europe waged a 17-year trade battle over subsidies to Boeing and Airbus, China poured money into its own commercial aircraft to take on the Western aviation duopoly. It took a common threat for the US and Europe to finally put an end to their dispute this past week, as the two sides signed a five-year truce suspending tit-for-tat tariffs. US President Joe Biden made it clear during his visit to Brussels on Tuesday: Washington and Brussels must "work together to challenge and counter China's non-market practices in this sector that give China's companies an unfair advantage". For the past four years, state-run manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) has run test flights for its 168-seat, narrow-bodied C919 airplane, a potential rival to Airbus's A320 and Boeing's B737.

COMAC expects to obtain airworthiness certification from Chinese air traffic regulators this year, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. The aircraft received between \$49-\$72 billion in state subsidies, much more than the aid that Airbus and Boeing were given by their governments, according to Scott Kennedy, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"The very real problem is that China is manipulating the market in playing Airbus and Boeing against each other and demanding technology transfers as a condition for orders," said Richard Aboulafia, aviation expert at Teal Group, a market analysis firm based in Virginia. China's air traffic has recovered much faster than elsewhere in the world as the country brought the coronavirus outbreak under relative control well before others last year. Boeing believes that the Chinese market will need 9,360 aircraft in the next 20 years, one-fifth of the world total. It could be a major windfall for the A320 and the 737 MAX, though China has yet to authorize the



(From left), Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Apple's Tim Cook and Google's Sundar Pichai.

Huge changes for Internet and Big Tech unveiled

WASHINGTON: The antitrust overhaul package unveiled in Congress targeting Big Tech, if enacted, could have far-reaching effects on how people use the Internet and on America's biggest and most successful companies. The five bills, due for a committee vote on Wednesday, could pave the way for a reorganization or breakup of giants such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon while reshaping the entire internet ecosystem.

The measures would stop tech giants from operating a platform for third parties while offering competing services on those platforms, dealing a major blow to the likes of Apple and Amazon.

Lawmakers also are seeking to ban tech firms from prioritizing their own products or services, with Google clearly in mind. Another measure would require data "portability" and "interoperability," which could make it easier for people to quit Facebook, for example, while keeping their data and contacts.

The largest tech firms additionally would be barred from acquiring competitors under the package, which would also add funds for antitrust enforcement. Fiona Scott Morton, a Yale University professor and former US official who has written extensively on Big Tech, said the legislation stems from the failure of antitrust enforcement in the US and elsewhere to make a dent in the dominance of major technology firms.

"This is regulation, it's not antitrust anymore," Morton said. If the bills are enacted, she noted, Apple might have to sell or shut down its music service so that it doesn't discriminate against rivals such as Spotify. "Apple would have to choose," she said.

An interoperability requirement "would be very profound for consumers because it would let people join social networks other than Facebook and (Facebook-owned) Instagram and stay in contact with their friends," Morton noted. The package comes amid signs of a more aggressive posture by Washington against dominant tech firms, including President Joe Biden's nomination of Lina Khan—a prominent advocate of breaking up Big Tech—to head the Federal Trade Commission, one of the agencies charged with antitrust enforcement.

'Risky' path

The House Judiciary Committee has scheduled a vote Wednesday on the package, which has some support from Republicans in addition to the Democratic leadership, signaling a likelihood of passage in the full House of Representatives. The fate in the Senate is less clear.

The measures come following a 16-month investigation in the House led by antitrust subcommittee chairman David Cicilline which concluded that tech giants were abusing their dominant positions and had too much power in the economy. Christopher Sagers, a Cleveland State University professor specializing in antitrust law, said the package represents a radical approach to dealing with tech firms' growing power. The bills "would make the platforms operate more like airlines or utility companies, which have to provide their services to anyone who wants them, and not give anyone (or themselves) discriminatory advantages," Sagers said.

"These laws also could bring an end to some products that are very popular," he added.

"I'm not sure how Apple could continue even selling its own mobile software, for example, if iOS devices or the App Store were denominated 'covered platforms,' and there could be consequences for products like Amazon Prime, Google Maps, books digitized in the Google Books project, and who knows what else." But Sagers said the impact might not be bad in the long run because "markets rearrange themselves and new competitors turn up to replace them... But it is to say that these laws seem risky and I find their consequences hard to predict."

Blank smartphones?

Other analysts offered stark warnings against unforeseen consequences of upending the massively successful firms on which many consumers rely in their daily lives. Iain Murray, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, said the measure might mean a firm such as Apple would need to shut its App Store, ship "blank phones" without any apps, or spin off its phone division. "For the most part, the average consumer will see her user experience severely degraded," he said in a statement. The legislation mirrors Europe's Digital Markets Act and is likely to "distort" competition, according to Aurelien Portuese of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a think tank which often reflects the industry's views. Portuese said the legislation comes amid a wave of resentment toward Big Tech but may ultimately hurt consumers by allowing less efficient firms to gain in the marketplace.—AFP



SEATTLE, WA: A Boeing 737 MAX 10 airliner taxis at Boeing Field after its first flight in Seattle, Washington. — AFP

Business

Squatters fill Gaddafi compound as Libya's housing crisis bites

Satellite dishes, water tanks now fill the grounds of Bab Al-Aziziya complex

TRIPOLI: Before Muammar Gaddafi ouster, Libyans steered well clear of the Bab Al-Aziziya compound from where the dictator ruled, but a housing shortage in Tripoli has forced squatters to move in. Satellite dishes and water tanks now fill the grounds of the once feared fortified complex in a southern suburb of the capital, as young boys kick balls and cars drive in and out of the main gate.

Much of the sprawling compound was destroyed in NATO bombardments during the 2011 uprising against Gaddafi and then rebels went on the rampage, ransacking it. Now dozens of families have moved into the small houses once allocated to soldiers and the villas that were home to high-ranking army officers. Bashir, 68, has been squatting in a 400-square-metre (4,300-square-foot) villa since 2012, one year after Gaddafi was captured and killed by rebels in Sirte, the coastal Mediterranean city that was his hometown.

"Hundreds of Libyans have come to live here," he said, puffing on a cigarette. "The villa had been set ablaze and it took me a year to renovate it, at great expense," said Bashir. "But I'm not complaining."

The complex, complete with bunker and a warren of underground tunnels, was Gaddafi's home and the site from where he ruled Libya for four decades. Built in the 1980s, it was reinforced following a US air strike in 1986 in response to an attack on US servicemen at a Berlin nightclub, for which Washington held Tripoli responsible.

'I will not leave'

In its heyday, Bab Al-Aziziya, which covers six square kilometers (two square miles), housed a zoo, an indoor pool, countless murals and a fairground in its gardens. Gaddafi had expanded the grounds by knocking down adjacent neighborhoods. After the

uprising, Libyan authorities considered turning Bab Al-Aziziya into a "green zone", an amusement park or a memorial for the "martyrs" who had fallen in the conflict to oust Gaddafi. None of those projects has materialized.

But according to information obtained by AFP, authorities are planning to turn Bab Al-Aziziya into a park as part of a wider campaign to beautify Tripoli. If so, the new residents of the once feared Gaddafi headquarters could face eviction. "I will not leave my house," said a man who gave his name as Hassan, declining to reveal his true identity for security reasons. His squat "was in an appalling state, there were no doors or windows", said Hassan, who claims to have spent the equivalent of \$32,100 on repairs.

'Decent housing'

Ten years since the uprising that toppled Gaddafi's regime, many Libyans who used to receive government grants and subsidies are struggling to make ends meet. The oil-rich country descended into chaos after the dictator's fall and still faces a host of political and economic crises, including chronic power cuts, petrol shortages and derelict infrastructure.

Years of conflict in post-Gaddafi Libya have resulted in tens of thousands of people being displaced, with many seeking refuge in big cities like Tripoli, creating a housing shortage.

"Before the revolution, you could find houses and there were less people (in Tripoli). But now finding an affordable house is rare, prices have skyrocketed," said Bashir. "Today, a small apartment costs around 400,000 dinars (\$83,000). Where can I find money like that?"

The minimum monthly salary ranges between 450 and 600 Libyan dinars (\$90 and \$120), civil servants



TRIPOLI: Libyans shop at a Friday market set in the gardens inside the Bab Al-Aziziya compound. Before Muammar Gaddafi's ouster Libyans avoided like the plague the Bab Al-Aziziya compound from where the dictator ruled, but a housing shortage in Tripoli has forced squatters to move in. —AFP

often go months without pay, and bank loans are almost impossible to obtain. Economist Kamal Al-Mansouri said insecurity has forced "foreign construction firms to pack up and go, leaving behind 200,000 unfinished homes". "Population growth and the dis-

placement of Libyans due to conflict, with many people moving to big cities, means that finding decent housing is hard," he said. "And rents have doubled in the past 10 years," said Tripoli-based real estate agent Ali Kelfat. —AFP

Europe powers up e-battery drive

BRUSSELS: As electric car sales soar, Europe has started to build up its capacity to produce batteries on the continent but it remains far from reducing its dependence on Asia. China, Japan and South Korea produce most of the world's electric car batteries. Europe now has projects to build 38 gigafactories with a combined annual output of 1,000 gigawatt hours (GWh) and an estimated cost of 40 billion euros (\$48 billion), according to a June report by Transport & Environment, a non-government organization.

This annual supply could be reached by 2029-

2030 and would be the equivalent to the production of 16.7 million battery electric vehicles, a T&E spokesman told AFP. "Given the monstrous increase in demand, there is a major stake at hand for manufacturers to break the battery makers' oligopoly," said Eric Kirstetter, a sector analyst at consulting firm Roland Berger.


"They will also have to ensure access to materials for the electrodes (anode and cathode), which will determine the batteries' price and availability," he added. In Sweden, the start-up Northvolt expects to reach annual production of 150 GWh in Europe by 2030, with one plant under construction now and two much bigger ones on the drawing board. Northvolt has previously said that production capacity would reach 32 GWh by 2024, or enough batteries for 600,000 electric vehicles per year.

Asian competition

In another report, Transport & Environment said battery electric vehicles could account for all new sales of units in the 27-nation European Union by 2035 — if policymakers introduce tighter CO2 targets and strong support for infrastructure to charge cars. Automakers, which are under pressure to transition out of fossil fuel vehicles, are putting money into battery production. German giant Volkswagen has invested in Northvolt and also plans to build five other battery plants.

Stellantis, which owns brands such as Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Citroen, Dodge and Fiat, is working on two of its own, while electric pioneer Tesla wants to make its future gigafactory near Berlin one of the biggest in the world with 250 GWh of capacity by 2030. European governments are backing the projects because they want the continent to maintain a major role in future automobile manufacturing.

Asian manufacturers are also investing in Europe, with the Chinese group AESC planning to work with Toyota and Renault on battery plants in Britain and France. Two South Korean companies, LG Chem and SKI, have already opened factories in Poland and Hungary, and China's CATL is building one in Germany. European Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic said in March that the continent needed to achieve strategic independence in what has become a critical sector. He wants European factories to cover the region's needs by 2025. That is a tall order, according to Oliver Montique, an analyst with Fitch Solutions. Montique targets 2040 for the establishment of "an entirely closed loop supply chain where the vast majority of battery materials are extracted, refined, processed and produced into battery cells on the continent." —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON
17 JUNE 2021

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	Number of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	28,084	6,947.83	1.5%	3.1%	14.8%	662,898,266	214,182,039	25,456	31.7	2.3	76.5%
Main Market	8,611	5,312.10	1.2%	2.5%	16.7%	1,454,413,868	143,110,090	46,626	8.4	1.6	23.5%
All Share	36,694	6,393.51	1.4%	2.9%	15.3%	2,117,312,134	357,292,129	72,082	26.0	2.1	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	Number of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	21,393	1,444.30	1.7%	4.0%	14.4%	397,235,645	137,492,831	11,828	33.2	2.3	56.55%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,018	1,139.72	1.4%	3.1%	26.8%	6,128,322	3,446,445	1,018	24.1	1.6	2.69%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	515	980.98	1.2%	3.4%	31.4%	53,396,352	7,385,540	2,999	6.7	5.7	1.36%
CONSUMER STAPLES	245	803.66	2.4%	2.4%	-1.8%	2,952,681	1,786,464	370	15.1	1.6	0.65%
ENERGY	315	1,511.31	2.4%	7.9%	18.3%	74,425,462	5,629,038	2,367	13.5	1.4	0.83%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	3,233	1,153.97	0.8%	1.8%	24.1%	812,581,427	92,949,794	25,727	6.1	1.4	8.55%
HEALTH CARE	391	787.11	3.5%	-0.4%	-4.8%	35,794	17,767	71	34.6	5.4	1.03%
INDUSTRIALS	4,035	1,134.95	0.5%	0.8%	27.4%	100,843,223	31,685,367	8,471	27.5	1.7	10.67%
INSURANCE	492	1,286.15	2.9%	3.1%	11.2%	10,189,369	1,391,330	660	9.6	1.1	1.30%
REAL ESTATE	2,596	1,207.72	2.2%	4.2%	26.8%	559,197,849	61,483,658	15,102	15.8	1.3	8.86%
TECHNOLOGY	12	858.45	8.3%	37.5%	70.8%	1,141,299	129,325	99	-	1.0	0.03%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,324	1,082.81	-0.2%	-0.6%	-1.8%	91,335,526	12,021,827	2,688	12.4	2.1	8.79%
UTILITIES	261	623.68	-0.8%	-1.3%	-14.4%	7,849,185	1,872,742	682	21.3	3.7	0.69%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ATC	544	19.6	31,942	15,944	62
KFOUC	376	13.9	1,148,035	423,899	192
ALEID	199.0	12.4	6,390,703	1,254,818	500
GIH	299	11.6	41,630,674	12,757,905	2,791
HAYATCOMM	79.4	11.1	5,640,419	426,231	316

Top Losers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
NCCI	48	-20.9	916,783	50,008	104
MUNSHAAT	60	-13.9	653,245	40,736	88
INTEGRATED	397.0	-11.0	9,024,787	3,931,781	1,073
KHOT	63	-10.3	90,797	5,807	17
QIC	70.0	-9.0	807,280	56,211	13

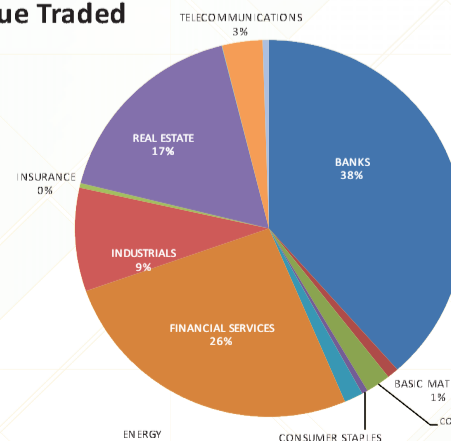
Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	232	2.2	141,461,901	33,041,115	2,043
MAZAYA	106	8.8	124,346,696	12,748,373	2,915
NRE	202	7.5	104,451,589	20,742,515	1,942
KIB	226	1.4	82,841,298	18,681,172	1,599
KRE	132	0.8	81,934,780	10,924,242	1,987


Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	232	2.2	141,461,901	33,041,115	2,043
KFH	772	2.9	41,959,275	31,912,345	2,584
NBK	843	0.5	29,676,964	25,012,450	1,965
NRE	202	7.5	104,451,589	20,742,515	1,942
KIB	226	1.4	82,841,298	18,681,172	1,599

Value Traded



All Share Price Index YTD



Market Summary:

For the second week in a row the market continued assuring the breaking of the falling trendline accompanied with a slight increase of value, volume, and number of trades. The premier market is currently driven by the Banks sector which is anticipated to continue to a higher levels in the coming weeks as we are approaching the Q2 with an improved and stronger financials compared to Q2 2020. Technically, the All Share Price Index continued towards 6415 but due to the slight increase of value and volume the index couldn't reach it last week, but anticipated to reach and exceed this week.

Business

Brandatt, first Gulf e-commerce company to join OTC platform

Brandatt shares registered on OTC platform

KUWAIT: Mubarak Al-Badr, Founder and Chairman of the board of directors of Brandatt Electronic Trading Company K.S.C., announced the registration of Brandatt company shares on OTC platform: system for trading securities unlisted on Kuwait Stock Exchange, to be the first Kuwaiti and Gulf company in e-commerce sector to trade its shares, by sale and purchase, using that activity for the public. It is worth noting that Brandatt application, which is available on Apple Store and Google Play applications, in addition to Huawei Store for Apple and Android devices, whether for mobile phones or laptops, includes different thresholds to online shopping channels, including everything related to men and women and children.

Al-Badr pointed out that Brandatt E-Commerce Company was established in 2016 and, since then, has widened its activity gradually until it achieved several successes at the commercial and economic levels. Therefore, it is one of today's attractive and contributing sources to support Kuwaiti national

economy, thanks to the joint cooperation between our Company and local and international companies, as well as to the customers, users and suppliers joining the application. In this respect, we cannot ignore the efforts exerted by our workers in all technical, administrative and logistical fields, as well as the recommendations of expert houses. Hence, we are very keen to provide our customers with their various requirements, focusing on expediting fulfilling their orders with the most possible quality and speed, whether they were inside or outside Kuwait.

In order to achieve integration in performance, Al-Badr said: "We were keen to own a service-logical arm represented by the delivery company, Evco, which is 100 percent owned by Brandatt, so as to ensure the level of quality, service and speed in local delivery, in addition to our keenness to contract with major global delivery companies to ensure that orders reach our customers all over the world".

One of the major targets of the distinguished activity of launching "Brandatt" on OTC Platform, the system for trading securities unlisted on Kuwait Stock Exchange, is to open the way for our customers to be true partners of a Kuwaiti success story to be added to the records of success stories, similar to international companies.

Mubarak Al-Badr added that, stemming from the principle of transparency, Brandatt shall be keen to display its information through "Al-Mawazi.com", which is the first provider of real-time price data and information on the shares of companies unlisted on OTC Platform in Kuwait Stock Exchange.

Brandatt's keenness to display its information through Al-Mawazi platform is due to the fact that it is characterized by ease of obtaining the main information and its continuous investigation of the accuracy of information it provides to shareholders and investors periodically through official sources and not only through the company's general assembly.

Al-Badr also indicated that upon the Company's registration, it becomes the first Kuwaiti technology company to join OTC Platform and provide its shareholders with opportunity for an easier exit or for the entry of new investors.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Shariaan, CEO of KIC Brokerage Company, stated that KIC Brokerage Company solely provides electronic trading solutions through its application and website to its customers on OTC Platform, the system for trading securities unlisted on Kuwait Stock Exchange, which, in turn, will allow a large segment of Shareholders to trade the shares of all companies registered on the Platform electronically.



Mubarak Al-Badr

KFH to join GUST's virtual career fair

KUWAIT: Under the theme of "A bright future starts with KFH", Kuwait Finance House (KFH) is participating in the virtual career fair organized by the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). The 22nd career fair will be held virtually for two days from June 22nd - 23rd through KHIIBRA platform.

Group Chief Human Resources Officer at KFH, Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar said that KFH participation comes in line with its efforts in acquiring and qualifying the national talents. It also confirms its keenness to always be present in GUST career fairs, and reflects its commitment to providing students with career opportunities. Al-Omar added in a press release that during the virtual career fair, a specialized KFH HR team will conduct virtual job interviews and answer job seekers' queries while educating them on the opportunities available at KFH and the private sector.

He pointed out that KFH has achieved great ratios in nationalization, indicating the bank is keen on maintaining high levels of benefits to its employees and new recruits. The bank encourages its staff to be certified and highly qualified by providing them with all training programs they need to enable them to enjoy productive and satisfying careers. KFH continues its efforts to be a leader in the field of talent development, particularly national labor by attracting, training, and qualifying young graduates. It is worth noting that KFH has taken part in two virtual career fairs organized by the American University of Middle East (AUM) and the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) and recruited a number of national talents to join KFH family. KFH has strong partnership with GUST in different fields that encompass sponsoring the Islamic financing club activities, cooperation and coordination concerning workshops, seminars, conferences, lectures and training courses, in addition to career fairs and scholarships programs among others.



Zeyad Al-Omar

NBK launches summer campaign: Customers could win 9 Tesla cars

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is keen to reward its customers all year round by continuing to launch unique and exceptional campaigns that give them the chance to enter draws to win prizes tailored to their expectations. In this context, NBK launched its annual summer campaign 2021, enabling customers to win 9 Tesla Model 3 cars.

It is worth mentioning that NBK's campaign for this summer is the first of its kind in Kuwait.

NBK credit or prepaid cardholders can get the opportunity to enter a draw and win 7 Tesla Model 3 cars when using their eligible cards during the campaign that started early June 2021 and ending 31 December 2021. NBK also allows students who transfer the student allowance to the bank and apply for Al-Shabab prepaid card to get 3 chances to enter the draw on 2 Tesla Model 3 cars.

Eligible NBK credit and prepaid cardholders will have greater chances to enter the draw as they use

Ooredoo offers Apple TV 4K to customers in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, and Gait, Apple Premium Reseller, announced the launch of the next generation of Apple TV 4K with the Siri Remote which makes it even easier to watch shows and movies on Apple TV with intuitive navigation controls. Hence, Apple announced the launching of its all-new Apple TV 4K, in April 2021.

With A12 Bionic, Apple TV 4K now supports high frame rate HDR (High Dynamic Range) and Dolby Vision video, enabling fast-moving action at 60 frames per second (fps) to play more smoothly and appear more lifelike than ever before. Together with tvOS - the

most powerful TV operating system - Apple TV 4K works seamlessly with Apple devices and services to magically transform the living room in ways that everyone in the family will love.

The all-new Apple TV 4K comes in two storage flavors and is available for Ooredoo customers at KWD 66 for Apple TV 4K 32GB, and for KWD 74 for Apple TV 4K 64GB. Customers can also purchase it through Ooredoo ADD for KWD 3 per month for the Apple TV 4K 32GB, or KWD 3.5 per month for the Apple TV 4K 64GB. The Apple TV 4K is also available through Ooredoo and Gait official websites and sales of point, in addition to branches. In a statement, Ooredoo Kuwait shed a new light on the fact that companies that operate in different sectors compete for maintaining and gaining new customers, where customer satisfaction is driven by offering them value through meeting their changing desires and demands. Therefore, Ooredoo is always keen on being the first in the country to offer its customers the latest products and services that will undoubtedly improve the customer experience.

On this occasion, Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Our summer campaign this year is totally exceptional and was designed to meet the expectations of all our customers, includ-

ing providing special offers, draws and special valuable prizes."

"We are keen to be closer to our customers from the youth, by carefully identifying their preferences, which helps us in our efforts to meet their needs and helps us design offers and rewards to suit their lifestyles, in addition to our digital services and payment solutions, which are considered the most advanced in Kuwait," he added.

Al-Othman emphasized that NBK strives to enrich the banking experience of NBK Credit Cardholders by offering them an exquisite lifestyle, and the opportunity to participate in unique and exceptional campaigns all year round, which are always well-liked and popular.

With returning to normal life, National Bank of Kuwait launched a variety of exceptional rewards for its customers, including cashback campaigns, salary transfer rewards, and other exclusive offers and draws that were well-received and appreciated by customers.



Mohammed Al-Othman

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Hasan Abdullah Ashkanani
2. Zaid Natae Rowaie
3. Thekayat Mousa Kakouli
4. Farah Osamah Aljarallah
5. Nadeen Hasan Alsadek

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

CBK announces winners of Al-Najma Account campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and salary transfer campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

- 1- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Akeel Hussain Al-Ibrahim
- 2- Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Hamad Mohammad Al-Ajmi

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan of five times the salary and a maximum of KD 10,000 to Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt amounting to KD 10,000 or above to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 1 percent from their transferred debt.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

NBK Money Markets Report

Dollar rises amid a hawkish Fed

KUWAIT: Last Wednesday saw a shift in the stance of the Federal Reserve, who has for months been wary of signaling that an end to its ultra-loose monetary policy would be in sight. A hawkish twist saw Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell announcing at a press conference that Fed officials expected to start raising interest rates in 2023, in addition to beginning talks on eventually reducing the pace of its \$120bn per month asset purchase program.

The moment when the Fed might start winding down its support, suddenly looked to be on the horizon. The dot plot is now showing that 13 of the 18 FOMC members predicted a first interest rate increase in 2023, compared to 7 in March's dot plot. Fed officials are now expecting two interest rate hikes in 2023, a year earlier than the forecast just three months ago. Powell went on to explain the changing views during his press conference, saying "Many participants are more comfortable that the economic conditions in the committee's forward guidance will be met somewhat sooner than previously anticipated. And that would be a welcome development."

Powell tried to put some brakes on the notions of a rapidly accelerating timeline toward monetary tightening, saying that the dot plot needed to be taken with a "grain of salt". The Fed has vowed to continue buying Treasuries and agency mortgage-backed securities at the current pace of \$120bn a month until it sees "substantial further progress" towards its goal of a more inclusive recovery. Only later would it increase interest rates, after certain economic milestones were met, stressing that that the Fed's monetary policy guidance is not calendar-based but dependent on economic outcomes.

Fed officials are now projecting that the US economy will grow by 7 percent this year, and 3.3 percent in 2022, with unemployment rate falling to 3.8 percent by the end of 2022, down from 5.8 percent in May. Although they do not see the economy to be overheating, they predict core inflation to jump to 3 percent this year, but would fall back to 2.1 percent in 2022 and 2023, a scenario consistent with the Fed's aim of a full recovery.

Higher prices

The producer price index (PPI) was released on Tuesday where it illustrated a gain in prices paid by producers, which might force companies to increase prices on consumers. The PPI has gained 0.8 percent in May following a 0.6 percent increase in April. The main driver to the increase of production costs comes from increased material costs and labor expenses. Additionally, increased demand has depleted inventories combined with transport bottlenecks, which influenced the prices to increase.

Markets react

The shift in the Fed's projections jolted the government bond market, where treasuries of all maturities sold off sharply in the back of the release. The benchmark 10-year note rose 0.08 percent before cooling down to close the week at 1.443 percent. The 5-year note closed the week 0.14 percent up at 0.876 percent. The 2-year note yield, which is even more sensitive to the timing of Fed rate rises and had budged little so far this year, jumped as well, to close the week at 0.252 percent. The Fed's hawkish tone saw the greenback strengthening taking the index up 2 percent to close the week at 92.225. The dollar's strength took its toll on the single currency, pushing the EUR/USD pair to three months lows closing at 1.1860, with the cable following suit reaching three month lows of 1.3809 against the dollar.

UK inflation

UK's inflation saw another jump last month, overshooting economists' forecasts and the Bank of England's target, as the reopening from lockdown drove up prices. Figures released by the Office for National Statistics on Wednesday showed prices of consumer goods rose 2.1 percent in the year to May, up from 1.5 percent in April and the highest level since July 2019. The consensus expectation was 1.8 percent. Central bankers have expressed confidence that such steep rises will be temporary, driven by short-term supply chain bottlenecks, rising commodity prices and suppressed demand. But some, including BoE chief economist Andy Haldane, have warned against complacency over upside inflation risks. It is worth noting that BoE governor Andrew Bailey said last month he would not hesitate to tighten monetary policy, by raising interest rates from their current 0.1 percent, if price rises appeared to be consistently outstripping 2 percent.

Retail sales

Data released on Friday showed UK retail sales unexpectedly fell last month for the first time since January as consumers spent more on meals and drinks out and less on grocery shopping. The volume of retail sales fell 1.4 percent in May compared to the previous month, throwing economist's forecasts of a 1.6 percent increase into the wind.

The decline followed a jump of almost 10 percent in April, when non-essential shops were allowed to reopen for the first time since early January in most of the country. The largest contribution to the monthly decline in May came from food stores, where sales volumes fell 5.7 percent. Indoor hospitality reopened on May 17 in many parts of the UK, resulting in many people eating out rather than cooking at home. Non-food stores, in contrast, reported a 2.3 percent increase. Household goods stores, such as furniture, reported the fastest growth, of 9 percent.

A Separate report released on Tuesday showed the number of employees in the UK has risen by 197,000 since April, the sixth consecutive monthly increase. The biggest gains for May were among people working in hospitality, mainly young people living in London. The unemployment rate averaged 4.7 percent over the three months leading to April.

BOJ holds its ground

In its monetary meeting statement on Friday, the Bank of Japan kept its rate targets unchanged and announced that it will maintain its massive stimulus to support the economy and extended a September deadline for its pandemic relief program, suggesting that Japan will lag well behind the US in ending its crisis mode policies. In a briefing following the policy decision, BoJ governor Haruhiko Kuroda said "In Japan, inflation had not reached 2 percent even before the pandemic. As such, we must continue with our ultra-loose monetary policy even after the pandemic subsides, in order to achieve our 2 percent inflation target." The regulator surprised markets with the unveiling of a plan to boost funding for fighting climate change, joining a growing number of central banks stepping up efforts to address its economic and financial consequences.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30110

Lifestyle | Features



Female and male specimens of the endangered Azraq killifish (Aphanius Sirhani), only found at Jordan's Azraq Wetland Reserve, swim in a pond at the reserve, about 110 km east of Jordan's capital, on June 10, 2021. — AFP photos



Visitors view fish from along a wooden bridge at Azraq Wetland Reserve.



Abdullah Oshoush, an environmental researcher, holds specimens of the endangered Dead Sea toothcarp (Aphanius dispar richardsoni) in a glass jar at the reserve.

Jordan battles to save rare tiny Dead Sea carp

Jordan is racing against time to save a tiny rare fish from extinction as falling water levels partly triggered by global warming threaten to dry up its last habitat. The Dead Sea toothcarp - scientific name *Aphanius dispar richardsoni* - has been on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature since 2014. The IUCN warns that the "exploitation of spring waters and climate change" are major threats facing the four-centimeter-long, silver-colored fish.

"This fish is threatened with extinction at the global level. It is endemic here and does not exist elsewhere," said Ibrahim Mahasneh, the manager of the fish's last home, the Fifa Nature Reserve. Lying some 140 km southwest of Amman in the Jordan Rift Valley and 60 km south of the Dead Sea, the area is the lowest wet reserve on Earth.

Established in 2011, the reserve consists of some 20 sq km. It is located some 426 m below sea level and is managed by an independent body, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). Even though the Hashemite kingdom is primarily desert, this area of wetlands is crisscrossed by streams and is home to a variety of plant and wildlife species including birds.

"We have a plan to save and breed this fish... to create a natural habitat for it to breed and at the same time to mitigate



A general view of the Azraq Wetland Reserve.

the existing threat," added Mahasneh. "The reserve is the last home for this endangered species of fish," said environmental researcher Abdallah Oshoush who works in the reserve.

'Precious treasures'

The male fish also has a streak of blue along its sides, while the female has incomplete black stripes. It is not known how many still remain, but "monitoring programs have warned of a clear decline in the presence of this fish in recent years," Oshoush said. Among the environmental threats causing numbers to drop is the "lowering water level due to

low rainfall and the change in its environment, as well as the presence of other fish that feed on it and its eggs."

Researchers are now preparing to open an artificial pond just for the toothcarp so they can grow safely and their eggs are not devoured by predators. Each season, a female produces around 1,000 eggs. The aim is then to release the young fish back into the natural environment. "In Jordan live two unique species of fish that do not exist anywhere else in the world. These are our precious treasures and they must be preserved for our ecosystem," said RSCN spokesperson Salem Nafaa.

Two decades ago the RSCN succeeded in saving the endangered *Aphanius Sirhani* fish in its only habitat in the Azraq reserve, about 110 km east of Amman. It got its scientific name from the Wadi Sirhan, which extends from the Arabian Peninsula to Azraq, but is commonly known in English as the Azraq killifish. Only about six centimeters long, it is also silver but the female is spotted while the male has black stripes.

Predators, birds

"In the year 2000, there were no more than 500 Azraq killifish in the oasis, which means it was on the verge of extinction," said Nashat Hmaidan, the director of the RSCN Biodiversity Monitoring Center. "It was declining sharply, and it reached just 0.02 percent of the number of fish in the oasis," he said, blaming other predatory fish and migratory birds as well as a fall in water levels.

The RSCN studied the fish's life cycle and determined it needed shallow water to lay eggs, and should be isolated from other species for the best chance of survival. "We collected 20 fish over two years and put them in a concrete pond designated for breeding." After the first fish were released back into the waters the team saw its presence had increased from 0.02 percent to nearly 50 percent. "It was a great success," he added.

Twenty years on, the Azraq killifish



Ibrahim Mahasneh, director of the Fifa Nature Reserve and member of the Royal Jordanian Society for the Conservation of Nature, gives a briefing about the endangered Dead Sea toothcarp.

accounts for almost 70 percent of the fish in the waters. But he cautioned the goal now is that the numbers should "never drop below 50 percent". Hazem Hrisa, the director of the Azraq Wetland Reserve, highlighted its important biodiversity, with more than 133 plant species and more than 163 species of invertebrates. The reserve "is located on the most important bird migration paths," he said, adding two thirds of the bird species found in the kingdom had been recorded in Azraq. — AFP



A file photo taken on Nov 1, 2008 shows Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi escorted by a female bodyguard, known as an Amazon, at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow.



People walk along a running track at the recreational area.



This image shows picnic tables at a recreational area between the port and the city center of the capital Tripoli on June 8, 2021. — AFP photos

Libyans chill at ex-barracks for Gaddafi's 'Amazons'

Libyans a decade ago could scarcely have imagined picnicking at a key military facility in Tripoli, but today a once feared site has been transformed into a family relaxation area. The military academy of Muammar Gaddafi's entourage of female bodyguards, known as "Amazons", was long seen as a symbol of the dictator's extravagant and capricious rule.

In the chaos and conflict that followed Gaddafi's toppling in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising, a succession of armed groups sought to take control of the strategic site, located between the port and city center. Finally four years ago, the Tripoli authorities decided to turn it into an outdoor public recreation zone. They demolished the buildings, training areas and high walls surrounding the barracks, leaving only a control tower at what was formerly the academy's main gate.

In their place, they set up five-a-side football fields, running and cycling tracks,

picnic tables, a play area for children and grassy sections - a first step towards demilitarizing the heart of the capital. The area, located beside the seaside road, opened to the public a few weeks ago. Tripoli mayor Ibrahim Al-Khlifi called the transformation "a wise decision". "Our aim was to limit the spread of weapons and shut down all military camps inside cities," he told AFP.

Release daily pressure

Other former military sites are also being turned into gardens, parks and bathing areas that should be accessible to the public soon, he added. The security situation in Libya has been slowly improving since a truce was signed last year by warring parties and the subsequent installation of a new interim government tasked with preparing the country for December elections. "Libyans need these kinds of spaces to release the pressure of daily life," Khlifi said.

Tripoli's recreation zone has been a hit since its opening. Families picnic at wooden tables and benches while children enjoy the playground or get ice creams from a van. Tripoli resident Muhammad Kashar said he and his family come every evening. "I like doing exercise, and here, I can go for a walk with my wife while our children play nearby," the 47-year-old said. "We can breathe the fresh sea air, and with all these families, it feels like Tripoli is alive again," said his wife in her late thirties, who did not give her name. — AFP

Digital nomads flee virus-hit Manila for shattered tourist towns

After months cooped up in coronavirus-hit Manila, Tanya Mariano fled the Philippine capital to work from the beach, joining a growing number of digital nomads helping a devastated tourism industry stay afloat. A ban on foreign holidaymakers entering the archipelago nation and domestic travel curbs since the pandemic began last year have forced many operators to close and wiped out millions of jobs.

Many digital workers in congested Manila, fearing COVID-19 and fed up with lockdowns and restrictions, are escaping to largely deserted nature hotspots to do their jobs - injecting much-needed money into communities dependent on outside visitors. Sitting with her laptop on the balcony of the ocean-view apartment she rents with her boyfriend in San Juan, a surf town several hours north of her home, Mariano says the move has been a "big quality of life improvement".

"Being close to the ocean, being close to nature is very calming," said Mariano, 37, a freelance writer and communications specialist. "When I'm in a meeting, usually Zoom or Google Meet, I try not to use the beach as my background - I just show people the wall so they don't hate me." There are no official figures on the number of people working remotely from the country's picture-postcard beaches and dive spots, but it is certainly a fraction of the millions of tourists that usually flock to its shores.

The impact of COVID-19 travel restrictions on the sector has been dramatic: \$37 billion slashed from the economy and the loss of over two million jobs, according to World Travel and Tourism Council data.

Bravo Beach Resort on the southern island of Siargao - a renowned surfing destination - has felt the pain acutely.



This photo taken on June 1, 2021 shows Tanya Mariano with her pet cat at her apartment in the town of San Juan, La Union province, north of Manila. — AFP photos

Normally packed out with local and international tourists, it now averages around five to 10 guests at any one time - about 10 percent of its capacity - said general manager Dennis Serrano. With the resort hemorrhaging as much as 200,000 pesos (\$4,180) a month, he hopes the situation will be "back to normal" by next year.

Even the white-sand resort island of Boracay has been turned into a "ghost town", according to Eugene Flores, manager of the La Banca House boutique hotel, where most of the rooms are filled with long-term digital nomads from Manila. Official figures show arrivals to the island fell to less than 335,000 last year, compared with more than two million in 2019. "When you go out you can see shops, you can see restaurants, you can see hotels that are really closed. Only a few are open," Flores said.

'You're still bleeding out'

The glacial pace of the country's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is likely to delay the full reopening of the country's beleaguered tourism industry. For now, digital nomads are a "target market", said the Department of Tourism, encouraging resorts and hotels to cater to the "new breed" of travellers by offering fast internet and wellness activities.

The influx of mobile workers, whose Manila salaries stretch further in the provinces, is keeping businesses like Papa Bear restaurant in San Juan afloat. "You are not completely bleeding out,



Mariano sits at the porch of her apartment.

you're still bleeding out for sure, but you're at least generating something to offset enough of it," said owner Denny Antonino.

Digital nomads now make up 30-40 percent of his customers and he hopes the trend continues after the pandemic to even out the seasonal fluctuations. "They're able to do their work but in between meetings they can surf, they can go hiking, they can go to the falls - there are more things to do," said Antonino.

'I didn't need to worry as much'

Nine months after Carlo Almendral left his "prison" apartment in Manila's financial district for San Juan, the chief executive of an artificial intelligence start-up said he has no plans to leave. The 43-year-old often starts his day with a dawn bike ride through the countryside or a surf when the waves are up. It ends with a business meeting and glass of wine on the beach at sunset, accompanied by his rescue French bulldog Alfred.

"I didn't realize how much time I had spent worrying about the pandemic until I got here," Almendral said from the beachfront resort, where his office is a breezy rooftop studio with a sea view. "Being here has made me more productive and more creative." — AFP



Almendral sits with others as they relax at the beach.



This photo taken on June 2, 2021 shows digital nomad, Carlo Almendral, the chief executive of an artificial intelligence startup, browsing his laptop at a beachfront resort in the town of San Juan.



Migrants from Africa work on June 11, 2021 at Top Manta, a clothing line created by an association of African street vendors in Barcelona. — AFP photos



Sneakers are on display at Top Manta.



T-shirts are on display at Top Manta.

MIGRANT-DESIGNED TRAINERS KICK AGAINST SYSTEM IN SPAIN

When he left Senegal, risking his life to make the dangerous boat trip to Spain's Canary Islands, Lamine Sarr never thought he'd end up selling fake goods on the streets of Barcelona. Known as "manteros" after the blanket on which they lay their wares, these street sellers live a precarious life, always on the lookout for the police. So Sarr decided to do something different: He helped set up the Barcelona Street Vendors Union, which has just launched its own brand of trainers in the hope of "changing the rules of the game".

"As we were always selling counterfeit products, it gave us the desire to create a brand with our own designs and our own clothes," explains Sarr, 38, inside the union's shop in Barcelona's Raval neighborhood. And the name they've given the trainers is "Ande Dem", which means "walking together" in Wolof, the most widely-spoken language in Senegal.

Behind the project is Top Manta, a clothing company set up in 2017 by the union, which is mostly made up of sub-Saharan Africans. "When we first created the brand, we thought about trainers. We thought it would be easy but we didn't have the means," Sarr told AFP. And what better way to kick against the system than by giving those who are known for selling fakes on the streets of Barcelona their very own brand of shoes, made locally in Spain and Portugal.

The project has been two years in the making, with the manteros working with

two local artists to create trainers made from sustainable, vegan-friendly materials that are produced in small local workshops rather than mass-produced. With a robust sole, they come in black or tan with a strip of colors "reflecting Africa" and the Top Manta logo: A blanket, that also represents "waves" of the dangerous sea crossing many brave to reach Spain.

Launched earlier this month with a thought-provoking ad on Instagram where the collective has 63,000 followers, the trainers retail at €115. "Life is not like a trainer advert. We know the race is full of traps," says a woman's voice over footage of police racing after a migrant and wrestling him to the ground. "It's not about just doing it, it's about doing it right," she says, in a slogan with a clear spin on Nike's Just Do It campaign.

Insurmountable red tape

Sarr says it is impossible to work as a street seller and not have problems with the law. For the union, the main aim is to get the manteros off the street where many end up no thanks to Spain's immigration laws. In order to get residency papers, the law requires non-EU citizens to prove they have been in Spain for three years, to show a one-year work contract, have a clean criminal record and more.

"How can you be in a place for three years without doing anything? I couldn't believe it," said Sarr who didn't tell his family in rural Senegal that he was leav-

ing for Europe. Following a week-long sea crossing, he arrived on the island of Fuerteventura in 2006, eventually making his way to Barcelona. But it was only two years ago that he managed to leave his life as a mantero after the union helped him to obtain his papers, as it has done around 120 others.

Today there are around 100 street sell-



ers working in Barcelona, according to City Hall figures. It was the disappearance of tourists as a result of the pandemic that put an end to Oumy Manga's five years working as a hawker on the streets. Wearing a colorful turban that matches her dress, this 32-year-old is focused on making a t-shirt at the Top Manta workshop where African tunes mingle with the rattle of sewing machines.

She is currently finishing a course in dressmaking as well as learning Spanish and Catalan. "I don't like selling, that's why we're here: Learning things so we don't go back on the streets," says Manga from Senegal, who sewed masks and other protective gear at the start of the pandemic.

Council. "In the end, it's the cities who have to cope with the situation no thanks to a law that we cannot change."

If she had known what was awaiting her, Manga says she wouldn't have left her homeland. "It's very complicated, being here five years without papers or work." Still without papers, she's hoping things might change given her newfound



ally, the sewing machine. "I'd like to carry on sewing, that's my profession," she says, dreaming of one day designing her own collection. For now, it seems Top Manta has a future: So far it's sold all of its first batch of 400 pairs of trainers and is now preparing to order another. — AFP



Peter Waszkiewicz, president and CEO of Randolph Engineering, holds a pair of Randolph Aviator Sunglasses in the Concord style at Randolph Engineering in Randolph, Massachusetts on June 17, 2021. — AFP photos

Biden gifts Putin pair of iconic US-made aviators

For his first meeting with Vladimir Putin in Geneva last week, US President Joe Biden gifted his Russian counterpart a pair of American-made sunglasses in the US leader's signature aviator style. Peter Waszkiewicz, head of Randolph Engineering, said he felt "surprise" at seeing the sunglasses his company made become a diplomatic token at a meeting followed the world over.

"It was a normal business day until

about after 12:00, when the phones started ringing and the social media went abuzz, then we realized what was going on," he told AFP, saying it was "pretty tense and exciting". "It's pretty amazing, isn't it? I mean how often does an opportunity like this happen?"

Specs of this style are often worn by the military - the company has had a contract with the US armed forces since 1978, which buys some 25,000 pairs per month. That's in addition to the pairs Randolph Engineering sells to the general public in the United States, where the aviator look was made famous by the 1980s Tom Cruise movie "Top Gun".

It takes 200 steps over six weeks to manufacture the "Concorde" style, the pair gifted to Putin, which was named after the 20th-century supersonic aircraft. A matte black polarized pair sells on the Randolph website for \$279. They are

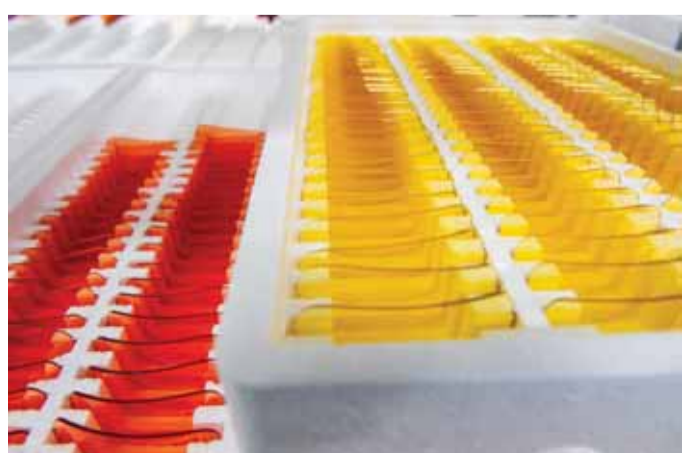


A pair of Randolph Aviator Sunglasses in the Concord style, are seen.



A worker solders the frame and other components of the sunglasses as part of the 200 steps required to complete a single pair, with the entire build taking six weeks.

made in a small town in the northeastern state of Massachusetts, and the company, founded in 1973, boasts of its "hand-crafted in the USA" credentials. "President Biden, I'm sure, gave those glasses to President Putin as a symbol of our national heritage," Waszkiewicz said. "And let's hope it's the symbol of peace," he said. — AFP



A variety of colored lenses sit on a rack waiting to be cut and paired with frames.



A worker adds lenses and puts the final assembly touches on the 200-step process to complete a single pair of sunglasses, before being boxed and shipped.

Ronaldo's Coca-Cola snub: Sports stars are 'reclaiming their voice'

When Cristiano Ronaldo and Paul Pogba removed Coca-Cola and Heineken bottles during Euro 2020 press conferences, it showed sports stars are rejecting sponsors' products that fail to correspond to their personal values, analysts say. Ronaldo has a combined social media audience of around 500 million followers, so when he speaks, it has an impact.

The 36-year-old Portugal captain is a fitness fanatic and made clear what he thought of the Coca-Cola bottle set out in front of him as he spoke to the media on Monday before his country's opening match against Hungary. He shifted the bottle out of sight of the cameras before saying in Portuguese: "Aguai!", appearing to encourage people to opt for the natural choice instead. Ronaldo went on to score twice in the 3-0 win against Hungary to become the all-time top scorer in European Championship history.

The next day France midfielder Paul Pogba, who is Muslim and does not drink alcohol, made a similar gesture by removing a bottle of Heineken beer during his press conference. The fact that it was a non-alcoholic version did nothing to lessen the message. "We're in a new era where athletes seem to be reclaiming their voice. They seem to reserve the right now to speak and behave in ways that are consistent with what they think, what they feel, what their values are," said Professor Simon Chadwick, the director of the Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry at Emlyon Business School in France.

Ronaldo has been happy to endorse sugary soft drinks in the past - in fact he did promotional work for Coca-Cola in China in the mid-2000s and has worked for their rivals Pepsi. But Chadwick told AFP the Portuguese superstar was saying, very publicly: "As an individual I have the personal right to move on from whatever I did in the past. I am entitled to change my opinion, I am entitled to shift my values, I am entitled to object to products that are not consistent with what I am or what I am trying to represent."

The reach of social media gives such protests more power than ever before. "I call it side-swipe activism," Chadwick said. "Whether you are online or you are in the physical world, if there is something in front of you that you don't like or isn't aligned with your own values, you just move it out of the way."

Headache for sponsors

Some reports suggested Ronaldo's gesture caused Coca-Cola's share price to fall by \$4 billion at one point, but many analysts said the footballer might not have been responsible. Gregori Volokhine, President of Meeschaert Financial Services in New York, said the drinks giant's shares finished 0.25 percent down, in line with the overall dip in the Dow Jones that day. "With a market value of \$235 billion, that corresponds to just over \$500 million. We wouldn't even have noticed if there hadn't been this controversy," Volokhine said.

So what is the impact for brands when top sports stars reject the products of the sponsors who pay tens of millions of dollars to be associated with an event such as Euro 2020? "It is too early to say," said Bertrand Chovet, head of Brand Finance France. "Product placement could, though, be more nuanced these days. But the players benefit from these sponsors so they are acting in a slightly contradictory way."

Coca-Cola and Heineken did not respond to AFP's request for comment, but UEFA's tournament director Martin Kallen said: "The revenues of the sponsors are important for the tournament and for European football." Chadwick believes such protests are a serious headache for sponsors. "This poses a big challenge because the two extremes are probably the only way forward for sponsors. Either you take away all the logos or you vigorously enforce the contractual rights associated with a sponsorship deal," he said. — AFP

Sports



TOKYO: Autonomous electric vehicles, which will be used at the Olympic Village, are seen during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos



Partitions are seen installed at the fitness centre to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo yesterday.

Fever clinic and COVID kits: Tokyo 2020 shows off Olympic Village

TOKYO: Tokyo 2020 organizers threw open the doors of the Olympic Village to the media yesterday, showcasing virus upgrades including a fever clinic just over a month before the Games begin. Organizers are in the home stretch before the July 23 opening ceremony, and are trying to build confidence that the mega-event will be safe for athletes and the Japanese public. Yesterday, they unveiled the dedicated virus clinic, warned that drinking in groups at the village would be prohibited and said a mixed zone for guests had been scrapped. Warning posters urging anti-virus measures including room ventilation have been placed throughout the mini-city, which can sleep 18,000 athletes and team members during the Olympics and 8,000 during the Paralympics.

The first glimpse of the village since last year's postponement revealed a virtual city within a city, with everything from a playground and florist to dry cleaners and ice baths for athletes and staff. The site stretches across 44 hectares of reclaimed land in the Tokyo Bay, with 21 residents towers, a 3,000-seat canteen, a park, gyms and recreation facilities, complete with Nintendo consoles.

Young trees that organizers hope will eventually provide shade during the fierce Tokyo summer dot the otherwise almost eerily empty village, populated only by workers, uniformed guards on bikes and firefighters

carrying out drills. But in just a few weeks, all that will change, with national teams taking up residence and up to 3,000 staff manning everything from stops for autonomous buses to kitchens serving thousands of meals.

'Drink alone'

The specter of the coronavirus, which forced the postponement of the Games last year, will hang heavy over the village. The newly added fever clinic, separate from the main medical facility, will be used to test and isolate people suspected of virus infection or considered close contacts. "This is just another example of how we are stringently managing matters about possible COVID infections," said Takashi Kitajima, general manager for the village. Testing will be "the biggest challenge", with about 20,000 carried out each day, according to Tetsuya Miyamoto, an official with Tokyo 2020's medical services.

Teams will collect their own samples for processing largely off-site by private operators. Other virus measures include reduced seating for diners, plexiglass shields between gym equipment, and a kit of hand sanitizers and soap to be handed to village residents.

The village will be particularly important for athletes this Games because they are barred from going anywhere else except training and competition venues.



Signage is seen outside a room at the doping control station during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo yesterday.

And there will be no partying, officials warned. "When you drink alcohol, in principle, you are requested to drink alone," said Kitajima.

Recyclable cardboard beds

Competitors can only enter the village shortly before their event and must leave within 48 hours of being eliminated or their competition ending. Conditions won't exactly be luxurious, with single rooms of nine square meters (100 square feet) and doubles of 12 square meters (130 sq ft).

Beds are made from recyclable cardboard, but are tough enough to stand up to beefy weightlifters and towering basketball players, organizers say. Kitajima promised excellent safety protocols, and athletes aren't likely to face the hot water shortages or dodgy plumbing that have made headlines at some previous Games.

Olympic officials expect most of those staying in the village will have been vaccinated, but the rules apply regardless of inoculation status, and athletes could be kicked out of the Games if they fail to comply.

In a taste of the challenges ahead, a member of the Ugandan Olympic delegation that arrived in Japan on Saturday tested positive for the virus, despite reportedly being vaccinated and testing negative before travel. The safety measures are set to make for a Games like no other, with overseas fans already banned and a decision on domestic spectators expected as soon as today. Public opposition to the Games appears to have softened in recent days, though a handful of protesters stood outside the village chanting against the Olympics as media toured the site. A new poll yesterday showed 86 percent of Japanese fear the Games will spark a rebound in virus cases. After the Games, the village will be transformed into thousands of luxury bayside condos. Around 900 were sold before the postponement last year — some carrying a price tag of 170 million yen (\$1.5 million). — AFP



Recyclable cardboard beds and mattresses for athletes during a media tour at the Olympic and Paralympic Village for the Tokyo 2020 Games, is seen in the Harumi waterfront district of Tokyo yesterday.



A view of the main dining hall of the Olympic Village during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo on June 20, 2021.



A Tokyo 2020 employee walks past hand sanitizers at the entrance of the casual dining hall during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo yesterday.

Emotional Richardson punches Tokyo ticket

EUGENE: An emotional Sha'Carri Richardson surged to 100m victory at the US Olympic track and field trials in Oregon on Saturday, punching her ticket to Tokyo in 10.86 seconds. The 21-year-old Texan streaked over the line at Hayward Field and moments later revealed that her win came after a week in which she learned of the death of her biological mother.

A jubilant Richardson leapt into the stands to share an embrace with her grandmother and other family members following her victory. "This year has been crazy for me," Richardson said afterwards. "I'm still here, last week finding out my biological mother passed away. And still choosing to pursue my dreams, still coming out here, still making the family that I do have on this earth proud."

Richardson said sharing her win with her grandmother, family and coaches had carried extra meaning. "Without them, there would be no me. And without my grandmother there would be no Sha'Carri Richardson. My family is everything to the day I'm done," Richardson said, adding that hugging her grandmother had "felt better than winning the race."

Earlier, Richardson had started slowly and trailed Javianne Oliver at the halfway stage. But she hit the front with 30 meters to go, and pulled clear to score a decisive victory. Oliver finished second in 10.99sec while Teahna Daniels was third in 11.03.

Richardson is the second fastest woman in the world over 100m this year, running a 10.72sec in April. Only Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce has run quicker, the two-time Olympic champion running 10.63sec in Kingston earlier this month.

Richardson however showed on Saturday that she is ready to give Fraser-Pryce a serious challenge at next month's Olympics. Her winning time in Saturday's final came despite running into negative headwind. In the semi-finals earlier Saturday she had run a blistering but wind-assisted 10.64.

Richardson's victory capped a second day of action that mostly followed the form book. In the men's 100m opening heats, Trayvon Bromell, the fastest man in the world this year, comfortably advanced to the semi-finals with a wind-assisted 9.84sec—AFP

News in brief

Olympian tests positive

TOKYO: A member of the Uganda Olympic team has tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in Japan, just over a month before the pandemic-postponed Games, officials said. The first group to arrive from Uganda — a nine-strong party, including boxers, coaches and officials — landed at Tokyo's Narita airport on Saturday. They are the second team to arrive after Australia women's softball squad on June 1. But one of the African nation's delegation tested positive during screening at the airport, a government official told reporters. The person tested twice but their condition remained unknown, reported local media. — AFP

Semenya fails again

PARIS: South African athlete Caster Semenya missed out again on Saturday in Regensburg, Germany to qualify for the 5,000 meters at the Tokyo Olympics. The 30-year-old finished fourth in Saturday's race in a time of 15 minutes 57.12 seconds, more than 47 seconds outside the 15:10 required to compete in Tokyo. Semenya has been the Olympic champion twice and world champion three times over 800m, but is barred from competing over that distance by World Athletics' testosterone-reducing regulations. — AFP

Van Niekerk achieves mark

PARIS: Olympic champion and world record holder Wayde van Niekerk on Saturday achieved the 400m qualifying standard for the Tokyo Olympics at a meeting in Madrid. The 28-year-old finished in a time of 44.56sec, inside the required standard of 44.90sec. The South African was second in the race behind Colombia's Anthony Jose Zambrano who clocked 44.51sec. Up until Saturday, Van Niekerk had yet to meet the qualifying mark for the Tokyo Olympics in either the 200m or 400m. — AFP

Mission accomplished: Dressel, Ledecky get job done with wins at US trials

OMAHA: World record-holder Caeleb Dressel will try to add 100m butterfly Olympic gold to his two world titles after a victory Saturday at the US Olympic swimming trials. Dressel, who clocked the world record of 49.50 at the 2019 World Championships, led wire-to-wire on the way to victory in 49.87sec.

That was a shade off his semi-final time of 49.76, but easily enough for victory over Tom Shields, a 2016 Rio Olympics relay gold medalist who was second in 51.19. Dressel, who won two relay golds in Rio but finished sixth in the 100m freestyle, has since emerged as a multi-event star, winning a record eight medals, six gold, at the 2019 worlds.

He had already punched his ticket to Tokyo in the 100m freestyle, and later Saturday topped the semi-final times in the 50m free ahead of Michael Andrew and 2012 100m free gold medalist Nathan Adrian. "The goal of this meet is making the team," Dressel said. "I would have liked to be a little faster just to put more of a show on for the home crowd. But we made the team and I'm in the final of the 50. This meet's going as according to plan as it possibly could have."

Katie Ledecky echoed that sentiment after completing her qualifying campaign with another dominant victory in the 800m freestyle, her time of 8:14.62 putting her more than five seconds ahead of surprise second-place finisher Katie Grimes. The time was nothing spectacular for Ledecky, who owns the world record of 8:04.79 and in fact the top 10 times of all time. But the five-time Olympic gold medalist said she wasn't too concerned about times coming out of the eight-day trials in which she qualified to swim the 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m freestyles in Tokyo. "I think we feel pretty good coming out of this week, mission accomplished," Ledecky said. "You can't really take that for granted." The 15-year-old Grimes was impressive in taking second place in a career best 8:20.36, running down open water Olympian Haley Anderson on the final lap. "I was just, like, in shock," said Grimes. "I can't even begin to explain how excited I am."

"Ohh," she added on a sigh. "Gosh." As she hung on a lane rope and absorbed her accomplishment, Grimes was congratulated by Ledecky and by two other members of her club team in the final who had already booked Tokyo berths — Bella Sims and Erica Sullivan. "I told Katie Grimes after her third place in the

(1500m) you're the future," Ledecky said. "I told her after that one she's the now." There was a certain symmetry in the one-two finish. Nine years ago Ledecky was 15 when she won the 800m free at trials and went to London and won her first Olympic gold.



OMAHA: Caeleb Dressel of the United States reacts after competing in a semifinal heat for the Men's 50m freestyle during Day Seven of the 2021 US Olympic Team Swimming Trials at CHI Health Center on Saturday in Omaha, Nebraska. — AFP

Backstroke shocker

It was an upset in the women's 200m backstroke, as Rhyann White and 18-year-old Phoebe Bacon finished one-two to shut world record-holder Regan Smith out of a 200m spot in Tokyo. White, 21, had already punched her ticket to Tokyo with a runner-up finish to Smith in the 100m back.

She won the 200m in 2:05.73sec while Bacon, an 18-year-old University of Wisconsin standout, was second in 2:06.46. Smith, who is already on the team in 200m butterfly as well as the 100m back, was third in 2:06.79. It was a season-best for the swimmer who set the world record at 2:03.35 in 2019, but not near enough to give her a chance at a backstroke double in Tokyo. Simone Manuel, 100m freestyle gold medalist in Rio, bounced back from her shock exit in the semi-finals of the 100m free with the third-fastest time in the 50m free semis. Abbey Weitzeil, winner of the 100m, led the way into Sunday's 50m final in 24.27, with teenager Torri Huske second in their semi in 24.45. Manuel won her semi-final in 24.50.—AFP

Sports

Antetokounmpo outduels Durant as Bucks oust Nets to reach East finals

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 13 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks defeated the Brooklyn Nets 115-111 in a thrilling game-seven overtime on Saturday to advance to the Eastern Conference finals.

The best-of-seven series has featured almost everything, including epic scoring performances, aggressive fouls, rim-rattling dunks, series-ending injuries and of course, Saturday's winner-take-all game seven which turned into a see-saw affair with dozens of lead changes throughout.

The only thing missing was an overtime when Kevin Durant set the stage for in game seven when he drained a turnaround jump shot at the buzzer in regulation to level the score at 109 all in front of a crowd of 16,200 at Barclays Center arena in New York.

Two-time league MVP Antetokounmpo shot 15-of-24 and had five assists in 50 minutes of playing time in the head-to-head match-up with Durant. "I want to be great," Antetokounmpo said. "We had to give everything."

Durant finished with 48 points, nine rebounds and six assists but missed two jumpers in the final minute of overtime that could have tied the score and possibly forced a second extra session. "We got looks, we just didn't knock them down," said Durant.

"At the end of the day, I try not to get too high, not to get too low. But I almost got emotional a lit-

tle bit out there because the team really tried their best," Antetokounmpo said. "We kept our composure. We were down 2-0. A lot of people didn't believe we could make it."

Khris Middleton tallied 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Bucks, who became the first road team to win a game in the series. Brook Lopez chipped in 19 and Jrue Holiday contributed 13 points to the win. Antetokounmpo hit the game-tying basket and Khris Middleton delivered the game winner in overtime as the Bucks advanced to the NBA semi-finals for the second time in three seasons.

Milwaukee took the lead for good, 113-111, when Middleton converted on a 13-foot turnaround jumper with 40 seconds to go. Durant shot 17 of 36, draining four three-pointers, while James Harden chipped in 22 points but shot a dismal five-of-17 in another frustrating playoff performance from the former league MVP. Harden was playing with a sore hamstring.

"Give them credit. They are a great team. They have a great chance to win the championship," said Durant of the Bucks. Durant forced overtime after the Nets failed to hold onto a five-point lead in the final minutes of the fourth.

With just 1.6 seconds left, Durant hit a 24-foot turnaround jumper from the three point line. After video review, officials ruled his foot was on the



BROOKLYN: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks shoots the ball during the game against the Brooklyn Nets during Round 2, Game 7 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Saturday at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP

line making it a two point basket instead of a three. "We got lucky his toe was on the line and they called it a two," Milwaukee's Khris

Middleton said. "But once he hits that shot, we've got to forget about it. There's still ballgame left. That wasn't the game." — AFP

Fans, police clash as Ahly edge Esperance, Chiefs shock Wydad

JOHANNESBURG: Mohamed Sherif scored as title-holders Al-Ahly of Egypt took a giant step toward the CAF Champions League final by winning 1-0 at Esperance of Tunisia on Saturday after pre-match clashes between fans and police saw teargas fired and kick-off delayed by an hour. The other semi-final first leg produced a shock result with Serbian Samir Nurkovic netting on 35 minutes to give Kaizer Chiefs of South Africa a 1-0 win at Wydad Casablanca of Morocco.

In Tunisia, trouble erupted before the kickoff at the 60,000-seat national stadium in Rades near Tunis when more than the 5,000 spectators permitted under coronavirus protocols gained entry. Police responded to taunts from an unruly crowd by firing tear gas and stun grenades as both squads abandoned warming-up on the pitch and fled to the changerooms with some coughing and others gasping for breath.

Amid fears that the clash of the north African giants would be called off, order was restored and Ahly agreed to play after a one-hour delay having received a written pledge guaranteeing their safety. The showdown between nine-time champions Ahly and four-time winners Esperance was decided by a 67th-minute goal from forward Mohamed Sherif, his fourth in the Champions League this season.

Mali-born Ahly midfielder Aliou Dieng was allowed to surge forward from his own half and pass to Sherif, who tapped in a rebound after his first shot struck the post. It was the seventh time the Egyptian Red Devils have beaten the Tunisian Blood and Gold in 19 meetings in the marquee African club competition with eight drawn.

Brilliant save

Ahly host the return match in Cairo next Saturday and a draw will suffice to secure a place in the July 17 final in Moroccan economic hub Casablanca. While Ahly winning was not unexpected, first-time semi-finalists Chiefs succeeding certainly was with vastly more experienced Wydad hot pre-match favorites to build an aggregate lead.

Nurkovic was flagged offside by an assistant referee after beating goalkeeper Ahmed Tagnaouti with a shot into the corner of the net. But a VAR review delivered a different outcome and the Senegalese referee awarded the goal. Earlier, Chiefs goalkeeper Bruce Bvuma had deprived Wydad of the lead with a brilliant save off a header from Libyan Muaid Ellafi.

As the second half drew to a close, Chiefs had up to nine men behind the ball as they successfully deprived the two-time champions of an equalizer. Apart from the vast gap in Champions League experience between the teams, Wydad were guided by Tunisian Faouzi Benzarti, who began coaching 42 years ago and has won five CAF club competitions.

Opposing him were Arthur Zwane and Dillon Sheppard, who were taking charge of Chiefs for just the third time as caretakers after head coach Gavin Hunt was fired last month. Hunt had been in charge when the teams met at the group stage with Wydad winning 4-0 at home and losing 1-0 away. Chiefs hope to become the third South African winners of the competition after Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns. —AFP

Marquez takes German MotoGP for first win since 2019

SACHSENRING: Marc Marquez banished 18 months of struggles yesterday as he dominated in the rain at the Sachsenring to win the German MotoGP. The six-time world champion, who returned this season after crashing in the opening race last year, escaped early and stayed clear of in-form Portuguese Miguel Oliveira and championship leader Fabio Quartararo.

Marquez started on the second row of the grid but burst through at the start and was battling for the lead with fellow Spaniard Alex Espargaro of Aprilia when rain started to fall. While other riders grew more cautious, Marquez reacted by attacking harder.

"The victory was a low possibly, but when I saw a few drops on laps four and five I thought: 'this is my race'," he said. "When more drops fall, I pushed more. I take a risk. Then the second race started with Oliveira." Catalonia GP winner Oliveira emerged from the pack to give chase but was more than a second back. The laps followed a consistent pattern.

Marquez, who is still recovering from the complicated break to his right arm, gained time turning left and lost time on right-handers. But he managed to preserve a cushion of more than a second. "It was a little cat and mouse all race," said Oliveira. "He was faster in some sectors, I was faster in others. We battled at a distance."

Marquez held on for what was clearly an emotional victory. "It was hard to concentrate because of all the memories and all the sensations of the past year," said Marquez, pausing to avoid



SACHSENRING: Honda Spanish rider Marc Marquez is celebrated by the circuit staff after winning the German MotoGP Grand Prix at the Sachsenring racing circuit in Hohenstein-Ernstthal near Chemnitz, eastern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

breaking down and to maintain the delighted grin on his face.

It was his 11th straight victory at the Sachsenring, which like him was off the MotoGP circuit last season, but it was the first for him and the Honda team since Valencia in November 2019. "We did it!" he said. "We will do it again. We are in a complicated situation but we will try to keep this level."

Quartararo, meanwhile, increased his lead in the championship on a track that does not suit his

Yamaha in contrast to Assen, home of the Dutch MotoGP next weekend. "This podium is gold," said Quartararo. "All weekend we have been struggling. Now I'm looking forward to Assen, one of my favorite tracks." Quartararo now holds a 22-point edge over compatriot Johann Zarco who was eighth on his Pramac Ducati. South African Brad Binder was fourth on a KTM. The factory Ducatis of Italian Francesco Bagnaia and Australian Jack Miller were next and remain fourth and third in the standings. — AFP

Mubarak Al-Kabeer club hosts tournament for the disabled

KUWAIT: The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Disabled Sports Club organized the Kuwait Open Championship for disabled clubs in Kuwait on Saturday. Mubarak Al-Kabeer Club Chairman Ibrahim Al-Mashaan lauded the event and its success, and thanked heads of the other clubs for their cooperation. The championship was held under the patronage of Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Honorary President of the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club.



KUWAIT: Some of the winners are celebrated at the end of the tournament.

Pulock makes clutch save as Islanders level series with Tampa 2-2

LOS ANGELES: Defenseman Ryan Pulock made a desperation save in the dying seconds with the net empty as the New York Islanders held on to beat Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 on Saturday in game four of their NHL playoff semi-final series.

The Lightning almost tied the game at the final buzzer as Ryan McDonagh fooled everyone on the ice but Pulock. McDonagh sidestepped goalie Semyon Varlamov and delivered a spinning backhand that appeared to be heading into the open cage.

But Pulock slid on one knee across the middle of the crease and blocked the shot, sparking wild celebrations and allowing New York to level the series against the defending Stanley Cup champions at 2-2 in front of a home crowd of 12,900 at Nassau Coliseum. Asked by reporters if he ever played goalie, the 26-year-old Canadian said, "Maybe street hockey. That's about it."

Game five is scheduled for Monday in Tampa, Florida. Josh Bailey, Mathew Barzal and Matt Martin all scored in the second period for the Islanders, who survived a third-period rally by the Lightning. Varlamov made 28 saves for the



UNIONDALE: Andrei Vasilevskiy #88 of the Tampa Bay Lightning blocks a shot by Brock Nelson #29 of the New York Islanders in Game Four of the Stanley Cup Semifinals during the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Nassau Coliseum on Saturday in Uniondale, New York. — AFP

Islanders, who seemed to get some spark after head coach Barry Trotz juggled the roster and inserted some fresh legs.

The move worked as New York scored three goals after scoring just four in their previous two games. Brayden Point and Tyler Johnson scored in

the third period for the Lightning. Goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 27 shots. It remains to be seen just how big a setback this is for the Lightning, who had been getting progressively better with wins in game two and three after losing the series opener 2-1 at home. — AFP



Loew dampens German Euro euphoria after Portugal rout

MUNICH: Joachim Loew has attempted to dampen German fans' Euro 2020 euphoria after a thrilling 4-2 win over Portugal boosted his side's chances of reaching the knockout stages. Germany bounced back from losing their opening Group F game to world champions France with an emphatic victory over the holders on Saturday as Kai Havertz and Robin Gosens shone.

The result in Munich blew the group wide open, but Germany need to beat Hungary, who managed a surprise 1-1 draw with France, to be sure of reaching the

will be just as testing," he said.

World Cup lesson

Loew's warning is based on bitter recent experience. At the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Germany bounced back after a shock 1-0 defeat to Mexico in their opening game with a last-gasp 2-1 win over Sweden, only to then finish bottom of the group after being stunned by South Korea.

Nevertheless, at the Allianz Arena there were

attacking move which led to Cristiano Ronaldo giving Portugal the lead.

It was the first time Ronaldo has scored against Germany and extended his record of 12 goals scored at five European Championship finals. However, the hosts roared back with four unanswered goals as Havertz and Gosens scored after sustained German pressure forced own goals by Ruben Dias and Raphael Guerreiro.

Against France the Germans tightened their defense but failed to create chances. Faced with Portugal, they cut loose and attacked the space Ronaldo's side generously allowed them. "It was a very strong performance for us against the technically sound and counter-attack-minded Portuguese," said Loew. "We showed a lot of morale especially after falling behind, did not lose the thread and kept calm. We overwhelmed Portugal's defense a few times."

'A little euphoria'

Germany have injury concerns for Wednesday as Ilkay Gundogan, Mats Hummels and Gosens all limped off in the second half. "Hummels' knee ligament has flared up again, with Robin it was the adductor, Ilkay Gundogan took a blow to the calf," said Loew. "We didn't want to take any risks, but I don't think it's anything dramatic and if all goes well, it should be okay."

Loew explained it had been part of the plan to play with "a completely different power on attack" compared to the France game by "creating more danger on the wings". However, the Germans know they cannot expect the same space to attack against the Hungarians in Munich on Wednesday.

"Hungary will be a tough opponent, one we should not underestimate. They are very strong defensively and will be tough to crack," warned Havertz, who responded after a poor display against France with a goal and assist.

Despite Loew's efforts to play down the win, the mood in the German camp has lifted dramatically. "It's fun to play in this atmosphere, the cauldron is bubbling," said Thomas Mueller. "We have three points and things in our own hands. We mustn't overdo it and become arrogant, but we can believe in our own quality and allow ourselves to feel a little euphoria." — AFP



SEVILLE: Spain's midfielder Ferran Torres (center) vies for the ball with Poland's goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny (right) during the UEFA EURO 2020 Group E football match between Spain and Poland at La Cartuja Stadium in Seville, Spain, on Saturday. — AFP

Spain battling for Euro lives after Poland stalemate

SEVILLE: Nine years after winning their third major tournament in a row, Spain are struggling to qualify for the knockout stage of Euro 2020 after only drawing their first two group matches. Coach Luis Enrique said if Saturday's 1-1 draw with Poland had been a boxing match, his team would have won on points but his team looked like they were on the ropes and lacking a knockout punch. After starting with a stalemate against Sweden last week, Spain now sit third in Group E and need to beat Slovakia on Wednesday to guarantee qualification for the last 16. Placed in a group that appeared one of the kindest in the draw and cosseted by a format that allows all but the very weakest to go through, failing to reach the next round would be nothing less than a humiliation for Spain. "I was expecting more," said Luis Enrique. "I was expecting six points and zero goals conceded but this is the situation."

Luis Enrique complained last week about the state of the pitch at La Cartuja in Seville where Spain are playing their three group games, a gripe that was repeated by Manchester City midfielder Rodri on Saturday. Jordi Alba, La Roja's stand-in captain in the absence of Sergio Busquets, said they also "lacked a bit of luck" as Gerard Moreno's penalty struck the post while Alvaro Morata failed to convince despite his opening goal.

One explanation favored by the Madrid press is that the squad has talent but not leaders, the kind of survival instinct a 35-year-old Sergio Ramos might have provided. "Carles Puyol, Sergio Busquets, Sergio Ramos — they give you fear, it will be a battlefield," former Germany striker and coach Jurgen Klinsmann told the BBC. "This Spain team is full of technical talent, they know how to read the space and when to play, but there is no fear of them anymore."

Spanish downturn

Busquets was in the stands against Poland after receiving a negative COVID-19 test and he should return against Slovakia, but Spain's problems appear to run deeper. They have now managed just one win in their last eight games at major tournaments, a run stretching across five years, and have scored more than one goal in only two of those matches. Since thrashing Italy at Euro 2012 to complete their historic hat-trick, Spain have recorded five victories in 13 tournament games, one of those a dead rubber against Australia at the 2014 World Cup when they had already crashed out in the group.

Luis Enrique was appointed in 2018 to sharpen the focus and oversee a shift in approach, to tweak Spain's possession style and bring them in line with the game's more modern, physical style. Yet there has been little evidence of it at Euro 2020, where his team have racked up almost 2,000 passes in two games for the return of a single goal. Robert Lewandowski showed what can be done even with a scarcity of opportunities, his brilliant back-post header in the second half on Saturday a clear demonstration of the cold, clinical finishing that Spain desperately lack. He gives Poland hope, given they will go through as runners-up if they beat Sweden and Spain's final match against Slovakia produces a winner.—AFP



MUNICH: Germany's forward Kai Havertz (left) celebrates with Germany's midfielder Toni Kroos after scoring his team's third goal during the UEFA EURO 2020 Group F football match between Portugal and Germany at Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

last 16. "The next game will perhaps be even more dogged, because Hungary stand deeper and defend with eight or nine men," warned Loew.

On Saturday night, the streets of Munich's city center were full of jubilant fans celebrating the victory after arguably Germany's best performance since the 2014 World Cup that they won in Brazil. But Loew, in his last tournament in charge, tried to temper expectations. "Nothing of significance has happened, we have only won a game, but now come further challenges which

encouraging signs all over the field for the coach, not least from left-back Gosens who came of age with an outstanding display. The 26-year-old Atalanta player headed in Germany's fourth goal to add to his two assists, while his spectacular early volley also hit the back of the net, but was ruled out by VAR because Serge Gnabry was offside.

Despite dominating the early exchanges in front of nearly 13,000 fans in a crowd limited by Covid-19 restrictions, Germany were caught out by a counter-

Barcelona move to give Depay 'something extra': De Boer

AMSTERDAM: Netherlands coach Frank de Boer is hopeful Memphis Depay's Euro 2020 form will be positively impacted after the confirmation the striker will play for Barcelona next season. Depay has long been linked with a move to the Camp Nou and on Saturday Barcelona announced the 27-year-old had signed a two-year deal to join on a free transfer from Lyon.

"Maybe the transfer to Barcelona will give him something extra to help him perform at his best," De Boer told reporters yesterday ahead of the Dutch team's final Euro 2020 Group C game against North Macedonia in Amsterdam today. "We need Memphis at his best to go as far as we want in this tournament but we have confidence in him and he is a confident player."

Depay, who scored 20 goals in Ligue 1 for Lyon in the season just finished, converted a penalty in the Netherlands' 2-0 win over Austria on Thursday in front of watching Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman. However he has come in for some criticism from some Dutch fans and media for failing to take other chances.

"I think Memphis is his first critic and I'm sure the criticism doesn't affect him," De Boer said of the former Manchester United player, who is a huge star in the Netherlands. "He knows if he played well or not so let's hope for the Netherlands that he can reach the level that we have in mind."

The Oranje have already secured qualification for the last 16 as winners of Group C after beating both Ukraine and Austria in their first major tournament since the 2014 World Cup. "When we are doing well we can beat anybody. Hopefully we can grow into the tournament and we still have some better performances to come," said De Boer, whose team will play in Budapest in the first knockout round against one of the best third-placed sides on June 27.

Victory there would set up a quarter-final in Baku against the runners-up in either Group A or B. "We



ZEIST: Netherlands' forward Memphis Depay takes part in their MD-1 training session in Zeist yesterday on the eve of their UEFA EURO 2020 Group C football match against North Macedonia. — AFP

know our path to the final and to get to the final you have to win every game, so I don't really care who we play next," De Boer said. "We have no influence on it."

De Boer said he would make two changes to his team for today's game at the Johan Cruyff Arena, the outcome of which is academic for both sides: North Macedonia are already eliminated after losing both matches so far.

"They want to get their first ever points at a tournament. They are proud to be here, but we want to win and will be taking it seriously," said De Boer. "There is no way we will be taking them lightly. They beat Germany 2-1 recently (in a World Cup qualifier) so this will not be an easy game." — AFP

Glen Kamara, Finland's quiet threat who took stand against racism

HELSINKI: Finland's fans will have eyes on star strikers Teemu Pukki and Joel Pohjanpalo as the Euro 2020 debutants face Belgium today, but one of the team's greatest assets will be quietly effective midfielder Glen Kamara.

"I'm very close to saying that he is, these days, the best player on the team," Janne Olvio, sports journalist at Finnish newspaper Ilta-Sanomat, told AFP of the 25-year-old who this season helped undefeated Rangers to the Scottish Premiership title. But the softly-spoken Kamara was recently thrust into the limelight not for his footballing skills but for being racially abused by Slavia Prague defender Ondrej Kudela.

Born in Finland to Sierra-Leonean parents before moving to London aged 12, Kamara has impressed at the Euro, winning praise for his skill in tight spaces, his knack for winning duels, and his composure under pressure. "He's very relaxed all the time (on the pitch), but that doesn't mean he's not fighting," Finland coach Markku Kanerva told reporters, calling Kamara "definitely one of our key players".

At a Europa League match in March, however, footage shows the normally serene Kamara reacting with disbelief after Kudela covers his mouth and says something into his ear. "I felt humiliated. All my family, friends, fans, whoever is watching, I felt like a little boy," Kamara later told UK channel ITV.

UEFA handed Kudela a 10-match ban — the minimum sanction for "racist behavior". Kamara himself, meanwhile, was banned for three matches for physically retaliating while in the tunnel — and has since been targeted "daily" by online racist abuse.

The midfielder now declines to take the knee as an anti-racism gesture before the Euro matches. "If UEFA genuinely wants to 'show racism the red card', then it's time to stop the tokenism and take a zero-tolerance approach," he said in a statement.—AFP

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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 Saiifiya, Bijalpur, Indore, M.P (India). (C 0608) 18-6-2021

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Wales qualify as Swiss made to wait

ROME/BAKU: Matteo Pessina scored as Italy made it three wins out of three at Euro 2020 by beating 10-man Wales 1-0 to finish top of Group A yesterday with both teams advancing to the last 16. Pessina's goal means Italy will play the runner-up from Group C in the next round, with Wales facing the team that comes second in Group B.

In his 35th game in charge of the Azzurri who failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, Roberto Mancini's side also matched an 80-year Italian record. Italy extended their unbeaten run to 30 games - 25 wins and five draws - a feat last achieved under two-time World Cup winning coach Vittorio Pozzo between 1935 and 1939.

It was also an 11th consecutive win with a clean sheet for Italy who had already booked their ticket to the knockout rounds with a game to spare. Italy will play Ukraine or Austria at Wembley on June 26 for a spot in the quarterfinals. Wales, semi-finalists in 2016, suffered in a game they played a man down for most of the second half after Ethan Ampadu was sent off for a foul on Federico Bernardeschi.

Real Madrid's Gareth Bale, Wales' all-time leading scorer with 33 international goals, could not add to his tally missing a chance for the equaliser in the final quarter of an hour. Wales coach Robert Page made three changes to his starting line-up, Ben Davies, Chris Mepham and Kieffer Moore dropping to the bench with the trio one booking away from suspension.

Mancini also brought in fresh players for their final group game with eight changes, and a three-man frontline with Federico Chiesa, Andrea Belotti and Federico Bernardeschi. Paris Saint-Germain's Marco Verratti proved decisive on his return from injury after a six-week layoff. Belotti threatened after 12 minutes but Wales goalkeeper Danny Ward held firm with Emerson Palmieri then missing a chance from a distance.

Rafael Toloi fired another which took a deflection off his Atalanta teammate Pessina, into the arms of Ward, while Chiesa missed an opportunity to latch on a Belotti shot across goal. But Pessina broke through six minutes before half-time with a flick off

a Verratti free-kick leaving Ward with no chance. It was the first goal for Italy in a major competition for the Atalanta player who had been called up as a late addition after Stefano Sensi's injury.

Francesco Acerbi replaced Leonardo Bonucci at half-time with an eye towards the knockout rounds. Bernardeschi missed a chance for a second after the break with a free-kick from distance hitting the post. And Wales' task got even more difficult when Ampadu was sent off 10 minutes after the break for a late challenge which caught Bernardeschi's ankle.

Cardiff City striker Moore came off the bench after an hour in place of Joe Morrell with Bale reverting back to midfield. Bale missed a golden chance to level after 75 minutes with Moore crossing for the unmarked skipper who volleyed over.

Meanwhile, Xherdan Shaqiri scored twice as Switzerland beat Turkey 3-1 in Baku yesterday, but they will have to wait to see if they reach the last 16 of Euro 2020 as one of the four best third-placed teams. Wales held on to second place in Group A thanks to a superior goal difference after their 1-0 loss to Italy.

Shaqiri's goals came after Haris Seferovic's first-half opener and either side of Irfan Kahveci scoring Turkey's only goal of the tournament. Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic made two changes from Wednesday's heavy loss to Italy, including giving Steven Zuber his first start of the championship.

Turkey boss Senol Gunes brought centre-back Merih Demiral back after dropping the Juventus defender last time out, with his side looking to avoid a third straight competitive defeat for the first time since Euro 1996. Switzerland opened the scoring in the sixth minute, silencing the 17,000 crowd supporting Turkey due to close historical and diplomatic ties between Ankara and Baku.

Seferovic buried a low effort past Turkish goalkeeper Ugurcan Cakir for his 22nd international goal, after Zuber's dummy. Zuber was involved again for the second 20 minutes later, as Seferovic held up possession and his pass deflected to the Eintracht Frankfurt winger's feet.

The former Hoffenheim man then fed Shaqiri who



ROME: Italy's defender Alessandro Bastoni vies for a header with Wales' forward Gareth Bale during a UEFA Euro 2020 Group A football match at the Olympic Stadium yesterday. — AFP

curled a sublime effort past a helpless Cakir. Shaqiri should have doubled his account for the match less than two minutes later when a bursting run put the Liverpool midfielder clear with just the goalkeeper to beat, but Cakir saved with his foot.

Zuber on-form

Just after the half-hour mark, left-back Mert Muldur tested goalkeeper Yann Sommer with a shot from outside the area but the 32-year-old, who became a father for a second time earlier this week, parried away. Switzerland's advantage was halved on the hour mark to send the crowd wild.

Hakan Calhanoglu fed Kahveci who shimmed

outside the area before firing a left-footed strike into the top corner for his first international goal. But Switzerland restored their two-goal lead six minutes later as Shaqiri claimed his second.

The 29-year-old, who scored just once in 22 club appearances this season, netted again from another Zuber assist following a quick counter-attack. With 20 minutes to play, Switzerland still needed a two-goal swing to move above Wales into second place.

Petkovic added fresh legs to his attack by replacing goal-scorers Shaqiri and Seferovic with Ruben Vargas and Mario Gavranovic. But Switzerland failed to find the required goals and their fate is in the hands of other sides' results. — AFP



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