



2 Kuwait expresses concern over hate speech, Islamophobia, discrimination



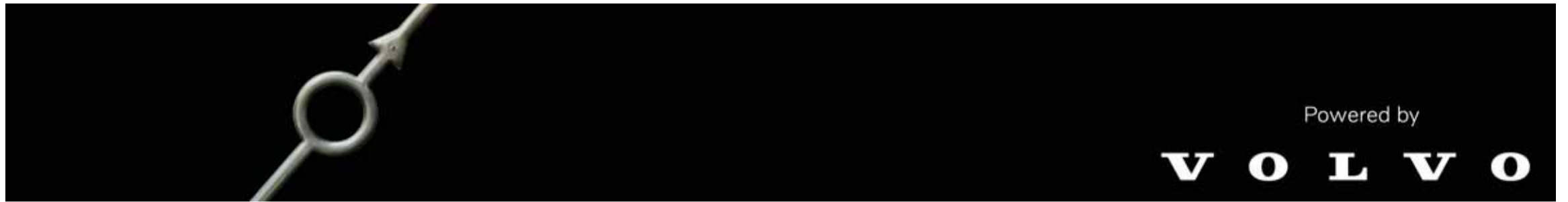
5 Singaporean woman jailed 30 years for torturing, killing maid



8 Turkmen capital Ashgabat tops Hong Kong as world's costliest



13 Troubled Tokyo Olympics near finish line with one month to go



Assembly passes budget amid quarrels, fisticuffs

Premier, ministers vote standing at chamber's entrance



KUWAIT: MPs trade blows during a bad-tempered session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: In a historic session that saw punches, quarrels and heated arguments from the start to the end, the National Assembly yesterday passed the state budget for the 2021/2022 fiscal with a KD 12.1 billion deficit. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and most Cabinet ministers did not enter the chamber after opposition MPs occupied their seats, but they still voted while standing at the chamber's entrance, a first in Kuwait's 59 years of democracy.

The budget was passed without any technical debate and without reports by the budgets committee, controlled by opposition lawmakers, in perhaps the shortest session to debate the state budget. The budget was passed with a slim majority with 32 MPs, including 16 Cabinet ministers, in favor, and one against, while 30 opposition lawmakers refused to vote.

Head of the budgets committee MP Bader Al-Mulla asked the speaker how 32 members voted in favor of the budget when seven ministers were

outside the chamber. The three-hour session was marred by non-stop shouting and heated arguments between opposition lawmakers and Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and a minority of MPs who supported the government.

Two MPs, one from the opposition and another from the pro-government camp, exchanged punches that led to chaos and promoted Ghanem to call off the session prematurely, but after the budget had been approved. Throughout the session, no Cabinet minister spoke and Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada sat on the podium without making any statement.

At one point, angry opposition MPs went up to the podium, but the speaker called the guards, who prevented the lawmakers from approaching the speaker. Opposition MPs arrived early and occupied seats reserved for Cabinet ministers, a tactic they have used in recent weeks to highlight their demand to question the prime minister over a host of issues. But the ministers this time did not boycott the session as they did in

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Egypt arrests Tiktok influencer

CAIRO: Egyptian police arrested Tiktok influencer Haneen Hossam yesterday, two days after she failed to appear in court for her sentencing to 10 years on "human trafficking" charges. Hossam, 19, was caught in a Cairo suburb and will be transferred to the Public Prosecution. Hossam's arrest came a day after she posted a tearful video on social media that went viral pleading with authorities to drop the charges. "10 years! I didn't do anything immoral to deserve all this. I was jailed for 10 months and didn't say a word after I was released... Why do you want to jail me again?" she asked. — AFP

Madame Tussauds to open in Dubai

DUBAI: London's renowned wax-work museum Madame Tussauds will open its first outpost in the Arab world in Dubai later this year, the group's owner Merlin Entertainments said yesterday. The brand, which began life in London where it boasts 250 wax sculptures that draw millions of visitors annually, also has smaller branches in the US, Europe and Asia. The Dubai branch would display 60 sculptures of "global stars", 16 of them from the region including Lebanese pop stars Nancy Ajram and Maya Diab, it added. — AFP

Detained journalist 'close to death'

CASABLANCA: A detained Moroccan journalist is "close to death" 76 days into a hunger strike, his family said as his trial resumed yesterday in his absence. Soulaïmane Raïssouni, editor-in-chief of now-defunct newspaper Akhbar Al Yaoum, is accused of indecent assault against another man, which he denies. His supporters say the case is part of an official defamation campaign against critical journalists and activists. Morocco says its judiciary is independent. Earlier this month he appeared in court, staggering and emaciated. Over the weekend, the 49-year-old was hospitalized twice after losing consciousness. — AFP

India tests longer-range drone flights

BANGALORE: An aviation firm has carried out the first tests in India of longer-range drone deliveries, as hopes grow that they could deliver medicines as well as COVID-19 vaccines to remote areas. Greater use of drones could be a game-changer for medical services in the South Asian nation's hard-to-reach rural areas where healthcare is limited and roads often poor, experts say.

Throttle Aerospace Systems is

among 20 organizations granted permits by the government since May to conduct experimental flights beyond the current limit of 450 m. Two drones - one that can carry up to one kilogram for 20 km or nearly an hour, and another that can lift two kilos for 15 km - were tested on Monday in the southern state of Karnataka.

"Medicines was the payload here and... 2.5 kilometers were covered in seven minutes and it delivered the medicines at the designated point and the drone returned," Throttle's co-founder, Sebastian Anto, told AFP at the test site in the southern state of Karnataka. The government this month also invited bids from drone operators to help set up a pilot

Continued on Page 2



GAURIBIDANUR, India: Technicians fly a drone belonging to Throttle Aerospace Systems which flies Beyond Visual Line of Sight to deliver lifesaving medical supplies during a test flight on Monday. — AFP

Thai family gets repeat jumbo visitor

BANGKOK: Some families living in a jungle may be fearful of things going bump at night, but for one household in Thailand, the sight of an elephant rummaging through their kitchen was not a total shock. "It came to cook again," wrote Kittichai Boodchan sarcastically in a caption to a Facebook video he shot over the weekend of an elephant nosing its way into his kitchen.

Likely driven by the midnight munchies, the massive animal pokes its head into Kittichai's kitchen in the early hours of Sunday, using its trunk to find food. At one point, it picks up a plastic bag of liquid, considers it briefly, and then sticks it in its mouth - before the video cuts out. Kittichai and his wife live near a national park in western Thailand, by a lake where wild



PA LA-U, Thailand: An elephant searches for food in the kitchen of Radchadawan Peungprasoporn's home on June 20, 2021. — AFP

elephants often bathe while roaming in the jungle.

He was unperturbed by the mammoth mammal, recognizing it as a frequent visitor as it often wanders into homes in his village where it eats, leaves and shoots off back into the jungle. The elephant had actually destroyed their kitchen wall in May, he said, creating an open-air kitchen concept reminiscent of a drive-through window. This weekend, its sole task was to find food.

Kittichai said a general rule of thumb in dealing with unwelcome visitors crashing is not to feed them. "When it doesn't get food, it just leaves on its own," he told AFP. "I am already used to it coming, so I was not so worried." Wild elephants are a common sight in Thailand's national parks and its surrounding areas, with farmers sometimes reporting incidents of their fruits and corn crops being eaten by a hungry herd. — AFP

Hashed armed alliance rising to dominate Iraq

BAGHDAD: With the second-biggest bloc in Iraq's parliament, powerful friends in Iran and vast financial assets, the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary alliance has become the predominant force in Iraqi politics, experts say. In a boost for the alliance, largely made up of pro-Tehran armed groups, neighboring Iran on Friday elected ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi as president. Hashed commander Abu Ala Al-Walaji welcomed the judiciary chief's election win as a victory for the "axis of resistance", Iran and its allies across the region from Yemen to Syria. The Hashed was created seven years ago to battle the Sunni extremist Islamic State group which had seized almost a third of Iraq in a lightning offensive.

Later, the Hashed was integrated into the armed forces of the state. Then it moved into politics. The alliance "is not an anomaly but an example of how power works in Iraq," said Renad Mansour, a Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House. The lack of oversight and rule of law in Iraq allows non-state actors to gain power without being held accountable "to either the people or the system", he said.

Continued on Page 2

Local

Kuwait expresses concern over Islamophobia, hate speech

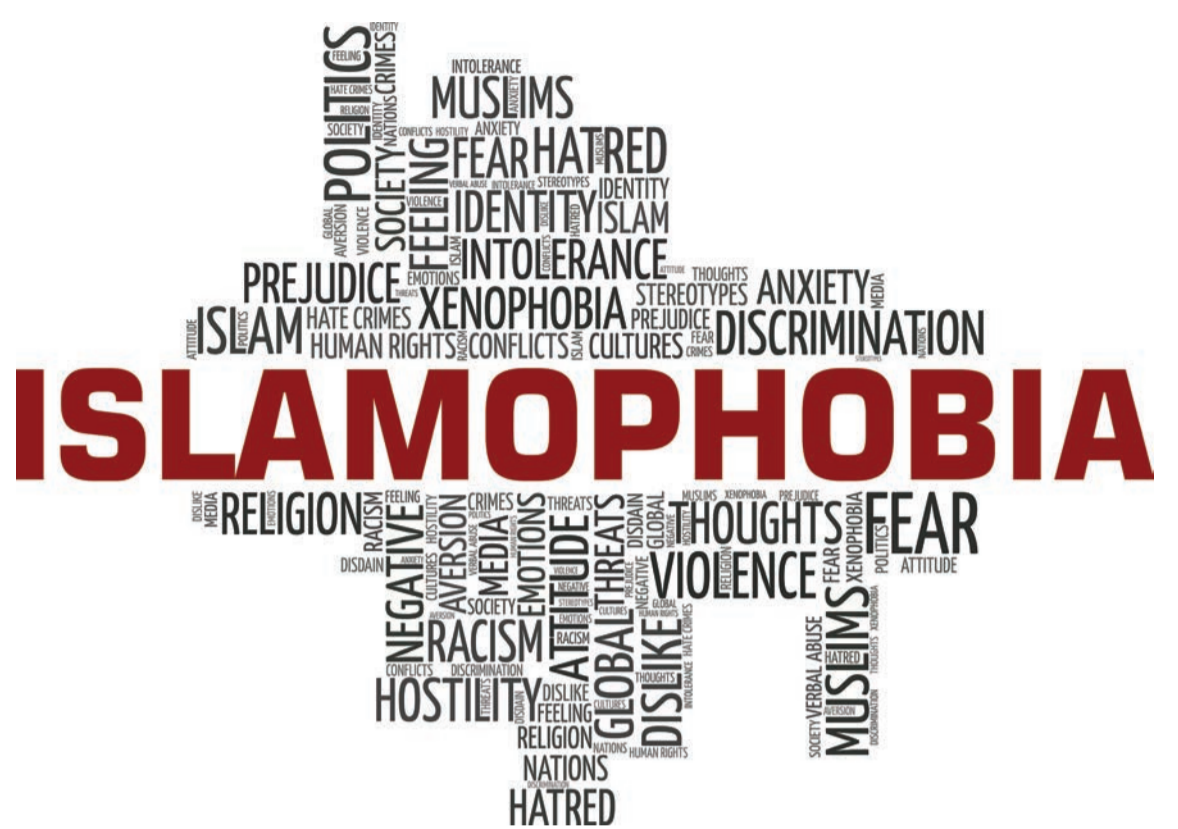
GENEVA: Kuwait expressed yesterday before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), its concern of the spreading phenomenon of Islamophobia, hate speech, and discrimination. This came during a speech given by Kuwait's Permanent Envoy to the United Nations and international organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim, before the UNHRC 47th session held between June 21 and July 13 in Geneva, Switzerland. The session is held via videoconference, as part of an interactive dialogue with United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet.

Islamophobia is undermining peaceful societies, and requires the international community's firm measures to counter it, in order to spread peace and tranquillity worldwide, he said. He also called for protecting the individuals from the acts of violence, discrimination and hate crimes. Kuwait expressed its deep conviction in human rights and constructive dialogue to protect those rights based on the communities' right in choosing the appropriate values, principles and concepts that suit their people, he said.

Kuwait also "rejects the attempts of some communities to impose their culture on others, justifying such an action by globalizing the human rights," he said. "We cannot accept any values that contradict with our culture and religion of Islam," he affirmed. "The sustainable development is hardly moving in

some parts of our region, not only because of the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), but also due to the series of armed conflicts that put lives at risk, and violate human rights, resulting in displacement of large number of people," he said. Kuwait strongly condemns the Zionist forces' occupation of the Palestinian territories, and committing flagrant violations against the unarmed Palestinian people, totally ignoring the international humanitarian law, and UNHRC resolutions, he affirmed.

The Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip and the blatant violations of Palestinians' human rights are part of many crimes committed against the unarmed people of Palestine, with international failure of questioning the Zionist authorities over their apartheid crimes," he added. Kuwait hopes that the international community provide further financial aid to UNHRC, to allow it practicing its work actively, said Ghunaim. Kuwait is keen on continuing to assist UNHRC, highly appreciating the efforts exerted to spread human right worldwide, he said. The Annual report issued by UNHRC highlighted the challenges countering the human rights, especially following the spread of COVID-19, and the negative impact it left on those rights, the Ambassador added. Kuwait will always be of a great support to the United Nations Human Rights Council and its work in serving human rights all over the world, he said. — KUNA



CBK issues coins commemorating Kuwaiti Dinar, GCC



KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the release of the second batch of commemorative coins marking the 60th anniversary of the issuance and circulation of Kuwait's national currency, as well as the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). A second batch was minted due to the high demand on the two commemorative coins upon their previous release.

The press statement highlighted the special occasion of the 60th anniversary of the issuance and circulation of the national currency and its stability and strength. It also marks the CBK's concerted efforts over decades and deliberate exchange that kept the Kuwaiti Dinar pegged to an undisclosed special weighted basket of currencies of countries that share significant economic and trade relations with the State of Kuwait, and, ultimately, supports the country's monetary stability itself an integral pillar of financial stability.

Likewise, CBK issued a commemorative coin to mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and to recognize the GCC's vital role and efforts towards stability and development in the region despite the geopolitical headwinds throughout the last decades, and to honor the founding leaders and their roles in the Council's success story.

In conclusion, CBK expressed its pride in such coins that mark deeply felt occasions and important historical events, pointing out that the two commemorative coins are made of gold-plated fine silver in line with the world standard specifications. Those wishing to acquire the coins may visit the CBK's Banking Hall by booking an appointment through the "Meta" App.

Hashed armed alliance rising...

Continued from Page 1

In a demonstration of its clout, the Hashed this month secured the release of one of its commanders after he was arrested on suspicion of ordering the killing of Ihab Al-Wazni, a pro-democracy activist. The judiciary said it had found "no proof" of Qassem Muslah's involvement in the murder. His release was also a blow to Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi's efforts to win over Iraq's pro-democracy protest movement, which has seen more than 70 activists targeted in assassinations or attempted assassinations since 2019.

Authorities have consistently failed to publicly identify or charge the perpetrators. The commander's release "shows the connectivity of the Hashed to state power, it shows that in some ways the Hashed have more connection to state power than (Kadhemi)," Mansour told AFP. The Hashed also has agents throughout the country's regular armed forces, which they "no longer fear", one senior military official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Armed groups within the Hashed are working to fragment what remains of the security forces of the state to weaken them and break them up," he said,



adding that there are "a few loyal commanders who are trying to resist these efforts." Experts have also linked the Hashed to previously unheard-of groups which have claimed attacks against US targets in recent months.

Creating murky proxies would allow the alliance to act against its archenemy without being directly implicated in operations - although some of its top commanders have hailed rocket and drone attacks on American targets, without ever claiming responsibility. Having one foot inside the state and one foot outside allows the coalition to maximize its room for maneuver, experts say.

Hashed members run some of Iraq's main ports and land border crossings, where bribes help fund their operations. But none of that is needed to pay their fighters' wages: Since they are integrated into the state, they are paid from the public purse. The profits are instead used to support multiple allies, including Iran, whose economy has been battered by American sanctions, and its regional allies such as Hezbollah.

One leading Iraqi bank official said some \$60 billion had been transferred to Lebanon "by politicians and militiamen who have spent the last 18 years loading aeroplanes with pallets full of cash." With such a strong financial base and powerful friends across the region, the Hashed has less and less need for a popular base. The alliance's popularity took it to second place in 2018 parliamentary elections, the first time it took part as a political force. — AFP



KUWAIT: Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Dr Samer Haddadin visited Kuwait Times yesterday and met with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. UNHCR Donor Relations Associate Eiman Al-Einawi accompanied Haddadin during the visit. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Ambassador of South Africa to Kuwait Manelisi Genge visited Kuwait Times yesterday and discussed with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan issues of mutual interest. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

India tests longer-range...

Continued from Page 1

project for the delivering of medical supplies as it seeks to bolster its faltering coronavirus vaccination drive.

The closing date for expressions of interest was yesterday, although the government has yet to announce when such projects would become operational. The epidemiology chief of the Indian Council of Medical Research, Samiran Panda, told The Hindu daily newspaper that the technology could help vaccinate priority groups in hard-to-reach places. "We need smart vaccination instead of mass vaccination to stem an epidemic," Panda told the newspaper last week.

India lags behind many other nations when it

comes to drones - or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles - both in terms of their uses and the regulatory framework. Under current regulations, they have to be flown in full view, or within 450 m, of their operators on the ground.

In Germany, researchers are reportedly testing drone prototypes that can track down disaster victims by their screams. In Australia, drones using artificial intelligence algorithms are being used to spot crocodiles and count koalas in rugged terrain. India, home to 1.3 billion people spread across some 3.2 million sq km, is the world's seventh-largest country by land mass.

"Drone technology would have a huge impact in those areas where emergency medicines and vaccines could be supplied," co-founder of lobby group the Drone Federation of India, Vipul Singh, told AFP. "Where it takes a few hours to travel 20-30 kilometers by road, whereas a drone can actually travel that distance in 10 to 15 minutes," said Singh, also the co-founder of Bangalore-based Aarav Unmanned Systems. —AFP

prime minister and the speaker of collaborating "to play with the future of the Kuwaiti people". "The session witnessed a moral, popular and constitutional downfall of the government ... This government does not deserve to continue for another day," Hajraf said.

"The ghosts of the government and the prime minister voted on the budget while standing at the chamber's gate. This is shameful," MP Thamer Al-Suwait said. "It is humiliating for Cabinet ministers to stand at the gate. Voting for the budget is a stigma in the face of the government," MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said. "Our problem is not with the budget, it is with the government," MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi said.

Pro-government MPs however justified their support for the government over the need to pass the budget to allow new spending to serve the interests of the Kuwaiti people. They warned that failure to approve the new budget will block fresh spending on essential items like housing, salaries and development projects.

The Assembly is scheduled to meet again today to debate the financial status of the country in a closed session. The government will brief MPs on the future generations and general reserve funds and other financial indicators in light of the sharp drop in oil prices.

Assembly passes budget amid...

Continued from Page 1

three previous sessions, although they remained standing. At the start, opposition MPs protested that the speaker cannot under the constitution hold a special session in place of the regular session. Ghanem immediately voted on a motion to turn the regular session into a special session amid massive protests by the opposition that his action clearly breached the constitution. But he did not stop. "We have the right to request a special session because all regular sessions have been disrupted," Ghanem said, referring to opposition tactics. In a special session, the prime minister cannot be questioned.

MP Obaid Al-Wasmi said the session was full of constitutional violations from the beginning to the end, while MP Hasan Jowhar accused the speaker of taking part in a "plot". MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf accused the

Local

Kuwait cabinet follows up on coronavirus developments

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah briefed the Cabinet on the latest coronavirus developments, saying that the country is witnessing a noticeable instability over the last period due to growing numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths. The health ministry had on Monday reported 1,935 new COVID-19 cases - its highest daily count - and seven related deaths in the past 24 hours. Dr Basel noted that vaccination would lead to herd immunity, affirming the efficacy and effectiveness of the vaccines accredited in Kuwait. The Cabinet stressed the necessity of abidance by health instructions in this regard and working as a teamwork to face and eradicate this epidemic.

During its weekly meeting held at Seif Palace on Monday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet discussed the recommendations of the public services committee on the labor city and other topics. The ministers also studied the recommendations on the periodic report submitted by the Ministry of Public Works regarding the stages of implementing the works related to the Kuwait International Airport (T2) project until the end of March 2021, and the visual presentation of the latest developments.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Cabinet members listened to a presentation made by representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of

Oil and Minister of Higher Education Mohammad Al-Fares, on the outcomes of his partaking in the second Islamic summit for sciences and technology last Wednesday. Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah made a presentation on the results of his participation in the consultative meeting of Arab foreign ministers and the Arab League ministerial council's gathering in its extraordinary session on the developments of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) held in Doha last Tuesday.

The minister briefed the Cabinet on the outcomes of his participation in the GCC foreign ministers' meeting held in Riyadh last Wednesday on backing the GCC path in all fields and the topics relating to the current developments in the region. He also informed the Cabinet about the outcomes of his participation in the Antalya Diplomatic Forum in Turkey held last Friday and Saturday.

Furthermore, the Cabinet discussed the political affairs in light of the current developments on the political arena on both Arab and international levels. The council of ministers expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of Houthis' repeated attempts aiming to target some Saudi cities, pointing to the Houthis' attack with a booby-trapped drone on Saudi Arabia on Sunday, expressing satisfaction about the destruction of these attacks by the coalition



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly meeting. — KUNA

forces. The Cabinet reiterated Kuwait's support to Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to defend its territories, and maintain its security and stability.

It affirmed its rejection to those criminal attacks that reflect the persistence of the militias in increasing tension in the region and undermining the peace endeavors. On Iran, the

Cabinet congratulated new Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on being elected as the country's leader. It wished further success and achievements in Iran under the new leader's leadership, hoping that the Iranian-Gulf ties would witness further improvement and cooperation as well as enhance confidence to achieve common interests and back the region's stability. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets the outgoing Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Bandar Al-Atiah.

Deputy Foreign Minister meets ambassadors

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri yesterday held talks with the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Belinda Lewis, on bilateral relations, regional and international issues. The Deputy Foreign Minister, separately, met the Chinese Ambassador Li Minggang, discussing identical topics. He also received the outgoing Qatari Ambassador Bandar Al-Atiah, expressing good wishes to him on end of his tenure. Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar, Assistant Foreign Minister for Deputy Foreign Minister Office, attended the three meetings. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang.

Ooredoo Kuwait, MoH join forces to fight COVID-19

KUWAIT: The COVID-19 pandemic calls for a prompt response from all sectors, corporates, and organizations to retain the country's economy, save the public's health and welfare, and maintain a safe world free of disease. For Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, there is one way to ensure sustaining the national economy and maintaining the community's welfare, which is mobilizing all the needed resources and capabilities to assist the governmental bodies in the country in the battle against COVID-19.

Ooredoo Kuwait has launched a vaccination campaign for its employees against the COVID-19 and in association with the Ministry of Health (MoH). The campaign is the largest of its kind in the private sector in the country. Ooredoo was keen to organize the vaccination process for more than 1,000 employees who work in different departments within the organization, which was held yesterday, at Ooredoo Tower. Hence, the vaccination process was carried out within the highest standards of accuracy, in order to

ensure the safety and comfort of all those who participated in the process, including workers in the Ministry of Health and employees.

Commenting on vaccination campaign, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "The goal of this vaccination campaign is to preserve the health and safety of our employees and customers, create a healthy work environment that increases productivity and preserves public health, and support the government's efforts to reduce the spread of the epidemic and expand the base of beneficiaries of the COVID-19 vaccine."

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the frontline workers, especially the medical staff, for their efforts and dedication throughout the past months, and I would also like to thank Kuwait's Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, and the undersecretary at Kuwait's Ministry of Health, Dr. Mustafa Reda, for their leadership in taking serious steps in saving the public's health and building a healthier and safer world," Babtain added.

It is worth noting that Ooredoo



Kuwait is still offering three months free of charge to all its customers - with post-paid subscriptions- who have had the COVID-19 vaccine. Hence, in its efforts to promote vaccination against COVID-19,

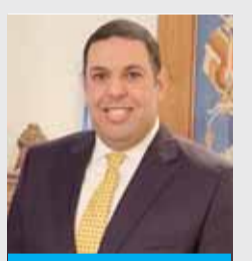
Ooredoo Kuwait supported the governmental bodies in the country by providing them with the latest digital solutions and services, along with hundreds of smart devices.

Think-tank founder represents Kuwait at French conference

KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, founder and CEO of Kuwait-based Reconnaissance Research, will represent Kuwait at the 1st Middle East Session, organized by the Institut Des Hautes Etudes De Defense Nationale (IHEDN) in Paris, France at the invitation of the French government. "He [Al-Anjeri] will be an added value throughout his participation and a great reflection on Kuwait's future thinkers," said Anne-Claire Legendre, French Ambassador to Kuwait.

The session will be seven days long, and will focus on France's contribution to Middle East security and stability. Established in 2005, the conference brings together high-level representatives, politicians, military personnel and directors of research institutes from countries in Asia and the Middle East including Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Qatar and Saudi Arabia along with regional French organizations such as The Directorate of Security and Defense Cooperation and The French Institute of Geopolitics.

This year the conference will focus on key topics including defense relations and strategy, international cooperation, the fight against terrorism, migration and supporting post-crisis countries. "I am honored to attend this event. I believe Kuwait and France enjoy very strong relations with ample room to expand them further in various fields, specially through collaborating with policy institute, think-tanks and French scholars," noted Anjeri.



Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

Kuwait vows to protect whistleblowers

KUWAIT: Kuwait's anti-corruption body vowed yesterday to protect whistleblowers in a bid to give impetus to a sweeping anti-corruption crusade, the watchdog said. The efforts of whistleblowers in Kuwait have been largely instrumental in uncovering corrupt practices, in addition to protecting public funds worth millions of Kuwaiti dinars, said Mohammad Buzabar, the anti-corruption body's deputy director general. Protecting whistleblowers, who are often the target of abuse on the part of those involved in nefarious actions, is among the watchdog's priorities given its significance towards a national strategy to root out corruption, according to a statement released by the body. On a day where the world celebrated the World Whistleblowers Day, he said the role of these individuals is crucial to the success of any anti-corruption campaign, thanking them for their significant contributions. — KUNA

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

NBK supports LOYAC's 'KON' program

KUWAIT: As a platinum sponsor, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) welcomes the participants from LOYAC's program "KON". This social entrepreneurship program is co-created with Babson College, the most prestigious entrepreneurship college in the United States and the number one institution in the world for entrepreneurship education. The program aims to introduce young adults between the ages of 12 to 16 to the world business and to turn their ideas into action.



Manal Al-Mattar

NBK will take part in the training sessions that will be ongoing until the 15th of July 2021. Throughout the three weeks program, leaders from NBK along with a group of professional leaders mentors and trainers, locally and regionally will encourage the participants to create a profitable business that solves social challenges.

NBK Public Relations Assistant General Manager, Manal Al-Mattar said, "NBK's sponsorship and participation in the program comes as a part of its strategic partnership with LOYAC. NBK is dedicated towards supporting talented young people and empowering them towards achieving their goals."

"KON" is one of these initiatives that help invest and support young youths. NBK supported KON for five consecutive years. Even in this time of uncertainty, the program continue to provide its expertise to young people through online training sessions and workshops and looks forward to seeing the participants moving into key leadership roles in their near future," Mattar added.

"KON" students will experience different stages during the program, thinking, planning and doing. The experiential learning journey the students undertake throughout the three weeks supports them to learn skills that include creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. The students also learn technical skills to write up a successful business plan, and how to pitch their business ideas to investors. By the end of the program, students will be able to present their business ideas before a jury panel, in addition to a professor from Babson College.

NBK believes that investing in human resources is investing in our future. The KON program goes along with NBK's initiatives to invest in youth and support their aspirations. LOYAC is a nonprofit organization that runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.

Woman dies in wall collapse

KUWAIT: A woman died after a wall of her house collapsed on her, a local daily reported. Three cars were also damaged, Al-Rai Arabic newspaper noted in a report published yesterday. Police and paramedics rushed the woman to hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries. Authorities summoned the building's officials to question them why there was no maintenance of the dilapidated wall.

Separately, security authorities are investigating the case of a Syrian woman in her 20s who fell to her death from the third floor of a Mahboula building. Forensics recovered the body as investigations are being carried out to determine the circumstances that led to her death.

In a separate case, a doctor accused a person of indecent actions after he attempted to enter the clinic before his turn. The doctor said the man asked the doctor to see him first, but he refused, so the patient got angry and offended him with profanities. Detectives are investigating. In another incident, police seized a dog from its Indian owner after it attacked and bit an Egyptian on the beach. The dog's owner was charged with negligence in caring for an animal.

Commerce Ministry monitors construction materials' prices

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry is monitoring the market to control prices of construction materials, which have been soaring globally. The ministry issued a number of resolutions to maintain prices of construction materials, including banning export and re-export of cement, lumber and iron but allowing citizens to import construction materials for personal use. The ministry also sent teams to monitor the market and fine construction shops which increase prices.

The ministry "supports commercial and economic activities, and make sure goods, construction materials and services in local market are meeting Gulf and international standards, as well as protecting consumers from any deliberate rise of prices," Mohammad Al-Enezi, Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Technical and Trade Development, said. Prices of construction materials have risen generally since December 2020, he acknowledged, but the ministry was keeping a close eye on shops violating prices-related regulations and has indeed referred 29 shops to prosecutor's office since January. The ministry, on the other hand, addressed obstacles facing local factories. Enezi said a ton of iron was sold with KD 248 (\$815) and KD 1.05-1.2 for a cement bag, the cheapest among neighboring countries. A price increase was caused by halt in sea freight, he added, and said surge in coronavirus cases and deaths in India for example forced goods to remain in ports for more than 90 days.

Dalal Al-Shemmeri, Director of the Ministry's Supply Department, said the ministry was subsidizing construction materials like iron, cement and ready-mix concrete, insulating white and black bricks, and air conditioning units. Shemmeri added

stc Masters, the ultimate destination for gamers

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the launch of stc Masters, an online gaming hub that features eSports tournaments for gamers. The initiative is part of a long-term partnership with regional SME, Zawaya Gaming, an award winning eSports event management company, that focuses on showcasing the various talents of online gaming through engaging tournaments.

stc issued a statement highlighting that its partnership with Zawaya Gaming supports the long-term objectives the two companies share in transforming the local gaming scene by utilizing the Kuwait-based simplified event management platform, Zemmz Play. The platform will enable avid gamers to join organized eSports tournaments to showcase their professional skills and talents, while competing for valuable prizes. The newly formed partnership marks stc's first steps into the gaming arena in support of an industry that has gained wide traction and popularity on a global scale.

The tournaments organized under this initiative will provide gamers with a chance to compete for a large prize pool amounting to over \$50,000 awarded to winners throughout the season. Gamers inter-

Indian embassy celebrates Int'l Yoga Day 2021

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India in Kuwait celebrated the 7th International Day of Yoga (IDY)-2021 on the theme 'Yoga For Wellness' at the Embassy of India recently in hybrid format. The event is one of the many events the Embassy, under the banner of Indian Cultural Network (ICN), has been organizing, under India@75 and 60th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait. The event also marks the government of India's initiative to spread awareness about Yoga and its benefits, all around the world.

Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George delivered the opening remarks on this prestigious event. Ambassador, in his speech, welcomed and thanked Kiren Rijju, Minister of State (IC) Ministry of AYUSH, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and Minister of State for Minority

Affairs, government of India for his special Video Message on International Yoga Day. He expressed his gratitude to the government of State of Kuwait and other Indian associations and groups in Kuwait for providing India with Medical Assistance when it was required the most. The ambassador also highlighted the improving COVID-19 situation in India. He underlined the importance of Yoga in the current scenario, and asked all to adopt Yoga in their lives.

Kiren Rijju, Minister of State (IC) Ministry of AYUSH, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and Minister of State for Minority Affairs, government of India presented his greetings on celebration of 7th International Day of Yoga (IDY)-2021 through a video message. He mentioned the importance of Yoga and also highlighted the transformation Yoga can bring in one's life, especially during these challenging pandemic times. He thanked the leadership of the State of Kuwait for hosting a large Indian community in Kuwait and the people of Kuwait for the care and support extended to the Indian community during the COVID-19 pandemic. In his speech, Rijju thanked and acknowledged the sup-



KUWAIT: This file photo shows an aerial view of buildings in Kuwait City and its surrounding areas.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ported that 750 people benefited from subsidizing materials in May with a value of KD 13.7 million (\$45 million). Dr Nayef Al-Shemmeri, professor of economics at Kuwait University, said prices were subjected to supply not demand.

Demand, he added, was "very limited." He said domestic production of cement was around nine million tons per year but demand was at six million tons. Raw materials were imported to manufacture

iron with an annual capacity of 1.5 million tons, however, market needs were 1.2-1.5 million tons. Shemmeri said opening doors for neighboring markets as well as lowering custom duties and administrative fees would contribute to less prices. He also proposed setting up warehouses for storage with affordable prices. Shemmeri also called for recycling of copper and iron in order to provide raw materials for local factories. — KUNA

ested in participating will compete in four gaming titles held over 16 tournaments, where finalists will battle in the grand tournament taking place in October 2021. The final tournament will be streamed live for viewers, revealing the ultimate winners of the stc Masters season 1. Following the end of the first season early October, stc Masters will launch a longer and more extensive season that will maintain the same caliber and consistency of challenging local gamers to prove they are the best in Kuwait.



Amer Atoui

stc Masters' season 1 is open to all gamers in Kuwait through Zemmz play and will consist of a series of tournaments. Online games under Season 1 include the widely popular Battle Royale games PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) and Call of Duty, licensed by Tencent and Activision. FORTNITE and FIFA 21 tournaments will also be held as approved community events for the first season, prior to forming official tie-ups with Epic Games and EA Sports in the following seasons. For more information on the upcoming seasons, gamers can visit masters.stc.com.kw, a dedicated page on stc's website providing updates and news on the initiative held under stc Masters.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the first season will purely focus on online tournaments with plans in place for live gaming tournaments in the future once the pandemic subsides. When implementing

any of its various initiatives, stc ensures that the appropriate guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health regarding social distancing are met to the highest degree. This also comes as a practice that stc enforces within its headquarters, across its branches, and at any external initiatives it participates in to avoid the spread of infection.

Chief Consumer Officer (CCO) of stc, Engineer Amer Atoui, said, "We are proud to introduce the first season of stc Masters in collaboration with the award winning eSports event management company 'Zawaya Gaming'. Through Zemmz Play, we aim to host online tournaments that will elevate the local gaming scene and emerge stc as a regional player in this rapidly growing industry. Our goal through this partnership is to enhance our exposure within this field and provide gamers with an advanced bilingual platform that will reflect our vision of becoming the preferred eSports hub in Kuwait."

He added, "Season 1 of stc Masters is only a steppingstone in our journey within the online gaming industry, as we are already aiming to expand our activities through bigger plans that are already under way. Moving forward, we aim to expand on the concept behind stc Masters and provide gamers with an unrivaled experience backed by pioneering digital and connectivity solutions."

Atoui also mentioned that launching stc Masters falls in line with the Company's commitment to enable digital transformation in Kuwait across various fields and industries. stc's investment in building a strong 5G infrastructure able to provide ultra-high-Internet speeds through a stable network with low latency, can be the ultimate solution for gamers wanting to enjoy a seamless online gaming experience.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George (left) participates in the event.

port of Government of State of Kuwait and Indian Diaspora in Kuwait for their supply of oxygen to India, during critical times.

In addition to celebration of International Day of Yoga (IDY), in Kuwait, the embassy also felicitated the winner of 'Bharat Ko Janiye Quiz (BKJQ)' from Kuwait by conferring silver medal and certificate. A special edition of 'AYUSH Bulletin' on Yoga

was also released. Video Messages from Yoga Gurus viz. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Dr HR Nagendra, Shri Kamlesh Patel and Sister Jayanti on importance of Yoga, were also streamed. The event also witnessed live demo of Yogasanas, while following COVID-19 protocols. The event received a huge response from Kuwait on the embassy's social media.

Firemen put out transformer blaze

KUWAIT: Firemen extinguished a blaze that erupted in a power transformer in Sabahiya yesterday. No injuries were reported in the incident as an investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire, Kuwait Fire Force said.





In Mali women's prison, inmates face a long wait

S Lanka's #MeToo movement starts from its newsrooms

Page 7

Page 6



BARCELONA: File photo taken on July 14, 2018 shows people holding pictures of Catalan leaders in jail or exiled (from left) Carme Forcadell, Anna Gabriel, Carles Puigdemont, Marta Rovira, Oriol Junqueras, Jordi Turull and Clara Ponsati during a demonstration in support of jailed Catalan leaders in Barcelona. — AFP

Spain pardons jailed Catalan separatists

All nine will be banned from holding public office

BARCELONA: Spain yesterday pardoned nine jailed Catalan separatists behind a failed 2017 independence bid as it aimed to break the deadlock over the political crisis in the wealthy northeastern region. In announcing the decision, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said he hoped the move would draw a line under past confrontations with Catalonia's separatist-led regional government and open the way for talks.

"With this act, we want to open a new stage of dialogue and reconciliation and close once and for all the division and confrontation," he said. The decision to grant clemency to nine separatist leaders who were serving long prison sentences was taken in order to "re-establish coexistence and harmony within Catalan society and Spanish society as a whole," he said. Although the date of their release remains unclear, media reports suggested it could happen very quickly.

The separatists were convicted over a banned referendum in October 2017 that was marred by police

violence and followed by a short-lived declaration of independence, sparking Spain's worst political crisis in decades. Several fled abroad but 12 others were tried and convicted, with three-quarters of them handed prison terms of nine to 13 years.

Sanchez said they were partial pardons, that all nine would be banned from holding public office and that the pardons would be conditional on them not committing "a serious crime" for a set period of time. "The Spanish government has taken this decision because it is the best for Catalonia and for Spain," Sanchez said.

But the decision has been attacked by Spain's right-wing opposition as well as by many in the pro-independence camp who want a full amnesty that would allow those who fled abroad to return home. Analysts have also warned it was a risky political gamble that may help calm tensions but won't solve the years-long turmoil over the separatist crisis, which has left Catalonia sharply divided.

A divisive measure

When the separatists were sentenced in October 2019 by Spain's Supreme Court, the ruling triggered an outcry across Catalonia, with thousands hitting the streets in protests that sometimes turned violent. Sanchez said although the move to grant clemency would directly affect the lives of the nine prisoners, it would also affect "the hundreds of thousands of Catalans who feel solidarity with them" and also many others across Spain "who didn't support their actions but believe they've served enough time".

Although 53 percent of Spaniards oppose the pardons, more than two-thirds — 68 percent — of Catalans are in favour, an Ipsos poll found. The Supreme Court has also opposed the pardons, as have Spain's right-wing opposition parties who accuse Sanchez of playing politics as his minority government relies in part on Catalan separatists

for support in the national parliament. It remains to be seen though if the pardons will drive forward dialogue between Madrid and the Catalan regional government, headed by Pere Aragonés, a recently elected moderate separatist from the leftist ERC party. In the coming weeks, Sanchez will meet for the first time with Aragonés, who is far more open to negotiating than his hardline predecessor, Quim Torra.

Even so, the independence movement is unlikely to give up on its desire for an amnesty and to hold a referendum on self-determination this time with Madrid's approval. Both options have been firmly ruled out by Sanchez's government.

"Catalonia without Spain would not be European, nor prosperous, nor plural," Sanchez said yesterday. "Spain without Catalonia simply would not be Spain, just as Catalonia without the rest of Spain would not be Catalonia." — AFP

Singaporean woman jailed 30 years for torturing, killing maid

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean woman who starved, assaulted and ultimately killed her domestic worker was sentenced to 30 years in prison yesterday, with the judge describing the case as "among the worst types of culpable homicide". The affluent city-state is home to about 250,000 domestic workers who mostly come from poorer Asian countries, and stories of mistreatment are common.

But the abuse inflicted on Myanmar national Piang Ngaith Don, 24, was particularly awful and captured on CCTV installed in the family's home. The domestic worker was stamped on, strangled, choked, battered with brooms and burnt with an iron, according to court documents. The domestic worker died in July 2016, after her employer, Gaiyathiri Murugayan, repeatedly assaulted her over several hours.

Gaiyathiri, 41, pleaded guilty in February to 28 charges including culpable homicide. Another 87 charges were taken into account in sentencing. She appeared in court yesterday wearing glasses and a black mask, and sat silently with her eyes closed and head bowed as the judge read his decision. After hearing an additional plea of mitigation submitted by

Gaiyathiri in a bid to avoid the life sentence sought by the prosecution, Justice See Kee Oon sentenced her to 30 years in prison starting from the date of her arrest in 2016. See cited the "abject cruelty of the accused's appalling conduct" in his sentencing, which he added must signal "societal outrage and abhorrence" at the crime. But taking into account the defendant's obsessive compulsive disorder and the depression she developed around the time she gave birth, See said he did not think that life imprisonment was "fair and appropriate".

The prosecution had sought a reduced charge of culpable homicide rather than murder — punishable with the death penalty in Singapore — after taking into account her mental health. The maid was employed by Gaiyathiri and her husband, a police officer, in 2015 to help take care of their four-year-old daughter and one-year-old son.

But Gaiyathiri physically assaulted the victim almost daily, often several times a day, with her 61-year-old mother sometimes joining in, according to court documents. The domestic worker, who had been employed by the family for over a year at the time of her death, was only allowed to sleep for five hours a night, and was forced to shower and relieve herself with the door open. Provided very little food, she lost about 38 percent of her body weight during her employment, and only weighed 24 kilograms (53 pounds) at the time of her death. Gaiyathiri's lawyer Joseph Chen had asked for a sentence of eight to nine years, arguing that a "combination of stresses" had turned the struggling mother into an abuser. — AFP



YANGON: Protesters hold a banner that reads, "Sanchaung main strike Gen Z" as they make the three-finger salute during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. — AFP

Suu Kyi back in junta court on sedition charges

NAYPYIDAW: Deposed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi appeared in a junta court again yesterday on trial for sedition and for flouting COVID-19 restrictions during an election her ousted party won in a landslide. A mass uprising in Myanmar against a February military putsch has been met with a brutal crackdown that has killed more than 870 civilians, according to a local monitoring group.

Under house arrest and invisible bar a handful of court appearances, Suu Kyi has been hit with an eclectic raft of charges, including accepting illegal payments of gold and violating a colonial-era secrecy law. Yesterday, the court heard testimony she violated COVID-19 restrictions during elections last year that her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won

in a landslide, her lawyer The Maung Maung told reporters.

The special court in Naypyidaw also heard testimony on separate sedition charges. Journalists were barred from the proceedings. Su Kyi appeared in good health, The Maung Maung said. Brief meetings with her legal team have been the only channel to the outside world for Suu Kyi who remains widely popular in Myanmar since she was detained in February.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in the November poll and has threatened to dissolve the NLD. Suu Kyi's lawyers have said they expect the trial to wrap up by July 26. The other charges against her include claims that she accepted illegal payments of gold and violated a colonial-era secrecy law.

The hearing came as soldiers battled an anti-junta militia with small arms and grenades in the city of Mandalay yesterday, with at least four protesters and two security personnel killed, authorities said. Fighting has flared across Myanmar since the February coup as people form "defence forces" to battle a brutal military crackdown on dissent, but previous clashes have largely been restricted to rural areas. — AFP



SINGAPORE: File photo provided by The Straits Times taken on August 3, 2016 and received by AFP yesterday shows police officers escorting Gaiyathiri Murugayan (C) to her home for investigations into a case involving the starvation and death of her domestic worker in Singapore. — AFP

International

New Yorkers vote in Democratic primary for post-pandemic mayor

Winner of the vote is unlikely to be known for several weeks

NEW YORK: New York City residents cast ballots in a Democratic primary yesterday that will select the candidate almost certain to take over as mayor tasked with shaping the post-pandemic future of America's largest metropolis. Registered Democrats will choose from a diverse group of 13 candidates for the job often called "the second-most difficult" in the United States after that of president.

Voters head to polls with COVID-19 still casting a long shadow over the Big Apple, the epicenter of America's early outbreak, and which has lost 33,000 people to the virus. But the city is now coming back to life—virtually all coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, and 66 percent of adults have received at least one vaccine dose.

A crowded field of progressives and moderates face off in a race made all the more uncertain by a new ranked-choice system of voting that has clouded all predictions. The winner of the vote is unlikely to be known for several weeks. Since New York is a Democratic stronghold, though, they are virtually guaranteed to win November's mayoral election against whomever Republicans choose as their candidate.

"There's a lot at stake here," said Columbia University politics expert Lincoln Mitchell, citing issues ranging from the post-pandemic recovery to climate change. Unemployment, homelessness,

shootings and homicides have all surged since the coronavirus struck. Thousands of businesses have closed, tens of thousands of wealthier residents have fled and many employees are still working from home.

Five choices

The pandemic, demonstrations sparked by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and attacks on Asian Americans have also highlighted the extent of racial inequalities in the city of 8.5 million. New York's first new mayor in eight years will have to contend with projected budget gaps of several billion dollars each in the next few years.

They will succeed unpopular far-left Democrat Bill de Blasio, who has been mayor since January 2014. Eric Adams, the moderate, Black ex-police-man and president of the borough of Brooklyn, has been leading in most recent polls, putting crime at the forefront of his campaign.

Tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang, who ran for president, is also a moderate and was frontrunner for much of the campaign. Kathryn Garcia, another moderate, and Maya Wiley, a Black lawyer specializing in civil rights who was endorsed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are bidding to become New York's first woman mayor. The new voting system, which asks voters to rank up to five candidates in order of



NEW YORK: New York City mayoral candidate Eric Adams exits his polling location after voting during Primary Election Day at P.S. 81 yesterday in New York City. —AFP

preference, makes predictions almost impossible.

Unless a candidate immediately garners more than 50 percent of the votes—an unlikely scenario—the candidate who came in last is eliminated, and the ballots cast for them are redistributed to voters' second choice, and so on until a candidate finally

exceeds the 50 percent threshold.

This may not produce a clear winner until mid-July. More than 191,000 people have already cast ballots during the nine-day early voting period that ended Sunday. Tens of thousands of absentee ballots will also need to be counted. —AFP

Cowardly attack kill 14 innocent victims: Mexico president

CIUDAD VICTORIA: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday condemned a shooting spree that he said had killed 14 innocent victims over the weekend in the crime-plagued border state of Tamaulipas. "Everything indicates that it wasn't a confrontation" between rival gangs, Lopez Obrador told reporters following the massacre on Saturday by gunmen traveling in vehicles in the city of Reynosa.

"It was a cowardly attack that took the lives of innocent people," he said, adding that he had instructed the attorney general's office to lead the investigation into the murders. The attorney general's office confirmed in a statement later Monday that it had taken over the case and said that an individual had been arrested during the attacks.

The individual, who was captured with "a long weapon of exclusive use of the Army," will appear before a judge, the statement said. Five alleged perpetrators were killed by the security forces, authorities said. The victims included 19-year-old Fernando Ruiz Flores, who was working in the street to install drainage with his stepfather, his sister Olga Ruiz said.

"From what my stepfather Jesus says, they killed my brother in cold blood," she told AFP by telephone. The gunmen arrived in pick-up trucks and "just like that, they took out their weapons and started shooting," she said.

Reynosa, on the border with the United States, has been shaken by escalating turf wars between rival drug cartels in recent years. It is one of the most violent regions in a country where more than 300,000 people have been murdered since the government deployed the military in the war on drugs in 2006. Most of the killings are linked to fighting between gangs, according to the authorities. —AFP

4 troops killed in Ukraine's war-torn east

KIEV: Russia-backed separatists have accused the Ukrainian army of killing four and injuring five of their troops as a result of shelling in the war-torn east of the country. The new casualties were reported after Russian leader Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden held their first summit meeting in Geneva last week.

The years-long conflict in eastern Ukraine—including an escalation of tensions since the start of 2021 — was on the agenda, but no agreements had been announced. Officials in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic said Monday evening that three of their troops were killed and one wounded in a mortar fire in the village of Lozove close to the separatists' de facto capital Donetsk.

The separatist mouthpiece, DAN news agency, said one more fighter was killed and four were wounded hours later, when an ambulance car was hit from a grenade launcher while evacuating the injured. In a statement, top Donetsk official Denys Pushilin said the separatists would take "retaliatory steps" following the incident.

Kiev has been battling Russian-backed separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions since 2014, following Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula. The war has claimed more than 13,000 lives. After a lull last year, fighting escalated at the start of 2021 and in April Russia amassed 100,000 troops near the Ukrainian border and in Crimea, prompting warnings from NATO. —AFP

Frenchman on trial for killing partner's family

NANTES: A Frenchman who admitted to killing his partner's parents and two of their children, allegedly in a dispute over a family gold horde, went on trial yesterday. Hubert Caouissin faces life in jail but the defence wants to convince the court he was not psychologically fit at the time of the killing and thus escape the maximum penalty for premeditated murder. The so-called "Trodec affair" made headlines in February 2017, when Pascal Trodec and his wife Brigitte, both 49, were reported missing along with 20-year-old son Sebastian and 18-year-old daughter Charlotte.

Police found traces of blood at their home outside Nantes in western France, and relatives immediately pointed fingers at Caouissin, who was in a relationship with Pascal and Brigitte's daughter Lydia. They were taken into custody for questioning but released, and suspicions turned to

Sebastian, whose car was missing.

But a few weeks later a jogger found Charlotte's banking and social security cards in a pair of trousers, and Sebastian's car was located in nearby Saint-Nazaire the next day. Caouissin and Lydia Trodec were again arrested and charged with murder after his DNA traces were found at the victims' home and in Sebastian's car.

Caouissin, who worked at the Brest naval yards, confessed to killing the family with a crowbar and then working "like a maniac" to cut up the bodies, burning some of the parts in an oven and scattering others around his farm in Brittany.

Gold horde?

He claimed that Lydia had been deprived her share of a trove of gold coins and ingots purportedly found by Pascal Trodec's father had found while renovating an apartment in Brittany. Pascal allegedly took the stash for himself and began flaunting a flashy new lifestyle, sending postcards from his family's holiday travels. Pascal's mother said in a press interview. But a lawyer for the Trodec family, Cecile de Oliveira, dismissed the account as a "fable" and "a claim



NANTES: Lawyers of main accused Hubert Caouissin, Thierry Fillion (L) and Patrick Larvor are seen at Nantes' courthouse, western France, yesterday, during a break of the trial of so-called "Trodec case". —AFP

he's trying to exploit to the max."

Investigating magistrates had also expressed doubts about a supposed gold stash, and Caouissin's lawyer Thierry Fillion has acknowledged that "at the time of the events, he was not living in reality." Two expert panels determined a "paranoid personality" and "chronic delusions," and Caouissin, who appeared in court in a navy blue polo shirt, will be cross-

examined beginning today.

He faces a life sentence without parole if convicted of murder, while Lydia Trodec faces three years in prison and a 45,000 euro fine on charges of helping to hide the corpses and tampering with a crime scene. "He's just a normal guy who had no intention of becoming... a murderer," his lawyer said. A verdict is expected for July 8 or 9. —AFP

In Mali women's prison, inmates face a long wait

BAMAKO: Laughing children, yoga classes, job-training sessions: Mali's only women's prison is a far cry from the squalid, overcrowded jails found elsewhere in the war-torn Sahel. Once past the rusty doors and ochre-coloured walls of the Bolle penitentiary in the capital Bamako, there is little indication that this is a prison at all.

Women pound millet as their children play around a slide in the nursery. A long-time prisoner who gave her name as Mariam told AFP that there is a strong sense of solidarity among the 144 inmates. "We stick together," said Mariam, adding that new arrivals are welcomed. Bolle is one of the only women's prisons in Africa's Sahel region, which has been plagued by a brutal jihadist conflict since 2012.

Standards are far higher than other in prisons in Mali, where male criminals and jihadists are crammed into dark and filthy cells. "We don't consider Bolle a detention centre," said Babou Togora, an official from Mali's prison service. The penitentiary is similar to others in the Sahel in some respects, however.

Delays

Most of the inmates are yet to stand trial because of lengthy delays in the former French colony's under-resourced legal system. A Nigerian woman in the courtyard, who declined to be named, said she has been imprisoned for 19 months, awaiting trial. "That's how it is here," she said, in heavily accented French, with a smile.

About two thirds of the women are in a similar position, according to prison authorities. Nineteen of the inmates hail from surrounding Sahel countries, with some coming from as far away as

Tornado kills one, injures others near Montreal

MONTREAL: A tornado that tore into a town near Montreal killed one person and injured two others, Canadian authorities said. After an "extreme weather phenomenon in Mascouche," around 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Montreal,



BAMAKO: A detainee tries on a dress in the sewing atelier of the Bolle re-education and rehabilitation detention centre for women in Bamako on May 21, 2021. Bolle is one of the only female prisons in the semi-arid Sahel, a poor African region which has been plagued by a brutal jihadist conflict since 2012. —AFP

Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Founded in 1999, Bolle has its origins in the turmoil triggered by Mali's 1991 coup d'etat.

During the putsch, male prisoners reportedly preyed upon female inmates. The central prison in Bamako was one facility where men "took advantage of the revolution to abuse the female inmates," according to Inspector Gabriel Flazan Sidibe, Bolle's deputy warden. Other prisons in Mali still contain women's sections. But Sidibe said "we are doing everything to group them" at Bolle.

'To err is human'

Bolle's inmates are detained on charges of everything from infanticide to assault and involvement in the drug trade. One prisoner, who was released a few months ago, had been detained on terrorism charges. Many inmates are put behind

"we unfortunately can confirm the death of one man," the deputy premier and minister of public safety of Quebec Genevieve Guilbault wrote on Twitter on Monday.

"Our thoughts are with his family and loved ones. Our government teams are mobilized on the ground to help victims and support municipal authorities," she added. Two people were injured and around 50 buildings were damaged, Mascouche spokeswoman Marisa Curcio told AFP early yesterday.

A video shared on social media showed a fast-moving, wide column of swirling dust approaching a road, whilst another captured an almost apoca-

lyptic scene as cars stopped on a highway with the tornado directly ahead. Footage from a residential area showed dark skies, with trees straining in strong winds and debris whirling in the air as the twister drew nearer.

"The severe thunderstorm watch remains in effect until further notice so we ask you to be cautious and avoid travel," the mayor of the town of 50,000 residents, Guillaume Tremblay, posted on Facebook. Environment Canada had warned Monday evening that a "severe thunderstorm watch" was in effect and the storm could produce strong winds, hail and tornadoes. —AFP

Binta, a woman in her twenties convicted of fraud two years ago, is locked up with her young son Nabil. She said the boy's father comes to the prison several times a week to take him for car rides around the city, but that Nabil cries when he has to return to jail.

Moussa Bagayoko, from a local NGO that aids the imprisoned children, said that "they didn't do anything to end up here — it's their mothers who did something wrong." He added that the foreign funding on which Bolle relies is becoming increasingly rare.

Mariam, who is serving a 20-year sentence for killing one of her husband's other wives, said that "we need a presidential pardon". "To err is human," she added. "No one is perfect in life." —AFP

lyptic scene as cars stopped on a highway with the tornado directly ahead. Footage from a residential area showed dark skies, with trees straining in strong winds and debris whirling in the air as the twister drew nearer.

International

Hong Kong leader says press must not 'subvert' government

New security law has criminalized a host of political views



HONG KONG: Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaks during her weekly press conference at the government headquarters in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

HONG KONG: Media outlets in Hong Kong must not "subvert" the government, the city's leader said yesterday, rejecting US criticism of recent action against a pro-democracy newspaper under a powerful new security law. Hong Kong has long hosted a vibrant international and local media scene but press freedoms have slipped dramatically in recent years.

Last week, authorities froze the assets of Hong Kong's largest pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily, using the national security law Beijing imposed on the city in 2020. Two of the paper's executives were charged with "collusion", a national security crime, over what police said were articles calling for international sanctions against China and Hong Kong's leaders.

"It's not a problem to criticize the Hong Kong government, but if there is an intent to organize activities to incite the subversion of the government then that is, of course, a different thing," Chief Executive Carrie Lam said when asked about Apple Daily and press freedom in the city.

"Media friends should have the ability to distinguish between them," she added during her weekly press conference. Unlike mainland China, where the press is

overwhelmingly state-owned and heavily censored, semi-autonomous Hong Kong has free speech protections baked into its mini-constitution.

But an ongoing campaign by China to root out dissent after huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019 has deepened unease over the business hub's future. The new security law has criminalized a host of political views and the action against Apple Daily has left the media wondering what opinions or reporting could trigger an investigation.

Resignations and closures

Echoing other officials, Lam said the prosecution of Apple Daily was not an attack on "normal journalistic work" and that the paper was trying to undermine China's national security with its coverage. When asked by a reporter what the government's definition of normal journalistic work was, she replied: "I think you are in a better position to answer that question."

The United States was among multiple Western nations that criticized the police operation against Apple Daily, saying it undermined press freedoms as well as Hong Kong's reputation as a safe place to do

business. Lam rejected those suggestions. "Don't try to accuse the Hong Kong authorities of using the national security law as a tool to suppress the media, or to stifle the freedom of expression," she said. "All those accusations made by the US government, I'm afraid, are wrong."

Apple Daily has long been a thorn in Beijing's side, with unapologetic support for the city's pro-democracy movement and caustic criticism of China's authoritarian leaders. The arrests and asset freeze last week have crippled its ability to continue operations. Board members of the paper's parent group Next Digital have asked Hong Kong's Security Bureau to unfreeze some of its assets so it can pay staff.

If that does not happen, the paper said it will cease publishing with a final print date to be announced on Friday. Resignations have already begun and some of the paper's sections have gone silent in the last 24 hours. On Monday night, the anchor of an Apple Daily online evening show announced it was her final broadcast. The paper's financial news desk and its English edition also announced they would cease publication. — AFP

Grave concerns raised about China at UN rights council

NEW YORK: More than 40 countries led by Canada voiced grave concerns at the UN Human Rights Council yesterday about China's actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet-triggering a fierce backlash from Beijing. The widely anticipated joint statement had been in the pipeline for several days and was delivered on day two of the 47th session of the council in Geneva.

"We are gravely concerned about the human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," Canada's ambassador Leslie Norton said. The statement was backed by Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain and the United States, among others.

Beijing must allow UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet and other independent observers "immediate, meaningful and unfettered access" to Xinjiang, and end the "arbitrary detention" of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, it said. "Credible reports indicate that over a million people have been arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang and that there is widespread surveillance disproportionately targeting Uyghurs and members of other minorities and restrictions on fundamental freedoms and Uyghur culture," it said. The statement cited reports of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilisation, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children from their parents.

The number of signatories is an increase from the 22 ambassadors who wrote to Bachelet in 2019 condemning China's treatment of the Uyghurs. China denies mistreating the Uyghurs—once a clear majority in their ancestral homeland until waves of state-backed migration of ethnic Han Chinese—and insists it is simply running vocational training centres designed to counter extremism.

Bachelet told the council on Monday that she hoped at last to visit Xinjiang this year and be given "meaningful access". In a move that was bound to further enrage Beijing, which decries what it says is the interference by foreign powers in its internal affairs, the statement added the group's concerns over the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. The move came after US President Joe Biden's first foreign trip, in which he garnered G7 and NATO unity in pushing back against Beijing, with Washington identifying China as the pre-eminent global challenge.

Agnes Callamard, head of the human rights group Amnesty International, said the statement "sends a crucial message to China's authorities that they are not above international scrutiny." Countries "must now move beyond handwringing and take real action", she said.

Aware that the statement was coming, China responded before it was delivered. Beijing's representative read out a statement on behalf of a group of countries "deeply concerned about serious human rights violations against the indigenous people in Canada". Belarus, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Syria and Venezuela were among the other signatories, according to the United Nations. — AFP

S Lanka's #MeToo movement starts from its newsrooms

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's government ordered an investigation yesterday into sexual harassment in the media after a string of #MeToo allegations from female newsroom staff. The flood of claims began after journalist Sarah Kellapatha tweeted last week that a male colleague had threatened to rape her while working at an unnamed newspaper from 2010-17.

"It was almost impossible for any female to wear a dress to work, without having to endure salacious remarks from male colleagues about their legs and bodies in general, or they'd utter a loud 'sexy' whenever they felt like it," Kellapatha said.

She said she had "blocked (the rape threat) from my mind for years, as a coping mechanism, until one day, I remembered it and broke down in tears". Other women journalists have since taken to Twitter in a campaign reminiscent of the #MeToo movement that began in the United States in 2017 when sex offender Harvey Weinstein's crimes emerged.

One was journalist Sahla Ilham who said she was sexually abused by a "famous editor" at a now-defunct paper who had pressured her family to keep quiet. "I have been silent for too long, now I have to add what

happened to me as well," Ilham said.

US journalist Jordana Narin, who had been an intern at a Sri Lankan newspaper, said a senior colleague had subjected her to a campaign of sexual harassment before the chief editor forced him to resign. "(He) was the best journalist Sri Lanka had ever seen. I couldn't wait to learn from him... Instead I spent the next two months being favoured by him, then yelled at by him, embarrassed by him, and groped repeatedly by him," Narin said.

Another, Kavindya Thennakoon, hailed women for speaking up about "predatory men", describing how a senior colleague tried to kiss her against her will. Dharisha Bastians, former editor of the Sunday Observer, called the allegations "disturbing, agonising, and all too familiar."

"Solidarity with women journalists for the courage to speak out about what has been happening in #SriLanka newsrooms for too long," she said. "Past time for accountability, critical reflection & change to make editorials safer. #MeToo," she said on Twitter.

Government spokesman and Minister of Mass Media, Keheliya Rambukwella said he had asked the Government Information Department to investigate and ensure women journalists could work in a safe environment. "We will take the sternest action possible," Rambukwella told reporters in Colombo. "We will not hesitate to take appropriate action."

He said he had already ordered the Director-General of the Information Department to launch an investigation into the allegations made on social media. — AFP

News in brief

Myanmar troops kill 4

YANGON: Myanmar soldiers battled an anti-junta civilian militia with small arms and grenades in the country's second city yesterday, with four protesters killed and several members of the security forces injured, authorities said. Fighting has flared across Myanmar since the February coup as people form "defence forces" to battle a brutal military crackdown on dissent, but clashes have largely been restricted to rural areas. Acting on a tip-off, security forces raided a house in Mandalay's Chan Mya Tharsi township yesterday morning, the junta's information team said in a statement, and were met with small arms fire and grenades. — AFP

Kabul airport talks

ANKARA: US defence officials will visit Turkey tomorrow to discuss the future of Kabul's airport, a Turkish defence ministry source said, after Ankara promised to secure the strategic site. Turkey committed to providing security for the airport after US forces complete their troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in September, in a move hailed as a mark of improving ties between Ankara and Washington. The US defence delegation will hold talks with Turkish officials, the source said yesterday, without providing details. The visit will come 10 days after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and US counterpart Joe Biden met in Brussels on the sidelines of a NATO summit. — AFP

Moscow battered by heat wave

MOSCOW: Moscow has been hit by a historic heat wave this week, with temperatures reaching a 120-year record due to the effects of climate change, Russia's weather service said yesterday. On Monday the temperature in the Russian capital hit 34.7 degrees Celsius (94.5 degrees Fahrenheit), according to Roshydromet, matching the record for a June day hit in 1901. The weather service, which has kept records since 1881, is forecasting temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) on Thursday and Friday. "The increase in temperatures recorded in Moscow for these days is unprecedented in 120 years," Roshydromet meteorologist Marina Makarova told. — AFP

Counting under way in 'historic' Ethiopia election

DOUET: Vote-counting was under way yesterday following elections in Ethiopia that went ahead without polling in the war-torn northern Tigray region and other restive parts of Africa's second-most populous nation. Some 38 million were registered to vote but many must wait until September, with elections postponed or cancelled in one-fifth of national constituencies because of war, insecurity and logistical problems.

Nevertheless, ballots were being tallied in the vast nation of 110 million, where results are not expected for several days. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said Monday was "a historic day for Ethiopia". "All sections of society have gone out to cast their voice in our nation's first free and fair election," the 44-year-old leader posted on Twitter, alongside images of crowds waiting to vote.

"Pictures are a thousand words and they show the earnestness, commitment to peace and the democratic process, by our people." Abiy faced voters for the first time since coming to power in 2018, and his ruling party is expected to secure a comfortable majority. Voting stretched into the evening, with the nearly 50,000 polling stations staying open an extra three hours to accommodate long queues after delays in delivering ballot papers.

The national electoral board said the vote was mostly peaceful but reported "high levels of intimidation" of opposition party members in some regions. A coalition of civil society election monitors reported 118 incidents, including 93 they had verified. In Bahir Dar, the capital of the northwestern Amhara region neighbouring Tigray, daily life had resumed yesterday, with businesses open and traffic returning to the streets.

Counting had finished in a number of polling stations in Bahir Dar, with results displayed clearly for the public.



ADDIS ABABA: Voters look at polling station tallies posted outside a polling station in Addis Ababa, yesterday. Ethiopia voted in an election billed as the most democratic yet in Africa's second-most populous country, but taking place as famine blights its war-torn Tigray region. — AFP

Court cuts Burundi activist's 32-year jail term to one

BUJUMBURA: A human rights activist in Burundi who was jailed for 32 years after protesting against the late president has had his sentence reduced to just one year, a rights group and judicial source said. The verdict was announced just as Burundi's EU ambassador said the bloc was considering lifting sanctions imposed on the country after a deadly political crisis in 2015.

Germain Rukuki was one of thousands arrested for protesting against then president Pierre Nkurunziza's controversial bid for a third term, and was given one of the heaviest sentences ever handed down to a rights activist in Burundi.

But his ruling was quashed last year by Burundi's Supreme Court after Evariste Ndayishimiye took office following the sudden death of Nkurunziza. Arnel

Niyongere, head of the human rights group Acat Burundi, told AFP on Monday that Rukuki had been re-tried at an appeals court in March.

"It delivered its verdict by reducing his sentence to one year in prison and a fine of 20 euros (\$24) for 'rebellion'," he said. A judicial source, who declined to be named, confirmed the information. "We're waiting for Rukuki, who has already served his sentence, to be released immediately," Niyongere said.

The verdict was announced just moments after Ndayishimiye met with Burundi's EU ambassador Claude Buchu on Monday. Buchu told reporters the bloc was considering lifting sanctions because of "positive developments initiated by the president in terms of good governance, rule of law and human rights."

Ndayishimiye's election last year has raised hopes for a more open political environment after many years of repression and violence in the troubled East African nation. But in an open letter on Monday, 12 international NGOs raised concerns that the EU and some of its member states "seem willing to turn a blind eye on the lack of meaningful progress on the human rights situation." — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2021

Turkmenistan capital tops HK as world's costliest: Survey

'World's happiest country' Finland seeks migrants

ASHGABAT: Turkmenistan's capital Ashgabat has overtaken Hong Kong as the world's most expensive city for foreign workers, a survey showed yesterday.

Beirut jumped to third place in the 2021 Mercer survey from 45th a year earlier owing to a "severe and extensive economic depression" resulting from multiple crises, including the country's financial trouble, Covid-19 and a deadly blast in the Lebanese port. Ashgabat rose from second in the previous survey to the first spot due to "high local inflation", Mercer France global mobility practice leader Jean-Philippe Sarra told AFP.

Turkmenistan is almost wholly dependent on natural gas exports and has struggled to recover from the global energy price slump in 2014 that battered the local manat currency and plunged many citizens into poverty. Despite the long-running economic crisis, authorities broke ground on a major expansion of Ashgabat in May, with autocrat leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov pledging to turn it into "one of the most prosperous cities in the world".

While Hong Kong, with its notoriously expensive housing, dropped to second place, Tokyo also fell one spot to fourth. Zurich dropped to fifth and is among three Swiss cities in the top 10 along with Geneva (8) and Bern (10).

Two other Chinese cities are among the most expensive in the world for expatriates: Shanghai climbed one spot to number six while Beijing rose to ninth. Singapore took seventh place.

US cities fell in this year's ranking mostly because of currency fluctuations, and despite rising inflation, according to Mercer. New York dropped eight spots but was the most expensive in the country at number 14.

The world's least expensive city for foreign employees is Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek at 209, according to the survey.

Happiest country

Repeatedly dubbed the happiest



Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan in Central Asia, is the most expensive city to live in this year, according to Mercer's Cost of Living Survey

nation on the planet with world-beating living standards, Finland should be deluged by people wanting to relocate, but in fact it faces an acute workforce shortage. "It's now widely acknowledged that we need a spectacular number of people to come to the country," recruiter Saku Tihverainen from agency Talented Solutions said. Workers are needed "to help cover the cost of the greying generation", the recruiter explained.

While many Western countries are battling weak population growth, few are feeling the effects as sharply as Finland. With 39.2 over-65s per 100 working-age people, it is second only to Japan in the extent of its ageing population, according to the UN, which forecasts that by 2030 the "old age dependency ratio" will rise to 47.5. The government has warned that the nation of 5.5 million needs to practically double immigration levels to 20,000-30,000 a year to maintain public services and plug a looming pensions deficit. Finland might seem like an attractive destination on paper, scoring high in international comparisons for quality of life, freedom and gender equality, with

little corruption, crime and pollution.

But anti-immigrant sentiment and a reluctance to employ outsiders are also widespread in Western Europe's most homogenous society, and the opposition far-right Finns Party regularly draws substantial support during elections.

Tipping point

After years of inertia, businesses and government "are now at the tipping point and are recognizing the problem" posed by a greying population, said Charles Mathies, a research fellow at the Academy of Finland. Mathies is one of the experts consulted by the government's "Talent Boost" program, now in its fourth year, which aims to make the country more attractive internationally, in part through local recruitment schemes.

Those targeted include health workers from Spain, metalworkers from Slovakia, and IT and maritime experts from Russia, India and Southeast Asia.

But previous such efforts have petered out. In 2013, five of the eight Spanish nurses recruited to the western town of Vaasa left after a few months, citing



Helsinki, the capital of Finland

Finland's exorbitant prices, cold weather and notoriously complex language. Finland has nonetheless seen net immigration for much of the last decade, with around 15,000 more people arriving than leaving in 2019.

But many of those quitting the country are higher-educated people, official statistics show. Faced with the OECD's largest skilled worker shortage, some Finnish startups are creating a joint careers site to better bag overseas talent. "As you can imagine, this is a slow burner," Shaun Rudden from food delivery firm Wolt said in an email, adding that "We try to make the relocation process as painless as possible."

Systemic problem

Startups "have told me that they can get anyone in the world to come and work for them in Helsinki, as long as he or she is single," the capital's mayor, Jan Vapaavuori, said to AFP.

But "their spouses still have huge problems getting a decent job." Many foreigners complain of a widespread reluctance to recognize overseas experi-

ence or qualifications, as well as prejudice against non-Finnish applicants. Ahmed (who requested his name be changed for professional reasons) is a 42-year-old Brit with many years' experience in building digital products for multinational, household-name companies.

Yet six months of networking and applying for jobs in Helsinki, where he was trying to move for family reasons, proved fruitless. "One recruiter even refused to shake my hand, that was a standout moment," he told AFP.

"There was never a shortage of jobs going, just a shortage of mindset," said Ahmed, who during his search in Finland received offers from major companies in Norway, Qatar, the UK and Germany, and eventually began commuting weekly from Helsinki to Düsseldorf.

Recruiter Saku Tihverainen said shortages are pushing more companies to loosen their insistence on only employing native Finnish workers. "And yet, a lot of the Finnish companies and organisations are very adamant about using Finnish, and very fluent Finnish at that," he said. —AFP

Bitcoin drops under \$30,000

LONDON: Bitcoin fell underneath \$30,000 yesterday for the first time in five months, hit by concerns over China's ongoing crackdown on the world's most popular cryptocurrency. At about 1230 GMT, bitcoin sank as low as \$29,334, a level last seen in January, with analysts citing Chinese efforts to curb trading and mining operations.

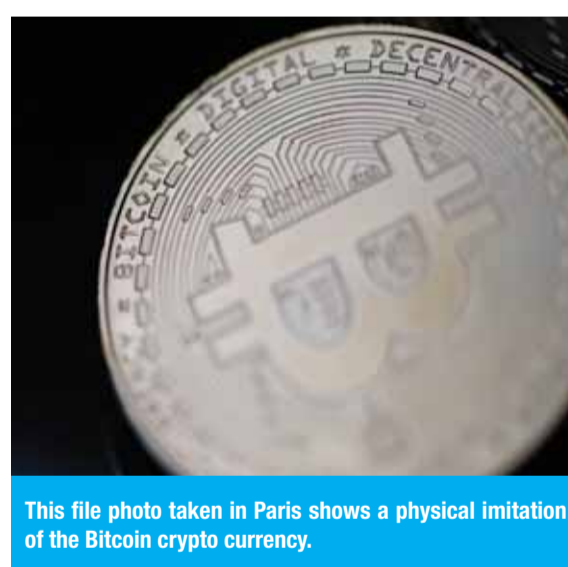
The unit later stood at \$29,590, down 9.25 percent in value. "Concerns mount over China's ongoing clampdown and fears that widespread acceptance of bitcoin and other digital currencies will be delayed because of concerns about their environmental impact," said analyst Fawad Razaqada at trading site ThinkMarkets. Bitcoin also faces a green backlash

because mining often uses electricity produced from fossil fuels, he noted.

China has broadened a crackdown on its massive cryptocurrency mining industry with a ban on mines in the key southwestern province.

Chinese mines power nearly 80 percent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies despite a domestic trading ban since 2017, but in recent months several provinces have ordered mines to close as Beijing turns a sharp eye to the industry. Authorities in the province of Sichuan ordered the closure of 26 mines last week, according to a notice widely circulated on Chinese social media and confirmed by a former bitcoin miner.

Sichuan, a mountainous region in southwest China, is home to a large number of cryptocurrency mines — huge data centers which require a colossal amount of energy. Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are mined by solving puzzles using powerful computers that consume enormous amounts of electricity — much of which is usually produced by coal plants. — AFP



This file photo taken in Paris shows a physical imitation of the Bitcoin crypto currency.

EU launches antitrust probe against Google over online ads

BRUSSELS: The EU launched a wide-ranging antitrust probe against Google yesterday over concerns that it is using its technology to keep out rivals in the lucrative online advertising market.

The case opens yet another front by the European Commission against the search engine giant, which has already received eight billion euros (\$9 billion) in fines for its anti-competitive practices. The investigation will "assess whether Google has violated EU competition rules by favoring its own online display advertising technology services", a statement from the EU executive said.

The probe narrows in on an important component of Google's profit-making machine: more than 80 percent of the giant's revenue in 2020 came from advertising, or \$147 billion. "We are concerned that Google has made it harder for rival online advertising services to compete" in display ad technology, said EU competition chief Margrethe Vestager. At issue is Google's largely unnoticed, but highly dominant technologies that serve as an intermediary or broker between advertisers and publishers online.

Google owned technologies include services such as AdX, Doubleclick or AdSense that power much of the EU's display advertising market for web pages and apps, which the commission estimated to be worth about 20 billion euros in 2019. The business

was at the heart of a recent case in France-brought by News Corp, French daily Le Figaro and Belgium's Groupe Rossel—that saw Google fined 220 million euros (\$267 million).

It is also central to blockbuster cases in the US where state prosecutors accuse the company of rigging the ad-tech market and snuffing out rivals.

As in the other cases, the EU will try to determine whether Google gave preferential treatment to its own ad inventory technologies AdX and Doubleclick, but will also look at other aspects of the ad-tech business. Crucially, the probe will also look into Google's announced plans to prohibit the placement of third party "cookies" on its Chrome browser, a move that has angered some publishers and advertisers. Critics fear that the project-known as the "Privacy Sandbox"—will only increase Google's dominance since the giant holds mountains of data on consumer behavior that will be denied to others.

The probe will also look into ads on Youtube, Google's video platform, and whether advertisers there are forced to channel their business through Google's ad technology. A Google spokesperson said the company "will continue to engage constructively with the European Commission to answer their questions and demonstrate the benefits of our products to European businesses and consumers." The in-depth look into Google's online ad-tech is not unexpected as it follows a broader inquest launched in 2019. The investigation comes as the EU is preparing new laws to better oversee tech giants by giving them special "gatekeeper" rules that would more tightly regulate how they can operate, but those will not be implemented for years. — AFP

UK borrowing sinks in May on easing lockdown

LONDON: UK government borrowing sank in May as the easing COVID lockdown boosted the economy and tax revenues, but remains elevated on costly pandemic support, official data showed yesterday.

Public sector net borrowing, the state's preferred measure of the deficit, slid to £24.3 billion (\$33.7 billion, 28.3 billion euros) last month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. However, that was still the second highest May level since records began after £43.8 billion in May 2020 at the height of the pandemic.

The ONS also revised down borrowing for the financial year to the end of March to £299.2 billion — but this remained the highest level since World War II. The public purse has been plagued by emergency COVID measures, in particular a furlough scheme which has paid the bulk of private sector wages for millions of workers across the UK during the crisis.

However, the economy is regaining its footing thanks to a phased reopening. Bars and restaurants restarted outdoor dining in April and indoor services in May.

That came after non-essential retailers reopened their doors in April. "May's public finances figures suggest the strong economic recovery is starting to feed through into lower government borrowing," said Capital Economics analyst Thomas Pugh. —AFP

Fed chief offers more assurances on economy

WASHINGTON: The US economy remains on a positive trajectory even as it contends with higher inflation, according to congressional testimony released Monday by the head of the Federal Reserve.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, in prepared remarks ahead of a House hearing Tuesday, reiterated that the central bank will continue its supportive stance to ensure that the "sustained improvement" since the depths of COVID-19 pandemic is extended. The labor market has improved, but progress has been "uneven," said Powell, in remarks consistent with his response to questions at a news conference last week.

"We at the Fed will do everything we can to support the economy for as long as it takes to complete the recovery," Powell said in the testimony. Powell acknowledged that inflation has "increased notably in recent months" due in part to higher oil prices and the hit from supply chain disruptions.

But he restated that higher prices are due to "transitory" factors, adding that "inflation is expected to drop back toward our longer-run goal."

Powell's appearance before the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis comes less than a week after the US central bank moved up its timeframe for lifting interest rates to 2023. The Fed's monetary policy committee said it will not begin to withdraw the stimulus measures implemented at the start of the pandemic until progress is made on reducing unemployment and keeping inflation above their two percent goal.

At last week's news conference, Powell warned that the "recovery is incomplete" and improvement has been "uneven," with employment in hard-hit sectors well below pre-pandemic levels. —AFP

Business

World economy surpassed its pre-pandemic peak: Data firm

Global recovery accelerates thanks to vaccination and end of virus-related restrictions

WASHINGTON: The global economy has surpassed its pre-pandemic peak, data survey firm IHS Markit said Monday, as the recovery accelerates thanks to vaccination and the end of pandemic-related restrictions. IHS Markit, which conducts monthly surveys of businesses that are highly valued by the market as a leading indicator of economic activity, forecasts that with 6.0 percent growth this year the global economy will post its biggest expansion in nearly 50 years.

"The global economy has reached an important milestone in the second quarter of 2021, surpassing the pre-pandemic real GDP peak attained in the fourth quarter of 2019," the firm said in a statement.

The second quarter ends at the end of June. The Asia-Pacific region recovered from the pandemic recession at the end of last year thanks to the resilience of China's economy.

IHS Markit's economists estimated that US real GDP hit a new peak in May. The firm estimates that Africa and the Middle East will return to pre-pandemic GDP in the third quarter that begins in July. Europe and Latin America will complete their recoveries in the final quarter of this year.

"As recovery from the COVID-19 recession is completed, the global economy is moving into the sweet spot of the current expansion," said IHS Markit's executive director for global economics, Sara Johnson.

"World real GDP growth is picking up from an annual rate of 1.5 percent quarter on quarter in the first quarter to rates of 6.0-7.0 percent over the remainder of 2021," she added.

IHS Markit's 2021 global GDP growth forecast is in line with that made by the International Monetary Fund in April. However, the IMF emphasized the unevenness of the recovery and said it expects many nations will not recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2022 or 2023.

Both the OECD and World Bank have also warned about the recovery leaving some nations behind, especially given the lack of vaccines in many countries. IHS Markit acknowledged that COVID-19 flare-ups remain a risk to economic recovery in places where vaccination has proceeded slowly.

It also pointed to constraints on the recovery posed disruptions in the supply of certain goods, including



semiconductors used in electronics goods and cars. Its survey "found that supplier delivery times lengthened in May to the greatest extent in survey history."

Supply disruptions are one reason behind a jump in prices. IHS Markit said it expects to consumer price inflation to rise to 3.3 percent this year before dropping to 2.7 percent next year as supply conditions improve. Investors have

become increasingly worried that the rapid recovery inflation may prompt central banks to remove stimulus support and raise interest rates faster than they have stated previously. "In the United States, the eurozone, and other advanced economies where inflation expectations are well-anchored, monetary tightening can be delayed in the short term but not indefinitely," said IHS Markit's Johnson. — AFP

Australia to challenge UNESCO downgrade of Great Barrier Reef

SYDNEY: Australia said yesterday it will strongly oppose a UNESCO plan to list the Great Barrier Reef as "in danger" over deterioration caused by climate change.

The UN body released a draft report on Monday recommending the reef's World Heritage status be downgraded because of its dramatic coral decline, after years of public threats to do so.

Environmental campaigners said the decision highlighted Australia's lack of action to curb the carbon emissions which contribute to global warming. Environment Minister Sussan Ley said Australia would challenge the move, accusing UN officials of backflipping on their assurances ahead of the World Heritage Committee's 44th session in China next month, where the recommendation will be formally considered. "Politics have subverted a proper process and for the World Heritage Committee to not even fore-shadow this listing is, I think, appalling," she told reporters in Canberra.

The UN body did not consider the billions of dollars spent attempting to protect the world's largest coral reef, she added.

The committee's draft report did

commend Australia's efforts to improve reef quality and its financial commitment. But it noted "with the utmost concern and regret... that the long-term outlook for the ecosystem of the property has further deteriorated from poor to very poor," referring to Australia's move to downgrade the reef's health status after back-to-back mass bleaching events in 2016 and 2017.

Ley said she had spoken to UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay overnight Monday to express "very clearly our strong disappointment, even bewilderment". Placement on the UN body's in-danger list is not considered a sanction. According to UNESCO, some nations have their sites added to gain international attention and help to save them but it is seen as a dishonor by others.

'Shame'

Australia has resisted calls to commit to a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison saying the country hoped to reach carbon neutral "as soon as possible" without harming its commodity-dependent economy. The downgrade recommendation for the Great Barrier Reef



An aerial view of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of the Whitsunday Islands, along the central coast of Queensland. — AFP

prompted environmental groups to take aim at the Australian government's reluctance to take stronger climate action. The Climate Council said it brought "shame on the federal government, which is standing by as the reef declines rather than fighting to protect it".

"The recommendation from UNESCO is clear and unequivocal that the Australian government is not doing enough to protect our greatest natural asset, especially on climate change," said WWF head of oceans Richard Leck. Aside from its inestimable natural, scientific and environmental value, the 2,300-kilometre-long (1,400-mile-long) reef was worth an estimated US\$4.8 billion a year in tourism revenue for the Australian economy before the coronavirus pandemic.

In December, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said climate change had pushed the reef into critical condition. Australian Marine Conservation Society environmental consultant Imogen Zethoven said the UNESCO report made clear that limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels was critical for the Great Barrier Reef. — AFP

YouTube may be liable for copyright breaches: EU court

BRUSSELS: The EU's top court yesterday said online platforms like YouTube can in some circumstances be held responsible for copyrighted material illegally uploaded by users.

The preliminary ruling will likely be welcomed by German music producer Frank Peterson who has been locked in a long-running legal battle with YouTube over unauthorised uploads featuring British artist Sarah Brightman. The Court of Justice of the European Union found that generally speaking, YouTube and the likes are not responsible for users posting protected content without permission.

"Operators of online platforms do not, in principle, themselves make a communication to the public of copyright-protected content illegally posted online by users of those platforms," judges said.

But the situation changes once operators of such sites are made aware of copyright breaches and fail to act "expeditiously" to remove or block the content and ensure the infringements do not recur, they said. Operators can also be liable for copyright violations if they refrain from putting in place technological tools to "credibly and effectively" fight against illegal uploads.

The EU judgement was triggered by two cases currently before Germany's Federal Court of Justice, whose judges in 2018 asked the Luxembourg-based court for guidance.

The first involves a lawsuit by Hamburg music producer Peterson against YouTube and its parent company Google for various songs and performances by soprano Sarah Brightman that were illegally posted in 2008. YouTube removed some but not all of the content, to which Peterson holds the rights, and the case has been snaking its way



PARIS: The logo of the US YouTube application on the screen of a tablet. The EU's top court yesterday said online platforms like YouTube can in some circumstances be held responsible for copyrighted material illegally uploaded by users. — AFP

through German courts for years.

Peterson is seeking damages from YouTube, arguing that the site is liable for the copyright infringements and has earned advertising revenue from hosting the videos.

The second case involves a claim by Dutch publisher Elsevier against file-hosting website Cyando, for copyrighted works uploaded by users without permission. It is now up to the German court to decide how to interpret the EU judgement in these two cases. The impact of the EU ruling beyond these two cases will be limited however because they cover events that took place before the European Union reformed its copyright laws in 2019. The new regulations place a heavier burden on online content-sharing services to protect copyright.

In a response to yesterday's ruling, YouTube said it "supports rights holders being paid their fair share".

"That's why we've invested in state of the art copyright tools which have created an entirely new revenue stream for the industry," it said in a statement. "In the past 12 months alone we have paid \$4 billion (3.4 billion euros) to the music industry, over 30 percent of which comes from monetized user-generated content." — AFP

US, European stocks steady, bitcoin retreats

NEW YORK: US and European stocks held steady yesterday ahead of key testimony from US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell that could shed light on plans to hike interest rates and pare back stimulus measures.

Meanwhile, bitcoin fell under the \$30,000 price level for the first time in five months in the face of a crackdown by Chinese authorities on cryptocurrency miners. And oil prices hit new two-year highs above \$75 on demand optimism.

Investors are waiting for testimony from Powell in which he is widely expected to shed more light on the monetary policy outlook. "The markets remain focused on inflation and the implications on the timing of when the Fed may begin to dial back its monthly asset purchases," said analysts at Charles Schwab brokerage.

Markets were sent into turmoil last week after the Fed brought forward its forecasts for hiking interest rates as it looks to prevent overheating in the US economy. In prepared remarks ahead of a House hearing yesterday, Powell pledged again the bank's continued support to ensure the "sustained improvement" in the economy is extended.

Investors contemplated the US central bank's latest projections for hiking interest rates in light of the country's blockbuster economic recovery and sharp spike in inflation. The Fed's "dot plot" forecast last week indicated liftoff in 2023 — a year earlier than first flagged — with some policymakers eyeing the end of 2022, while discussions on winding down, or "tapering" its vast bond-buying program are likely in the next few months. Schwab analysts said investors will be looking to Powell's discussion with lawmakers for "some color on what the tapering process may look like." — AFP

Opinion Editorial

Funding hydrogen's rapid evolution?

By Badar Chaudhry

How do investors feel about a hydrogen market that is expected to be valued at \$300 billion by 2027, according to Global Market Insights? In short, mixed - but sentiment is certainly strengthening.

As the world recovers from what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called the worst economic depression in nearly 100 years, and big oil faces soaring environmental pressure, the allure of hydrogen has intensified. This is especially true for green and blue hydrogen, which both support climate goals to varying degrees, and the appetite is only expected to continue. Hydrogen use overall is expected to climb seven-fold by 2050, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).



Badar Chaudhry

Bullish push

Against this backdrop, there is understandable interest among investors, both private and public. This is especially true in regions, like the Middle East, which want to capture a first-mover advantage in becoming a hydrogen hub. Examples this year in the Middle East alone include the start of the Abu Dhabi Hydrogen Alliance by ADNOC, Mubadala, and ADQ; the alliance aims to spur the Emirate's role as a leader in green and blue hydrogen. In Saudi Arabia, Air Products, ACWA Power, and NEOM, signed a \$5bn deal for a world-scale green hydrogen-based ammonia production facility powered by renewable energy. And Oman's OQ, with its partners, will produce 25GW of renewable solar and wind energy to generate millions of tons of green hydrogen per year.

Sitting on the fence

What is equally understandable, however, is other investors' hesitation. For some, it is a case of too much change too soon. Many are just getting to grips with renewable markets amid the energy transition and adding another market to the list is a step too far, especially amid a pandemic. This certainly applies to many investors who have long specialised outside energy markets or in big oil for decades and now find they face a steep, green learning curve.

Plus, the cost of building a hydrogen economy tends to be higher than other sources of low-carbon energy, such as solar and wind. And hydrogen is generally a riskier bet right now than other greener energy markets, with both green and blue hydrogen largely untested as sizeable and scalable projects. And of course, these in turn often demand bigger, longer-term financial commitments too.

Security in track records?

The narrative of hesitation among investors that hovers over hydrogen is not a new one. It echoes the initial to-and-fro that surrounded the development of the renewables market - an even harder sell in what was then a world of \$100/bbl of oil. Eventually, after more than a decade of stagnated moves, the push by climate activists and pioneering investors has truly paid off. Solar power prices have fallen by more than 90% over the last decade, according to Bloomberg Green. This marks a dramatic turnaround for a niche market that only the most adventurous of investors deemed worthy.

And, as seen in renewables, the greater investors' support, the greater the scale and efficiency of the market, and the more competitive the cost. Today, renewable power is increasingly cheaper than any new electricity capacity based on fossil fuels. Not even the most optimistic climate activist or the most reluctant investor could have imagined this new dynamic ten years ago. There is no reason the same push will not pay off for the development of green and blue hydrogen markets.

Guiding beacons

Equally, proactive steps must be made to help investors quickly feel more comfortable, notably when it comes to regulatory goalposts. For example, Europe's comprehensive Hydrogen Strategy defines clear goals within relatively short timelines, giving investors more clarity and tangibility. As the world grapples with the economic and social impact of the pandemic, such markers from governments and regulatory bodies are invaluable.

Plus, policy schemes, such as contract for differences (CfDs) or regulated asset-based models, can be used to help provide greater certainty to investors across various parts of the hydrogen supply chain, Deloitte said. The same applies to stimulating innovation and research to help integrate different energy systems and to provide a system-wide view of hydrogen's role.

Clearly, there is still a long way to go. For one, the cost of producing hydrogen from renewables will need to fall by more than 50 percent to \$2-\$2.5/kg by 2030 to make hydrogen a viable alternative to conventional fuels, detailed S&P Global Ratings. This is achievable with solar or wind production costs of \$20-\$30/MWh and a 30-50 percent cut in the cost of electrolyzers. This ambitious target is certainly doable, but not without more investors taking a seat at the hydrogen table. The sooner those seats are filled, the sooner costs will fall and a market that many are calling the oil of the 21st century can truly flourish.

Note: Chaudhry is senior vice president, sector head - energy at Mashreq Bank

Brazil Congress green-lights Eletrobras privatization

A victory for Bolsonaro's privatization agenda

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's Congress passed a bill paving the way to privatize the biggest electric utility in Latin America, state-controlled company Eletrobras, a victory for far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's privatization agenda. The bill, which sets up a share issue that will dilute the government's stake in the company, passed the lower house by a vote of 258 to 136. Lawmakers must still vote on a series of amendments before sending it to Bolsonaro.

It had already passed in the Senate Thursday. The legislation will reduce the government's stake in Eletrobras from 51.82 to 45 percent, via a share issue penciled in for early next year that the state estimates will raise 60 billion reais (around \$12 billion). Of that amount, 25 billion reais would go to the company's coffers and the rest to government programs, experts estimate. The government will retain a "golden share" in the company, giving it the final say on strategic matters.

Created in 1962, Eletrobras is one of Brazil's "big four" state-controlled firms, along with oil company Petrobras and banks Banco do Brasil and Caixa Economica Federal. It supplies around one-third of the electricity consumed in Brazil, Latin America's biggest economy. But critics complain it is inefficient, bloated and needs more cash to invest in modernizing its assets.

"Without privatization, Brazil's energy system is going to end up in chaos," Bolsonaro had warned.

His ultra-liberal economy minister, Paulo Guedes, has said the privatization will save Brazilians up to 7.4 percent on electricity. However, during a sometimes fiery debate in the lower house, opponents

warned the plan would in fact increase consumers' electricity bills and threaten Brazil's control over its energy supply.

Opponents have also criticized amendments that would increase the amount of electricity produced by heavily polluting thermoelectric plants. It is a sensitive subject for a government already facing international criticism over the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, a vital resource in the race to curb climate change.

Shares jump

Eletrobras shares surged more than five percent Friday after the Senate passed the bill, and gained another 2.21 percent Monday. They have risen more than 40 percent on the year on expectations the company would be going private. Before that happens, Eletrobras must first transfer ownership of the Itaipu hydroelectric dam and Angra dos Reis nuclear power plants to the state, since Brazil's constitution designates them as strategic assets.

The privatization comes just as Brazil faces an electricity crisis caused by the worst drought in almost a century in the central-west and southeast, key regions for the hydroelectric dams that supply the majority of the country's electricity. The drought has led the National Water and Sanitation Agency (ANA) to declare a "critical shortage of water resources," effective until November, for the Parana river basin, the heart of Brazil's hydroelectric capacity.

The national electricity regulator has imposed an additional tax of 6.24 reais (\$1.25) per 100 kilowatt hours on consumers for June because of the elec-



The facade of Brazil's state-run oil company Petrobras headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies votes a bill that would authorize the privatization of Eletrobras Monday. —AFP

tricity crunch—its highest extraordinary surcharge ever. Rising electricity prices are fueling a surge in inflation, which came in at 8.1 percent last month, well above the central bank's target range of 2.25 to 5.25 percent.

Brazilians are fearing a return to painful electricity rationing instituted in 2001.

The legislation is a win for Bolsonaro, who has

struggled to implement the privatization plans he campaigned on in 2018. Politics and the pandemic have delayed the mass spinoff of state firms he and Guedes had promised. But those plans have started to pick up again, with lucrative concessions in recent months for the operating rights to Rio de Janeiro water company Cedae and a raft of airports, port terminals and a key railroad. —AFP

KFH's digital services offer latest payment solutions

KUWAIT: Acting Group Deputy General Manager Cards at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Talal Al-Arbeed said that KFH is keen on meeting customer's needs and aspirations by providing best products and services in a way that strengthens Kuwait's economy and development plans.



Talal Al-Arbeed

He added that KFH keeps providing products, services and promotional campaigns that encourage using a variety of KFH banking cards. To this effect, KFH launched Oasis Club credit card products in collaboration with Kuwait Airways. These include KFH MasterCard and World Elite Oasis Credit Card for Private Banking customers, and KFH MasterCard and KFH Oasis Card credit cards exclusively for Alruwad and Altamayoz customers as well as those who meet the conditions.

Al-Arbeed stressed on moving forward with providing latest payment solutions locally and globally, adding that KFH launched the Digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin. Compatible with IOS and Android apps, this service also includes Visa and Mastercard cards and POS which is compatible with NFC technology. This comes as a culmination of KFH's initiatives that aim to provide the highest level of services and new values for the market and beneficiaries in various economic conditions.

He mentioned that: "in order to encourage local market use of cards and boost traders' sales, KFH launched several promotional card campaigns, most recently "Ready for summer" in collaboration with Visa Cards. This campaign provides KFH customers with unique banking experience and several chances to win Fliteboard or Sea Ray boats when using KFH Visa Cards."

Kuwait's digital economy is our shared responsibility

By Rico Lin

Digitization in Kuwait has accelerated remarkably over the past few years. The country has been at the forefront of innovation and adoption of ICT technologies, enabling its economy to become more competitive. By leveraging advanced technologies, organizations in Kuwait are increasingly more responsive and predictive to the citizens' digital needs.

In line with Vision 2035, Kuwait's ambitious strategic roadmap for a post-oil economy, the country has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to the development of its digital economy to further empower economic diversification. By implementing wide-ranging digital transformation across its key industries through the integration of technologies like cloud computing, Big Data, 5G, IoT (Internet of Things), and AI (Artificial Intelligence), Kuwait is improving the competitiveness of its businesses in line with global standards. The country has leveraged digitalization to enhance its position in the Middle East as a regional financial, commercial, and cultural hub.

Emirates Skywards launches Tier Miles offer with ABK

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), in partnership with Emirates Skywards, the award-winning loyalty program of Emirates and flydubai, has launched an industry-first offer allowing ABK Emirates Visa cardholders to earn Tier Miles, in addition to Skywards Miles, on spends until 31 December 2021. The offer is available for ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit cardholders and ABK Emirates Visa Gold Prepaid Travel cardholders on eligible spends across all categories, including: online shopping, utility bill payments, groceries, educational fees, and much more.

This exclusive offer allows ABK Emirates Visa cardholders to earn 1 Tier Mile for every 4 Skywards Miles earned. Cardholders need to simply

National digital transformation was further accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic as public and private entities, educators, etc., turned to advanced technologies to stay connected, sustain their businesses and drive growth. The rapid advancement of technology is leading us to a new era of intelligence that will unlock new economic opportunities. Huawei estimates that by 2025, 97 percent of all large enterprises will use AI, and AI will power 77 percent of all cloud applications.

However, as the country continues to build its digital economy and implements new and innovative technologies, it also faces sophisticated and complex cybersecurity challenges. In fact, many business leaders cite cybersecurity as one of the most significant challenges they encounter as they embark on their digital transformation journey. With recent remote working initiatives rolled out extensively across the public and private sectors, the need for proper security measures and deliverables has only further amplified.

The Kuwaiti government acknowledges these challenges and had made digital security a priority. With the Kuwait National Cyber Security Strategy in place, the government envisages working together



Rico Lin

use their card to fast-track to the next Tier quicker - unlocking elite tier benefits such as bonus Miles while flying Emirates and flydubai, Emirates lounge access, priority check-in, complimentary seat selection, additional baggage allowance, and many more privileges.

Members can earn even more Skywards Miles when spending with the ABK Emirates Visa Cards across a variety of hotel, car rental, retail and lifestyle partners such as skywardsmiles.com, Emirates Skywards Hotels and more. Skywards Miles can be redeemed for an extensive range of rewards, including flight tickets with Emirates and partner airlines, upgrades, hotel stays and money-can't-buy experiences.

The loyalty program was one of the first of its kind globally, to offer members an extension on Tier status until 2022 and has extended validity of any Skywards Miles due to expire since April 2020 until 31 December 2021. Emirates Skywards has over 27 million members globally and provides members with valuable offerings and unmatched rewards. ABK's strategic partnership with Emirates

er with the private sector to develop a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy and create a safe and strong cyber infrastructure.

Cybersecurity and privacy protection are the foundation of our shared future. As technology becomes ever more ubiquitous, Kuwait's enterprises and government entities need to take an enhanced approach to mitigate cyber threats. Hence, an all-industry, full-society approach to collaboration is essential to strengthening systematic cybersecurity governance for everyone.

With a goal of encouraging industry-wide cooperation towards common security standards and verification mechanisms, Huawei recently launched the Huawei Global Cyber Security and Privacy Protection Transparency Center. At the heart of the centers' design is a concerted effort to address cybersecurity across various technology platforms. It is designed to facilitate communication, open collaboration, knowledge sharing and trust-building between the government, partners, and customers to build an era of unparalleled global cyber resilience.

As a business, we thrive on openness, collaboration, and shared success to address real needs and create real value. As Kuwait continues to build its digital economy, we need to ensure we are laying the foundation for a robust cybersecurity infrastructure through open public-private collaborations. After all, Kuwait's digital economy is our shared responsibility.

Note: Rico Lin is CEO, Huawei Kuwait



Skywards reaffirms the Bank's commitment to enhancing its customers' banking experience by providing exclusive personalized offerings, rewarding value propositions and shopping experiences with added-value.

Congo, China agree debt restructuring

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday agreed in principle to a restructuring of Congo's vast debts, an issue which was blocking negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, a minister said. Congolese Finance Minister Rigobert Roger Andely said President Denis Sassou Nguesso had "raised the problem" in a telephone call with Xi, "proposing a second restructuring" of the debt. "President Xi Jinping approved" the request, Andely told reporters.

"This restructuring is to allow the country to have a few more resources to deal with its own internal needs and to lift this obstacle to good relations with the IMF," Andely said experts from both the Chinese and Congolese sides would be charged with fixing the conditions of the new agreement. China had already restructured Brazzaville's debts in 2019 to allow the Central African oil producer to unlock an IMF loan of \$449 million. Since then, Congo's debts have risen to some 110 percent of GDP — a level deemed "unsustainable" by the IMF, Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso told parliament Monday. —AFP

Tinder adds new features as love seekers stay virtual

SAN FRANCISCO: Dating app Tinder yesterday added more ways for people to get to know each other from afar before meeting in a world changed by the pandemic. "People want to take more time to get to know somebody virtually before deciding that they want to match and meet offline," chief executive Jim Lanzone said while briefing AFP on the app updates.

The smartphone app for finding love, whether it be fleeting or life-long, unveiled new features including playful "Hot Takes": multiple-choice questions to see whether users' "flirty banter" is in sync.

Tinder is also providing an option to add video clips to user profiles to provide glimpses of people's lives, interests or adventures. As the pandemic accelerated trends of remote work, learning and socializing, it also gave momentum to cultivating new relationships more deeply

online before committing to connecting in the real world, according to Lanzone.

"Twenty-somethings today want something a little bit different, which is more substantive and more virtual-first," Lanzone said. "That trend, generationally, was pre-Covid. Then Covid just really cemented it across all generations."

The "Gen Z" demographic, referring to people in their early twenties, accounts for more than half of Tinder's users, according to the company.

"The ultimate need for people is to meet offline, and to have a real relationship in the real world," Lanzone said. "How they get to that point and the tools they use to get to that point have shifted."

Tinder makes its money from subscriptions that provide more features than the basic free access to the platform. The app is available in some 190 countries. The dating app is known for its trademark system of swiping right on a screen to signal interest in someone's profile and left to pass on them.

Tinder, owned by Match Group, boasts being the top dating app in the US and elsewhere.

Despite getting a reputation as an app for casual sexual encounters after its launch in



2012, Tinder has become the top dating site for marriage, according to a recent report on wedding website The Knot. "Not only are we one of the leading sources of relationships and marriages, we are also one of the leading reasons why there has been an increase in interracial relationships," Lanzone said. "That comes from getting outside of your social circle and opening up these possibilities." —AFP

Lifestyle | Fashion

Milan Men's Fashion Week wrapped up yesterday, following Giorgio Armani's first live runway show since coronavirus that opened the door to a return to normalcy for the industry. "Back where it all began" was the name chosen by Armani, 86, for his latest men's collection shown late Monday before a live audience.



It was a fitting description for the industry hoping to see the end of a punishing period of dismal sales and audience-free shows caused by the global coronavirus pandemic. Combining fluidity of movement with extreme elegance, the Men's Spring/Summer 2022 collection was presented in the courtyard of Armani's Milan headquarters near the city's fashion district, with models-both with and without masks-making their way down a runway in front of the well-manicured lawn.

Bold floral graphics in black and white adorned light knitwear or pants, blouson jackets were relaxed and roomy, while Bermuda shorts-some in tribal indigo blue, grey and red prints-were paired with vests or jackets. "My new collection reflects my state of mind after the pandemic. It is very classic in a sense, but also informal and relaxed," Armani told journalists after the show. "And of course, I wanted the collection to bear my trademark, a certain effortless elegance," he added.



RELAXED GIORGIO ARMANI WRAPS UP MILAN MEN'S FASHION WEEK

The Italian luxury house was the first to announce the return of live audiences in May this year, after being the first to renounce them in February 2020, at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis.

Fashion experts have described the live shows as an important sign of recovery for the Italian fashion industry, where revenue fell by 26 percent last year. Pre-pandemic sales levels are only expected to be regained in 2022.

Prada at the beach
Armani dusted off the traditional suit,

but looks felt relaxed and unencumbered-unsurprisingly, following the constraints on movement felt over the past year. The deconstructed, unlined jacket, the brand's emblem since its founding in 1975, was also in the spotlight, sometimes sporty, sometimes featuring more dandy flair. Armani was the last of three fashion heavyweights to hold live shows in Milan, after Dolce & Gabbana's show Saturday at the Metropoli, a former movie theatre that has become the brand's headquarters, and Etro's show Sunday, which transformed old railroad tracks into a catwalk.



The majority of brands, however, including Prada and Ermenegildo Zegna, offered filmed presentations for fashion week.

Prada's, presented Sunday, saw models emerge from a claustrophobic red tun-

nel to emerge on a sunny beach in Sardinia. "Immersing yourself in nature, going to the beach, is synonymous with freedom. It is utopian. It's really a primal need, but it's also an intellectual need," said designer Miuccia Prada.

Together with co-creative director Raf Simons, Prada brought back short-shorts for men, loose or close to the body, often rolled up, and combined with blazers, colorful tank tops, leather jackets or classic waxed raincoats. — AFP



MILAN: Models present creations for Giorgio Armani's Men's Spring Summer 2022 fashion collection during the Milan Fashion Week. — AFP photos



MILAN: Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani (center) poses with models following the presentation of Emporio Armani's men's spring/summer 2020 fashion collection.



MILAN: Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani (right) and his historical collaborator Leo Dell'Orco acknowledge applause following the presentation of Giorgio Armani's Men's Spring Summer 2022 fashion collection during the Milan Fashion Week.

Paris fashion houses make tentative return to catwalk

France's fashion houses are tip-toeing back on to the catwalk this week after more than a year of crisis that has upended the industry and left many wondering if the traditional calendar will ever return.

With pandemic restrictions easing, many in the Paris fashion world hope men's fashion week, will mark the start of a return to normalcy. Still, only six of 72 brands that make up the official Paris fashion calendar will present live shows this week, though they include two big names in the form of Dior and Hermes.

It follows a similarly tentative return in Milan, where only three of 47 — Dolce and Gabbana, Etro, and Armani-offered live events for this week's Spring/Summer 2022 show. New York won't be back in physical form until September, while the newly gender-neutral London Fashion Week has also remained fully digital up to now.

In Paris, many big names are staying within the confines of computer screens, including Louis Vuitton, Dries Van Noten, Loewe and Tom Browne. Pascal Morand, president of France's Federation of Haute Couture and Fashion, told AFP there was "a very strong appetite to return to the physical."

But he was not ashamed to deploy the word "phygital" for the current state of affairs. "It won't be one thing or the other. It will be both, and it's a sign of innovation," he insisted.

'Obsolete'
Nonetheless, many big designers seem



to think that the days of the rigid spring/summer calendar are over in the four main fashion capitals. Berluti, for example, has said it will run its own timetable from now on, and presented its men's collection in Shanghai in April, reflecting the increasing importance of Asian buyers. Another major absentee from Paris this week is Hedi Slimane, head designer at Celine.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, he had declared the fashion calendar "obsolete", telling Le Monde: "These days, creating a sense of event and rarity seems more essential than an obligatory exercise

at a fixed time." His last two men's and women's collections, in February and April, were presented via poetic short films set in castles.

Morand played down these absences, saying there had always been names missing from the roster and that the institution of the fashion calendar was not under threat. "C'est la vie," he said of the missing brands, and highlighted the return of Courreges and Balenciaga to next month's haute couture week, as well as the desire of many young brands to join the line-ups.

'Made on Instagram'
Brazilian designer Francisco Terra, from young label Neith Nyer, is not among those keen to return to the traditional way of doing things. He has pulled out of the official event in Paris this week to organize his own catwalk show tomorrow followed by a pop-up store that will run for four days "to directly test clients' reactions".

"I don't think we really need the calendar," he told AFP. "The image of a young brand is made on Instagram, with celebrities and above all outside of the seasons." But some of the most gilded names are preparing for a return. Chanel's head of fashion Bruno Pavlovsky called last month

for "a return to a bit of discipline", and the storied fashion house will be back on the catwalk for next month's haute couture week in Paris.

So will Dior, which already returned to live shows last week with its mid-season show in Athens.

'A responsibility'
This is about more than just returning to champagne receptions. Fashion houses have "a responsibility to their suppliers," Dior women's designer Maria Grazia Chiuri told AFP, especially after the terrible economic blow many have been dealt by the pandemic. Smaller fashion houses, however, with markets focused on dressing the ultra-rich from outside Europe, say it is still too early to return to the catwalk.

"We aren't going to do a live show knowing that the opinion-makers from China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United States can't come," said French designer Julien Fournie.

"At the moment, there isn't the right ambiance," added his contemporary Stephane Rolland. "I don't miss the live shows because I know they will eventually return." — AFP



PARIS: France's fashion houses are tip-toeing back on to the catwalk this week



Ballooning spiders leave Australian region covered in webs

An arachnid invasion left swathes of Australia's Gippsland region covered in webs as the spiders sought higher ground to escape flooding. A sea of silk engulfed an area in Australia's south-east hit by flooding earlier in June, caused by sheet web spiders that normally live on the ground looking for shelter according to ecologist Dieter Hochuli. "When we get these types of very heavy rains and flooding, these animals who spend their lives cryptically on the ground can't live there anymore, and do exactly what we try to do-they move to the higher ground," Hochuli, from the University of Sydney, told local broadcaster Channel 7.

Spiders are known to release webs to create makeshift parachutes and ride the wind to change location, a phenomenon known as ballooning. At least two people died when the storms hit Victoria earlier this month, with authorities finding both bodies in separate partially submerged vehicles. Thousands of people in the hardest-hit areas were also left without power for weeks, with some homes yet to be reconnected to electricity. Australians living in regional and rural areas have struck by a series of disasters in recent years.

A prolonged drought was followed by months of devastating bushfires in late 2019 to early 2020 before welcome rains brought damaging floods in several regions. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (foreground, left) and Head of French multinational corporation LVMH Bernard Arnault (foreground, right) applaud during a ceremony marking Paris' iconic department store 'La Samaritaine' reopening after 16 years of closure, Monday.



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron and Head of French multinational corporation LVMH Bernard Arnault (right) attend a ceremony marking Paris' iconic department store 'La Samaritaine' reopening after 16 years of closure Monday.



PARIS: This general view shows a store inside within the 'La Samaritaine' department store in Paris. — AFP photos

Grande dame of Paris emporiums reopens after 16-year facelift

Parisians will once again be able to stroll the gilded aisles of the Samaritaine department store starting Wednesday, after 16 years of painstaking work to restore the Art Deco and Art Nouveau landmark to its former glory. Luxury conglomerate LVMH shut the 151-year-old emporium overlooking the Seine river in 2005, when safety inspectors discovered widespread risks including antiquated wiring.

Once a retail anchor for the historic core of the capital between the Louvre and Notre-Dame, by then it was losing money and customers no longer interested in its pitch: "You can find everything at La Samaritaine." "It was dying," the store's chief Jean-Jacques Guiony told journalists on Monday, when President Emmanuel Macron visited for the restored site's inauguration. Macron, touring alongside Bernard Arnault, LVMH's chief and one of the world's richest people, called it "a stunning French cultural treasure."

For the revamp, LVMH shrank the floor-space in the flagship building, a classified monument, by a third and took its offerings firmly upmarket-applying the formula at Le Bon Marche, LVMH's other temple of luxe in Paris. Gone is the hunting gear, housewares, tools and toys, despite the historic signs still on the facade. Instead, think designer fashion labels, an entire floor dedicated to swank watches, two concept stores and a vast beauty and cosmetics department in the basement.

Restaurants, bars and food offerings like Street Caviar by Prunier are spread throughout, while a Cheval Blanc hotel opening in September will offer Seine views and a restaurant with Michelin-starred Arnaud Donckele at the helm.

Rooms start at 1,150 euros (nearly \$1,400) a night, and the two-storey rooftop penthouse will have its own pool, spa and cinema and a private elevator direct to the street. Price upon request. "You'll no longer find everything at La Samaritaine,

but you will find all of Paris at La Samaritaine," said Eleonore de Boysson, Europe director at LVMH's DFS retailing arm.

'Complicated'

Opened in 1870 by Ernest Cognac, a travelling salesman, and expanded with his wife Louise Jay, the four Samaritaine stores became a fixture of Paris culminating in a 1930s golden age.

He named it La Samaritaine after a pump on the nearby Pont Neuf bridge that depicted the Gospel story of the woman of Samaria offering water to Jesus. It's the bridge Matt Damon's character spies on from the Samaritaine's roof in the 2002 thriller "The Bourne Identity"—though the huge lettered sign he stands behind won't be replaced. The work was originally expected to last three to six years, but delays emerged as LVMH sought out hundreds of artisans across France capable of restoring mosaics and other artworks.

They also discovered that an elegant, golden-hued peacock fresco, an Art Nouveau masterpiece extending along the walls under the glass atrium roof, had been covered in white paint in the 1990s.

A court battle with residential and heritage groups angry over a new undulating glass facade on one section, designed by the Pritzker-winning Japanese firm Sanaa, also went to France's top court before LVMH was allowed to proceed. Press reports say the budget climbed to 750 million euros, an amount executives have not officially confirmed but quietly concede is in the ballpark. "Renovating is much more complicated to do than just rebuild," Guiony said.

'It's a rebirth'

As part of the project negotiated with City Hall, much of the store was converted into office space as well as 97 low-income housing units and a child daycare center. One building will be rented to Japanese

fast-fashion specialist Uniqlo and other shops. LVMH also carved out an esplanade complete with fountains where cars used to whiz past, making it easier to marvel at the ornate facades and hopefully drawing more Parisians as well as tourists.

The store and hotel alone will create 2,100 jobs, further revitalizing a district that has seen a spate of recent projects, including the new Bourse de Commerce art museum by Arnault's luxury rival Francois Pinault. But only a handful of the nearly 750 employees abruptly dismissed 16 years ago have been rehired—dozens were interviewed but LVMH requires sales staff to speak at least three languages.

"It's a rebirth," said Mourad Khatib, 53, a manager once again on site. "I first started when I was 21, having just arrived from Kabylia" in Algeria. "In those days it was more working-class," he said. "Today it's very high-end." — AFP



ATHENS: Adriana Theohari and women participating in a project on gender equality edit short films and podcasts in the office of an organization. — AFP photos



ATHENS: Fateme Jafari, from Afghanistan (right) and Greek Donna Petropoulou listen to Greek Olympic sailing champion Sofia Bekatorou, who started a belated #MeToo awakening in Greece, during an interview.

Refugee women promote gender equality through film

In the offices of a small Athens charity offering vocational courses, a group of women are busy editing short films and podcasts under the supervision of an American director.

have gradually seen more exposure in recent years after decades of silence.

Sexual harassment is also more widely reported since January when Greek Olympic sailing champion Sofia Bekatorou accused a federation official of sex abuse, spurring a belated #MeToo awakening in Greece. "The voices of women are hardly audible in the media, especially those of young refugees," says GlobalGirl Media's coordinator in Greece, American director Amie Williams. "The idea is to allow them to train in journalism professions, to be heard but also to rebuild themselves by

propriate behavior," Sude said. The two sisters had previously lived in the notorious Moria camp on the island of Lesbos.

After it burned down in September, they wandered the streets of Athens and Thessaloniki for days before going to the Elaionas camp in the capital. "As women, dangers are everywhere, in the camps this feeling is even more present. You are afraid to go to the toilet, to walk alone at night," says Elie. One of the short films deals with a space on Lesbos set aside for women for showering and relaxation. Another asks female interviewees to identify what constitutes feminism.

'I was lucky to find a good man'

At 14, Ataa Brimo was married off by her parents to a man nine years her senior, and had her first child a year later. Now 30, stranded in Greece and separated from her family in Germany for the past two years, this Syrian refugee has made a short film on underage marriages that resonates with thousands of women with similar experiences—and many more with even worse tales to tell.

Titled "Little Mother", Brimo's film has been selected for the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival that opens tomorrow. "I was lucky to come across a good man. But clearly I was not prepared to become a mother so young, I did not understand what happened to me," she told AFP. According to Greek police, the number of domestic violence incidents quadrupled in Greece between 2010 and 2018, from 1,148 to 4,254.

But many cases still go unreported. Last week, a 32-year-old Greek confessed to killing his 20-year-old British wife as she slept next to their baby daughter, and tried to disguise the crime as a deadly burglary.

"These young women did not necessarily know until now what gender equality was," said Williams. "But even without knowing it, they are very strong and feminists... they have left their families, patriarchal societies, travelled, faced many hardships alone." —AFP

'Speak up'

"You shouldn't be afraid to speak up or be ashamed to denounce a man's inap-



ATHENS: (Left to right) Fateme, Sude and Ataa work on the editing of an interview while participating in a project on gender equality in the office of an organization.

Refugees from Congo, Syria, Afghanistan and Iran, the women are being trained by GlobalGirl Media, an organization teaching digital media and journalism skills to young women from under-served communities. But although some have come to Greece from halfway across the world, they have found that the problems they face are not so different after all.

"I was not aware of the difficulties experienced by Greek women. During the interviews, we discussed at length the need to support each other as women whatever our origins, because we are going through similar experiences", notes Fateme Jafari, a 25-year-old Afghan. Violence against women and femicide in Greece

George Clooney to launch LA high school film program

Hollywood star George Clooney will launch an academy for Los Angeles high school students as part of a new scheme to teach movie industry skills to children from disadvantaged and minority communities, it was announced Monday. Clooney and fellow A-listers Don Cheadle and Eva Longoria will spearhead the program initially available next fall for 14 to 16-year-olds at a downtown high school, with plans to expand to other ages and pilot locations throughout Los Angeles' public school system.

"Our aim is to better reflect the diversity of our country. That means starting early," Clooney said in a statement announcing the Royal School of Film and Television Production. "It means creating high school programs that teach young people about cameras, and editing and visual effects and sound and all the career opportunities that this industry has to offer."



US actor George Clooney arrives to the premiere of "Catch-22" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, in this file photo. — AFP

The program follows similar star-backed collaborations with Los Angeles public schools, including an inner-city educational facility announced last week by music producers Dr Dre and Jimmy Iovine. The Los Angeles Unified School District teaches some 650,000 students, who are mainly from low-income backgrounds and predominantly Latino or Black. Hollywood's poor record on diversity both in front of and behind the camera has come under close scrutiny in recent years, including the #OscarsSoWhite campaign launched in 2015 on social media to denounce and draw attention to the overwhelming majority of white nominees honored year after year.

In a sign of positive change, a report in April found female and minority actors were proportionately represented in Hollywood for the first time last year in a "watershed moment for diversity." But it warned that films with female or racial minority directors still have far smaller budgets, and that groups including Latinos remain severely underrepresented on screen. —AFP



PARIS: French ballet dancer of the Paris Opera Ballet Dorothee Gilbert says goodbye to a child after dancing for him at the intensive care child unit of the Hospital Necker-Enfants Malades AP-HP in Paris. — AFP

Paris ballet stars bring relief in children's hospital

In an intensive care unit, an intubated boy is watching intently as two star dancers from the Paris Opera twirl before him in shimmering costumes. "We're going to do a promenade, an arabesque, a porte poison," says dancer Hugo Marchand as he pulls off some elaborate moves with his partner Dorothee Gilbert around the bed and beeping machines. "We just came to say a little hello," he says as they depart, and the child gives a small wave of acknowledgement.

The dancers move from room to room, dressed in the green and gold costumes of the "La Bayadere" ballet—with added surgical masks—joking with caregivers and getting some bemused expressions from the patients. In one room, it's a baby watching them, eyes wide as Gilbert's pirouette sets her dress fluttering.

They are in the Necker-Enfant Malades Hospital as part of the "What Dance Can Do Project" organised by a Swiss-French association, which aims to empower children through dance, especially those affected by poverty, exile or illness. Its field of operations never stops growing, from an orphanage in Morocco to a dance school in New Zealand to hospitals in Paris and Zurich. "We see how it lifts them out of their complicated daily lives," said Marchand, adding that he likes the opportunity to "feel useful".

"The thing that moves me the most is managing to bring them a bit of lightness. I always hope these children go to sleep that night dreaming of dance."

"In their looks, we see little sparks, curiosity, maybe some admiration, or maybe just 'What on earth are these people up to?'" laughs Gilbert. In her bed, 15-year-old Maely smiles as she watches Marchand jumping across the corridor.

"We are like giant frogs," he tells her. "There's no talking in ballet?" the young girl asks. So the dancers show her some pantomime. "I'm the swan queen," says Gilbert, making a crown above her head with her hands. —AFP

Sports

Troubled Tokyo Olympics near finish line with one month to go

TOKYO: The Tokyo Olympics have weathered a historic postponement, an unprecedented ban on overseas fans and persistent domestic opposition, but with one month to go, the finish line is finally in sight.

The journey to Tokyo 2020 has involved a long list of complications that sometimes threatened to make it the first modern Olympics cancelled in peacetime. Now, just four weeks remain until the opening ceremony on July 23, and while the mood is far from jubilant, organizers might just have cause to celebrate.

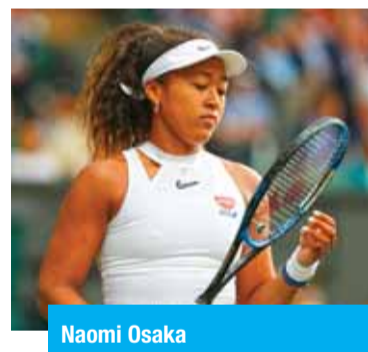
The first Olympic teams are already in Japan, along with key officials and some overseas media. And polls suggest long-standing public opposition to the Games may be weakening as D-day approaches. "We are in the full delivery phase," International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach said on Monday. "Athletes are beginning to arrive in Tokyo, ready to make their Olympic dreams become a reality."

It has been an uphill battle since the unprecedented decision to postpone the Games in March 2020, as the scale of the pandemic started to emerge. Back then, there was cause to hope the pandemic might be over before the opening ceremony came around. But a global coronavirus surge and the rise of more infectious variants put paid to those dreams and fuelled rising opposition in Japan.

Increased doping in pandemic 'not a worry', says WADA chief

MONTREAL: World anti-doping chiefs insist they are not overly worried by athletes who may have tried to take advantage of reduced drugs testing programs during the coronavirus pandemic. With just one month to go before the Tokyo Olympics, Olivier Niggli, the director general of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), told AFP in an interview that testing levels had made a significant, and timely, recovery. "For sure, at the beginning of the pandemic, there had been a slowdown of testing and anti-doping due to health measures," Niggli said.

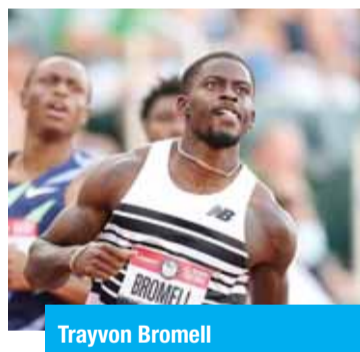
Although COVID-19 restrictions had had an initial impact, "we are now back to a level which is even higher than it used to be," Niggli added. "A lot of countries have simply closed down for all fields in society. But since March last year, things have recovered significantly, and to the point that... the number of tests that are being conducted, out of competition, are higher than they were at the same time in 2019, pre-pandemic." Turning to athletes potentially abusing strict restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact by turning to doping, Niggli said the issue was "not that straightforward".



Naomi Osaka



Caeleb Dressel



Trayvon Bromell

Osaka, Dressel, Bromell: Stars to watch at Olympics

TOKYO: Five stars to watch at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which start on July 23 after a year's delay because of the coronavirus pandemic:

Naomi Osaka

The Japanese tennis star's return to action is certain to draw plenty of attention after she withdrew from the French Open citing mental health concerns and also skipped Wimbledon. Osaka, 23, prompted soul-searching in the sport and media with her French Open pull-out over her refusal to take part in press conferences, which she said were like "kicking people while they're down".

Osaka said she had suffered "bouts of depression" since winning the first of her four major titles at the 2018 US Open and needed to "take some time away from the court". However, she is currently expected to compete in Tokyo where her treatment by the press is likely to be under close scrutiny.

She had already proved her willingness to challenge the status quo at last year's US Open, where she wore a different facemask in each round highlighting victims of racism and police brutality. She went on to win the US Open and then this year's Australian Open, giving her back-to-back Grand Slam titles.

Caeleb Dressel

Caeleb Dressel is poised to be one of the faces of the Tokyo Games as he targets a possible seven gold medals in the pool. The 24-year-old American swimming star was the stand-out performer at June's national trials winning the 100m freestyle, 100m butterfly and 50m freestyle. He will arrive in Tokyo as the gold medal favorite in each of those and is also likely to feature in four US relay teams.

Dressel flew under the radar at the Rio Games, with two Olympic relay golds, but exploded into view at the 2017 world championships in Budapest with seven gold medals followed by six more at the 2019 worlds in Gwangju, where he also broke Michael Phelps' 10-year-old world record in the 100m butterfly. The 6ft 3in (1.91m) Floridian lives close to his strength and conditioning coach so was able to train



TOKYO: In this file photo a general view shows the Olympic rings lit up at dusk on the Odaiba waterfront in Tokyo on April 28, 2021. — AFP

No cheering, high-fives

Officials pressed ahead, contending with delayed qualifiers and test events and launching a mammoth effort to draft virus rules they say will keep the event safe. In March they announced the Games would be the first to bar overseas spectators, a decision that Tokyo 2020 chief and former Olympian Seiko Hashimoto called

Dismantle networks

"Testing is not the only weapon in anti-doping," said Niggli, who has worked as a lawyer in Switzerland. "You have other means of fighting doping like the longitudinal profile and the athlete's passport, storage of samples. So it's not as simple as thinking that because you're not going to get tested, you won't be caught."

Niggli added: "Also the reality that when there was no testing, there was no competition... no training. So it wasn't a period of time where doping would have brought you any real benefits. So yes, maybe some have tried to take advantage of that, but it's not something that I would say is a particular worry for us."

Niggli, however, said doping was an "ever-evolving situation where more sophistication comes into the picture". He cited not only new substances and new ways of ingesting drugs like micro-dosing, but also the influence of athletes' entourages that demands investigations that can help dismantle networks of professionals who are helping the athletes to dope.

"That's where you can see drastic change in how the fight against doping is conducted," he said. The use of dried blood spot testing is also being trialed at the Tokyo Olympics. The technique — in which small samples are collected from a finger prick and blotted onto an absorbent card — could mark a new era in anti-doping, and WADA believes it could eventually allow for more athletes to be targeted and more tests to be carried out.—AFP

regularly during the pandemic, although pool sessions were scaled back.

Trayvon Bromell

The American established himself as favorite to succeed Usain Bolt as Olympic 100m champion when he blasted to a gun-to-tape victory in the US trials in 9.80sec on Sunday. The 25-year-old from Florida has made a remarkable return to form this year after a career ravaged by injuries.

With world champion Christian Coleman banned for missing doping tests, Bromell will attempt to become the first US sprinter to win the Olympic 100m crown since Justin Gatlin took gold at the Athens Olympics in 2004. Bromell said there was no danger he would suffer from over-confidence.

"I feel with confidence sometimes comes complacency," he said. "I come from the hood, nothing was easy for me, and so every time I go to training I feel I have everything to lose." World 200m champion Noah Lyles failed in his bid to attempt an Olympic sprint double when he failed to make the team for the 100m.

Sifan Hassan

The versatile Dutch runner this month came within half a second of a stunning world record in the women's 1500m, just five days after setting a short-lived 10,000m world record. The Ethiopian-born Hassan already has three world records to her name, and it was briefly four before Ethiopian Letesenbet Gidey set a new world best in the 10,000m just two days after she herself had knocked off more than 10 seconds off the record.

Hassan, who moved to the Netherlands from Ethiopia at the age of 15 in 2008, said she was not surprised by Gidey's performance, insisting she was "actually happy about it because I want to make the distance more exciting!" The world 1500m champion will face a battle royale in Tokyo with Olympic champion Faith Kipyegon of Kenya.

Adam Peaty

Olympic champion and 100m breaststroke world record holder Adam Peaty had a training pool installed in his back garden after facilities were closed during Britain's first coronavirus lockdown last year. The extraordinary measure has already paid off for the 26-year-old, who won four gold medals at last month's European Championships. Peaty won gold in the 100m breaststroke in Rio and silver in the 4x100m medley relay. He is an eight-time world champion. — AFP

"unavoidable". On Monday, organizers set a maximum of 10,000 domestic fans per venue, but warned events could move behind closed doors if infections surge. Even with some spectators in the stands, there's no doubt this year's Games will be a pale imitation of Olympics past.

Cheering will be banned, and athletes can't hug or high-five. They must wear masks except when eating, sleeping or competing, and can only move between the Olympic Village and their venues. They face warnings, fines or being kicked out of the Games for breaking the rules.

Hurdles ahead

The Tokyo Olympics faced setbacks as far back as 2015, when the main stadium's revamp was sent back to the drawing board because it was too expensive. In 2019, the head of Japan's Olympic committee stepped down over a French investigation probing \$2.3 billion in payments made before and after Tokyo's nomination. He denied any wrongdoing.

And in February, Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori resigned after causing a furor with his sexist remarks that women talk too much in meetings. As the Games finally approach, the IOC says more than 80 percent of those in the Village will be vaccinated, but competitors will still be tested daily.



TOKYO: This file photo taken on September 7, 2019 shows a general view of the Nippon Budokan, a venue for the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

Arenas of gold: Tokyo venues ready to forge Olympic dreams

TOKYO: From a state-of-the-art aquatics center to a historic martial arts arena whose roof resembles Mount Fuji, Tokyo's Olympic sites are ready for action after a year's virus delay. The 43 venues are located in two main areas: the "Tokyo Bay Zone" in the capital's busy port district, and the more central "Heritage Zone" incorporating several sites from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Coronavirus rules announced Monday mean a maximum of 10,000 spectators will be allowed at each venue, though sponsors and Olympic officials may slightly swell that figure. With one month to go until the opening ceremony, AFP takes a tour of the key venues:

Olympic Stadium

Used for the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the athletics and some football matches, the 68,000-seater Olympic Stadium in central Tokyo has been built on the site of the 1964 stadium. The original design, by Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid, was jettisoned in July 2015 after public outrage over its \$2 billion price tag — which would have made it the world's most expensive stadium. A slimmed-down, cheaper version was commissioned and the five-floor facility was unveiled in December 2019, along with special features to beat the heat of the Tokyo summer.

Aquatics Centre

The 56.7 billion yen (\$516 million) Aquatics Centre was completed in February 2020 but its grand opening was postponed by the virus. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was finally held in October 2020 at the 15,000-seat venue in the Bay Zone for swimming, diving and artistic swimming events.

The main pool features a movable wall allowing the 50m facility to be converted into two 25m pools, with the depth also adjustable. Tokyo hopes to make the most of the facility after this summer, aiming to attract one million users a year, mostly through swimming competitions but also allowing casual punters to swim.

Sea Forest Waterway

On a lush artificial island, in the shadow of the huge Tokyo Gate Bridge, sits the Sea Forest Waterway — a

In a taste of the challenges ahead, a coach from Uganda's Olympic team tested positive on arrival in Japan on Saturday, despite the delegation being vaccinated and testing negative before travel. Yesterday, the team's other eight members were put into quarantine until July 3, a local official told.

The relentless preparations may have taken their toll on Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, who will take the rest of the week off to recover from exhaustion, her office said yesterday. The Olympic delay and virus security have added at least 294 billion yen (\$2.6 billion) to an already hefty budget of 1.64 trillion yen (\$14.9 billion), which could make Tokyo among the most expensive Summer Games ever. But despite the coronavirus and the hefty expense, there are signs public opposition is softening, with recent surveys finding 50 percent or more favor the Games going ahead over cancellation. Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who faces his first election just after the Games, will be hoping for a success that can boost his political career. His government has faced pressure over its coronavirus response, though Japan has seen a smaller outbreak than many nations, with around 14,500 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. The country vaccine rollout started slowly, though the pace is now increasing, with around seven percent of the population fully inoculated. — AFP

two-kilometer basin protected from the sea by a dam, where rowers will glide along eight competition lanes. Built to seat 24,000, the arena's capacity will be reduced to 2,000 afterwards when it will host 30 competitions per year as well as canoeing and rowing classes.

Ariake Arena

The brand-new Ariake Arena will host Olympic volleyball and Paralympic basketball, with seating for 15,000. Solar panels on its curved roof were carefully aligned to avoid reflecting sunlight into nearby apartments. The solar panels, heat sensors and geothermal pumps will reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The venue is earmarked for concerts and sporting events after 2020.

Nippon Budokan

The renowned martial arts arena was first built for judo in 1964 and boasts a curved roof to resemble Mount Fuji. It will also host karate in 2020. It became a renowned concert venue after the 1964 Olympics and famously played host to the Beatles in 1966 when they made their first appearance in Japan.

Olympic Village

The Olympic Village, which will house athletes and officials from over 200 countries, was built on reclaimed land on a huge rectangular site looking out over the water. The 21 residential towers will have a total capacity of 18,000 beds during the Olympics and 8,000 for the Paralympics. They have been empty for months, but after the Games will be converted into luxury apartments to buy or rent — with around 900 units already sold before the postponement.

Kasai Canoe Slalom Centre

The first artificial canoe slalom course in Japan has vast concrete basins that slope at a two-degree gradient. Four pumps will be installed and blocks placed on the course to create a raging current. The site is intended for a wide range of watersports and leisure activities after the Games.

Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium

Japanese authorities have dubbed Tokyo 2020 the "Reconstruction Olympics" and they are determined to show that areas in eastern Fukushima have been revitalized since the crippling 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown. The venue will be used for baseball, one of Japan's most popular sports, and softball. — AFP



This file photo taken on August 3, 2019 shows Fukushima Azuma baseball stadium, venue for the baseball and softball in Fukushima.

Sports

Argentina, Chile through to Copa America quarter-final

BRASILIA: Argentina and Chile on Monday booked their places in the Copa America quarter-finals, ending top of Group A after low-scoring matches that left the other two spots up for grabs. Argentina logged its second win in three group matches played, beating Paraguay 1-0, with Alejandro "Papu" Gomez scoring the sole goal of a lacklustre match in Brasilia in the ninth minute.

The win placed Lionel Messi's La Albiceleste top of

Group A with seven points — enough to secure its spot in the next phase of the tournament being played in empty stadiums in coronavirus-battered Brazil. The match marked a personal milestone for Messi, who tied Javier Mascherano's record for the most games played for Argentina — 147. But it was not a night of glory for Messi or his team, who in the second half seemed to resign themselves to defending a spirited, but ultimately fruitless, Paraguayan attack.

In the other match Monday, Chile drew 1-1 with Uruguay to end the day with five log points. With four matches left to play in Group A, Paraguay has three points, Uruguay one, and Bolivia zero, meaning they all still stand a theoretical chance to go to the quarter-finals. Brazil has already qualified from Group B.

Despite opposition from politicians and citizens, Brazil agreed at the 11th hour to host the world's oldest international tournament after South American football's governing body CONMEBOL took it from co-hosts Argentina, battling a pandemic surge, and Colombia where dozens have died in anti-government protests.

The contest had already been delayed by a year due to the pandemic and many players and coaches spoke out against it going ahead before the tournament began. The build-up to Monday's Chile-Uruguay game had been overshadowed by controversy in the Chile camp after revelations the team had breached COVID-19 protocols by bringing a local hairdresser into the team hotel. CONMEBOL said it would fine those involved \$30,000.

However there was no sign of the controversy affecting their play, with Vargas firing Chile ahead on 26 minutes from a tight angle after latching onto a clever pass from English-born Ben Brereton. Uruguay grabbed a share of the points in the second-half when Suarez bundled in the ball from close range during a tangle with former Barcelona team-mate Arturo Vidal at the far post following a corner.

Manchester United striker Edinson Cavani almost snatched victory for Uruguay in the 85th minute, but his glancing header flashed just wide of the post. Vargas's first-half strike saw him draw level with Peru's Paolo Guerrero on 14 goals in the Copa America's all-time goalscoring rankings, three behind the record of 17 held by Brazil's Zinho and Argentina's Norberto Mendez. — AFP



CUIABA: Chile's Francisco Sierralta (left) and Uruguay's Edinson Cavani vie for the ball during their Conmebol Copa America 2021 football tournament group phase match at the Pantanal Arena in Cuiaba, Brazil, on Monday. — AFP

Ball in Serena's court at Wimbledon with rivals' fitness doubts

LONDON: Serena Williams turns 40 on September 26 and the arrival of that landmark birthday will be all the sweeter if she has at last equaled Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles. The tennis legend could even hold the record outright if she wins both Wimbledon and the US Open but despite holding her own in the top 10, there is a fear that age is impacting on her powers.

A fourth round loss at the French Open to Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina reflected this although clay would be her least preferred surface despite three Roland Garros titles. However, her chances of an eighth Wimbledon crown have improved with the withdrawal of world number two Naomi Osaka, who is taking time out of the game after revealing she has been battling anxiety and depression.

There are also fitness doubts over Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty and third-ranked Simona Halep, who denied Williams the record-equaling Slam at Wimbledon two years ago. That was one of four Grand Slam finals Williams has played since she drew within one title of the controversial Court's record at the 2017 Australian Open.

Fellow American tennis legend Chris Evert believes Williams is still capable of winning at Wimbledon where she has been the losing finalist on her last two visits. "Like Roger Federer I would give Serena a better chance at Wimbledon because the grass is perfect for her game," Evert told Eurosport prior to the French Open. "On the grass, if Serena is fit and that serve is

working then that's half of the match right there. She has that experience and flexibility."

Evert, though, concedes that like any great champion who appears vulnerable all her opponents suddenly entertain hopes of beating her. "The players are better now than they were two years ago and they are not intimidated," said the 66-year-old, 18-time Grand Slam singles champion. "They all feel they have a chance against Serena."

'Going to have fun'

Barty will go into Wimbledon without a warm-up tournament on grass after pulling out due to a hip injury in the middle of the second set of her second round match at the French Open. The 25-year-old Australian has been practicing on grass at Wimbledon labeling them "baby steps" as the 2019 French Open champion bids to be fighting fit.

Halep too will open her defense of the title — Wimbledon having been cancelled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic — without a match on grass under her belt. The 29-year-old Romanian's calf injury forced her to miss the French Open and although she turned up for this week's Bad Homburg tournament she felt she was not fit enough to compete.

"My calf is not ready for a competition," she said. "I will keep practising as I really want to be able to play at Wimbledon but for now I have to take care of my body and to see how the recovery is going."

Barbora Krejickova is the form player after her surprise triumph in the French Open. The 25-year-old Czech paid a moving tribute to her late compatriot and former coach Jana Novotna when she won at Roland Garros. She might have to repeat it should she win at the All England Club, the venue where Novotna won her only singles Grand Slam crown in 1998.

One player who will remind spectators of what fun it was to watch tennis before coronavirus will be American teenager Coco Gauff. As a 15-year-old she



PARIS: Serena Williams of the US returns the ball to Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu during their women's singles second round match of the French Open in Paris on June 2, 2021. — AFP

lit up the 2019 tournament both on and off the court after reaching the last 16 having come through the qualifiers.

Unlike Halep and Barty she is getting match practice in at the Eastbourne tournament this week. Gauff, ranked 23 in the world, says the limelight might shine on her again at Wimbledon. "People might expect me to feel pressure going into it, but I don't really feel any pressure," she said. "I'm just going to have fun and enjoy it. I don't really want to push myself to compare my result this year with last time." — AFP



ROME: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning the second set against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas during their quarter final match of the Men's Italian Open at Foro Italico on May 15, 2021 in Rome, Italy. — AFP

Djokovic ready to be first among equals at Wimbledon

LONDON: Novak Djokovic is targeting a record-equaling 20th major and sixth Wimbledon title from next week, edging him closer to becoming only the third man to complete a calendar Grand Slam. The world number one has already won a ninth Australian Open and second French Open this season.

That has put him halfway to emulating Don Budge (1937) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) in sweeping all four majors in the same year. It is a feat that even his closest rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have never managed and will probably never achieve.

"Everything is possible," said 34-year-old Djokovic after winning the French Open earlier this month when asked if the Golden Slam of all four majors and Olympic Games gold was a realistic target. "I've achieved some things that a lot of people thought it would be not possible for me to achieve."

Djokovic memorably captured a fifth Wimbledon in 2019, saving two championship points to defeat Federer in the longest ever final at the All England Club at four hours and 57 minutes. He was deprived of defending his title in 2020 when Wimbledon was cancelled due to the pandemic.

However, Djokovic has been at this juncture before, winning in Australia and Paris in 2016 but coming up short at the Rio Olympics, Wimbledon and the US Open later in the year. Djokovic has won seven of the last 11 Slams as he ramps up his assault on the record of 20 majors held jointly by Federer and Nadal. Nadal, the Wimbledon champion in 2008 and 2010, has already withdrawn from this year's tournament, still scarred by the bruising loss to the Serb in the French Open semi-finals.

'Huge challenge'

Eight-time winner Federer, meanwhile, will be 40 in August and won just one match on grass at Halle in the build-up to Wimbledon. Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, won the last of his eight Wimbledon titles in 2017 and the most recent of his 20 majors in Australia in 2018.

The Swiss star has lost three finals to Djokovic at the All England Club in 2014, 2015 and the epic 2019 clash. "It's a huge challenge for me," said Federer of his comeback. "Things don't come simple, they don't come easy."

The rest of the current top 10 have endured so far mediocre Wimbledon records. Only 33-year-old Roberto Bautista Agut, a surprise semi-finalist two years ago, has got beyond the last 16. Daniil Medvedev has a best of the third round, while Dominic Thiem, who made the fourth round in 2017, crashed at the first hurdle in 2018 and 2019.

Alexander Zverev had a best last 16 run in 2017 but was also a first-round loser two years ago while Andrey Rublev has yet to get past the second round. Of the remainder of the top 10, French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas and Matteo Berrettini are Djokovic's most likely threats.

Tsitsipas made the last 16 in 2018 before exiting in the first round two years ago. The Greek, however, is one of the form players of 2021, winning titles in Monte Carlo and Lyon before forcing Djokovic to recover from two sets down in the Roland Garros final.

Queen's Club champion Matteo Berrettini is also a dangerman for Djokovic. The Italian made the last 16 in 2019 where it took Federer to stop his progress. He was also the first man to win the Queen's title on debut since Boris Becker in 1985 — the German went on to win a maiden Wimbledon just weeks later.

Andy Murray, the 2013 and 2016 champion, will hope to ride a national wave of emotion at least into the second week. But the injury-plagued Briton, a former world number one, is down at 119 in the rankings and has won just two matches all season. — AFP



TAMPA: Steven Stamkos of the Tampa Bay Lightning celebrates after scoring a goal against the New York Islanders during the first period in Game Five of the Stanley Cup Semifinals during the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Amalie Arena on Monday in Tampa, Florida. — AFP

Lightning explode for 8-0 win over Isles

LOS ANGELES: Steven Stamkos rediscovered his scoring touch, and Brayden Point stretched his goal streak to eight games as the Tampa Bay Lightning routed the New York Islanders 8-0 in the fifth game of their NHL semi-final series.

Stamkos and Alex Killorn both had two goals and one assist, and goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 21 shots for his fourth shutout of the playoffs as the defending Stanley Cup champions seized a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven series. "This showed our bounce-back ability," said Stamkos of the Lightning, who lost game four 3-2. "Coming off a loss we have always found a way to win."

Point scored on the powerplay in the third period in

front of a crowd of 14,700 at the Amalie Arena. The Canadian forward has now scored in eight straight games, one of the longest playoff scoring streaks in league history. He leads the NHL with 13 goals in the postseason. The Islanders were not only blown out Monday, but they also may have lost their top player Mathew Barzal to a possible suspension after he delivered a cross check to the head of Lightning defenceman Jan Rutta. The Lightning can wrap up the series and advance to their second straight NHL finals with a win on the road tonight at Nassau Coliseum. If there is a game seven, it would be Friday in Florida.

Stamkos had no goals heading into Monday's contest as the Lightning scored almost as many goals in game five as they had in the first four games of the series (nine). The Lightning captain said this is going to be a confidence booster. "There was no frustration. You never know when it is going to be your night," Stamkos said. "I had some better looks tonight so this is going to give me some confidence." — AFP

Kuwait Cycling Club thanks sports authority

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sports Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Affairs Dr Saqer Al-Mulla received Secretary General of Kuwait Cycling Club Abdallah Al-Shimmari, who presented to him the third-place winner's jersey that the club has won during the Estonia tour recently. Shimmari said this achievement "would not have happened without the support" of PAS, who he thanked for "exerting tremendous efforts to facilitate the cycling team's participation" in the tournament.



KUWAIT: Secretary General of Kuwait Cycling Club Abdallah Al-Shimmari presents the jersey to Public Authority for Sports Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Affairs Dr Saqer Al-Mulla.



Denmark 'unit' rides wave of emotion into Wales last-16 clash

COPENHAGEN: Denmark is a nation united behind its football team after they charged into the Euro 2020 knockouts on a cathartic night in Copenhagen which sets them up well for the rest of the tournament. Considered by many a dark horse before the Euro started thanks to a squad packed with talent, Denmark will face Wales in the last 16 and on the evidence of Monday's thrilling 4-1 thumping of Russia will be favorites to make the last eight.

Before the tournament started, coach Kasper Hjulmand said he wanted his side to "dare to dream" of going all the way as in 1992, and on Monday their resolve shone through after a rough fortnight in

which the players had to deal with seeing teammate Christian Eriksen nearly die on the pitch.

Asked how he managed to hold things together for the team after they secured a spot in the next round, Hjulmand said: "I have a great team around me, great staff, great people around me, great players."

"I think the only way I can tell it is we are a unit. It's not one person, it's not me or anything else, it's a unit," he added. "We're backing each other up and that is the best within Denmark I think, the best values we can show that we stand united, we are helping each other."

Having lost their first two matches in the aftermath

of Eriksen's sudden cardiac arrest midway through their opener against Finland, the Danes came into Monday's match with their tournament status in danger. They needed eventual Group B winners Belgium to beat Finland and a win by two goals or more — or a single-goal win by any other score than 1-0 — over the Russians.

'Thinking about Christian'

Mikkel Damsgaard gave Denmark the lead with a stunning curling strike shortly before the break but it wasn't until Yussuf Poulsen capitalised on Daler Kuzyaev's horrendous backpass to tap into an open goal on the hour mark that the rowdy fans packed into the Parken Stadium knew the knockouts were within their grasp.

After one false alarm in Saint Petersburg — and in the meantime, a Russia penalty — Belgium finally took the lead through a Lukas Hradecky own goal and the partying started in beer-soaked stands, helped by two late goals in quick succession from Andreas Christensen and Joakim Maehle which completed the rout.

"We hoped that it would be a magic night," said Hjulmand. "When we heard about Belgium I thought that it was OK that we had 2-0, and then when Belgium's goal was disallowed we got a little nervous. But when they scored one more time we got more stable."

Monday's match felt like the true beginning of the Euro campaign for Denmark after their traumatic opening week, the first time since Eriksen's fall that the football was the main story. During the match's opening ceremony fans roared as a huge Denmark shirt with "Eriksen 10" written on it was unfurled, and Hjulmand said his team were playing in honor of their close friend.

"The team spirit we have and how everyone contributed is amazing, and then mixing it up with amazing performances it's just fantastic," he said. "It's hard to describe what this team has been through the past four weeks. We're thinking about Cristian all the way." — AFP



SAINT PETERSBURG: Belgium's defender Jason Denayer (right) vies for the ball with Finland's midfielder Glen Kamara during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group B football match between Finland and Belgium at Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on Monday. — AFP

Clinical Belgium put Finland on brink of exit

SAINT PETERSBURG: Belgium scored two late goals to see off a valiant Finland 2-0 on Monday, pushing their opponents to the brink of a group-stage exit from Euro 2020 and sending Denmark through to the last 16. Finnish goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky's 74th-minute own goal and Romelu Lukaku's third strike of the tournament ensured Roberto Martinez's Belgium finished top of Group B. The world's number-one-ranked side will face a third-placed team in the next round on Sunday in Seville.

"We're making good progress and we'll be ready," Belgium midfielder Kevin De Bruyne told RTBF. Finland finish third in the group, but appear unlikely to be one of the four best third-placed teams. "We received tremendous support from the Finns," said Finland coach Markku Kanerva. "They inspired us. We could not achieve our goal of taking at least one point. We are obviously disappointed. I am proud of my team."

The other game saw Denmark thrash Russia 4-1 in Copenhagen to snatch second place and book a ticket to the last 16. Finland knew they would only need a point to go through if the Danes won, but despite holding off Belgium for more than 70 minutes, they couldn't keep it up in the Saint Petersburg heat. "There were no spaces, it was a little bit difficult," De Bruyne said.

Strong Belgium

This was arguably the strongest XI Belgium have fielded in the tournament so far, with captain Eden Hazard, De Bruyne and Axel Witsel all starting after recent struggles with injury. They did not take long to find their stride, with De Bruyne releasing Lukaku, who fired wide, before seeing a low cross hacked away by a panicking Finland defense.

The first half was largely played at a slow pace, but Belgium always looked dangerous when they moved the ball more quickly, with two such moves ending in Witsel and Hazard blasting over the crossbar. The Red Devils showed what they are capable of shortly before half-time with a wonderful counter-attack led by Hazard, but Hradecky denied teenager Jeremy Doku with a diving, one-handed save.

Hazard tried to win a penalty by falling near Finland defender Daniel O'Shaughnessy, but his appeals for a spot-kick were waved away. Finland showed a little more adventure at the start of the second half, which left them more open at the back.

Hradecky pulled off a magnificent save to deny Hazard, but was beaten by Lukaku in the 65th minute. However, the goal was ruled out by VAR for the tightest of offside decisions. But Finland did fall behind, in agonizing circumstances, as Thomas Vermaelen's header from a corner struck the post and crossbar before being nudged over his own line by Hradecky.

The underdogs had no choice but to chase an equalizer if they wanted to finish second in the group, but they were caught out again nine minutes from time. De Bruyne's clever pass into the area found Lukaku, who turned and slammed home a right-footed shot to score his 63rd international goal. Finland now face a nervy wait to see if they have done enough, but would need a remarkable run of results to progress. — AFP



COPENHAGEN: Denmark's forward Mikkel Damsgaard celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group B football match between Russia and Denmark at Parken Stadium in Copenhagen on Monday. — AFP

Wembley to host 60K+ fans for semis, final

LONDON: More than 60,000 fans will be allowed to attend the semi-finals and final of Euro 2020 at Wembley with attendance increased to 75 percent of capacity, the British government announced yesterday. The matches will see the largest crowds assembled at a sporting event in Britain in more than 15 months, with numbers previously strictly limited due to the coronavirus pandemic.

All ticket holders will need to follow a number of strict entry requirements, including having a negative COVID-19 test or proof of full vaccination. "We have worked extremely closely with UEFA and the FA (Football Association) to ensure rigorous and tight public health measures are in place whilst allowing more fans to see the action live," said culture and sport secretary Oliver Dowden. "The finals promise to be an unforgettable moment in our national recovery from the pandemic."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman had said earlier yesterday that Britain is looking forward to staging a "fantastic" Euro 2020 final, in a clear hint the matches would take place at Wembley despite issues around coronavirus restrictions. The Puskas Arena in the Hungarian capital was floated as a potential alternative should the matches not be able to go ahead in London, while Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi also suggested Rome could step in.

He voiced concerns over the increase in coronavirus infections in Britain. The highly contagious Delta variant, first detected in India, has fuelled a spike in new cases in Britain and forced the government to delay planned reopenings. The government has a difficult path to tread, with any decision to ease the rules for UEFA officials likely to prove controversial. Britons' ability to travel on holiday has been restricted by rules enforcing a strict period of self-isolation or quarantine on their return. — AFP

Doubts hang over Spain ahead of 'do or die' game

MADRID: Spain are bracing themselves for a test of nerve in their last group game against Slovakia tonight, with Luis Enrique's side needing victory to guarantee their place in the last 16. After leaving out Sergio Ramos, Luis Enrique has left himself open to questions about a lack of leadership in his youthful squad. A bright start against Sweden fizzled out in the second half while a missed penalty against Poland turned a decent display into one paralyzed by anxiety and tension. "This country has won the Euro and the World Cup but in this squad there are many youngsters," Cesar Azpilicueta said on Monday. "There are several captains in our team, we know how to act and everyone is going to give their all on Wednesday."

Captain Sergio Busquets is expected to return after rejoining the group on Friday following his negative COVID-19 test. Busquets has not played in either of Spain's first two matches. "He's an important player, with his experience on and off the pitch," Azpilicueta said. "He's an incredible captain and we know the dominance he can bring in midfield. We're very happy he's back."

Azpilicueta said Spain can draw inspiration from Chelsea's triumph in the Champions League last season. He lifted Chelsea's second European Cup after the team changed gear under new coach Thomas Tuchel, a superb finish culminating in a surprise victory over Manchester City in the final.

Not about 'how you start'

Spain are pinning their hopes on a similar transformation after two disappointing draws against Sweden and Poland mean they currently sit third, a point behind Slovakia and two behind Sweden in Group E.

"It's not how you start, it's how you finish," said Azpilicueta. "I have seen it this year in the Champions League. Before January we weren't very good, and after that we did very well. A lot of people gave us up for dead last season, they thought we were out of the Champions League, out of the race for top four. People write you off but you never give up."

Despite his excellent form for Chelsea, Azpilicueta has rarely been favored by Luis Enrique

and has started on the bench for both of Spain's opening two games. "We are all fighting for places," he said. "For now, we don't know anything about the next line-up."



MADRID: Spain's coach Luis Enrique leads the team's MD-1 training session at Las Rozas near Madrid yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Euro 2020 Group E football match against Slovakia. — AFP

Azpilicueta's experience might be a valuable addition to a youthful Spanish team, who now find themselves under pressure to make it out of what looked a straightforward group. "We are not in the situation we expected," Azpilicueta said. "We would have liked to be more comfortable but football rarely gives you what you expect. We are alive and we depend on ourselves."

"We must be humble, self-critical and correct what we are doing wrong and also assess what we are doing well. It's a combination of the two. It's an all or nothing game so we have to approach it with the confidence that we will go through. The situation is not what we hoped it would be but you can't just say: 'We didn't win the first two games, that's us out.'"

"You have to fight to the end and all pull in the same direction. Now we have a clear objective and it's important we have the right mentality because Wednesday is do or die, we have to approach it like that." Luis Enrique could make changes, with Azpilicueta, Thiago Alcantara and Mikel Oyarzabal among those in contention to come in. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals

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

Automated enquiry

about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:

Call **MSALHOTLINE 128**

EMERGENCY 112

CHANGE OF NAME

I have changed my name from Shehzad Shabbir Siddiqui to Shehzad Shabbir Ratlamwala as per gazette no. (M-19118033). **(C 0611) 23-6-2021**

I, **Mohammed Sahib S/o. Mohammed Qhasim R/o. 19-2-21-11F-25, Tadban Hyd-T.S.**, have changed my name as "MOHAMMED SAHEB" with immediate effect. **(C 0609) 21-6-2021**

Germany eye last 16 with Portugal at risk of shock exit

BUDAPEST: Germany can secure a place in the last 16 of Euro 2020 tonight, but holders Portugal are at real risk of crashing out despite a prolific start to Group F by Cristiano Ronaldo. France top the section with four points heading into their final game against Portugal, a repeat of the Euro 2016 final, despite an underwhelming 1-1 draw with bottom side Hungary in Budapest.

Germany and Portugal are locked on three points apiece but Joachim Loew's side crucially have the head-to-head edge following a thrilling 4-2 win in Munich that shifted the pressure onto Ronaldo and co. Portugal began their campaign with a 3-0 win against Hungary as Ronaldo became the leading scorer in European Championship history, but Fernando Santos watched his team ripped apart by Germany last Saturday. "We will have to look at this game and now what we have to do is clear our heads as we have a very important game against France," Santos said after the loss to Germany.

Ronaldo scored for the third time in two games after starting and finishing a lightning counter-attack against Germany, taking his European Championship tally to 12 goals at a record fifth tournament appearance. But a fifth defeat in as many meetings with the Germans left Portugal needing to avoid defeat against world champions France to be guaranteed a spot in the knockout rounds. "The next task is a very difficult one against France," said midfielder Joao Moutinho. "We want to give a better image of ourselves than we did in the last match."

A draw would likely send Portugal through as one of the four best third-placed teams, just as when they went on to win the title five years ago in France. An opening loss to France had left Germany in trouble, contemplating the prospect of another group stage failure after their 2018 World Cup flop. They responded by delivering arguably their best performance since winning the 2014 World Cup, but Loew has tried to temper expectations. "Nothing of



HERZOGENAURACH: Germany's coach Joachim Loew speaks to his players during an MD-1 training session at the team's base at the Adi Dassler stadium in Herzogenaurach, Germany, yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA EURO 2020 Group F football match against Hungary. — AFP

significance has happened, we have only won a game, but now come further challenges which will be just as testing," he said.

Benzema yet to fire

At the last World Cup in Russia, Germany bounced back after a shock 1-0 defeat by 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. Germany will go through with a draw, but would be guaranteed a top-two finish if they beat Hungary.

The lack of goals from France's superstar attack

of Karim Benzema, Antoine Griezmann and Kylian Mbappe has become the talking point back home — against Germany it was a Mats Hummels own goal that decided the game. Griezmann, the Euro 2016 Golden Boot winner, defended Benzema, who is under the spotlight after firing blanks in his first two games at the tournament.

"He wants to score just like Kylian and I, and as a player you need it to feel relaxed and liberated," Griezmann said. "He has been really important in our link-up play and I am sure when he gets one goal the tap will open and it will keep running. He knows he has the support of the staff and the players and we

hope he gets a goal soon, but the most annoying thing would be if he were not even getting the chances."

Ronaldo is two goals shy of the all-time international record, set by Ali Daei who scored 109 times for Iran. However the Portugal captain has never scored in six previous attempts against France. As for Germany, they could be without Hummels, Thomas Mueller and Ilkay Gundogan for the clash with Hungary, after the trio picked up knocks against Portugal. Hungary had fervent home support behind them in Budapest, but must spring an upset in Munich if they are to reach the last 16 for a second straight Euro. — AFP



Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY
for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

www.moh.gov.kw

STEP 1: Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION **STEP 2:** FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION **STEP 3:** SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health