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34 lawmakers demand vote on Dahoum's membership

MPs warn against 'unilateral' actions • Civil rights for bedoons proposed

Locusts swarm amid dust storm



KUWAIT: A swarm of locusts is seen during a dust storm in Shuwaikh yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: At least 34 MPs, forming an absolute majority in the National Assembly, yesterday insisted that the membership of leading opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum, which was nullified by the constitutional court, must be settled in a vote in the house. In a statement they issued after an emergency meeting, the lawmakers said the Assembly speaker and office have no right to take unilateral actions against Dahoum, and any action must be decided by the entire Assembly.

The meeting was called after Dahoum said he had learnt that Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem instructed Assembly guards to stop him from entering the Assembly building and the chamber on the day of the Assembly's regular meeting, expected next week. MPs warned in the statement they will use constitutional tools if the speaker insists on his unilateral decisions against Dahoum, with some lawmakers floating the idea of boycotting the next session, thus preventing the new Cabinet from taking the oath because they form the majority needed for the session to convene.

"The country is passing through a dangerous political turning point that has no precedence in the framework of relations between public authorities, which has resulted in the disruption of the constitutional balance between them," the statement said, alluding to the recent court rulings on Dahoum.

The controversy began after the constitutional court on March 14 revoked the membership of Dahoum because he was convicted in 2014 of insulting HH the Amir. The ruling disqualified Dahoum from running for public office for life. But before contesting the Dec 5 general polls and scoring a resounding victory, the court of cassation, the country's top court, had ruled that Dahoum's participation in the election was legal and in line with the law.

Opposition MPs insist that the two rulings are contradictory and the cassation court's ruling should have priority over the constitutional court verdict, which they claim has several legal loopholes. But Ghanem had already instructed the Assembly secretariat to remove Dahoum's name from the Assembly website, clearly indicating his acceptance of the constitutional court ruling without even waiting for a debate on the issue. Some legal experts said Ghanem has the right to implement the verdict without consulting the house.

Dahoum yesterday reiterated that he is still a member of parliament and no one has the right to strike his name off except the National Assembly in a floor voting. If voting takes place, Dahoum has a clear majority to confirm his membership. The lawmakers said they will hold a meeting next week to spell out their course of action for the session, which could lead to a serious confrontation with the government and the speaker.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Sheikh Hamdan passes away

LONDON: Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Dubai's deputy ruler and one of the most influential figures in horse racing over the past four decades, has died at the age of 75, his brother and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed announced on Twitter yesterday. Sheikh Hamdan had also been the UAE's finance minister since 1971. — AFP

Probe into trafficked Filipinas

MANILA: The Philippine immigration bureau said yesterday it has launched an investigation into allegations that some of its officers were involved in the trafficking of 44 women to work in Syria. A Senate inquiry has been told the women using tourist visas travelled to Dubai, where they had been promised work. After their 30-day visas expired, they were forced to go to Damascus, where they were sold to employers for as much as \$10,000. — AFP

Lebanon hikes bread price

BEIRUT: Lebanese authorities announced late Tuesday a bread price hike, the third in nine months, a move the government blames on a plunge in the value of the local currency. The economy ministry announced that the price of 960 gm of bread would be set at 3,000 Lebanese pounds, up from 2,500 pounds, the state-run National News Agency reported. — AFP

Largest art canvas sells for \$62m

DUBAI: Work by British artist Sacha Jafri consisting of the world's largest painting on canvas has been sold for \$62 million at an auction in Dubai, organizers said on Tuesday. The "Journey of Humanity" is split into 70 framed sections spanning 1,595.76 sq m. Organizers said that the work sold for \$62 million, with the money going to charities helping children. Andre Abdoune, a French national residing in Dubai, bought all 70 segments. — AFP

Wedged giant ship blocks Suez Canal

CAIRO: Tugboats worked yesterday to free a giant container ship stuck in the Suez Canal after it veered off course in a sandstorm, creating huge tailbacks on one of the world's busiest trade routes. Egypt's Suez Canal Authority said it was trying to refloat the Taiwan-run, Panama-flagged MV Ever Given, a 400-m long and 59-m wide vessel, which was wedged across the waterway.

The Suez Canal is one of the world's most important trade routes, providing passage for 10 percent of all international maritime trade. The SCA said the stranded ship was caught up in a gale-force sandstorm, a common occurrence in Egypt's Sinai desert at this time of year, which blotting out light and limited the captain's ability to see. It was "mainly due to the lack of visibility due to the weather conditions when winds reached 40 knots, which affected the control" of the ship, the SCA said.

Ship operator Evergreen Marine Corp said the Rotterdam-bound vessel "ran aground after a suspected gust of wind hit it".

Continued on Page 2



ISMAILIA: Taiwan-owned MV Ever Given (Evergreen) vessel is lodged sideways yesterday, impeding all traffic across the Suez Canal. — AFP

Islamic party kingmaker after Israel elections

JERUSALEM: Israel's election brought a surprise when a conservative Islamic party

crossed the threshold to enter parliament and its leader emerged yesterday as a possible kingmaker. Mansour Abbas and his Raam party - unlike other Arab political groups before it - have not ruled out joining an Israeli government. "We are prepared to engage" with either Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's camp or his rivals, Abbas told Israeli radio while stressing that "I'm not in anyone's pocket".

Yesterday the party was on track to win five seats in Israel's 120-member Knesset, with roughly 90 percent of the vote counted. Israel's latest inconclusive election left no clear path for Netanyahu or his rivals to form a government, setting the stage for protracted coalition talks. When Israel last voted a year ago, Raam had been part of the mainly Arab Joint List.

Continued on Page 2



Mansour Abbas

Postcard from the edge - of a black hole

PARIS: The astronomers who gave the world its first true glimpse of a black hole have produced another landmark image, this time capturing the polarized light swirling around the same star-eating monster's magnetic fields. But it is more than just a pretty picture. Never before has it been possible to measure polarization - which causes light waves to vibrate in a single plane - so close to the edge of a black hole.

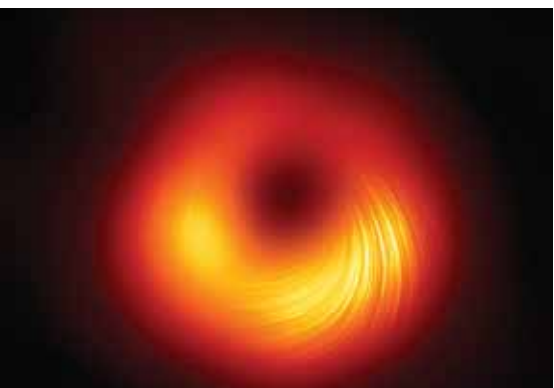
The new observations, based on data collected by the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2017, are

key to understanding how a galaxy can project streams of energy thousands of lightyears outward from its core, more than 300 scientists reported yesterday in a pair of studies.

"We are now seeing the next crucial piece of evidence to understand how magnetic fields behave around black holes," said co-author Monika Moscibrodzka, an assistant professor at Radboud University in the Netherlands. "Activity in this very compact region of space can drive powerful jets that extend far beyond the galaxy."

After releasing the historic image of the super-massive black hole at the heart of galaxy M87, more than 55 million light years from Earth, the researchers discovered that a significant fraction of its surrounding light was polarized. "The polarization of light carries information that allows us to better understand the physics behind the image we

Continued on Page 2



This handout photo released yesterday shows the polarized view of the black hole in the Messier 87 (M87) galaxy, with lines marking the orientation of polarization. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince congratulates Amir on return to Kuwait

Sheikh Nawaf condoles with UAE leaders on Sheikh Hamdan's demise

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on Tuesday, received a cable from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of his return to Kuwait. In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince congratulated His Highness the Amir on his return after the successful medical check-ups abroad. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked His Highness the Crown Prince for his sincere sentiments.

His Highness the Amir also received cables of congratulations yesterday from various state officials after the successful medical checkup he recently underwent in the United States. The cables were from National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, the President of Kuwait National Guard His Highness Sheikh Salem Ali Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Lieutenant General

Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The senior officials wished continuous success and thrive to the country under his wise leadership. In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a cable thanking them for their kind words and sentiments.

Amir sends condolences

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables of condolences to leadership of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the passing of Deputy Ruler of Dubai and UAE's Finance Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashed Al-Maktoum. His Highness the Amir sent cables of condolences to President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohamad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of UAE's Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, praying to Allah to bless the

deceased with mercy, and to bestow the family with solace. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables of condolences to President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum and Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan over the passing away of Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashed Al-Maktoum. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, expressing deep sympathy over the passing of Prince Bader bin Fahad bin Saud Al-Kabeer Al-Saud. In his cable, His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah to bless the deceased with mercy, and to bestow the family with solace. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables of condolences to the Saudi leadership.

Colorado shooting

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent on Tuesday a cable of condolences to US President Joe Biden over the deadly Colorado shooting. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere sympathy over the shooting at a central market in Colorado State that left several people dead and injured, wishing a speedy recovery to those wounded. His Highness the Amir stressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of this criminal act against innocent people. He added such acts run counter to all religious and humanitarian values. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to the US President, while National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent cables of condolences to President of the US Senate Kamala Harris and Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. — KUNA

EU official: Kuwait strong partner in efforts to resolve Syria crisis

BRUSSELS: Kuwait has been at the forefront in organizing conferences on Syria and remains a strong partner of the European Union in ongoing efforts to resolve the 10-year-old Syrian conflict, a senior EU official said in Brussels. "Kuwait remains a strong partner with whom we have regular conversations on aid as well as on the overall political situation and is part of the international consensus to back the efforts of the UN in solving the conflict," said the official in an online press briefing ahead of the fifth Syrian conference in Brussels next week. Kuwait has played a leading part in organizing pleading conferences on Syria (in 2013, 2014, and 2015), said the EU official speaking on condition of anonymity.

Kuwait was also the co-chair of the Brussels I conference on Syria, he recalled. Sixty countries have been invited to the Brussels conference including the key actors in the Gulf, as well as several regional and UN agencies. The European Union together with the UN is organizing the fifth Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" on March 29-30. In view of COVID-19

restrictions, the Conference will take place in virtual format. The Ministerial Conference will take place on March 30. On March 29, the Day of Dialogue will allow pursuing dialogue between civil society, refugee-hosting countries, the EU, and the UN.

The first objective of the conference is to support a political solution and to ensure the implementation of UN resolutions. The second objective is to raise pledges, to raise humanitarian support for the Syrians inside and outside Syria. The objectives of the Brussels conferences have been unchanged since 2017. These conferences are here to remind the world of the unity of the international community behind the efforts that are being made by the UN, said the official. March 15th marked the 10th anniversary of the Syrian crisis. The conflict is still ongoing, the situation in Syria and the region remains highly critical, with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deterioration of the economies across the region over the last year further exacerbating the dire humanitarian situation inside Syria and the conditions for Syrian refugees and their host communities in neighboring countries. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait's Diwan of Human Rights Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarak meets with Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert. — KUNA

Kuwait Human Rights Diwan chief meets Australian Ambassador

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait's Diwan of Human Rights Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarak held talks with Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert yesterday on duties of the Diwan and how they were in compliance with international human rights accords. The Diwan, in a statement yesterday, said the meeting was within the framework of ongoing

meetings with officials locally and internationally. Mubarak noted progress of human rights situation in Kuwait, which was keen on promoting human rights, it said. Gilbert reaffirmed Australia's support to human rights issue, and said the country was keen on exchanging expertise to promote human rights agencies. — KUNA

Islamic party kingmaker after...

Continued from Page 1

But that alliance fractured earlier this year amid ideological divisions between Abbas and his former partners.

The conservative Abbas long had frictions with other Arab Israeli factions, including those with communist roots. Weeks before Tuesday's vote, Abbas indicated an openness to dealing with Netanyahu, even though the premier has demonized Arab-Israelis at various points through his political career. But Abbas argued that Arab leaders have a responsibility to partner with whoever is in power in order to

tackle a crime epidemic rocking Arab communities.

Analysis by state broadcaster Kan vote showed that the combined strength of the declared pro-Netanyahu parties was 52 seats while those seeking to end his long reign commanded 56. For Netanyahu, that means securing a 61-seat majority could require an alliance with his estranged former protege, the religious nationalist Naftali Bennett, who is projected to control seven seats, as well as with Abbas. Such alliance would however be plagued by bitter divisions.

The pro-Netanyahu bloc following Tuesday's vote also includes the far-right extremist Religious Zionism bloc whose members have spouted incendiary anti-Arab rhetoric. The prospects for Raam and Religious Zionism to sit a stable coalition under Netanyahu appear dim. For the ideologically divided anti-Netanyahu camp, bringing Abbas on board could also prove complicated. — AFP

Postcard from the edge - of...

Continued from Page 1

saw in April 2019," explained co-author Ivan Marti-Vidal, a researcher at the University of Valencia.

It took several years to process and analyze the data, he added, calling the result "a major milestone". When light is emitted in hot regions of space where magnetic fields are present it becomes polarized. In the same way that specially treated sunglasses reduce reflections and glare from bright surfaces, astronomers can see the regions around a black hole better by looking at how the light is polarized. This makes it possible to map the magnetic field lines at the black hole's inner edge.

Matter in a black hole is so dense as to create a gravity field from which even light cannot escape. At the same scale of compression, Earth would fit inside a thimble. This makes black holes difficult to see. They are most often detected by the radiation produced when their gravity pulls in surrounding gases, a process called accretion.

34 lawmakers demand vote...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, MP Ali Al-Qattan submitted a draft law calling to grant over 100,000 stateless people

- locally known as bedoons - basic civil rights, including permanent residency and jobs. The bill calls to provide all bedoons with a civil ID valid for five years, which can be renewed. On the basis of this ID, bedoons should be entitled to free medical care, education - including at the university level - and priority for jobs after Kuwaiti citizens. Under the bill, bedoons will enjoy all other basic rights, many of which they are currently deprived of.



A handout satellite image released yesterday shows the Taiwan-owned MV 'Ever Given' (Evergreen) container ship lodged sideways and impeding all traffic across the waterway of Egypt's Suez Canal. — AFP

Wedged giant ship blocks...

Continued from Page 1

Storms with dense dust clouds carrying fine sand have swept across much of the Middle East since yesterday. Shipping monitors MarineTraffic said the vessel had been in the same position since at least Tuesday afternoon. "Rescue and tug units are continuing their efforts" to free the MV Ever Given, involving at least eight tug boats, SCA chairman Admiral Osama Rabie said yesterday morning.

Photographs released by the SCA also showed excavators onshore digging soil from the canal's bank, with the earth-moving equipment dwarfed by the giant hull towering above. A MarineTraffic map showed large clusters of vessels circling in both the Mediterranean to the north and the Red Sea to the south. Historic sections of the canal were reopened in a bid to ease the bottleneck, with dozens of ships waiting at both ends of the waterway.

A source at the SCA said later that the first of the ships stuck to the north of the Ever Given had entered an alternative navigational channel and was on its way to the Red Sea. "It is unclear at this point how long ships will remain in the transit area in the lakes region or if they will continue their journey southwards," the source told AFP.

Instagram user Julianne Cona posted a photo of the grounded ship from the Maersk Denver, which was forced to wait behind the Ever Given. "Ship in front of us ran aground while going through the canal and is now stuck sideways," she wrote. "Looks like we might be here for a little bit."

The canal, which links the Mediterranean to the

Red Sea, was opened to navigation in 1869, and was expanded in 2015 to accommodate larger ships. The journey between ports in the Gulf and London, for example, is roughly halved by going through the Suez - compared with the alternate route via the southern tip of Africa.

Even a short closure of the route has a big impact on "just in time" logistic chains, said Camille Egloff, transport and logistic expert at Boston Consulting Group. While Egloff said the ship was in a "hyper-controlled environment" and suggesting it would be "a matter of hours" before traffic was moving freely again, the costs would add up. "It costs a lot of money, because it blocks the traffic behind," she said. "There will be a domino effect in all the European ports in the coming days."

Bjonar Tonhaugen, head of oil market research at Rystad Energy, was more optimistic in his assessment. "The effect is likely to be small and transient" because "demand is currently soft amid the refinery maintenance season and concerns about extended lockdowns," he told AFP. However, he warned "if the blockage lasts for more than a few days, it could impact prices more and for a longer time".

Nearly 19,000 ships passed through the canal last year carrying more than one billion tons of cargo, according to the SCA. It has been a boon for Egypt's economy in recent years, with the country earning \$5.61 billion in revenues from the canal in 2020. President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi unveiled plans in 2015 for an expansion designed to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships using the canal daily by 2023.

Most of the cargo travelling from the Gulf to Western Europe is oil. In the opposite direction, it is mostly manufactured goods and grain from Europe and North America headed to the Middle East and Asia. — AFP

Local

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 5:00 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. The curfew hours were later changed to be from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am starting March 23. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services. The government later allowed co-ops and supermarkets to serve shoppers from the start of the curfew to 10:00 pm every day, and then allowed restaurants and cafes to deliver food from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to Fajr, Maghreb and Isha prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government later allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day after a one-month closure but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit www.moci.shop, enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swabs and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

Omariya Co-op
WhatsApp 6041-0067

Farwaniya Co-op
WhatsApp 6767-8211

Qairawan Co-op
WhatsApp 9000-3749

Jahra Co-op
WhatsApp 5160-2458

Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-6338

Nuzha Co-op
WhatsApp 9784-5531

Khaitan Co-op
WhatsApp 6777-9745

Ardhiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6902-0779

Rabiya Co-op
WhatsApp 2438-8316

Wafra Farm Co-op
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085

Salmiya Co-op
Tel: 22253225

Jabriya Co-op
Tel: 1805-353
WhatsApp 6566-6084

Rawdha & Hawally
WhatsApp 9662-2883

Shaab Co-op
WhatsApp 9090-4455

Wafra Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-0539

Keifan Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-1719

Rehab Co-op
WhatsApp 9222-2358

Mishref Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-9900

Faiha Co-op
Tel: 1861-000
WhatsApp 9098-6000

Rumaithiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045

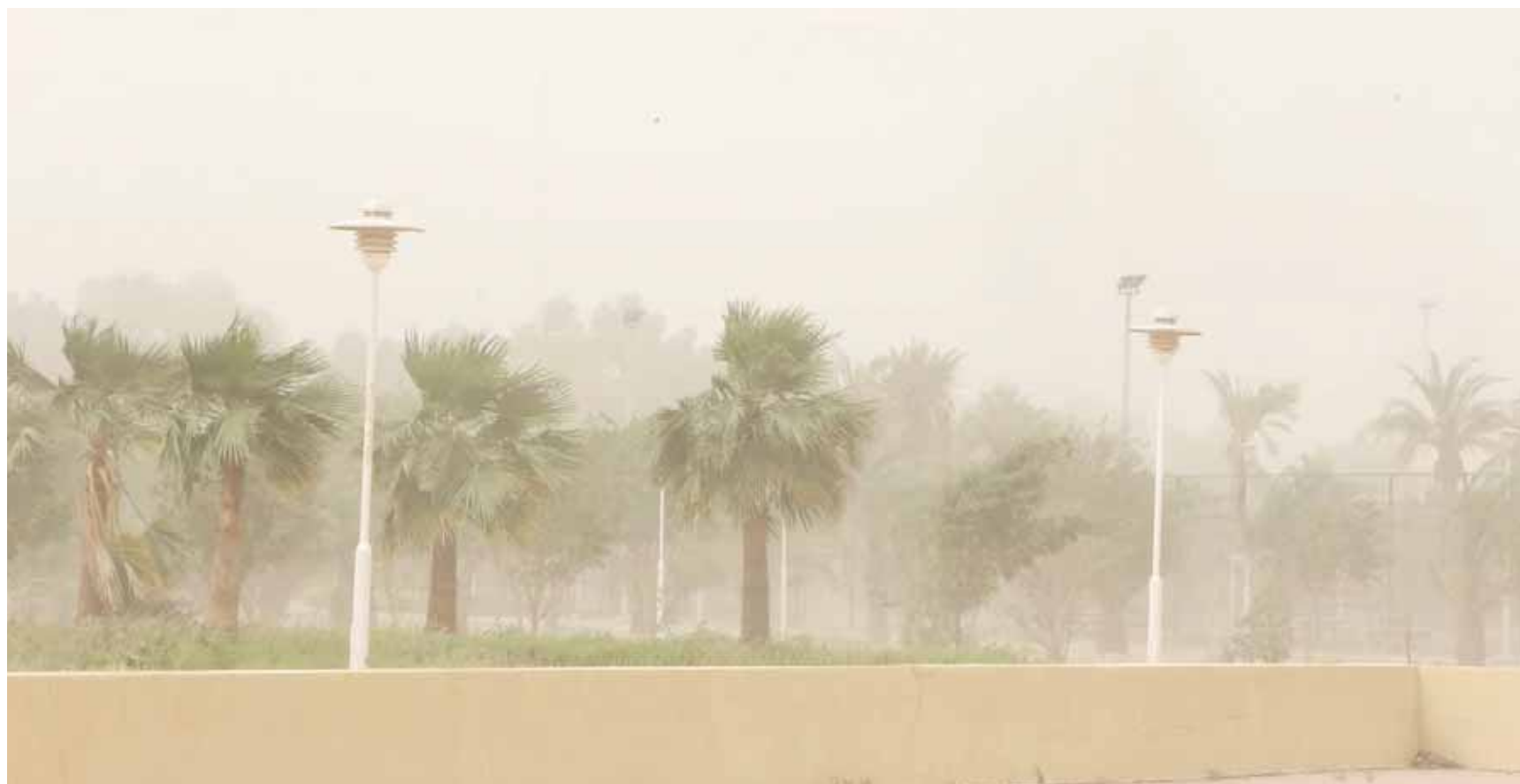
Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500

Fahaheel Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-9951

Adan & Qusour Co-op
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975

Salam Co-op
WhatsApp 9788-7832

Strong winds blow dust, locusts into Kuwait



KUWAIT: People in Kuwait were caught off guard yesterday by a sudden dust storm that dropped visibility under 500 meters in some areas, powered by winds that exceeded 70 kilometers per hour in speed, and coupled with an

unusual spike in temperature at this time of the year as the maximum reached 44 C at Kuwait International Airport. In addition, the strong winds, which resulted from a low pressure, brought with them swarms of locusts that were seen

in several areas across the country. The weather is expected to improve in the early hours of today morning, with temperatures dropping back to the low 30s, according to Kuwait Meteorological Center. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Young Writers

The human

By Layan Al-Qenaei

A human is a creation that isn't born perfect and has flaws on the way. Although he tries to be a perfectionist but fails. He is born with a brain to think before doing and a tongue to connect it with the brain before speaking. Humans have many imperfections or flaws such as slavery, harassment, forced marriage, animal abuse, etc. Slavery began in 1619, yet it is still found nowadays. Nannies, drivers and company workers are not slaves, but are named as victims of modern slavery. I repeat, Nannies, drivers and company workers are not slaves. They deserve their salary on time, plus their food and rest readily available. They are humans; they deserve love, attention, and kindness. Some families treat nannies and drivers as if they are slaves from the 1600s or some kind of robots. Those actions should be forbidden. In addition, many high company operations use their workers as slaves by not giving them their salaries although they gain millions of dollars. Some company workers are children; they deserve to be studying at schools, not working in bag, shoe and fabric factories. Every human deserves to be respected no matter how much money they make, their looks, class, nationality, and so-on.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Residents walk on a waterfront promenade in Kuwait City on Tuesday, as authorities allowed people to exercise for two hours amid a nationwide curfew due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait could save KD 900 million on metro project

KUWAIT: Correspondence issued by the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) shows that the current model for the Kuwait Metro, for which a financial study was conducted, showed that the construction cost for the first stage - if implemented with the conventional system - will be KD 4 billion, in addition to KD 1.3 billion annually for operation and maintenance for 30 years. Meanwhile, construction of the first stage if the current system continues with partnership between public

and private sectors will be around KD 3.476 billion, in addition to KD 934.8 million for operation and maintenance annually for 30 years, which means savings of around KD 900 million, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. The partnership authority said that on April 5, 2017, a higher committee decision was issued asking KAPP to correspond with the Public Authority for Roads and Transport (PART) to complete a feasibility study and decide the suitable means to execute the project. It called the concerned departments to issue related decisions to finish the feasibility study as soon as possible. KAPP called PART on May 16, 2017 to implement what the higher committee instructed. The independent higher committee is formed of specialized persons according to a finance ministry decision.

COVID-19 vaccine doesn't invalidate fast

KUWAIT: The fatwa (religious edict) authority at the Ministry of Awqaf Islamic Affairs said the COVID-19 vaccine does not invalidate the fast and can be taken during the day-time in Ramadan, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. This came in a statement by the fatwa department while answering a query with regards to the vaccination campaign the ministry is carrying out against the novel coronavirus. The question was: Will the vaccine taken through the muscle during the day spoil the fast or not? The authority said in its fatwa: "If a recipient becomes very tired due to fasting because of the jab, or if a competent doctor advises them to break the fast to avoid harm and alleviate pain, they can break the fast and must make up for it after recovering."

FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition 2021



It is our pleasure to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition. We hope that everyone is ready to create beautiful artworks and show support for our heroes of Kuwait! We're searching for great art – so get your paintbrushes, color pencils, crayons and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6-18 years with categories (6 - 8 years) (9 - 11 years) (12 - 14 years) (15 -18 years) and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- Submissions are open from February 14, 2021 till March 31, 2021.
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- Participants in the ages 6 - 8 years may use marker colors only.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artwork must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email at painting@kuwaittimes.net in PDF format ONLY.
- Participant must include on the bottom of the artwork the following: name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.

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TUNIS: Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhafiri. —KUNA

Kuwait, Tunisia discuss ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation

TUNIS: Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhafiri discussed yesterday ways to strengthen and develop bilateral cooperation between both countries. This was brought up during a meeting between Mechichi and Al-Dhafiri, at the Government Palace in Kasbah,

the Tunisian government said in a statement, noting that the talks focused on supporting cooperation between both sides and elevating it to the level of strategic partnership. Mechichi underlined the importance of the exemplary ties that existed between both sides for decades, highlighting the size of Kuwaiti investments in tourism and the banking sector in Tunisia, which dates back to the 1960s. Meanwhile, Dhafiri expressed Kuwait's support with standing by Tunisia in its path and the economic reforms to be implemented, as well as revitalizing economic ties by upgrading the work of the joint Tunisian-Kuwaiti Higher Committee to the level of heads of government. On this occasion, Dhafiri presented an official invitation to Mechichi to visit Kuwait, which he accepted to be scheduled for later. — KUNA

Kuwait oil price down to \$63.64 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil was down 23 cents to reach \$63.64 per barrel on Tuesday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Elsewhere, the price of Brent Crude saw a decline of \$3.83 to reach \$60.79 pb, as the West Texas Intermediate was also down \$3.80 to settle at \$57.76 pb. The price of OPEC basket of 13 crudes went down by 95 cents to \$62.27 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday compared to \$63.22 the day before, said OPEC Secretariat calculations yesterday. OPEC bulletin stated that the annual rate of the basket price last year was at \$41.47 pb. Dealers in the oil market said that the recent OPEC Plus agreement to maintain low production, contributed in supporting global market prices above \$60.00 pb. The General Secretariat estimated the demand for OPEC raw materials would reach 27.3 million this year, which is about 4.9 million barrels per day compared to 2020. — KUNA



Gulf states keen on enhancing ties with China

RIYADH: GCC states are looking forward to enhancing cooperation and good ties with China to achieve common goals, said the GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf yesterday. During his meeting with State Counselor and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Hajraf discussed the latest regional and international developments. The two sides welcomed Saudi Arabia's initiative to end the crisis in Yemen to reach a comprehensive political agreement that includes a ceasefire under the UN supervision. Moreover, both sides discussed the outcomes of the fourth strategic dialogue held between the two parties on November 9. They also stressed the importance of investing in the opportunities that resulted from the Coronavirus pandemic in the fields of the digital economy, artificial intelligence, the fourth industrial revolution, and e-commerce, as well as the Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative' projects in a way that serves the common strategic interests between the two sides. — KUNA



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MEKELE: A general view, through a broken glass, of a bus station in Wukro, north of Mekele. Every phase of the four-month-old conflict in Tigray has brought suffering to Wukro, a fast-growing transport hub once best-known for its religious and archaeological sites. —AFP

Over 100 killed in Tigray massacre: Rights body

Abiy admits Eritrean troops crossed the border into Tigray

NAIROBI: The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said yesterday that Eritrean soldiers killed over 100 civilians in a November massacre in war-torn Tigray that may amount to crimes against humanity. The findings by the government-affiliated but independent body corroborate separate investigations by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch into the same killings in the historic town of Axum.

"Information collected during this preliminary investigation confirm that during the two days of November 28 and November 29, grave violations of human rights were committed and that in Axum, over one hundred residents... were killed by Eritrean soldiers," the commission said. "As these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes, it underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into overall human rights situation in Tigray region."

The latest report comes after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted for the first time that Eritrean troops had crossed the border into Tigray, and suggested they may have been involved in abuses against civilians. Addis Ababa and Asmara had for months flatly denied the involvement of Eritrean forces in the conflict, and described reports of their alleged atrocities in the region as misinformation and propaganda.

'Door to door'

The EHRC conducted a fact-finding mission to Axum, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in late February and early March after earlier attempts to reach the town were "impeded by the security situation". The rights commission spoke to dozens of witnesses who said Eritrean troops shot unarmed civilians and fired on those who tried to collect their bodies. "Eritrean soldiers went door to door asking women 'where their husbands or children were' telling them 'to bring their sons out if they have any'," the report stated. Corpses were left in the streets for days, some being dismembered by animals, witnesses said.

Like Amnesty and HRW—which separately reported hundreds butchered in Axum—the EHRC could not provide an exact death toll. The commission was still verifying more victims and investigating other alleged atrocities in areas around Axum, it

said. Eritrean and Ethiopian troops were also accused of looting hospitals—even taking hospital beds and mattresses—resulting in crippling medicine and equipment shortages that resulted in patient deaths, the report said. Abiy sent troops into Tigray on November 4 after he blamed the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, for attacks on federal army camps. He declared fighting over in late November with the capture of the regional capital but reports of widespread rape, murder and looting by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces have spurred calls for an investigation. The United Nations, among other members of the international community, have urged Eritrean troops to withdraw from Tigray.

The military campaign to unseat the TPLF—which dominated national politics for decades—has led to a drawn-out conflict that has seen brutal atrocities carried out against civilians. In a wide-ranging speech to parliament, Abiy said the "Eritrean people and government did a lasting favor to our soldiers", during the conflict, without giving details.

"However, after the Eritrean army crossed the border and was operating in Ethiopia, any damage it did to our people was unacceptable," he said. "We don't accept it because it is the Eritrean army, and we would not accept it if it were our soldiers. The military campaign was against our clearly targeted enemies, not against the people. We have discussed this four or five times with the Eritrean government."

National security issues

Abiy said that according to the Eritrean government, its soldiers had taken over trenches on the border—which had been dug during the bloody 1998-2000 war between the two nations—after they were abandoned by Ethiopian soldiers. "Eritrea told us it had national security issues and as a result had seized areas on the border" but had vowed to leave if Ethiopian soldiers returned to the trenches. He said Eritrea argued the TPLF pushed them to enter the battle "by firing rockets" across the border.

"The Eritrean government has severely condemned alleged abuses and has said it will take measures against any of its sol-

diers accused of such," Amnesty International has said. Eritrean troops had killed hundreds in the town of Axum, while AFP spoke to residents of the village of Dengolat, where the church counted 164 dead. In his speech Abiy accused Amnesty, the United Nations and other agencies of being "part of the TPLF family". However he admitted there had been abuses. "Battle is destructive, it hurts many, there is no question about it. There have been damages that happened in Tigray region, notwith-

standing the propaganda and lies, information indicates there have been rapes of women and looting of properties."

Eritrea, one of the world's most repressive and secretive nations, gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, and relations quickly deteriorated over territorial and economic disputes. Five years later the two launched into a bloody war which left 80,000 dead, and led to a diplomatic stalemate long after a peace deal was signed in 2000. —AFP

Congo's Nguesso re-elected with 88.57% of vote

BRAZZAVILLE, Congo: The Republic of Congo's veteran president, Denis Sassou Nguesso, has been re-elected with 88.57 percent of the vote, according to provisional results released Tuesday. Sassou Nguesso, 77, has been in power for an accumulated 36 years, first taking the helm of the central African state in 1979. His landslide first-round victory, announced by the interior minister citing figures from the electoral commission, had been widely expected.

Sunday's ballot had been boycotted by the main opposition and overshadowed by the death from COVID of Sassou Nguesso's only major rival, Guy-Brice Parfait Kolelas, 61, who garnered 7.84 percent of the vote. Turnout was measured at 67.55 percent.

One of the world's longest-serving rulers, Sassou Nguesso has long been accused by critics of authoritarian rule and turning a blind eye to corruption, poverty and inequality despite the country's oil wealth. "By this vote, the people in their majority responded and said that we had the capacity to bounce back, to recover our economy and to move towards development," he said in brief comments to reporters. Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno, considered a shoo-in to extend his own 30-year rule in April 11 elections, congratulated Sassou Nguesso on his "brilliant reelection."

Rival's death

Kolelas, the son of a former prime minister who was a leading government critic, died aboard a medical plane that flew him to Paris on polling day, his campaign director Christian Cyr Rodrigue Mayanda



BRAZZAVILLE, Commune de Brazzaville: Supporters of Congo's re-elected President Denis Sassou Nguesso gather to celebrate the election results outside the headquarters of the ruling Congolese Labor Party (PCT) in Brazzaville. —AFP

said. Kolelas initially thought he had malaria, but belatedly discovered that it was COVID-19, a friend of his said. He posted a video from his sickbed, declaring he was "battling against death" and urging followers to "rise up as one person."

Mathias Dzon, a former finance minister who picked up 1.9 percent of the vote, announced on Monday that he would file suit to the Constitutional Court to overturn the vote, which he described as "disastrous." On polling day, access to the internet and social media, as well as text messages, was cut while in the centre of the capital Brazzaville, shops were closed and only security vehicles were seen.

In some areas voters complained that their names were not on the electoral list. The victory, placing Sassou Nguesso on course for another five-year term, marks his fourth election win since 2002. The former paratrooper first rose to power in 1979. He served three presidential terms until he was forced to introduce multi-party elections in 1991 and was defeated at the ballot box the following year. But he returned to power in 1997 following a prolonged civil war. —AFP

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN
Ministry of Housing



مملكة البحرين
وزارة الأشغال
والمدينة

The Ministry of Housing would like to announce the tender for the following works:

Tender Title	Tender No.	Tender/Initial Bond	Documentation Fee	Closing Date & Time	
Construction of 256 Social Apartment Units & its associated External Woks & Infrastructure in Village C1/C2 at East Hidd in the Kingdom of Bahrain funded through the Kuwait Grant under the GCC Development Program to the Kingdom of Bahrain. (Package – A)	HP/07/20	BD 50,000 /-	BD 100 /- (non-refundable)	Sunday, 09-May-2021	1:30 PM (Bahrain local time)
Construction of 264 Social Apartment Units & its associated External Woks & Infrastructure in Village B1/B2 at East Hidd in the Kingdom of Bahrain funded through the Kuwait Grant under the GCC Development Program to the Kingdom of Bahrain. (Package – B)	HP/08/20	BD 50,000 /-	BD 100 /- (non-refundable)	Sunday, 09-May-2021	1:30 PM (Bahrain local time)

- Suitably eligible and qualified contractors are invited to participate in the above-mentioned Tender Packages. Eligibility to participate shall be given to Kuwaiti Grade 'A' Contractor registered with the Kuwaiti Central Tender Committee; and Contractors registered in Bahrain should be categorized as Grade A with the Ministry of Housing and/or Grade AA in Building Construction Projects with the Ministry of Works, Kingdom of Bahrain in a Joint Venture with any Kuwaiti Eligible Contractor. Full details of the tenderer's eligibility and qualification criteria are provided in the Invitation for Qualification document.
- This is a public tender whereby the prequalification of tenderers is combined with the submission of their technical and financial proposals. Full details are provided in the Invitation for Qualification Document no. QD EHH-HP-2020 attached to each of the tender Packages. This tender is a two-envelope tender and the prequalification & technical bids will be opened first and the financial bid of technically qualified tenderers only will be opened later.
- This tender is through the Bahrain Tender Board E-Tendering System and eligible contractors who wish to participate for above mentioned Project shall have to purchase and download the Documents online through the Bahrain Tender Board's portal <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.bh>. The tender documents shall be available for purchase and download beginning from Sunday, 21-Mar-2021 up to Sunday, 18-Apr-2021.
- Contractors who are not yet registered in the Bahrain Tender Board's e-tendering system shall be required to register through the below-mentioned link. Details of registration are provided online at the Bahrain Tender Board website. For technical assistance please contact the Tender Board through email address helpdesk@tenderboard.gov.bh or call on Tel No. +973-17566666.

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.bh/Tenders/registerUser>

- The completed Tender which comprise of the Application for Qualification, Technical and Financial Proposal documents shall be submitted online in accordance with the Instruction to Tender and the E-Tendering Guidelines of the Bahrain Tender Board. The Tenderer should include and enclose in his offer the Tender Bond for the amount specified above. The Tender Bond should be in the form and manner as prescribed in the tender document valid for 180 days from the closing date.
- This Tender is in accordance with the provision of the Kingdom of Bahrain's Law Regulating Government Tenders & Purchases No. (36) of 2002 and Its Implementing Regulations issued by Decree No. (37) of 2002; and is subjected to the Unified Rules for Giving Priority to National Products and Products of a National Origin (Article 8, Prime Ministerial Edict No. 21 of 1987).
- For any query regarding the invitation, please contact: Cost Engineering Section, Ministry of Housing, P.O. Box 5802, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, Tel. No.: +973-17533000-ext.519, Email: Chandramohan.Krishnapilla@housing.gov.bh.
- This advertisement shall be a supplementary to the Tender Document.

International

China accuses EU of ‘hypocrisy’ after ambassadors summoned

US hits two Chinese officials with sanctions over Uighur abuses

BEIJING: Beijing accused the EU of “hypocrisy” yesterday after the two sides summoned each other’s envoys in an escalating row over the treatment of China’s Uighurs. France, Germany and other EU nations called in Chinese ambassadors to protest against sanctions imposed by Beijing targeting their citizens, including five members of the European Parliament as well as two EU bodies and two think-tanks.

Meanwhile, the US Treasury Department placed sanctions on two senior Chinese officials for what it called “serious human rights abuses” against Uighurs and other minorities in the country’s Xinjiang region. “Chinese authorities will continue to face consequences as long as atrocities occur in Xinjiang,” said Andrea Gacki, the Treasury official overseeing the sanctions program.

The sanctions targeted Wang Junzheng, the secretary of the Chinese Communist Party committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), and Chen Mingguo, director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau. The Treasury action was part of a coordinated effort by the European Union, Britain, Canada and the United States to raise the pressure on Beijing for putting more than one million Xinjiang citizens, mostly Muslim Uighurs, in prison camps, and using many in forced labor programs.

The sanctions were a tit-for-tat response after the EU, Britain and Canada blacklisted four former and current officials in China’s Xinjiang region. China called in the EU and British envoys in Beijing over the coordinated move. Rights groups say at least one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps in Xinjiang, where authorities are also accused of forcibly sterilizing women and imposing forced labor. China has strongly denied the allegations, saying training programs, work schemes and better education have helped stamp out extremism in the northwest region and raise income. “The EU only allows itself to arbitrarily smear and attack others, and even arbitrarily imposes sanctions based on false information and lies, but does



THE HAGUE: The entrance of the China embassy in the Netherlands in The Hague as the Dutch government summoned the Chinese ambassador after a lawmaker was among 10 Europeans sanctioned by Beijing in a row with the EU over the Uighur crackdown, the foreign ministry said. — AFP

not allow the Chinese to talk back or fight back,” said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a press briefing. “This in itself is double standards, a manifestation of bullying and hypocrisy.” Washington, which had already imposed sanctions on two of the Chinese officials in July 2020, extended them to two others.

It is leading a drive to form a united front against China on issues from rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong to Beijing’s claims over the South China Sea. China had until recently enjoyed relatively cordial relations with the EU, which has been muted over alleged rights abuses as it hunts a trade pact with the world’s second largest economy. The European Union and China in December approved “in principle” a major investment pact after seven years of painstaking negotiations—but it is still expected to take months to be final-

ized and fully ratified as a legal text. Hua said China did “not accept the unreasonable practice of some European countries in summoning Chinese ambassadors.” The tensions come as the EU seeks to formulate a strategy on China at a time when tensions between Beijing and Washington are emerging as the world’s number one geopolitical issue. Beijing also released a report yesterday detailing what it said were human rights abuses committed in the US, citing gun crime, violence towards ethnic minorities and the way Washington has tackled the COVID-19 outbreak.

“The United States, which has always considered itself an exception and superior, saw its own epidemic situation go out of control, accompanied by political disorder, inter-ethnic conflicts, and social division,” the report claimed. — AFP

‘Dubious charge’

The accusations against Monjib relate to the management of a center he created to help promote investigative journalism. Six journalists and activists who were also on trial were sentenced to up to a year in prison. Three have left Morocco, and been granted political asylum in Europe.



RABAT: Moroccan historian and rights activist Maati Monjib (right), who was on hunger strike for 19 days, is embraced by a man upon his release from El Arjat prison near the capital Rabat on Tuesday. — AFP

Human Rights Watch said it was “relieved” at Monjib’s release. His conviction “should be overturned because authorities did not notify him of the trial’s last session, which took place in his absence”, the New York-based watchdog said in a statement. It said that “the criminal investigation into the dubious charge of ‘money laundering’ against him is pending,” and urged authorities to “respect his fair-trial rights by ending their refusal to grant him full access to his own case file”. Monjib’s support committee said he had requested transferal to hospital on Monday to “continue the hunger strike under medical supervision”. He had become considerably weaker and had lost consciousness several times, his supporters said.—AFP



SAO PAULO: An aerial view of a burial at the Vila Formosa cemetery during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, in Sao Paulo, on Tuesday. — AFP

Currently some 11.1 million Brazilians, or 5.2 percent of the population, have received at least one dose of vaccine and 3.5 million both doses, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Bolsonaro, who is up for re-election in 2022, has also gone from dismissing the pandemic to expressing solidarity “with all those who have lost a loved one.” His presentation however was met with a cacophony of pot banging in the country’s main cities such as Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia – a traditional sign of protest in Latin America.

Brazil’s average daily COVID-19 death toll has more than tripled since the start of the year to 2,364, currently the highest worldwide. Experts say the explosion is fueled by a local variant of the virus that is believed to be more contagious. In a new warning sign, the prosecutor general’s office said Tuesday the health ministry had told it that medical oxygen supplies were at “worrying” levels in six of Brazil’s 27 states. One of Brazil’s main oxygen suppliers, the White Martins company, said it was racing to keep up with an “exponential increase” in demand of up to 300 percent in some regions, prosecutors said in a statement.—AFP

Morocco dissident historian provisionally freed from prison

RABAT: Moroccan historian and rights activist Maati Monjib, who was on hunger strike for 19 days, was provisionally released from prison Tuesday after three months in custody. Friends and supporters welcomed the 60-year-old academic, who was visibly thin but happy as he walked out of El Arjat prison near Rabat, where he had been held since his arrest. “The accusations against me are fabricated... now that I enjoy provisional release, I will agitate for freedom of other detainees” held for their opinions, he said shortly after his release. Monjib’s lawyer Mohamed Messaoudi told AFP earlier on Tuesday that “the investigating judge has decided to provisionally release him.” Monjib, known for his open criticism of the authorities, was taken into custody on December 29 as part of a preliminary investigation into money laundering.

In parallel, a Moroccan court sentenced him in January to one year in prison for fraud and undermining state security, as part of a trial that opened in 2015.

His defense team said they were not told about the hearing and Monjib purportedly was not in attendance. He has repeatedly denounced his “wrongful arrest” and has denied the charges against him. Moroccan authorities have said Monjib received a fair trial. His supporters in Morocco and abroad have repeatedly demanded his release, calling him a “prisoner of conscience” and expressing worry about the health effects of his hunger strike.

In a statement on Facebook in November saying he had contracted the novel coronavirus, Monjib said he also suffered from heart problems and diabetes. His lawyer said Tuesday that he was “in good spirits”.

Brazil’s 24-hour COVID deaths surpass 3,000

BRASÓLIA, Brazil: Brazil’s daily COVID-19 death toll soared past 3,000 for the first time Tuesday as the hard-hit country struggled to contain a surge of cases that has pushed many hospitals to breaking point. The health ministry registered a record 3,251 deaths in the past 24 hours, bringing Brazil’s overall death toll to nearly 299,000 — second only to the United States.

The latest bleak milestone came on the same day President Jair Bolsonaro installed his fourth health minister of the pandemic, facing pressure to change tack after downplaying the virus and flouting expert advice on containing it. Cardiologist Marcelo Queiroga, 55, took over the post from Eduardo Pazuello, an army general with no medical experience whose handling of Covid-19 was widely criticized.

Pazuello is notably facing investigation for failing to ensure oxygen supplies to the northern city of Manaus, where there were horrific scenes in January of COVID-19 patients suffocating to death when hospitals ran out. Bolsonaro’s first two health ministers, doctors Luiz Henrique Mandetta and Nelson Teich, both fell out with the president over his defiance of expert advice on containing the virus.

‘Very soon a normal life’?

Speaking late Tuesday Bolsonaro said that Brazil would resume “very soon a normal life” thanks to the vaccination campaign that he had early criticized. “I want to reassure the Brazilian people and inform them that the vaccines are guaranteed. By the end of the year we will have more than 500 million doses of vaccine to vaccinate the whole population,” Bolsonaro said.



PURI: Artist Manas Sahoo makes a sand art to observe ‘World TB Day’, in Puri, India, on Tuesday.—AFP

As COVID rages, world risks losing TB gains

PARIS: In the year since COVID-19 flipped the world on its head, diagnosis and treatment of another serious lung disease—tuberculosis—has plummeted, leaving experts fearful that progress in tackling that pandemic will be lost. Tuberculosis is treatable and easily diagnosed yet until COVID-19 emerged it was the world’s biggest infectious killer, leading to 1.4 million deaths each year and infecting more than 10 million people. While TB has been with humans for millennia, the progress towards eradicating this preventable disease has been painstaking, with the overwhelming majority of cases occurring in developing nations.

In the run up to World Tuberculosis Day yesterday, the Stop TB Partnership warned that lockdowns and healthcare interventions prompted by COVID-19 had seen a 23 percent drop in TB treatment and diagnosis. That essentially sets the world 12 years back in its fight to eradicate the global killer. “Twelve years of impressive gains in the fight against TB, including in reducing the number of people who are missing from TB care, have been tragically reversed by another virulent respiratory infection,” said Lucica Ditiu, executive director of the Stop TB Partnership. “In the process, we put the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in jeopardy.”

Worse than feared

At the start of the pandemic, modelling by Johns Hopkins University showed that a three-month lockdown followed by 10 months of health service disruption would lead to an additional 6.3 million TB cases by 2025. In the same period, 1.4 million people would die from the disease, the model showed.

Experts now acknowledged the situation is far worse than the one envisaged in the Johns Hopkins’ simulation. Statistics from the nine highest incidence countries—Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Tajikistan and Ukraine—showed TB diagnosis and treatment has already declined by a total of one million people.

And new studies from India and South Africa shows that people suffering with TB are three times more likely to die if infected with COVID-19. “The effects of COVID-19 go far beyond the death and disease caused by the virus itself,” the World Health Organization’s Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this week. “The disruption to essential services for people with TB is just one tragic example of the ways the pandemic is disproportionately affecting some of the world’s poorest people, who were already at higher risk for TB.” Jose Luis Castro, president and CEO of global health organization Vital Strategies, told AFP that the impact of COVID-19 on TB would be felt “for a long time to come”. —AFP

News in brief

Rato faces string of new crimes

MADRID: Former IMF chief Rodrigo Rato, already serving time for misuse of funds, was on Tuesday charged with a string of new crimes including tax fraud and money laundering, with Spanish prosecutors seeking a 70-year jail term. The scandal-hit 72-year-old was charged with 11 new offences which took place while he was economy minister in the government of Jose Maria Aznar (1996-2004), prosecutors said in a statement. Rato, who also served as deputy prime minister before going on to head the IMF from 2004-2007, was sentenced to 4.5 years in 2018 but was recently moved to a semi-open prison regime. —AFP

Ernst given 10-mth suspended jail term

VIENNA: Prince Ernst August of Hanover, husband of Caroline of Monaco, received a ten-month suspended jail sentence in Austria on Tuesday for violence against a police officer and threatening employees, the Austrian press agency APA said. Prince Ernst, 67, was also required by the court to find another home in Austria and attend psychotherapy. The Wels Court, which handed down the verdict, was not immediately available to confirm the news. The prince had faced up to three years in prison in the trial that flowed from events in the summer of 2020, magistrate Gerlinde Hellebrand said earlier. — AFP

Belarus businessman held in DR Congo

LUBUMBASHI, DR Congo: A Belarus businessman with alleged ties to Belarus strongman Alexander Lukashenko has been arrested in the Democratic Republic of Congo with two others and transferred to the capital Kinshasa, a security source said Tuesday. Alexander Zingman, who is honorary consul for Zimbabwe, was arrested in DR Congo’s second city Lubumbashi, the source said. The source did not give the reason for the arrest of the 54-year-old Zingman, who also holds US nationality. Zingman’s company AF Trade DMCC confirmed he was detained with another Belarusian Oleg Vodchits and Italian businessman Paolo Persico on March 18.

22 charged over anti-Senegalese riot

BANJUL: Gambian police said Tuesday that over 20 people have been charged over an anti-Senegalese riot this month in the tiny West African country surrounded by Senegal. On March 15, the coastal fishing town of Sanyang erupted in violence after a Senegalese man allegedly murdered a Gambian named Gibril Ceasey. Crowds then torched a police station, looted a Chinese-owned fishmeal processing plant, destroyed fishing boats and attacked homes, the police said in a statement. Senegal’s ambassador to The Gambia, Bassirou Sene, said Senegalese fishermen in the town had tried to shelter the suspected murderer and were attacked by locals. — AFP

NASA will attempt first off-world flight in early April

WASHINGTON: NASA is targeting early April for the Ingenuity Mars Helicopter to make the first attempt at powered, controlled flight on another planet, the space agency said Tuesday.

Right now, the ultra-light aircraft remains fixed to the belly of the Perseverance rover, which touched down on the Red Planet on February 18. On Sunday, Perseverance dropped the debris shield that had protected Ingenuity during landing, and is currently making its way to the “airfield” where Ingenuity will attempt its flights. Once there, it will have 30 Martian sols—equal to 31 Earth days—to carry out its mission.

“The best guess we have right now is April 8,” for the first flight, said Bob Balaram, Mars Helicopter chief engineer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, though he added it could be sooner or later by a few days. Balaram revealed for the first time that Ingenuity is carrying a small piece of cloth that covered one of the wings of the Wright brothers’ first aircraft that achieved the first powered flight on Earth at Kitty Hawk in 1903, to pay tribute to the milestone.

Ingenuity will be attempting to fly in an atmosphere that is one percent the density of Earth’s, which makes achieving lift harder—but will be assisted by a gravity that is one-third our planet’s. The first flight will involve climbing at a rate of about three feet (one meter) per second to a height of 10 feet (three meters), hovering there for 30 seconds, then descending back to the surface. Ingenuity will be taking high resolution photography as it flies.

Before any of this happens, however, Ingenuity needs to be placed at its launching site, and set upright, a process that will take a few more days. Once Perseverance drops off the helicopter, it needs to drive away about five meters within 25 hours so it doesn’t cast a shadow on Ingenuity. —AFP

International

Dhaka defends use of barbed-wire fences after Rohingya camp blaze

Fire guts 10,000 refugee shanties, killing 15 and rendering 50,000 homeless

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: Bangladesh yesterday defended the use of barbed-wire fences around vast camps holding almost a million Rohingya refugees, after a major fire left at least 15 people dead and nearly 50,000 homeless. The fire, which gutted some 10,000 refugee shanties, was the deadliest since more than 740,000 Rohingya fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 that UN investigators concluded was executed with "genocidal intent".

The UN, aid groups and Rohingya leaders said that the fences erected by the military hampered rescue work and caused injuries during Monday's 12-hour blaze in the maze of bamboo-and-tarp huts.

"Rescue efforts proved to be challenging as a result of the presence of perimeter fencing," a joint statement from the United Nations, local and international aid agencies said. "In some instances, refugees themselves cut through the fence to escape the fire," it said.

Bangladesh refugee commissioner Shah Rezwan Hayat defended the fences, which were built in recent months amid a worsening law and order situation in the vast settlements. "I don't believe these fences have hampered rescue efforts. There were enough roads in the camps and the hundreds of our officials, policemen and volunteers were there to rescue them," he said.

He said the fences were not built inside the camps to act as barriers between blocks of shanties. "The barbed-wire fences were erected on the outer boundary of the camps to ensure the safety and security of the Rohingya people. If the fencing acted as a barrier, how could dozens of fire fighting vehicles, police vans enter the camps within 20 minutes after the fire?" he said.

Earlier Rohingya refugees vented their anger to



People are seen clearing debris at a Rohingya refugee camp in Ukhaia on Tuesday where a huge blaze forced around 50,000 people to flee. — AFP

reporters and on social media saying some were injured as they were trying to flee the fire through the fences. Hayat also rejected the UN's claim that some 400 people were still missing after the fire, saying most refugees have taken shelters with relatives in neighboring camps, in schools and refugee transit centers.

"We are on the ground. So far we don't think anybody is missing," he said, adding the authorities and the UN agencies were now building tents and temporary

shelters and most refugees have started returning. A police spokesman said the local police station did not receive any reports of missing people from the Rohingya.

He said officers were questioning eight people over the fire. Hayat said preliminary findings suggested the fire originated from a stove in a shelter and then quickly spread due to strong wind and cooking gas cylinders. A full investigation was ongoing, he said. — AFP

Australia's 'Big Wet' eases, but many still isolated

WINDSOR, Australia: Rescue teams raced emergency supplies to flood-hit Australians yesterday, as trapped residents waited for still-swollen rivers to ebb, so the long, hard clean-up can begin. Eight million people in Australia's most populous state New South Wales woke to brilliant blue skies for the first time in a week, as a torrential downpour that has been dubbed the "Big Wet" finally ceased. But across the vast flood zone thousands of homes remained underwater, many communities were still isolated and police reported the first fatalities linked to the disaster. Officers said they discovered the remains of a 25-year-old Pakistani man trapped in his car in six meters (20 feet) of floodwater in Sydney's northwest. The man, who has not been named, had been on the phone with emergency services when the incident occurred and may have been unable to escape the vehicle because the electric failed.

Police in Queensland said divers found a second man dead in a vehicle that was upturned in a river. Since the flooding began last week, emergency services have responded to more than 11,000 calls for help, rescuing at least 950 people from floodwaters.

But the focus has now shifted to ferrying in food, medical supplies and other essentials and transporting out those in urgent need. Among them was 56-year-old Di Smith, who hours after receiving a cancer diagnosis needed to reach a hospital. She was on her farm north-

west of Sydney with a pig, a goat, chickens, six alpacas and a handful of dogs when the floods hit earlier in the week. Three bridges were washed out and a landslide blocked the main road out. "There's thousands of people over there isolated," she told AFP. She was ferried out by the State Emergency Service. "I'd have been absolutely lost without them," she said. "They're all volunteers, absolutely amazing."

Sixty-year-old Father John Rizzo had been administering rites to a heart patient in the mountains when he became stuck. "The damage is horrific," he said. "Even where the river isn't influencing anything, you have a lot of water that has run off the mountain, quite a few landslips and debris all over the road." "Finally today SES was able to get me across the river."

Thousands are still without power and energy providers have warned electricity will not be restored in the worst-affected areas until later in the week. The Red Cross reported 6,000 people had turned up at evacuation centers in the past 24 hours and 1,399 people had registered to reunite with loved ones.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who toured affected areas near Sydney by helicopter Wednesday morning, told local radio he had witnessed an "expanse of water" and "homes that are totally subsumed". He warned of a "massive clean-up task" ahead, saying the government had already made 10,000 disaster recovery payments to residents. State Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the flooding in some regions had been the worst in a century, with tens of thousands fleeing their homes, and thousands more remaining on evacuation alert. Many rivers have stabilized or begun to slowly recede, but water levels are not expected to substantially change until Saturday. Ailsa Jones said there was a "crazy" lack of supplies in Wheeny Creek, northwest of the city, with no essentials available in supermarkets since Sunday. — AFP



SYDNEY: Members of the State Emergency Service transport relief goods during rescue operations at a flooded residential area in the Windsor suburb of northwestern Sydney yesterday after torrential downpours have lashed Australia's southeast for days. — AFP

HK, Macau suspend Pfizer vaccine over packaging flaw

HONG KONG: Hong Kong suspended the use of Pfizer/BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine yesterday after being informed some vials from a recent batch had "defective caps"—although authorities said none of the problematic containers were used on residents. The stoppage, which was also announced by neighboring Macau, is the latest blow in efforts to roll out mass vaccination programs against a deadly virus that has killed more than 2.7 million people around the world and hammered the global economy.

Both Chinese cities said their decision came after they were contacted about the issue by Fosun, the Chinese pharmaceutical company that is distributing the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in China. Some vials with the lot number 210102 were found to have defective

caps, authorities said. "The pharmaceutical company said they don't have any reason to believe that this batch of vaccines has safety risks," Hong Kong health chief Sophia Chan told reporters. "The vaccines which we have found to have vial defects prior to injection were dumped. They were not used on residents," she added. Many vaccines are shipped in concentrated form inside vials and are then diluted before being administered. Bottles found to have problematic caps, cracks or other defects were dumped and therefore not used, Hong Kong officials said, adding they decided to suspend the program out of an abundance of caution until their investigation is concluded.

Turbulent politics

Some Hong Kongers took to social media to say their appointments that day had been cancelled and that some vaccination centers were closed. "I haven't lost confidence in the vaccine but I'm quite disappointed as I took the day off," one man, who gave his surname as Wong, told AFP as he arrived at a taped-off center. Hong Kong authorities said another batch of vaccines with lot number 210104 would be put to one side until the investigation is concluded.

News in brief

HK journalist on trial over data search

HONG KONG: An award-winning Hong Kong journalist went on trial yesterday for accessing car ownership details on official databases during an investigation into the perpetrators of an attack on democracy supporters by government loyalists. The prosecution of Bao Choy, a producer with public broadcaster RTHK, has deepened concerns over press freedoms as Beijing moves to stamp out dissent in the wake of huge democracy protests. Some of Choy's colleagues gathered outside court yesterday holding banners that read "Journalism is not a crime" and "Without fear or favor". Choy pleaded not guilty to two counts of "knowingly making a false statement" to access numberplate ownership records. — AFP

HK 'speedboat fugitive' charged

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong democracy activist who made a failed escape to Taiwan by speedboat was charged with a national security crime yesterday, a day after he was returned to the city by Chinese police. Andy Li, 30, was one of 12 "speedboat fugitives" who were picked up by Chinese coastguard last August as they made a bid to escape charges linked to taking part in 2019's democracy protests. They were jailed in mainland China for illegal border crossing and eight of them were returned to Hong Kong custody on Monday after serving their sentences. — AFP

North Korea slams EU for sanctions

SEOUL: North Korea slammed European Union human rights sanctions imposed against its senior officials this week as a "despicable political provocation" and the result of "a psychotic way of thinking". The 27-member EU Council said Monday it will slap sanctions on a dozen individuals and four entities in six countries—including China, Russia and North Korea—for human rights violations. The move prompted immediate retaliation by Beijing, triggering a furious diplomatic row between China-the North's key backer-and EU nations. — AFP

Two former Spanish PMs to testify

SAN FERNANDO DE HENARES, Spain: Two former Spanish prime ministers will testify as witnesses yesterday in the trial of a former treasurer of the right-wing Popular Party accused of operating a slush fund. Mariano Rajoy, who was premier from 2011-2018, and Jose Maria Aznar, who served from 1996-2004, will be quizzed by videoconference in the trial, which is focused on an alleged system of parallel bookkeeping by the PP to manage undeclared funds. The accounts were run by Luis Barcenan, who served as treasurer between 1990 and 2009 while first Aznar and then Rajoy led the PP, now Spain's main opposition party. The high-profile trial opened on February 8 at the National Court in San Fernando de Henares near Madrid and will run until May. — AFP

Anez accuses govt of risking her life

LA PAZ, Bolivia: Former Bolivia interim president Jeanine Anez on Tuesday accused authorities of injecting her with a dangerous substance in prison where she is being held in pre-trial detention. She was detained 10 days ago on charges of leading a coup against her socialist predecessor Evo Morales. Anez was handed six months of pre-trial detention, but last week she petitioned authorities to release her to a clinic to receive treatment for a "hypertension crisis." "I don't trust the government's doctors. They're part of the system of abuse and repression and have shown they're prepared to risk my life, injecting me with high risk medication without precautions or previous studies, with the only aim of keeping me in their cells," said Anez in a written note. — AFP

The city had planned to administer second doses within 21 days of the first, but Pfizer's guidelines allow for a 42-day space between shots giving authorities more time to trace any issues.

Despite being a notoriously packed city, Hong Kong has kept infections low thanks to some of the most stringent quarantine measures in the world, recording just 11,000 infections and 200 deaths since the pandemic began. Hong Kong began its vaccination drive last month but the public take-up has been slow and ensnared by roiling political unrest. The city was upended by huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019 that Beijing has responded to with a sweeping crackdown on dissent. As a result, public trust in Hong Kong's government is low. A recent poll said only 37 percent of Hong Kong adults planned to get vaccinated. As of Tuesday, 403,000 people—about five percent of the city's population—have had their first shot. Authorities currently offer China's Sinovac and the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Sinovac received fast-track approval despite not publishing peer-reviewed clinical data. The data available points to an efficacy rate of between 50-80 percent, depending on the studies. Pfizer says its efficacy rate is 94-95 percent. — AFP



YANGON: An empty street next to Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon yesterday as demonstrators called for a "silent strike" in protest against the military coup. — AFP

Myanmar frees 600 protesters detained at anti-coup rallies

YANGON: Myanmar freed more than 600 coup detainees from prison yesterday, amid fresh outrage at the junta's brutal crackdown on protesters. The regime has unleashed a deadly wave of violence as it struggles to quell nationwide protests against the February 1 ouster and arrest of Suu Kyi. The 75-year-old Nobel laureate was due to have a court hearing yesterday in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, on criminal charges that could see her permanently barred from political office. But her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said the hearing was adjourned until April 1 because of problems with video conferencing caused by a junta-imposed internet shutdown.

In commercial hub Yangon more than 600 people held for protesting against the coup were released on Wednesday from Insein prison. "We released 360 men and 268 women from Insein prison today," a senior prison official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Lawyer Khin Maung Myint, who was at Insein prison for the hearing of two other clients, said 16 busloads of people left the jail at 10 am local (0400 GMT). "They were sent to related police stations to go back home... Some clients called me (after) informing me of their release," he said. Local media showed images of the prisoners on the buses flashing the three-fingered salute—a sign of resistance for the anti-coup movement—as people waiting outside the prison waved at them and returned the gesture.

Activists called for a nationwide "Silent Strike" yesterday, and streets were bare in the cities of Yangon and Naypyidaw. In the southern city of Myeik, rows of dolls were set up along roads, holding up tiny signs reading "We need democracy" and "We wish for Mother Suu to be healthy."

At least 20 children killed

There was chaos overnight in Mandalay with barricades burning, arrests, homes raided by security forces, beatings and machine guns ringing out over multiple neighborhoods, local media reported. Three people were killed on Tuesday including seven-year-old girl Khin Myo Chit, shot dead at her home in Mandalay, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group.

AFP has yet to independently verify the girl's death. Aid group Save the Children and AAPP both say that at least 20 people aged under 18 have been killed in the crackdown. "We are horrified that children continue to be among the targets of these fatal attacks on peaceful protesters," Save the Children said in a statement. "The safety of children must be protected under all circumstances and we once again call on security forces to end these deadly attacks against protesters immediately." — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021

Business

Chinese ban sours Taiwan's 'freedom pineapple' harvest

Restaurants forced to come up with inventive new menu choices

PINGTUNG, Taiwan: A Chinese ban on pineapple imports from Taiwan has sparked a flood of patriotic buying of the fruit and forced restaurants to come up with inventive new menu choices but it has also left many questioning Taipei's overwhelming economic reliance on its giant neighbor.

While much of the island's pineapple crop is consumed at home, 90 percent of its overseas shipments head for sale in the vast Chinese market. However, that leaves its farmers at the mercy of Beijing's authoritarian leaders who view the self-ruled democracy as their own territory and have vowed to one day seize it, by force if needed.

And on March 1 they suddenly imposed a ban on pineapples citing the discovery of pests, sending panic among the fruit's farmers fearing for their livelihoods. "This is a political issue that we farmers are unable to resolve," lamented plantation owner Min Lee-ming, as dozens of workers rushed to pluck, trim and box up the fruits in Taishan, a rural part of southern Pingtung County known locally as "Pineapple Town".

"We just want to live a stable life and we need to make ends meet," he said. The ban led the government in Taipei to put out a call for solidarity and the people of Taiwan responded.

Social media has filled with calls for consumers to buy pineapples while restaurants are coming up with ever more ways to add pineapple to their offers. Among the food choices now on offer are pineapple salmon pasta, pineapple seafood rolls, pineapple shrimp balls with red curry fried rice, pineapple chicken and bento boxes featuring the fruit with meat.

'Cannon fodder'

A government-declared goal of selling 20,000 extra tons of the fruit domestically achieved its target in just four days, helped by major local conglomerates who jumped on large orders to boost their profile.

Sunny Liao, a 53-year-old businesswoman, was among recent diners at a hotel in Taipei now offering some 20 pineapple themed dishes and drinks. She said she wants to see tensions lowered between Taiwan and Beijing and favors the two sides talking but the latest move has left her furious.

"I think all Taiwanese are angry at the ban and I feel farmers have become cannon fodder to be sacrificed," she said. The Taishan region sends around 70 percent of its harvest across the Taiwan Strait and farmers are now scrambling to find new markets. "We've depended too heavily on China," fretted Chen Yu-nung, 30, who runs a fruit packaging factory. "We shouldn't have put all our eggs in one basket."

Taiwan's 23 million people live under the constant threat of invasion by China which has long used a mixture of carrot and stick to bring about its stated aim of "reunification". Relations have considerably worsened since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen who views Taiwan as a de facto sovereign nation, not part of Beijing's "one China". But despite the increase in tensions, bilateral trade rose 13.5 percent on-year to \$216 billion in 2020, including \$1 billion of produce, according to Taiwan's official data. Taipei has rejected China's claims over pests in the pineapple shipments, saying 99.8 percent of imports in recent years had passed inspection.

'Everyone is very nervous'

The south, where most of Taiwan's pineapples are grown, is the traditional heartland of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party. Political figures were quick to liken the ban to heavy tariffs China placed on certain Australian products, including wine, when relations between those two countries took a dive. "Remember Australia's Freedom Wine?" tweeted foreign minister Joseph Wu. "I urge like-minded friends around the globe to stand with Taiwan and rally behind the



TAIPEI: Farmers harvesting pineapples in Pingtung county. —AFP

FreedomPineapple."

Back in Taishan, farmers say they have been delighted by the domestic drive to buy more pineapples.

But they caution against early declarations of victory given the harvest has only just begun. "Next month is when we will know if we have won or lost," said Min, the plantation owner. "Everyone is very nervous". "I am worried the domestic buying spree won't last when the harvest peaks next month," added Lee Bai-wei, 28, saying half his crop would usually go to China.

Tseng Chin-yun, a 60-year-old rice farmer,

said she believed it was time for Taiwan to diversify where it sells its products to. "We need to be stronger and stand on our own," she declared. "Taiwan is an independent country and we can't always rely on others." College student Hsu Ying-chih, 21, works part-time in the fruit packaging factory and has seen shifts dry up the last two weeks.

But he doesn't think Taiwan should cave to Chinese pressure. "Taiwan is a country and 'one China' is unacceptable," he said. "If we concede in order to hold talks on agricultural issues, they will push the envelope further in other areas." —AFP

New lockdowns send oil prices tumbling

NEW YORK: Oil prices nosedived on lower demand prospects as Europe's biggest economy Germany said it would reimpose strict coronavirus containment measures as it struggles, along with other EU nations, to roll out vaccines. European stocks ended the day mostly lower, as did US stocks, as renewed fears of spreading COVID-19 overtook hopes of a swift reopening to the world's largest economy.

On currency markets, the Turkish lira stabilized a day after plunging in reaction to news that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sacked the country's market-friendly central bank chief, raising concerns about another round of financial turbulence. Germany will meanwhile enter a strict shutdown for five days over Easter amid surging virus rates, Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders agreed Tuesday.

Neighbouring France should be vaccinating "morning, noon and evening", President Emmanuel Macron said as he tackles criticism that the COVID-19 immunization drive has been too slow.

France is facing a third wave of infections but is lagging behind many Western countries in terms of the number of people vaccinated. "Oil has tumbled today over growing concerns about European demand as tighter restrictions in countries is likely to be a setback in regards to reopening their economies," said market analyst David Madden at CMC Markets UK. He noted that little over two weeks ago crude struck 14-month highs as OPEC and its allies decided keep most of their production cuts in place. "Now it seems that several large economies in Europe might not experience economic lift-off for a few more months, so dealers have been dumping oil as a result," he said. Stocks prices of oil companies and airlines, which could lose the crucial summer travel season in Europe if cases continue to rise, suffered.

Across the Atlantic, the focus was on the first joint congressional testimony by Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Powell again downplayed the risk of a sustained spike in inflation, after markets were rattled by a sharp rise in US Treasury yields in recent weeks amid bets that the economic recovery forecast for this year would push prices up. Markets fear that a spike in inflation could force the Fed to raise interest rates from their rock-bottom level, even as central bank policymakers don't expect to do so until at least 2024. For her part, Yellen said President Joe Biden would consider raising the corporate tax rate to 28 percent and take steps to encourage US businesses to move operations into the country, as the White House eyes the price tag of a forthcoming infrastructure bill. —AFP

Renesas fire threatens to deepen global chip supply woes

TOKYO: Japan's government and automakers are lining up to offer support to a key chip manufacturer following a factory fire that could worsen a global semiconductor shortage plaguing car firms.

The blaze at one of Renesas's plants last week comes at the worst possible time for the auto sector, which is already battling supply problems in part because of increased demand for chips from manufacturers of laptops, tablets and gaming devices. "Amid global concerns over a semiconductor shortage, there could be a substantial impact," wrote UBS Securities Japan analysts Kenji Yasui and Sean Park in a note after the fire. Renesas controls about 35 percent of the market for automotive semiconductors and company president Hidetoshi Shibata warned this weekend of a "very big" impact on global chip supply. Now Japan's government and some of Renesas's own customers, including top-selling Toyota, are offering help, in a sign of the deep concern caused by the fire given the existing supply problems.

"It is important to support the company's efforts to recover from the fire as it could have economic and social impacts in Japan," said Kazumi Nishikawa, an official in charge of the

Intel to spend \$20bn on new US chip plants

SAN FRANCISCO: US chip titan Intel said Tuesday it will invest \$20 billion in building two new plants in Arizona as part of a plan to ramp up production in the United States and Europe.

The move comes as a global chip shortage has countries and companies in those regions looking to reduce reliance on plants in Asia for semiconductors, which are used in a growing array of products such as cars. "Intel's investment will help to preserve US technology innovation and leadership, strengthen US economic and national security, and protect and grow thousands of high-tech, high-wage American jobs," Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said in a statement. Intel chief executive Pat Gelsinger announced the investment during a webcast about the company's strategy, as it faces pressure to come up with ways to fend off fierce competition.

"Intel is the only company with the depth and breadth of software, silicon and platforms, packaging, and process with at-scale manufacturing customers

tech sector at Japan's ministry of economy, trade and industry. Government support is not likely to include financial assistance, but could involve coordinating help from the private sector or helping Renesas procure replacement equipment. "What is important right now is to prepare an environment in which Japanese industry as a whole will cooperate for a quick recovery," he said yesterday.

Toyota confirmed it had sent several staff to "investigate the situation" at the plant in north-eastern Ibaraki prefecture, but gave no further details. The March 19 fire burned through 600 square metres of a unit producing 300mm wafers, and Renesas says it hopes to restore operations within a month. But Satoru Takada, an auto analyst at Tokyo-based research and consulting firm TIW, said production was unlikely to be back to normal quickly. "Renesas said it would recover in a month, but it may not be able to get back to full capacity straight away. The impact could drag on," he said. Some reports have said it could take closer to three months to restore capacity, and Takada said automakers need to "consider ways to reduce supply shortage risks that affect their entire production".

Automakers in Japan and abroad have been circumspect about the impact. Firms including France's Renault, Germany's Volkswagen and Hyundai in South Korea told AFP they would take action as necessary to deal with any additional shortages, but declined to give details. In Japan, Honda, Nissan and Toyota all said they were still

can depend on for their next-generation innovations," Gelsinger said. He stressed that Intel intends to continue doing most of its chip making at its own plants while also building on relationships with third-party manufacturers for some of its product line. As part of a vision to be a major producer of chips in the United States and Europe, Intel is establishing a new manufacturing unit called "Foundry Services," according to the Silicon Valley company. "Gelsinger's disclosure gave me many reasons to believe Intel is 'back' if the company can execute its plans," said analyst Patrick Moorhead of Moor Insights and Strategy. "The \$20 billion doubling down of manufacturing is bold."

Moorhead expected more investment by Intel given the need expressed by the United States and European governments for on-shore, leading-edge chip making.

"This isn't Intel hedging its manufacturing bets-it looks to me as if the company is all-in," the analyst said of tech giant's plan. Intel said it took in \$20 billion in revenue during the final quarter of last year, little changed from a year earlier, amid robust sales of personal computers.

The company reported net income of \$5.9 billion in the quarter, down a billion dollars from the same period a year earlier. Intel early this year approved an increased cash dividend of \$1.39 per share in what may have been a move to placate activist investor Dan



In this file photo, employees of Japan's microprocessor maker Renesas Electronics work at the company's Naka wafer fabrication factory in Hitachinaka, Ibaraki prefecture. —AFP

studying the impact of the fire.

Analysts said further chip shortages were unavoidable, especially given earlier hits including a halt in production in Texas during recent cold weather. Experts at Moody's Investors Service were already warning earlier this year of a "bottleneck" lasting "for the next two to three quarters until semiconductor supply and stock levels have normalized". "The incident adds to the existing supply chain disruptions that the auto industry has been experiencing in recent months," wrote Mariko Semetko, VP-senior credit officer at Moody's Japan, in a note after the Renesas fire. But there are hopes that the long-term impact could be limited by efforts that were already underway by automakers to diversify their suppliers, and by manufacturers to boost semiconductor production. —AFP



In this file photo, the Intel logo is displayed outside of the Intel headquarters in Santa Clara, California. —AFP

Loeb of Third Point, who has called on Intel to bolster its weakening position in the chip market.

The hedge fund has told the company it should consider outsourcing its manufacturing operations to keep pace with rivals in the sector such as Taiwan-based TSMC and South Korean giant Samsung.

While Intel remains one of the world's leading chip companies, it has lagged behind rivals in the fast-growing segment of mobile devices, and its chips are being phased out by Apple, which is developing its own microprocessors for its Mac computers. —AFP

Business

Yellen signals US corporate tax hike, Powell again downplays inflation

Lawmakers brace for Biden's next move after \$1.9 trillion rescue plan

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday signaled that President Joe Biden is willing to hike corporate taxes to pay for his administration's priorities, while Fed Chair Jerome Powell again downplayed fears that inflation would spike as the economy healed from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The comments from Yellen come as Washington lawmakers prepare for Biden's next move after Congress passed his \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan earlier this month, a massive injection of spending intended to support businesses and workers in the world's largest economy, hard-hit by the pandemic. Biden has vowed to soon propose a huge infrastructure package that will help the United States create jobs and fight climate change, but he is under pressure to offset the costs of what are reported to be two pricey bills.

In testimony for the House Financial Services Committee, Yellen indicated that the White House would propose raising the corporate tax rate to 28 percent, and find ways to get US corporations to move more of their business into the United States. "I think a package that consists of investments in people, investments in infrastructure, will help to create good jobs in the American economy and changes in the tax structure will help to pay for those programs," Yellen said.

"We've had a global race to the bottom in corporate taxation and we hope to put an end to that," US media reported on Monday that Biden is considering spending \$3 trillion on infrastructure in the United States, which would be split into two bills, although the White House disputed those reports.

Any new measures could face tough odds in Congress, where Democrats hold a thin margin in the House and are evenly split with Republicans in the Senate. They relied on a special parliamentary tactic to get the American Rescue Plan through the upper chamber.

Inflation fears

The bill was the third major package passed by the United States after the pandemic slammed the economy in March 2020, causing tens of millions of job losses and a sharp downturn in economic growth. Unemployment has declined in the months since and GDP growth is expected to rebound this year. That recovery, along with the American Rescue Plan and a \$900 billion relief measure passed in December, has led stock markets and some economists to worry the strengthening economy will push prices up, leading the Fed to raise interest rates from their zero level sooner than expected.

In testimony before the committee, Powell acknowledged that prices, which have remained muted throughout the downturn, could increase, but he said any spike would be temporary. "We do expect that inflation will move up over the course of this year," said the central bank chief, noting that this would be partly due to major economic sectors recovering from the deep slumps of March and April 2020, when business restrictions to stop Covid-19 were at their most intense.

"Our best view is that these effects on inflation will be neither particularly large nor persistent," The



WASHINGTON, DC: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a virtual roundtable with Black chambers of commerce from across the country, in Washington, DC. —AFP

rock-bottom rates are seen as one reason why Wall Street has boomed even amid the wider malaise of the pandemic. The Fed last year also released a new

inflation targeting policy that would see it keep rates low until inflation hits 2.0 percent and stays there, in a bid to maximize employment. —AFP

Ooredoo Kuwait extends its collaboration with Infovista

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, is accelerating its 5G network deployment using the Infovista radio planning portfolio to upgrade over 2,500 sites across the country. Ooredoo Kuwait is a long-standing partner of Infovista, having previously used the TEMS Network Testing Portfolio to help it optimize mobile network quality and application performance by measuring end user experience.

As part of the newly extended relationship, Ooredoo Kuwait is deploying the Infovista Planet solution as a single network-planning tool across its business, for collaboration, continuity, and efficiency. Planet leverages crowd-sourced datasets,

including a large volume of social media data, for traffic map creation to help Ooredoo Kuwait reach an unmatched level of accuracy when it comes to precise planning for densification to meet the needs of its customers across the country.

Ooredoo Kuwait is guided by its vision of enriching people's digital lives and its belief that it can stimulate human growth by leveraging communications to help people achieve their full potential.

In the context of 5G, Ooredoo Kuwait is one of the first operators that did a pre-commercial 5G launch in mid of 2018, which was followed by the first international 5G video call in the MENA region between Ooredoo Kuwait and Ooredoo Qatar. Ooredoo Kuwait is also the first operator in the country, and among the first in the Middle East to deploy Dynamic Spectrum Sharing (DSS) to fast track the deployment of its 5G network.

Essa Haider, Director Network Planning & Design, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "The Infovista Planet solution will support Ooredoo Kuwait across our 5G planning and deployment phase allowing us to reduce time to market along with optimizing our 5G site investment. Our relationship with Infovista spans many years and this expansion is based on the technical strength of the solution and Infovista's



Faiq Khan



Essa Haider

long term vision towards a full network automation lifecycle solution which we strongly support."

Faiq Khan, managing director, East Europe, Asia and Africa at Infovista, said: "We are pleased to extend our relationship with the Ooredoo Kuwait to assist in delivering a streamlined 5G rollout and looking forward to collaborating in the future to deliver the automation needed to power its next generation 5G use cases." Infovista is supporting major 5G trials and deployments with Tier 1 mobile network operators and leading 5G network vendors around the globe.

NBK Group CEO speaks at banking, finance roundtable

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sager, the Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) stated that although negatively impacted as a result of the lower interest rate environment, the lower business volumes and the higher provisions that were mainly precautionary in nature in anticipation for the pandemic's fallout, Kuwaiti banks remained very solid demonstrating ample liquidity, strong capitalization and stable asset quality trends.

During the virtual roundtable organized by Global Finance under the theme "Banking and Finance", Al-Sager said: "Thanks to the efforts of the Central Bank over the past decade, building one of the strongest banking systems in the region, banks can be part of the recovery of economic activity in Kuwait. The solid position that the banking sector enjoys today will be a key enabler to support a macro recovery once the virus is controlled."

We are optimistic with the efforts carried by the government to control the spread of the virus and to accelerate the vaccination of the population in order to bring life back to normal, he mentioned. The imminent economic recovery will reflect positively on some sectors allowing them to be early beneficiaries like consumer, retail, travel and aviation, while others will lag but with limited permanent damage in the future, Al-Sager highlighted. Al-Sager indicated that recent GDP data are showing some recovery compared to previous quarters, and we are expecting 2021 GDP growth to reach around 3 percent, noting that a rebound in government spending on infrastructure projects can also lead to a pickup in non-oil GDP growth and improve economic diversification, in addition to creating opportunities for the private sector.

The future of consolidations

On the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the future of consolidations at the country and regional level, Al-Sager mentioned that the pandemic has led to extreme instability in markets as it disrupted the global business trends and reshaped many industries. Al-Sager explained that the disruption caused by the pandemic has also affected the banking sector across various geographies and its protracted consequences will remain felt in the future as recovery takes place gradually, noting that the post-COVID world will offer opportunities for cross-border mergers and acquisitions as various financial institutions will face challenges to remain operational while others strive to become larger and more diversified to withstand regional and global competition.



Cross-border consolidation can also create many synergies allowing for cross selling in different markets, cost savings, transfer of knowledge, technology and talent, he added. Al-Sager indicated that higher compliance costs associated with the increase requirements are also adding to the costs for banks, compounding pressure on small and medium-sized lenders to consolidate, referring to the estimates that more than twenty Gulf financial institutions with total assets exceeding \$1 trillion were in merger talks in 2020. Banks in KSA, UAE and Qatar are merging to create larger financial institutions to support the transformational efforts that are underway in their relevant economies, he added. Al-Sager stressed that Kuwaiti banks need to be well-prepared and positioned to leverage any emerging opportunities and remain competitive on the regional front.

Faster and more sustainable recovery

Speaking on the new prominence of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations during the pandemic, Al-Sager mentioned that companies' embracement of ESG will undoubtedly lead to a faster and more sustainable recovery. ESG disclosures and transparency help mainly in building public trust and enable all stakeholders to make a better-informed decision, he noted. Al-Sager highlighted the growing importance of ESG practices and reporting, thanks to the growing demand for sustainable investments globally, with more investors focusing on ESG investing.

Additionally, premium valuations and pricing are being paid for companies with a strong ESG program and satisfactory reporting. Al-Sager added, noting that all NBK's recent bond issuances, and its discussions with investors in the process of promotion of these

issuances, reflected their increased focus on ESG practices and disclosures. Al-Sager mentioned that in 2020, ESG funds captured \$51 billion in net money from investors compared to \$21 billion in 2019, whereas more than \$30 trillion of sustainable assets are professionally managed globally.

ESG disclosures have recently been evolving from an optional, best-practice concept into a prerequisite and a reporting requirement by various industry practitioners. Most recently, we have seen various initiatives and proposals by the likes of ESFS (European System of Financial Supervision) and IFRS Foundation (International Financial Reporting Standard) all aiming to improve ESG transparency through a standardized set of sustainable reporting standards, he added. Al-Sager saw that, very soon, all rating agencies will include ESG reporting and scoring into their rating criteria, creating a framework where ESG practices can have a direct impact on credit ratings.

In Kuwait, we have seen significant developments taking place on the Governance front thanks to the CBK's efforts in developing and advancing the framework in the banking sector, he added, noting that the recent appointment of independent board members in banks is a great example of these ongoing developments. Al-Sager concluded that many initiatives were introduced by Boursa Kuwait to promote sustainability reporting by listed companies and potential plans to establish an ESG index to further stimulate ESG disclosures, emphasizing that there is more to be done to accelerate the trend through more country-wide efforts to prepare Kuwait companies to the upcoming changes in the regulations and reporting standards that are focused on ESG.

Huawei's latest smartwatch brings stunning looks

KUWAIT: Huawei's wearable product line-up has always been a fan favorite, especially with its stylish designs, focus on health and fitness and its exceptional battery life. One particular series that stands out is the Huawei Watch Fit series. The new update to this series is the Huawei watch fit elegant, brings more aesthetically pleasing take on the smartwatch with stylish looks, variety of colors along with smarter health management and long lasting battery, serving as not just a fashion accessory but also a functional companion for everyday use.



Stainless steel body

With the launch of its new variant, Huawei decided to not just bring in new color options of Frosty White and Midnight Black, but also add an 'elegant' element with a refined precision forged stainless steel body. This creates a more luxurious look for the smartwatch. At the same time, these new parts don't contribute to its overall weight, ensuring that the Huawei Watch Fit Elegant is light-weight enough for wearing comfort all-day long. Complementing and personalizing this look are customizable watch faces which can be easily set from a Huawei smartphone with a single tap, giving the 1.64 inch rectangular display a more personal touch.

All-day continuous SpO2 monitoring

Keeping track of one's blood oxygen levels is quite important when it comes to staying on top of their health. Having low SpO2 levels causes fatigue, lack of energy, etc. In today's fast paced world with high intensity lifestyles, keeping track of this important health indicator is often overlooked. The Huawei Watch Fit Elegant ensures blood oxygen level tracking happens passively all-day long without impacting the battery. Not only does it monitor these levels, but it also generates an alarm when the bloody oxygen level is low, allowing users to take swift action when needed.

10-day long battery life

Huawei's wearables are known for their long-lasting battery life and the Huawei Watch Fit series has been no stranger to it. Similar to its previous iteration, the Huawei Watch Fit Elegant offers a long-lasting battery life of 10 days, even with heart rate monitoring, sleep tracking and SpO2 monitoring turned on. This is further complemented by Huawei's fast charging technology, which can give an entire day of use in just five minutes of charge.

Smart Health Management and Private Training

The Huawei Watch Fit Elegant lives up to the "FIT" in its name with a wide range of health monitoring and tracking features. Along with the continuous SpO2 tracking, it also supports Huawei TruSeen4.0 for accurate heart measurement and Huawei TruRelax to manage stress levels better. Meanwhile, on the fitness front, it comes with 12 fitness training courses complete with proper instructions to follow. Users can also choose from 96 workout modes based on what physical activity they are engaging in. Additionally, it also features 13 built in running courses, during which it analyzes step count with a built-in GPS and multiple sensors, all of which is put together to give real-time running guidance and training advice.

Smart Life Assistant users can also enjoy a range of intelligent solutions for everyday use. The Huawei Watch Fit elegant not only ensures notifications or calls are not missed out with the help of reminders, but also provides a remote camera shutter and music playback control for an easier experience overall.

Business

Al-Roshood: KFH demonstrated the success of its performance and strategy during pandemic

Virtual roundtable discusses Kuwait's banking and finance sector

KUWAIT: Abdulwahab Al-Roshood, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), said that the COVID-19 pandemic was a good opportunity to test the resilience of KFH's performance, business activities, and digital transformation strategy. He added that during the past year, and at a time when many sectors and industries were suffering from the repercussions of the pandemic, KFH maintained its high performance and provided high-quality mobile banking services without interruption along with focusing on health and safety of its employees and customers.

During Global Finance virtual round-table meeting entitled: "Kuwait's Banking and Finance in Kuwait," that brought together senior officials, experts from the banking and financial services sector, prominent economic figures from the public and private sectors and representatives from financial technology compa-

capital and liquidity they accumulated compared to recent crisis episodes and the precautionary provisions they allocated based on the regulatory requirements," He added.

He noted that the outlook for recovery rely on the recovery of the economy and the sentiment of the market which are of course associated with the status of COVID-19. Meanwhile, Al-Roshood sees that the local economy and businesses require the government to keep spending on planned projects and also take aggressive measures to prop up the economy.

He confirmed that the pandemic hasn't treated all sectors equally, as some sectors were hit, while others benefited from it. SMEs, Infrastructure and construction, aviation, hospitality, and transportation are the sectors that were deeply hit but still can revive fast when things come back to normal. However, some sectors like tech companies, e-commerce or even media

has been a crucial concern for banks as they think twice before rolling out innovative services i.e, some digital services are ready to go live but the cybersecurity concern hinder them," he noted.

SMEs

Al-Roshood said: "It is highly important to involve the private sector in the development plan to lift the burden off the government in its commitment to find jobs for the citizens. The private sector including SMEs spur growth that comprises a major factor for creating new jobs and supporting the development plan".

"SME sector is one of the main sectors that are targeted to be supported by the government and subsequently by banks to achieve Kuwait 2035 vision. KFH is considered the first bank and one of the main banks in Kuwait who designated a financing department for SME sector. Moreover, Kuwait government continued to support SME segment through a special program that would encourage entrepreneurs to start their own SME business," he added. He noted that banks with the supervision of the government are taking all supportive measures to sustain all affected SME clients to enable them to withstand and survive COVID 19 pandemic effects through rescheduling their debt or through subsidized finance in addition to the continuity to grant new finance to unaffected clients.

Al-Roshood expressed his hope that after the COVID 19 pandemic, the recovery of the economic sector would be quick to enable SME business to rebound and grow again.

Societal considerations

Al-Roshood confirmed that Kuwait has played a great role in dealing with the crises at the social level as evidenced by the initiative of the CBK in collaboration with government and the banking sector to defer the installments for 6 months for all bank customers. This initiative had great impact on the families and contributed to maintaining their financial level unaffected. He added that the Kuwaiti banks also complied with government precautionary measures of minimizing the number of staff at workplaces to avoid crowding, implemented the COVID-19 protocols in an optimal manner and took part in spreading awareness of how to deal with the pandemic.

Digitization

During the round-table meeting, Al-Rashood reviewed the most advanced digital banking services provided by KFH to its customers, saying that the efficiency of KFH's digital services was evident in 2020 as transactions completed by its customers through KFHonline on the website or the mobile app exceeded 140 million. "Being the first bank in the world to use NCR Hybrid Solution to instantly issue banking cards via tablets, KFH has also launched the digital onboarding service "opening bank account online" for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch". He added.

Al-Roshood pointed out some of the innovative

financial solutions provided by KFH such as: the free of charge "SWIFT GPI" service to track local and international banking transfers electronically for individuals and corporates via KFHonline, deposit of cheques via mobile, cardless cash withdrawal by (QR Code, Civil ID& Mobile



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood

Number), opening a gold account with options of selling, buying and trading online, instant Cheque Printing and receiving gold biscuits instantly through XMTs available at the smart branches, KFH Go, in addition to many other highly efficient digital services.

Recently, KFH has inaugurated its tenth KFH-GO smart branch that offers customers highly efficient e-services covering over 80 percent of the services and transactions provided by traditional branches, making it the preferred choice for many segments of customers, especially young people.

Developing the talents

During the meeting, Al-Roshood highlighted the interest that KFH attaches to developing and training the human resources and retaining talented employees, adding that having competencies and talents in all departments helps KFH to navigate the pandemic to ensure business continuity and maximum application of digitization in line with the digital transformation strategy of the bank.

He added that despite the pandemic, KFH succeeded over the past year in designing and organizing training programs for its staff covering banking, technical and behavioral aspects. "Also, the development of KFH employees has been high priority on 2020 agenda where they have successfully concluded a series of virtual intensive courses with Harvard Business, INSEAD, and IMD to build staff's capabilities as KFH Group Future Leaders." He mentioned.

Furthermore, KFH granted in-scholarships to a number of employees as part of the scholarship program being offered by the bank since 2013. In terms of Kuwaitization, Al-Roshood confirmed that KFH leads the Kuwaiti banks and the private sector as a top recruiter of Kuwaitis where citizens made up 99 percent of new hires in 2020. As fresh graduates made up 70 percent of new hires in 2020, KFH confirmed its leadership in terms of employing and qualifying national youth talents.

He noted that that KFH is the only bank to launch the "Forsah" program for the outstanding new graduates who joined KFH, adding that the bank has been investing in this program since 2009 and during the last years KFH conducted through Forsah program training courses including field visits to Big tech companies like Microsoft and global institutions, in addition to banks of the Group in Turkey, Bahrain, Malaysia and Germany.

- KFH's comprehensive and proactive approach enabled it to manage the crisis effectively
- COVID-19 increases pressure on Kuwait's financial position and economic activity
- The outlook depends on the recovery of the economy and the return of investor confidence associated with the Coronavirus
- Ongoing government spending on projects and supporting the economy is a necessity for recovery
- CBK has made great strides towards developing new financial technology frameworks
- In 2020 KFH continued developing and training its employees
- SMEs are among the main sectors targeted by the government and banks to achieve Kuwait Vision 2035
- Kuwaiti banks have succeeded in absorbing the unprecedented situation thanks to their high levels of capitalization and accumulated liquidity

nies, Al-Rashood said: "while the COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented challenge with severe socio-economic consequences, our comprehensive and proactive strategy enables us to effectively manage the crisis by fully utilizing our digital tools to facilitate customer services".

He explained that during 2020, the Kuwaiti economy was struggling with economic and social pressures such as the decline in oil price, undiversified economy, weak operating environment, fiscal deficit and demographic imbalance.

"The spread of the COVID-19 virus has added stress on Kuwait's financial position and economic activity, limiting its ability to address the inherited socioeconomic issues. However, the pandemic has also prompted vast policy responses and relief measures by the local regulators and the finance sector to swiftly absorb the COVID-19 impacts. For instance, the banks were largely able to accommodate the unprecedented situation thanks to the higher level of

streaming took advantage of the pandemic as the demand exponentially surged on such sectors.

Challenges of technology

Al-Roshood mentioned that the banking industry has seen huge evolution and it is undergoing a process of digital transformation where many processes are being fully automated. He added that Kuwaiti banks are keen to invest in banking and financial technology and digital transformation. This trend would enhance the role of the private sector in the Kuwaiti economy as it is a key part of Kuwait's 2035 vision to become a regional and regional financial and commercial hub.

Al-Roshood confirmed that the CBK's efforts in supporting banks with their digital transformation are recognized, adding that CBK has made great strides in paving the way for applying financial technology by providing sand boxes and the suitable infrastructure. "However, the infrastructure in Kuwait might not be compatible with all digital services. The cybersecurity

Trump's provocative use of social media was a defining feature of his presidency. He often used tweets to slam his critics or to announce personnel changes or significant policy shifts. But Twitter permanently suspended his account after he used it to rile up supporters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6 in a deadly rampage. Trump was also booted from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat after the attack.

"We need to be asking more from big tech companies, not less," Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota said in a release announcing the Safe Tech Act. "Holding these platforms accountable for ads and content that can lead to real-world harm is critical, and this legislation will do just that."

Meanwhile, political conservatives accuse social media platforms of stifling free speech with moves such as fact-checking or removing accounts that spread debunked and dangerous information. "I am kind of surprised at the timing of all of this," Milanesi said of today's hearing. "Although it is an important topic, I feel there are more important topics like getting people vaccinated and helping them put food on the table." — AFP

Banks provide \$4tn to oil since climate deal: NGOs

PARIS: The world's leading banks have provided the fossil fuel industry with \$3.8 trillion in financing in the five years following the signing of the Paris climate accord, a group of non-governmental organizations said Tuesday. While financing dropped last year as oil output plunged thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, the report found that it was still higher than in 2016, the year after the signing of the Paris Agreement where nations agreed to cut back CO2 emissions to limit the rise in global temperatures.

"The overall fossil fuel financing trend of the last five years is still heading definitively in the wrong direction," said the report by NGOs including Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Oil Change International and Sierra Club. The report called for "banks to establish policies that lock in the fossil fuel financing declines of 2020, lest they snap back to business-as-usual in 2021."

It found that US banks remained the top bankers to fossil fuel companies last year, with JPMorgan Chase coming in first, followed by Citi and Bank of America.—AFP

Congress to grill US Internet giants over disinformation

SAN FRANCISCO: The heads of Facebook, Google and Twitter will testify before Congress today on disinformation, following a tense US election, Capitol attack and rise of a new administration seemingly intent on doing battle with Big Tech.

The remote video hearing will be the fourth for Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter's Jack Dorsey since last July and the third for Google's Sundar Pichai: evidence of how the companies' vast economic and political power has landed them squarely in the crosshairs of Democrats and Republicans alike. "Whether it be falsehoods about the COVID-19 vaccine or debunked claims of election fraud, these online platforms have allowed misinformation to spread, intensifying national crises with real-life, grim consequences for public health and safety," said the heads of the two Congressional subcommittees holding the hearing, in a statement. A recent backlash against the tech behemoths, which dominate key economic sectors, has intensified as their influence has grown during the coronavirus pandemic. "I don't expect more than theater" at the hearing, said analyst Carolina Milanesi of market research firm Creative Strategies.

"It's still politics and you are still going to have the whole Republicans-versus-Democrats and free speech coming into play," US President Joe Biden this week named a prominent advocate of breaking up Big Tech firms, Lina Khan, to head the Federal Trade Commission, in a move suggesting an aggressive posture on antitrust enforcement. Another Big Tech critic, Tim Wu, was recently appointed to an economic advisory post in the White House.

Self-made mess?

Milanesi said she expected the tech executives to play up investments, hiring, and measures put in place to fight abuses such as the spread of disinformation, while "avoiding the elephant in the room" of having enabled the harmful misconduct. "If I have to hire seven people to sweep up the broken glass from I don't in the china shop, if I let them in in the first place I won't get brownie points for cleaning up the mess," Milanesi said. Stakes for the tech giants are high: Multiple senators back a Safe Tech Act, which would reform legislation favored by the companies which is meant to protect them from being held responsible for the content posted on their platforms. Interest in reforming the legislation, called Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, has been heightened by former president Donald Trump hinting he may launch his own social media platform.



MOSCOW: This picture taken on March 16, 2021, shows felled trees stacked ready for transportation to the sawmill at a forestry plot near Vologda, 500 kilometers northeast of the Russian capital Moscow. — AFP

Russia, an oil giant, goes big on timber

VOLOGDA, Russia: In a dense forest northeast of Moscow, logging machines cut down rows of trees as Russia taps foreign demand for its wood as part of efforts to reduce its dependence on oil exports.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Vologda, a region 500 kilometers (310 miles) northeast of the Russian capital, where forests of birch and pine stretch as far as the eye can see. Tracked vehicles equipped with booms that can grab and cut trees are used by the Segezha group, which turns the wood into planks at a nearby factory.

For Segezha vice president Dmitry Rudenko, the scene illustrates a turning point for Russia's timber sector. "What we're seeing today is the rise of the timber construction industry. It is Russia's future without a doubt," he told AFP at the Moscow offices of the Sistema holding firm, of which Segezha is a subsidiary.

Russia is home to one-fifth of the world's forest and further exploiting this resource could help the country cut down its economic reliance on oil and gas. Hydrocarbons account for half of Russian exports by volume while wood and its derived materials represent about three percent.

It could also help Russia improve its environmental image as wood is a much greener construction material than concrete, which releases lots of carbon into the atmosphere during its production. Trees can be replaced, though environmental groups are skeptical about Russia's record on that front.

'Bright future'

Segezha was already a leader at home and abroad in paper-based packaging and various wooden construction products. Now it has launched the first factory in Russia to manufacture cross-laminated timber (CLT) panels, which thanks to the layers of wood being glued at right angles, are rigid enough to build multi-storey buildings. The use of CLT for buildings is increasingly popular in Europe but still niche in Russia, where firms hope it will be approved by regulators in the coming months.

In the meantime, Segezha is busy exporting to Germany, Austria, Italy and Japan. "Biomaterial, including wood, has a bright future. Consumer demand for ecological and natural products is increasing," said Marina Zotova of the WhatWood analysis firm.

"The quality of Russian timber is on par with that of Finland and the United States," she added, describing the texture of some Siberian wood as "breathtakingly beautiful." Andrei Frolov, vice president of the Russian timber industry union, said that the sector has "good prospects, particularly in the foreign market." But he noted that massive investments would be necessary for the timber industry to compete with the oil and gas industries. One way that Russian authorities hope to encourage the development of the industry is to ban the export of certain types of logs from 2022 and instead focus on processing the lumber at home in order to ship wood-based materials that have more value. Russia is a global leader in exports of raw wood. In Vologda, sporting a red beard and bottle-green uniform, site manager Ilya Moskalov told AFP that all felled trees—some of which are seven decades old—are ultimately replaced. "Wood is a renewable building material so long as forests are managed properly." —AFP

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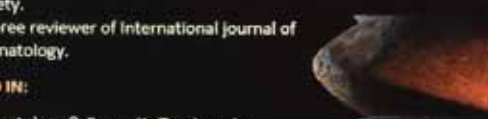
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Lifestyle | Features

Japan's **Mieko Kawakami** wants to 'stir things up'

Mieko Kawakami has called out clichéd depictions of women by one of her country's most feted writers, and seen her own bold style attacked by a top politician. But the award-winning Japanese author says she is happy to "stir things up" in her drive to depict the world as she sees it, as well as the experiences of people who might otherwise go unnoticed. And it's a formula she's confident readers want. "There is a growing desire to hear the real voices of Asian women," the 44-year-old told AFP, describing her desire to shed light on a broader sweep of Japanese society.

"(My focus) is the voices that would not be brought to the surface if they weren't written," Kawakami shot to fame in her home country when "Breasts and Eggs", her second novel, was given Japan's most prestigious literary prize in 2008. Not everyone was impressed by its experimental style, with Tokyo's then-governor, who is also a novelist and has often been critical of young Japanese writers, denouncing it as "unpleasant" and "self-centered rambling." But her exploration of the discomfort and confu-

sion women sometimes feel with their bodies was a big hit among the public. A reworked and expanded version was published in English last year, becoming a fixture of the book club circuit and winning its author international acclaim.

'Not a feminist writer'

Its dissection of sexuality and reproductive ethics has seen Kawakami cast a feminist writer. But that wasn't her intention. "I'm a feminist, but I'm not a feminist writer," she said. "I want to write about women as a part of humanity as a whole." But she is critical of persistent inequalities in her society, slamming traditional gender roles in Japan she says are so ingrained that "it's hard to even put it into words." "There's a social structure that makes it difficult for women to be independent," she argues. Outdated views on gender in Japan have been back in the spotlight since former Tokyo Olympic chief Yoshiro Mori last month declared that women speak too much in meetings.

For many in Japan, the comments were shocking, but not surprising. "It's a human rights issue, but that seems to be

something (he) didn't understand at all," Kawakami said. "That's the most problematic thing." Still, she sees hope in the fact that an outcry over the remarks eventually forced the 83-year-old to step down, while it "probably would have been overlooked as a gaffe, say, five or 10 years ago."

'I'm on their side'

Kawakami has been praised by her literary peers, but she hasn't been afraid to ask questions about their depictions of women. She made waves with an interview published in 2017 where she asked one of Japan's most famous writers, Haruki Murakami, why so many women in his novels seemed to serve a purely sexual function. Her upbringing has also made her sensitive to the importance of class and economic inequality.

Raised in a working-class family in Osaka, Kawakami has felt keenly the difference in her background compared to many in Japan's literary world. "I will never forget the town, the people and their voices, that shaped me," adds Kawakami, who sometimes writes in the western city's distinctive dialect. "Now



This photo shows Japanese novelist Mieko Kawakami posing during a photo session in Tokyo. — AFP

I'm surrounded by highly educated people from the middle and upper classes in the publishing industry, but I'm working class... and I'm on their side," she said. She was raised by a single mother in a poor household where "you had to work, it didn't matter if you were female or male" and she lied about her age so she could work at a factory during school holidays.

From music to poetry

Scouted as a singer in her early 20s, she pursued music for five years without a hit, and says she felt free when her record deal ended. A poem she submitted to a magazine caught the eye of an editor, who encouraged her to write longer stories. Her debut novella, "My Ego Ratio, My Teeth, and the World", told the story of a female dental assistant who believes her consciousness resides not in her brain, but her molars. It was nominated in 2007 for the biannual Akutagawa Prize, the award she later won for "Breasts and Eggs."

This year will bring the English-language release of her 2009 novel "Heaven", about a 14-year-old who is bullied at school—a work that grapples with questions of good and evil, with no easy answers. And she's now working on a project about the day that precedes a life-changing event. "I have an obsession with the day before something happens," she said. "None of us knows what will happen tomorrow, that is natural, but it is also a wonder-and terrifying to me." — AFP



This photo shows employees from the Burapha coffin shop working on a coffin near skateboards, made from wood used for coffins, in Bangkok. — AFP photos



Photo shows skateboards, made from wood used for coffins.



Photo shows an employee from the Burapha coffin shop painting skateboards.



Photo shows the exterior of the Burapha coffin shop, where they are also making skateboards from wood used for coffins.

Thai coffin-maker kickflips his caskets into skateboards

From a final resting place for the dead to a gnarly way to land a trick; a Thai coffin-maker is affixing Buddhist emblems to the dismantled walls of his caskets, and transforming them into skateboards. As the popularity of board sports exploded in Thailand, and the price of a skateboard skyrocketed, Anusorn Yungyearn decided to breathe new life into some of the wooden caskets he had lying around his Bangkok workshop. "I want to give the kids who don't really have much chance in life an opportunity to skate," said the 30-year-old. "I also don't want them to ask their parents to buy one for them since the cost of it is really high."

In the past year hordes of young Thais have taken up skateboarding and surf-skating-likely a consequence of most social spaces like bars and gyms being closed for months at a time because of pandemic restrictions. Today, bands of young skaters can be seen cruising through Bangkok's historic quarter and its universities' open spaces. Anusorn's warehouse has coffins with brocade designs, golden lattice work and even holographic stick-ons. But for his boards, he has decided to keep it comparatively simple-gleaming white with golden trimming on the bottom.

"The procedure of making these boards is almost exactly like making the

coffins," he told AFP, adding that he sticks a signature twist to the boards. "We put the Thai angel emblem and the Thai traditional border on the board's edge." The first 10 he flips from coffins to skateboards will be donated to lower-income families-though he admitted getting them right will be tough. "Some kids have never ever heard of a skateboard before so we want to make these casket skateboards as close to the real boards as possible. "That way they could play and smile a little bit from all the fun." — AFP

'Cultural asset'

Vincent, a salesman in a nearby store, said his girlfriend had read media reports that video games had joined book and record stores on the expanded list allowed to stay open. "We don't really understand anything about this confinement," he admitted. It was not just independent shops struggling to interpret the new rules. French electronics retail chain FNAC hesitated at first, with YouTube game reviewer Julien Chieze tweeting that the video games sections in its stores were closed on the weekend. But FNAC director of products Olivier Garcia responded to his tweet on Monday saying the gaming sections had been reopened, citing the government's decree.

Chieze hailed the government's decision, saying: "Yes, video games are a cultural asset just like books and records". Jacques Creysse of the FCD retailing federation said "it is true that until now, we were rather uncertain on the subject of video games".



Video games are seen inside a video game store in Paris. — AFP

The former president of the Paris Saint-Germain football club, Robin Leproux, said Monday he would launch what he called Europe's largest video gaming center. The 2,000-square-metre (21,500-square-foot) facility in the heart of Paris has a 150-seat arena, 100 computers and 40 consoles, and is already being used by some professional clients. Called ESpot, it will open to the public "when the health authorities allow us to do so," he told AFP. — AFP

FASHION INDUSTRY FAILING TO MEET GREEN TARGETS

Fashion's biggest firms are making slow progress in meeting promises to improve their environmental and social impact, according to a damning sustainability report released Monday. The inaugural Sustainability Index by the Business of Fashion magazine, the first to offer direct comparisons between the industry's top firms, found they were often falling far short of their ambitious rhetoric on going green. "The global economy has 10 years to avoid catastrophic climate change and an urgent duty to improve the welfare of the workers who make it tick," said the report, which was put together by a panel of sustainability experts from around the world.

"Time is running out and simply stat-



File photo shows models display creations from fashion brand Requal by designer Tetsuya Doi for the 2021 autumn/winter collection at Tokyo Fashion Week. — AFP

ing an ambition to change is no longer good enough." It graded the biggest 15 fashion companies across six areas: transparency, emissions, water and chemicals, materials, workers' rights and waste. Not one company scored more than 50 out of 100, with Swiss firm

Richemont and US firm Under Armor faring worst with scores of just 14 and nine overall. They did not respond to requests for comment. The best performers were French luxury house Kering and Nike, who scored 49 and 47 respectively. "Many of fashion's biggest companies

still don't know or don't disclose where their products come from, and the further down the supply chain you go, the more opaque things become," the report said. "That enables exploitation and human rights abuses and creates difficulties measuring the industry's environmental impact."

'Just not working'

A 2019 study by the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion found that fashion was the second-biggest consumer of water, and responsible for eight-to-10 percent of global carbon emissions—"more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined". The new Sustainability Index said many firms had targets to reduce emissions but little information on how they were faring. Three firms-Richemont, Under Armor and LVMH-had not set emissions targets at all, it said.

Fewer than half were found to have clear goals on reducing the use of water and hazardous chemicals, and only four had a time-bound target to replace oil-based polyester-the most commonly-used fabric in the world-with recycled alternatives. The worst results were on the issue of waste, with the report citing

a recent Ellen MacArthur Foundation study that found 40 million tons of textiles were sent to landfills or incinerated every year. "Companies are talking more about circularity than they are embracing it," it said.

Scores on workers' rights were also dismal. "We have been stuck with the current state of play for more than 10 years and the discourse is still way ahead of the action," Anannya Bhattacharjee of the Asia Floor Wage Alliance was quoted as saying in the report. "No matter how many commitments are set up in factories, they are just not working," she added. "Commitments to a living wage are meaningless if buying prices do not cover the cost of living wages."

Nonetheless, the report sought a constructive tone, saying it was not designed to chastise or praise individual companies, but to encourage innovation. "Environmental sustainability is bigger than any one brand, supplier or retailer. We all have to work together," wrote another of the authors, Edwin Keh, of the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



British artist Sacha Jafri shakes hands with Andre Abdoune, who bought his artwork for \$62 million at auction in Dubai.



The original painting, "The Journey of Humanity" by British artist Sacha Jafri, holds the Guinness World Record for the largest art canvas.— Reuters photos

Largest art canvas sells for \$62 million

Work by British artist Sacha Jafri consisting of the world's largest painting on canvas has been sold for \$62 million at an auction in Dubai, organizers said on Tuesday. The "Journey of Humanity" is split into 70 framed sections spanning 1,595.76 square meters-equivalent to nearly four basketball courts. Organizers said in a statement that the work sold for \$62 million, double the amount targeted, with the money going to charities helping chil-

dren. Andre Abdoune, a French national residing in Dubai-one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE-bought all 70 segments on Monday at an auction in Dubai's "Atlantis, The Palm".

The work, confirmed by the Guinness World Records as the "Largest Art Canvas", had been put on display in the ballroom of the opulent hotel, and was originally meant to be sold in segments. "I come from a poor family, and I knew at times how it feels to have nothing to eat,

but at least I had the love of my parents, schooling, and support," Abdoune, who runs a crypto-currency business, told AFP.

"The painting was very powerful when I saw it, and, for me, it would have been a mistake to separate the pieces," said the former stock trader. Abdoune also highlighted the coronavirus pandemic, noting how it had taken a toll on children around the world. "We have to react, so if I can bring my little piece in the puzzle,

I'm happy," he said. Jafri had aimed to raise \$30 million to fund health, sanitation and education initiatives for children in impoverished parts of the world. The 44-year-old contemporary artist is hoping his painting will spark a humanitarian movement. Children from 140 countries submitted artwork online to be included in Jafri's creation, which was completed at the end of September. — AFP

Prince Harry joins \$1.7 billion US counseling startup

Britain's Prince Harry on Tuesday added to a growing portfolio of post-royal jobs, becoming "chief impact officer" at a San Francisco startup that provides mobile-based coaching, counseling and mentorship. Amid a highly public spat with Buckingham Palace, Harry and his American wife Meghan Markle, a mixed-race former television actress, now live in California after stepping away from royal duties. An explosive interview they gave to Oprah Winfrey this month in which they claimed an unnamed royal had asked how dark their baby's skin would be-plunged the monarchy into its biggest crisis since the death of Harry's mother, princess Diana, in 1997.

In his new role with BetterUp, the Duke of Sussex will champion the importance of maximizing human potential worldwide, according to chief executive Alexi Robichaux. "I firmly believe that focusing on and prioritizing our mental fitness unlocks potential and opportunity that we never knew we had inside of us," Prince Harry said in a BetterUp blog post. "As the Royal Marine Commandos say, 'It's a state of mind.' We all have it in us." BetterUp's platform combines behavioral science, artificial intelligence, and human coaching to optimize personal growth and professional development, according to the company, which last month announced it had raised \$125 million in funding at a valuation of \$1.73 billion.

In his new job, the prince-who said he had used the BetterUp platform himself-will not manage employees or have direct reports, according to The Wall Street Journal. Founded in 2013, BetterUp has grown to more than 270 employees and a network of some 2,000 coaches. A list of its clients included NASA, Chevron, Mars, Genentech, Snap, and Warner Media. Since leaving their roles as working royals, Harry and Meghan have already signed lucrative digital media deals to capitalize on their celebrity-one to produce content for Netflix, and another to present podcasts for Spotify.



Romanian national and the main dancer of the Moulin Rouge Alexandru Nicolae Denes aka Alex Denes poses during a photo session at the Moulin Rouge in Paris. — AFP photos



Romanian national and the main dancer of the Moulin Rouge Alexandru Nicolae Denes aka Alex Denes poses during a photo session.

Moulin Rouge counting the days until cancan returns

The feathers may be gathering dust, but a year into its longest shutdown in more than a century, at least the windmill is still turning atop the Moulin Rouge. "It would be too sad otherwise," said Jean-Victor Clerico, whose family runs the Parisian landmark. The sails are moving, but everything else has been frozen since the last cancan was performed on March 12, 2020 — the longest break since the theatre was destroyed by fire in 1915.

Clerico recalls the following day, phoning round 1,600 ticket-holders to tell them the show was cancelled: "It was unprecedented and painful, and we never could have imagined that the closure would last this long." He thought it would end in the autumn, then the spring. Now, with non-essential businesses again shut to guard against a fresh spike in infections, he would be delighted with June. "It's hard on morale," he admitted.

For one of the stars, 32-year-old

dancer Mathilde Tutiaux, that means more months of trying to rehearse in her small Parisian apartment where the kitchen counter doubles as a stretching barre. "This third lockdown is demoralizing but we remain hopeful. We will return to the stage. The worst is past," she told AFP. There are 60 members of the cast, all stuck at home now for a year, trying hard to keep in shape for when they need to resume one of the most demanding of dance routines.

"Dance is not only stretching. It's hard to keep the rhythm and maintain the shapes, so we have organized sports sessions on Zoom with our ballet teacher and I go running as much as possible," said Tutiaux. They are at least supported

by the state. "There is a little loss of income, but we can't complain in France. In London and on Broadway, it's been terrible for our fellow dancers," said Tutiaux.

'Give hope'

The Moulin Rouge at the foot of Montmartre opened at the height of Belle Epoque Paris in 1889, quickly associated with the wild cancan dance and immortalized in the paintings of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. It has lived many lives, rebuilt after the fire, surviving through World War II, its boards graced by legends from Edith Piaf to Charles Aznavour, and then getting another global boost with the release of the 2001

eponymous film starring Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor.

Today, it remains a favourite with tourists, who account for half its business in normal times. Clerico remains hopeful it can work even with a limited reopening. "Social distancing won't be a problem. Although the numbers will certainly be reduced, we are optimistic given the attraction of the Moulin," he said. The other neighboring temples to "nude chic"-Le Lido, Crazy Horse-are in the same boat. Le Paradis Latin, across the river on the Left Bank, managed to reopen for a few short weeks in the autumn before another lockdown hit.

"Despite everything, we saw the reopening as an act of citizenship," said owner Walter Butler. "We had to give hope to the public and the troupe." Like many cafes and restaurants, they have taken advantage of the break to spruce up and say they are ready to go. Well, with a bit of a limbering up. "As soon as we get the green light, we will need six weeks to get the machine moving again. The cancan requires a lot of rehearsals," said Clerico. — AFP



Jean-Victor Clerico, owner and great-great-great grandson of the founder of the Moulin Rouge poses during a photo session at the Moulin Rouge in Paris.



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, speaks to members of the media at Windsor Castle in Windsor. — AFP

They have spoken of their desire "to do something of meaning, to do something that matters," in California, where they have launched a wide-ranging non-profit organization named Archewell. The couple have worked with a charity to hand out meals to chronically ill people in Los Angeles, and Markle-whose mother is Black-spoke out last year after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed African American killed in police custody.

Demand for coaching focused on employee well-being and development has grown "significantly" in the past year, according to BetterUp. "Self-optimization is not about fixing something that's broken," Prince Harry said. "It's about becoming the best version of ourselves, with whatever life throws at us-someone who is ready for the next challenge and can meet setbacks with courage, confidence, and self-awareness." — AFP

Oscar-nominated US actor George Segal dies at 87



In this file photo actor George Segal puts his hand on his star during his Walk of Fame ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP

US actor George Segal, whose long film and television career spanned from the 1960s to the present day, has died at age 87. Segal, who was nominated for an Oscar for the 1966 drama "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?", died in Santa Rosa, California of complications from bypass surgery, his wife told the Hollywood news publication Deadline on Tuesday. While younger viewers may know him as grandfather Albert "Pops" Solomon in the ABC network TV series "The Goldbergs," his long film career included starring roles in "The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox" (1976) with Goldie Hawn, and "Fun With Dick and Jane" (1977) with Jane Fonda.

"We are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of George Segal," Sony Pictures Television-which produces "The Goldbergs"-said in a statement. "He was a true icon and legend in this business and an integral member of our Sony family." "So sorry to hear about George Segal's passing. We had such fun making Owl and the Pussycat," tweeted Barbra Streisand, who co-starred with Segal in the



This photo actor George Segal at AFI Life Achievement award to Mike Nichols held at the Sony Studios in Los Angeles.

1970 romantic comedy. "May he Rest In Peace." And James Gunn, writer and director of Marvel's "Guardians of the Galaxy" films, wrote on Twitter that he was "a movie star who commanded our attention while still seeming like one of us."

Born February 17, 1934 in a small town in the state of New York, Segal studied acting and had early roles in Broadway theater productions. His first major Hollywood role was in "The Young

Doctors" (1961), and later in "The Longest Day" (1962) about the allied landing in Normandy during World War II. In "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?" he played a young professor alongside two megastars of the time, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Segal won a Golden Globe award for his role in "A Touch of Class" (1973) with Glenda Jackson.

On TV Segal was known for his roles in shows such as the NBC sitcom "Just Shoot Me!" (1997-2003), and later "The Goldbergs," which began its run in 2013 and is still in production. "Today we lost a legend," tweeted series creator Adam Goldberg. "It was a true honor being a small part of George Segal's amazing legacy. By pure fate, I ended up casting the perfect person to play Pops. Just like my grandfather, George was a kid at heart with a magical spark." On its official Twitter account, the TV show posted: "His talent left an indelible mark and we're grateful for the laughter and joy he has given us all." — AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Dominik Paris (ITA) races in Kitzbühel, Austria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Ingram rampant as depleted Lakers lose third straight

Suns beat Heat, Nuggets win behind Jokic's triple-double

LOS ANGELES: Brandon Ingram scored 36 points as the New Orleans Pelicans took full advantage of LeBron James' injury absence to pummel the Los Angeles Lakers 128-111 on Tuesday. Ingram, who was drafted by the Lakers in 2016 but traded away by the club in 2019, sent his former team sliding to defeat in a one-sided game at New Orleans' Smoothie King Center.

The Lakers were rocked on Saturday by an injury to James which has left the four-time NBA champion facing several weeks on the sidelines. With Anthony Davis and Marc Gasol already out injured, the depleted Lakers have now lost three consecutive games to fall to fourth place in the Western Conference standings at 28-16.

The Pelicans meanwhile remain in the hunt for a playoff berth after a win that sees them improve to 19-24. The Pels' superior firepower comfortably overwhelmed the Lakers on Tuesday, with Zion Williamson complementing Ingram's display with a 27-point effort.

Nickel Alexander-Walker added 18 points, while Kira Lewis Jr (16 points), Jaxson Hayes (15) and New Zealander Steven Adams (12) also weighed in with double-digit contributions. Montrezl Harrell led the Lakers scoring with 18 points, with Kyle Kuzma and Markieff Morris adding 16 points apiece for the reigning NBA champions.

Lakers coach Frank Vogel said his team must improve offensively in the absence of James and Davis, but insisted the squad could overcome their absence. "Getting us organized offensively is probably my top priority right now," Vogel said. "We're staying positive. We've got a great belief in this group that even with LeBron and AD out we can win games down this stretch and that there'll be a silver lining at the end of it."



NEW ORLEANS: Brandon Ingram of the New Orleans Pelicans shoots over Wesley Matthews of the Los Angeles Lakers during the third quarter of an NBA game at Smoothie King Center on Tuesday in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

Suns rising

In other games Tuesday, Devin Booker scored 23 points and Deandre Ayton added a double-double as the Phoenix Suns extended their winning streak to three games with a 110-100 road win over the Miami Heat. The Suns are now in second spot in the Western Conference after improving to 29-13, two games back from leaders Utah.

The fifth-placed Denver Nuggets meanwhile are closing in on the fourth-placed Lakers after a 110-99 win over the Orlando Magic in Florida. Serbian international Nikola Jokic was once again the star man for Denver, delivering another MVP-

caliber performance with a triple-double featuring 28 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists.

The Denver win played out against the tragic backdrop of Monday's mass shooting in a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado which left 10 people dead. In pre-game remarks to media, Nuggets coach Michael Malone fought back tears as he read out the names of each of the victims on Monday's massacre. "It's important to turn our attention to where it should be — which is back in Boulder," Malone said. "It feels like we've been here before. Yesterday was another tragedy. Hopefully we can find a way to prevent this happening in the future." — AFP

'One of our sweetest', says Kohli after England ODI win

PUNE: India skipper Virat Kohli said Tuesday's 66-run win over England was "one of the sweetest" after his bowlers hit back following a batting onslaught in the first one-day international. Chasing 318 for victory, the tourists were bowled out for 251 in 42.1 overs despite Jonny Bairstow's 94 and his opening stand of 135 with Jason Roy to trail the three-match series 1-0.

Shikhar Dhawan hit 98 while KL Rahul, 62 not out, and Krunal Pandya, unbeaten 58 off 31 balls, steered the hosts to 317-5 after being put into bat first. "This is one of our sweetest victories in the recent past," skipper Virat Kohli said in the post-match presentation. "It is right up there purely because from 135-1 getting nine wickets is simply outstanding. I am a really, really proud man right now."

Prasidh Krishna, who returned ODI figures of 4-54, a best by an Indian on debut, and fellow quick bowler Shardul Thakur shared seven wickets between them and turned the game on its head after the Bairstow-Roy blitz.

Krishna broke the stand to send back Roy for 46 and then struck in his next over with the key wicket of Ben Stokes for one. He nearly got his third on the next ball when Morgan edged his first ball to Kohli at slip but the

India captain dropped the catch.

Thakur soon took over from Krishna to deny Bairstow his hundred after getting the opener caught at deep midwicket. He then struck twice in his next over to send back Morgan, for 22, and Jos Buttler, lbw for two, as England slipped further to 176-5. Moeen Ali made a fighting 30 before falling to Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who combined with Pandya and Krishna to wipe out the tail.

"We need to execute better than we did today. India did really well and deserved to win," said England captain Eoin Morgan. "Being able to take the attack to the opposition is something that we pride ourselves on. We want to continue to push the envelope in that regard. It's better for us to lose like this than losing by 20 runs."

'Bigger scores'

The away side have fitness worries after Sam Billings "sprained his collar bone joint" and skipper Morgan needed four stitches on the webbing between his thumb and index finger. On the injuries Morgan said, "we are going to wait 48 hours, see how it is. Give them as much time as needed to hopefully be available for Friday (second ODI). When you have a split webbing fielding is a concern and



PUNE: India's captain Virat Kohli (C-R) celebrates with teammate Hardik Pandya (C-L) after the wickets of England's Sam Curran (L) during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match between India and England at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday. — AFP

with Sam obviously landing while he is fielding."

For India, left-hander Pandya, who played alongside his younger brother Hardik Pandya, put on an unbroken stand of 112 with wicketkeeper-batsman Rahul as India finished with a flourish. Stokes struck first with his pace bowling, claiming Rohit Sharma caught behind for 28. He returned figures of 3-34 from eight overs. Dhawan put on 105 for the second wicket with Kohli. He made his 31st ODI fifty with a six off leg-spinner Adil Rashid. Kohli reached a run-a-ball fifty but fell for 56 to pace bowler Mark Wood.

"If I had stayed with Shikhar around that 40-over period we could have got 350," said Kohli. "England hit some amazing shots, and scores will be high scoring moving forward, and we'll look to get bigger scores moving forward."

Dhawan, who hit 11 fours and two sixes in his 106-ball knock, fell short of his hundred after he mistimed a pull off Stokes. Pandya completed his 50 in 26 balls to record the fastest fifty for an ODI debutant and later choked up with emotion while dedicating the innings to his father who died in January. — AFP

FIFA extends ban on Blatter and Valcke by six years

LAUSANNE: FIFA said yesterday it had extended the ban on its former president Sepp Blatter and former secretary-general Jerome Valcke by six years and eight months, in relation to the receipt of huge bonuses. Blatter, who is 85, received 23 million Swiss francs (\$24.6 million) in "extraordinary bonuses" linked to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the 2014 World Cup in Brazil as well as the Confederations Cup tournament in Brazil that preceded it, FIFA's Ethics Committee said in a statement.

Valcke, the 60-year-old Frenchman who was Blatter's right-hand man during his 17-year reign at the head of football's world governing body, received 30 million Swiss francs over the same period, the committee said. The Ethics Committee said Blatter and Valcke had broken rules in FIFA's Code of Ethics including "offering and accepting gifts or other benefits" and "abuse of position". The new bans will only come into force when the current bans on Blatter and Valcke, which last till October this year and October 2025, end. The Ethics Committee said it had also fined each man one million Swiss francs. — AFP



BERN: In this file photo taken on September 1, 2020 former president of World football's governing body FIFA, Sepp Blatter looks on as he arrives at the building of the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland followed by his lawyer Lorenz Erni to a hearing summoned by Swiss prosecutor. — AFP

Battling Fernando leads Sri Lanka fightback in first Test

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Oshada Fernando and Lahiru Thirimanne led a Sri Lankan fightback as the tourists reached 255 for four in their second innings, a lead of 153, at close of play on the third day of the first Test against the West Indies in Antigua on Tuesday.

With the other Fernando in the team, fast-medium bowler Visha, doing just what was required in the taking the last two West Indies first innings wickets at the start of the day to dismiss the home side for 271, it was the fluent middle-order batsman Oshada who starred with an innings of 91 in a 162-run second wicket partnership with Thirimanne.

Fernando, in just his eighth Test, came to crease in the fifth over of the innings when his captain Dimuth Karunaratne, failed for the second time in the match, driving loosely at Kemar Roach to give John Campbell a straightforward catch at third slip.

The 28-year-old Fernando was given a life on 17 when he was dropped at leg-slip by Jason Holder off off-spinner Rakheem Cornwall but looked assured throughout his innings which spanned 149 deliveries and included 11 fours. Fernando appeared destined for a second Test hundred until West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite, in what was either a moment of inspiration or desperation, brought on Kyle Mayers as his seventh bowler of the innings.

The occasional medium-pacer met with instant



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Oshada Fernando (L) of Sri Lanka hits a 4 during day 3 of the 1st Test between West Indies and Sri Lanka at Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, on Tuesday. — AFP

success as Fernando pushed at his first ball, a full-length delivery just outside off-stump, and edged a catch to wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva. Mayers then removed Dinesh Chandimal in almost identical fashion two overs later. When Roach returned for another spell and bowled the obdurate Thirimanne for 76 to follow his first innings top score of 70, Sri Lanka were wobbling at 189 for four.

Just when the West Indies might have sensed a chance to sweep away the rest of the Sri Lankan batting, Dhananjaya de Silva and debutant Pathum Nissanka featured in an unbroken fifth-wicket partnership of 66 and will resume on the fourth morning seeking to extend their overall lead beyond 250 to give themselves a fighting chance of pulling off a come-from-behind victory.

"I think this is a good batting pitch because it has flattened out nicely," said Mayers in assessing the day's toil, even with his double-strike. "They had the upper hand today but the game is still evenly poised. We just need to pick up two early wickets (on the fourth day) and things can look very differently."

Earlier, West Indian hopes of extending their 99-run overnight lead ended in the second over of the day when Vishwa Fernando bowled Cornwall for a top score of 61 and then trapped last man Shannon Gabriel leg-before without scoring.

Suranga Lakmal missed out the tail but ended with career-best Test innings figures of five for 47, an improvement on the fast-medium bowler's previous best of five for 54 against New Zealand in the Boxing Day Test in Christchurch in 2018. — AFP

Sports

Southgate spoiled for choice as 'home' Euro 2020 awaits for England

Three Lions aim to end 55-year wait to win major int'l tournament

LONDON: Three World Cup qualifiers against San Marino, Albania and Poland over the next week provide England manager Gareth Southgate with his final chance to experiment before he names his squad for the delayed Euro 2020.

The Three Lions will enjoy home advantage for most of the Euro as they aim to end a 55-year wait to win a major international tournament. Wembley host all three of their group games against Croatia, Scotland and the Czech Republic, as well as both semi-finals and the final.

Fans could even be back in stadiums by June and July to cheer Southgate's men on thanks to the speed of the UK's coronavirus vaccination roll out. The pressure is on the England boss to build on a surprise run to the World Cup semi-finals in 2018, especially given the rich resources he now has to choose from. AFP Sport looks at the big decisions that await Southgate in the coming months.

Goalkeeper

One of the few areas where England are not blessed with a world class talent is in goal. Jordan Pickford has retained his status as number one despite a number of costly errors for Everton. However, Pickford is absent this week due to a rib injury, handing Burnley's

Nick Pope his long-awaited chance to prove himself in competitive games at international level.

Pope has proven himself to be a reliable Premier League shot-stopper, but his distribution has counted against him. Dean Henderson could therefore emerge as Pickford's challenger. The 24-year-old has started Manchester United's last seven games, but may lose his place when David De Gea returns from paternity leave after the international break.

Defense

Southgate will be judged not only on what personnel he picks, but what system. The former Middlesbrough boss largely used three at the back in Euro 2020 qualifying, but there have been calls for him to find space for more of his attacking talent.

A return to form from United's Luke Shaw and Manchester City's John Stones helps solve two problem positions should Southgate revert to a back four. Shaw will challenge Chelsea's Ben Chilwell at left-back, while Stones is expected to start alongside Harry Maguire at center-back.

The depth of talent at right-back means Trent Alexander-Arnold has been dropped for his dip in form for Liverpool

after an outstanding season in 2019/20. Reece James will battle the more experienced Kieran Trippier and Kyle Walker for that role.

Midfield

Despite the absence of Jack Grealish and James Maddison due to injury, Southgate's latest squad is still blessed with an array of young creative talent. Phil Foden, Mason Mount and Jude Bellingham will be looking to cement their places in the squad for the summer.

At 28, Jesse Lingard is now one of the older heads in the squad and has earned a recall after a bright start to a loan spell at West Ham. But a lack of game time at Tottenham looks set to end Dele Alli's chances of an international return.

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson faces a race against time to prove his fitness for Euro 2020 after groin surgery. West Ham's Declan Rice and Kalvin Phillips of Leeds are the two holding midfielders in pole position if Henderson fails to make it.

Forwards

Captain Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling have been England's reliable source of goals since the World Cup. Fitness permitting, both seem guaranteed



LONDON: West Ham United's English midfielder Jesse Lingard celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Arsenal at The London Stadium, in east London on March 21, 2021. — AFP

to start the Euro with the final place in the front three coming down to battle between Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho. There is fierce competition just to

make the squad in the front line. Dominic Calvert-Lewin's prolific season for Everton has seen him edge ahead as the reserve for Kane at number nine. — AFP

Bale expects Real return after Spurs loan

LONDON: Gareth Bale said Tuesday that he plans to resume his Real Madrid career once his loan at Tottenham expires at the end of this season. Wales forward Bale returned for a second spell with Tottenham in September after being frozen out by Real manager Zinedine Zidane.

He has endured a difficult time back in the Premier League, plagued by fitness issues, inconsistent form and a dispute with Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho over his readiness for an FA Cup tie at Everton. The 31-year-old's Madrid contract runs until the end of the 2021-22 season and he revealed he will head back to Spain after the delayed Euro 2020 this summer.

"There's no distraction for me," Bale told a press conference. "I think the main reason I came to Spurs this year was to play football first and foremost. Going into the Euros I wanted to be match-fit. The original plan was to do a season at Spurs and after the Euros still have a year left at Real Madrid. My plan is to go back, that's as far I have planned."

Mourinho said earlier this month that Bale's future beyond the end of the season was a matter for Real. Finally showing signs of his best form, Bale — a four-time Champions League winner with Real — recently scored six goals in six games.



BIRMINGHAM: Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh midfielder Gareth Bale (2R) watches as Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho (L) puts Tottenham Hotspur's French midfielder Moussa Sissoko (2L) as a substitute during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Tottenham Hotspur at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England on March 21, 2021. — AFP

But Bale found himself back on the bench for Tottenham's shock Europa League exit at Dinamo Zagreb last Thursday and their Premier League win against Aston Villa on Sunday. His spell among the substitutes has at least kept Bale fit for Wales' forthcoming matches.

Wales headed to Belgium for their opening World Cup qualifier yesterday, host Mexico in a friendly on Saturday and take on the Czech Republic in their second qualifier next Tuesday. With a busy international schedule looming, Bale is eager to put his club issues to one side for now. — AFP

Atletico's Dembele faints in training ground incident

MADRID: Atletico Madrid forward Moussa Dembele collapsed during a training session on Tuesday due to a reported drop in blood pressure, and images of his dramatic slump and medical response were widely reported in the Spanish press.

Dembele, 24, was stretching with team-mates in the center circle at the club's headquarters before falling to the ground, a leg shaking as he lay on his back. The Frenchman's worried Atletico teammates, coaches and medical staff rushed to help him and an ambulance was in attendance at the scene.

The former Celtic striker regained consciousness on the field and walked to the vehicle pitchside and eventually left the stadium at the wheel of his own car. Spanish press reported Dembele had a drop in blood pressure but is doing well. Dembele joined Atleti on loan from Lyon in January and is yet to score in two appearances. — AFP



MAJADAHONDA: In this file photo taken on March 16, 2021 Atletico Madrid's French forward Moussa Dembele heads a ball during a training session at the club's training ground in Majadahonda on March 16, 2021, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Atletico Madrid and Chelsea. — AFP

Saliva test a 'game-changer' in rugby's fight against concussion

LONDON: A new "game-changing" saliva test could provide quicker and more accurate treatment of concussion in rugby union, according to a study published on Tuesday. Concussion has become a major concern within the contact sport as fears grow about the impact of its increasing ferocity on elite-level players.

Former England international Dan Scarbrough, diagnosed with early onset dementia, said Monday he had joined a case involving 2003 World Cup-winner Steve Thompson. They allege several rugby authorities, including World Rugby, the sport's global governing body, failed to protect players from the risks of concussion.

It is an issue for several sports who fear costly litigation similar to that which has engulfed American football. The gridiron game has seen multi-million dollar payouts made to former



AUCKLAND: In this file photo taken on September 26, 2011 England's Steve Thompson takes part in a training session in Auckland, New Zealand. — AFP

players who, unlike their rugby counterparts, were wearing helmets that protected their skull but still suffered severe brain injuries.

However, the SCRUM (Study of Concussion in Rugby Union through MicroRNAs) paper published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine says that, for the first time, specific salivary molecules known as biomarkers can indicate if a player has been concussed.

Significantly, the saliva test shows both the immediate impact of any trauma and its effect several days later—something which may also benefit amateur rugby, where it is rare to have the same extensive touchline medical support as in the professional game.

Tuesday's paper follows a three-year program conducted by the University of Birmingham in central England and involving England's governing Rugby Football Union. Biomarker analysis carried out on 1,028 professional men's players in England's top two leagues—the Premiership and Championship — found the test to be 96 percent accurate in diagnosing concussion.

"What's really exciting is we have found a very accurate way of identifying brain trauma and in saliva, which is non-invasive," said Professor Antonio Belli of the University of Birmingham, one of the study's authors. "The next stage will be to make it faster and portable and instantly available to the doctor on the bench, but we are not there yet." — AFP



ROME: In this file photo taken on June 27, 2020 a general view shows a television broadcast camera and empty tribunes prior to the Italian Serie A football match Lazio vs Fiorentina at the Olympic stadium in Rome. —AFP

Italian league sells TV rights for USA, stalemate on home market

MILAN: Italian top flight football clubs on Tuesday again failed to reach agreement on the sale of domestic television rights for the next three years, but the CBS network will broadcast in the United States.

Italy's 20 Serie A clubs voted unanimously to assign CBS international audiovisual rights for the Italian championship and Coppa Italia for the period 2021-2024. "In a strategic area like the United States of America we have increased the value of our rights by over 30 percent with a major partner

like CBS," said Lega Serie A CEO Luigi De Siervo.

"This is the result of work over the last 18 months and the growing number of American owners who have decided to invest in our teams," he added. However, clubs failed to reach agreement for the seventh time on the home market with rules stating at least 14 must be in favor for the vote to be carried.

The Italian league hopes to raise over 973 million euros (\$1.1 billion) per annum over the next three years from the sale of pay-TV rights domestically. "Regarding the television rights for the Italian territory for the three-year period, the vote did not lead to the assignment of any package, so the issue will be discussed again at the Assembly on March 26," Lega Serie A added.

The limit for the validity of offers submitted last January by the DAZN sports streaming platform and current provider Sky is March 29. If rights are not awarded by this date, a new call for tenders should be launched, with the risk of a downturn in offers. — AFP

Sport | Times

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021

Gym and nutritionists: Inside South Korea's T1 eSports empire

SEOUL: A Nike-sponsored gym, support staff including nutritionists and English language classes are all part of the set-up at T1, one of the world's top eSports organizations, where around 70 gamers are looking to emulate its highest-profile member, League of Legends giant Faker.

Explosive growth has turned competitive video gaming into an increasingly professional sport, with a youthful, ever-growing fan base that appeals to sponsors and advertisers. Players — mostly in their 20s or even teenagers — can attract a global following to rival stars in traditional sports, with the best making millions of dollars in salaries and prize money.

South Korea is a leading power in eSports and in a brand new, 10-storey building in Seoul's expensive Gangnam district, dozens of T1's professional and budding gamers train, following a routine similar to mainstream sports. "We have a gym, a cafeteria, chefs... everything that these young players need to perform their best," said John Kim, the organization's chief operating officer.

The routine is intense: around 10 hours a day with coaches and trainers, strategizing and polishing their skills for the next match. Promotional photos show the team in uniform, half of them in glasses and most with identical pudding-basin haircuts.

It is a far cry from when Choi Ellim, who was promoted in 2019 to a spot alongside star player Lee 'Faker' Sang-hyeok on T1's top roster, played video games at home for fun. "When I was playing games as a hobby, I could eat when I was hungry and sleep when I was sleepy but now we are on a set schedule," he said.

They are also required to fulfill monthly minimum hours interacting with their millennial and Generation Z fans through social media and streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube. It has proved a successful model: T1 are three-times League of Legends world champions, and

according to esportsarnings.com are the world number one for overall prize money, with around \$7.1 million.

'Lucrative opportunities'

T1 was founded by South Korean telecommunications giant SK Telecom in 2004, which combined it two years ago in an international joint venture with Comcast Spectacor — a subsidiary of the US entertainment giant Comcast, which also owns the Philadelphia Flyers ice hockey team. Last month SK Telecom sold off its professional South Korean baseball team, the Incheon-based Wyverns, for \$122 million, saying it would increase investment in "futuristic sports".

The eSports audience is one of the fastest-growing in professional sports: in a 2018 report, investment bank Goldman Sachs said it was already larger than that of Major League Baseball. More than 100 million fans tuned into the 2019 League of Legends World Championships online. "We believe eSports are as much of a sport as any other, and one that at the highest levels requires intense training and focus," the Goldman Sachs report said.

The industry is expected to generate revenues of more than \$1 billion this year, up around 15 percent from 2020, according to figures from games and eSports data company Newzoo. Around 60 percent will come from sponsors. "eSports audiences average much younger than traditional sports, which tends to be an attractive segment," Remer Rietkerk, Newzoo's head of Esports, told AFP.

Nike, BMW and Red Bull are among T1's sponsors and last year's League of Legends World Championships were backed by prestigious brands such as Louis Vuitton and Mercedes-Benz. eSports will debut as a medal event at next year's Asian Games in China, although efforts to become an Olympic sport suffered a setback last year when



SEOUL: This picture taken on February 25, 2021 shows gamers during their training session at the T1 building, one of the world's top eSports organizations where dozens of professional and budding gamers train, in Seoul. — AFP

the IOC refused to recognize a world governing body. Commercial ownership of the games is another hurdle, as is the International Olympic Committee's stance it would not endorse games that simulate violence or killing.

'Elite of the elite'

COO Kim told AFP that eSports were as competitive as traditional sports, likening Faker to Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods for his longevity and dubbing him the "greatest of all time". "He just had this relentlessness and he's still a top player to

this day. All his peers that he began with, they are all retired or have moved on."

According to esportsarnings.com Faker has made more than \$1.2 million in prize money, and reports say he is paid millions of dollars in base salary. Kim attributed the star's enduring success to his "deep competitive nature" and "good mental emotional intelligence". "League of Legends, there's about 100 million monthly active players and to be a pro you have to be at the top of that. The elite of the elite," he said. "And to join T1 you have to be even higher than that." — AFP

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