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Opposition short of one vote to prevent govt from taking oath

32 MPs to boycott Assembly session, call on prime minister to resign

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Thirty-two lawmakers yesterday said they will boycott the National Assembly session tomorrow to prevent the new Cabinet from taking the oath of office, just one vote short of preventing the Assembly from meeting. For the session to be legal, an absolute majority of members - 33 - must attend the session, and so far opposition MPs said they have guaranteed that 32 lawmakers will not attend the session. If one more member joins the opposition boycott, the Assembly will not be able to meet.

Not holding the session will prevent the 16-

member Cabinet, including H.H. the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, from taking the oath to become members of the Assembly. If ministers do not become members of the Assembly, they will not be able to attend sessions, which is a prerequisite for Assembly sessions to be legal. A similar incident happened in 1964, when a majority of MPs refused to attend the Assembly session and prevented Cabinet members from taking the oath. That forced the Cabinet to resign.

Opposition MPs met again yesterday and issued a brief statement in which they assured they will boycott the session because Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem had insisted that the membership of lead-

ing opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum is "null and void". Following the meeting, Dahoum said 32 MPs have pledged they will boycott the session tomorrow in a bid to prevent the government from taking the oath. He called on people to press other MPs to join the boycott.

Dahoum warned that lawmakers who will attend the session will allow the Cabinet to take the oath and will give confidence to the prime minister and speaker, adding that people are demanding the departure of both of them.

Pressure is mounting on social media on five tribal MPs - four of them from the Awazem tribe, of which Dahoum is a member. One of them, MP

Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, the deputy speaker, said he will attend the session even if he is the only member present. Other lawmakers have made no comment so far. MP Saifi Al-Saifi said the government is illegitimate from constitutional, popular and legal viewpoints and the premier must go.

Meanwhile, Ghanem yesterday sent out invitations to lawmakers to attend the session tomorrow, the first since June 5. The session, if it convenes, is scheduled to discuss a number of important laws, including the general amnesty law, mainly for opposition activists and former MPs. The Assembly is also due to discuss two grillings against the prime minister.

Iraq returns archives stolen from Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait received yesterday eight tons of documents and other items taken during the 1990 Iraq invasion led by Saddam Hussein, officials said. It is the third shipment that Kuwait has received since 2019, according to officials from both countries. Kuwait's assistant foreign minister Nasser Al-Hain welcomed the move, saying the shipment contained archives from Kuwait University, the information ministry and other institutions.

"We look forward to more cooperation and, God willing, there will soon be additional steps to complete the handover," he said during a ceremony marking the occasion in Kuwait City. Qahtan Al-Janabi, from Iraq's foreign ministry, said that his

country had previously received a list of missing items from Kuwait and "based on that, the handover is taking place".

In response to a question about Kuwaiti authorities finding the remains of an Iraqi soldier on Boubyan island, Hain said that the interior ministry had taken the necessary measures in this regard, adding the remains of the Iraqi soldier will be handed over to the Iraqi delegation by Janabi before it leaves Kuwait tomorrow.

Iraqi forces, under ex-dictator Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait on Aug 2, 1990, sparking international condemnation, and occupying the state for seven months before they were pushed out by a US-led international coalition. Baghdad has paid around \$50 billion in the last three decades in reparations, but faced with its worst fiscal crisis in years amid the coronavirus pandemic and plummeting oil prices, it has asked for an extension for the final \$3.8 billion. While the countries now have civil relations, issues remain over borders and the repatriation of bodies. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Information Ministry official Essam Al-Said inspects boxes in the back of a truck containing Kuwaiti archives seized during the Iraqi invasion in 1990, after their return by Iraqi authorities yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

Suicide attack on cathedral in Indonesia



MAKASSAR, Indonesia: An anti-terror policeman stands guard as police seal the area after an explosion outside a church yesterday. — AFP

JAKARTA: The suicide bombing at an Indonesian cathedral on Palm Sunday was carried out by two members of a pro-Islamic State extremist group blamed for other church blasts, including a deadly 2019 attack in the Philippines, police said. About 20 worshippers were injured by the powerful explosion outside the church in Makassar city on Sulawesi island as they celebrated the start of Holy Week.

Both suspects in the attack were killed as they rode a motorbike into the compound of the church, setting off what authorities said was an improvised explosive device known

as a pressure-cooker bomb. A church security guard tried to prevent the two perpetrators from entering when the blast occurred, they added.

Late yesterday, National Police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo said both attackers - a man and a woman - were members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an extremist group also blamed for a deadly church bombing in Indonesia's second-biggest city Surabaya in 2018. Prabowo did not give names or say how they were identified, but forensic examiners were performing

Continued on Page 2

Deaths in Egypt building collapse climb to 25

CAIRO: Egyptian state media said yesterday that at least 25 people were killed in a 10-storey building collapse in Cairo the day before, revising the toll up as rescue operations continued. Al-Ahram newspaper said the number of injured in Saturday's incident in the capital's eastern Gesr Suez district rose to 75. Rescue workers continued to sift through cement and rubble yesterday, a security source said.

Al-Ahram quoted local reports as claiming four of the building's floors had been added illegally.

Continued on Page 2



CAIRO: People and rescuers gather around the rubble of a building that collapsed in Gesr Suez, east of the Egyptian capital, on Saturday. — AFP

Taste and smell gone: Anguish of COVID survivors

NEW YORK: Three days after testing positive for COVID-19, "everything tasted like cardboard", recalls 38-year-old Elizabeth Medina, who lost her sense of taste and smell at the start of the pandemic. A year later, she fears she will never get them back. Medina consulted ear, nose and throat doctors and neurologists, tried various nasal sprays, and is part of a group of patients undergoing experimental treatment that uses fish oil.

To try to stimulate her senses, she puts copious amounts of spices on everything she eats, pours aromatic herbs into her tea and regularly sniffs a bracelet soaked in essential oils. But her attempts have been in vain. Medina, a guidance counselor at

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NEW YORK: Elizabeth Medina smells her hand after using hand sanitizer during an interview outside NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital on March 22, 2021. — AFP

Local

Virtual technology parade of EGOV8 takes off tomorrow

Organized by NoufEXPO and held under Prime Minister's auspices

KUWAIT: Organized by NoufEXPO, the 8th eGovernment Forum (EGOV8), which kicks off tomorrow, will be a remarkable technological event that comes after disruption due to the challenges and difficulties of COVID19. EGOV8 convenes during the next two days under the generous auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Dr Rana Al-Fares, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, will represent His Highness during the opening ceremony. NoufEXPO highly values the support of His Highness the Prime Minister, and wishes Dr Fares all the best in carrying out her responsibilities in leading the Ministry of State for Communications and Information Technology, established for the first time in Kuwait's history.

Dr Fares said on this occasion, "I realize the extent of effort required. The tasks are large, and the challenge is not easy, especially since I realize that the ICT sector has an important role to play in activating the digital transformation paths of the state and society in Kuwait. There is also a big role for ICT in rationalizing the state's expenditure by harnessing technology in the provision of advanced electronic services and protecting society and its institutions and interests through cybersecurity capabilities that have become a national mission. We will move ahead benefiting from what we have now while building together for a better future, benefiting from the achievements of ICT globally as we empower the Kuwaiti youth capabilities to carry out the responsibility."

Vital projects

In his turn, Eng Salem Al-Othainah, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), said, "We highly welcome the blessed step taken by the political leadership to establish the Ministry of State for Communications and Information Technology. We



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled



Rana Al-Fares



Salem Al-Othainah



Ahmad Al-Manfouhi



Badr Al-Salman

look forward to working hand in hand with the Minister to achieve this step's aspirations. We hope that her blessed efforts will help implement many vital projects that CITRA has completed their preparatory steps. We, particularly, note the National Center for Cyber Security that we aspire to establish as an independent body to ensure its success in carrying out its tasks, according to CITRA's strategy that the Kuwaiti government approved. Similar countries' experiences and best global practices support CITRA's conclusion. Cybersecurity is a key building block in building sophisticated e-government services." Othainah elaborated that we hope the new ministry would unify government information centers' efforts to energize the development of integrated e-services that spare citizens and residents the burden of visiting government agencies. It is worth mentioning that CITRA is the strategic partner of NoufEXPO in organizing EGOV8.

Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, General Director of Kuwait Municipality, expressed his happiness in dedicating a panel discussion on the Unified Permits System, a joint initiative between Kuwait Municipality and the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and

Consultant Houses. Manfouhi said, "The importance of this system is to provide an electronic service to issue all permits electronically by government agencies according to their competence when embarking on plans to implement construction and industrial projects in Kuwait. We are looking to build a unified electronic portal that beneficiaries can visit to issue their permits from their offices or homes' comfort. The process includes getting initial advice, submitting applications, sending or completing documents, follow-up procedures, solving obstacles, if any, and ending up with the issuance of permits electronically. The project includes, of course, an electronic platform with all the requirements of security and privacy." Manfouhi added that Kuwait Municipality is also pursuing this project's implementation with confidence, relying on a professional team that successfully managed to implement a nationwide GIS system.

Private sector's involvement

Eng Badr Al-Salman, the President of the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses, also welcomed the cooperation between the Federation and Kuwait Municipality to

plan for the Unified Permits Project. He said, "The Federation's initiative comes from the government's direction to encourage the private sector's involvement in vital projects. Kuwaiti consultant houses are qualified to carry out the necessary advisory role and act as a mediator between the beneficiaries and the concerned government agencies. We are confident that the members of the Federation can provide this service efficiently. They have the right experience and understand both the requirements of project owners and government department procedures."

EGOV8 mainly focuses on developing integrated e-government services and government process re-engineering that constitute a mandatory requirement for developing those services. It will also consider the long-term impact of COVID19 on government agencies, such as remote work and workforce development and evaluation. The event will feature a special workshop on how enterprises can build their strategies, objectives, and KPIs while associating them with executing their projects to have live dashboards that show their performance levels 24/7. Finally, cybersecurity will be a crucial topic of EGOV8.

NoufEXPO concluded its press release by thanking all EGOV8 participating organizations, namely the strategic partners of the General Authority for Communications and Information Technology (CITRA) and the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses. NoufEXPO extended special thanks and welcomed: the Strategic sponsor, Alghanim Industries, the Platinum sponsors Zain, Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Cisco Systems Inc, Huawei, Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Company, SAP, and Diyar United Company, The Golden sponsors Fortinet, Techno-Management, and Xerox, and Alamba Newspaper which is the exclusive media sponsor of EGOV8. Finally, NoufEXPO extended special thanks to EGOV8 attendees, speakers, experts, and participants from inside and outside Kuwait, wishing them all a successful and enjoyable event.



Minister Fares to participate

Saudi Arabia unveils campaign to tackle climate change

RIYADH: Top crude exporter Saudi Arabia on Saturday unveiled a sweeping campaign to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions, including a plan to plant billions of trees in the coming decades. The OPEC kingpin seems an unlikely champion of clean energy, but the "Saudi Green Initiative" aims to reduce emissions by generating half of its energy from renewables by 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said.

Saudi Arabia also plans to plant 10 billion trees in the kingdom in the coming decades, he said in a statement released by the official SPA news agency. Riyadh also plans to work with other Arab states on a "Middle East Green Initiative" to plant an additional 40 billion trees, in what would be the world's largest reforestation program, he added.

"The kingdom, the region and the world needs to go much further and faster in combatting climate change," Prince Mohammed said. "We reject the false choice between preserving the economy and protect-

ing the environment." The statement did not elaborate on how the mammoth plan would be executed in a largely desert landscape with extremely limited renewable water sources.

Saudi Arabia currently draws on oil and natural gas to both meet its own fast-growing power demand and desalinate its water - which consumes huge quantities of oil daily. The new initiatives are part of the prince's Vision 2030 plan to diversify the kingdom's oil-reliant economy. Prince Mohammed said Saudi Arabia and the region face "significant climate challenges", including desertification, which poses an "immediate economic risk".

Some \$13 billion is lost annually due to sand storms in the region, while pollution from greenhouse gases has reduced average Saudi life expectancy by 1.5 years, he added. The initiatives come as energy giant Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's cash cow, faces scrutiny from investors over its emissions.

In January, Bloomberg News reported that the company excluded emissions generated from many of its refineries and petrochemical plants in its overall carbon disclosures to investors. It added that if those facilities are included, the company's self-reported carbon footprint could nearly double, adding as much as 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent to its annual tally - roughly the emissions produced by Portugal. — AFP



SANTO ANDRE, Brazil: Patients affected by the COVID-19 coronavirus are seen at a field hospital set up at a sports gym in Sao Paulo state on March 26, 2021. — AFP

Taste and smell gone: Anguish of...

Continued from Page 1

a New York school, says she has lost many everyday pleasures she once enjoyed, including eating and cooking.

She says she has cried every day for months. Medina is one of a growing number of people with lasting anosmia - a poorly understood disorder that has become an underestimated consequence for many in the pandemic. Most COVID-19 sufferers who lose the ability to taste or smell recover "within three or four weeks", according to Valentina Parma, a psychologist at Temple University in Philadelphia. But 10 to 15 percent lose the senses for months, said Parma. She chairs the Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research (GCCR), which was formed at the start of the pandemic to study the problem.

Sensory loss is estimated to affect more than two million Americans and 10 million people worldwide, according to the expert. Taste and smell are often seen as less essential than sight and hearing, and their loss is often considered as less serious than other effects of "Long COVID"; but they are a key part of socialization, says Parma, noting that "we pick mates based on smells". Their disappearance, moreover, is frequently compounded not just by nutritional problems but by anxiety and even depression, Parma added.

Like other "anosmics", Medina found solace and solidarity in a support group organized by a hospital near her home. Such groups have flourished on social networks. The AbScent group, formed as a charity in Britain in 2019, has seen its members on various platforms soar from 1,500 to more than 45,000 since the pandemic began, according to founder Chrissi Kelly.

On the organization's main Facebook page, the question that haunts Medina repeatedly comes up:

"Will I ever regain my sense of taste and smell?" At this stage, said Parma, "it is quite difficult to predict how things will evolve."

But there is one good indicator that anosmics are on their way to recovery: Developing parosmia, when people's smells of familiar things are distorted, like smelling garbage while sniffing coffee. Presently there is no known cure, and the only treatment recommended without reservation is to smell four different scents twice a day. According to Parma, this works in 30 percent of cases, but only after three to six months of practice.

Faced with this uncertainty, it's perhaps no surprise that the likes of AbScent's Kelly, who lost her taste and smell after a bout of sinusitis in 2012, and Katie Boateng, an American who lost the senses in 2009, have become near-celebrities. They share their experiences, and push the medical community to intensify research and recognize the seriousness of their symptoms. In 2018, Boateng created the Smell Podcast, a mine of information and advice for her companions in misfortune.

She is now part of a patient advocacy group that helps guide GCCR's research. Although Boateng has given up hope of being cured herself, "I am still very hopeful that we can lead to research that can cure people in the future," she said. While waiting for a medical breakthrough, many continue to perform their daily sniffing exercises, sometimes with the help of a coach, like Leah Holzel.

The food expert, who had lost her sense of smell from 2016 to 2019, has helped six people recover from anosmia since the start of the pandemic. Many sufferers also cling to messages about improvements or healings that appear regularly on social networks, enjoying the camaraderie that the groups provide. "It's almost exactly a year after I first lost my smell and taste and I'm pretty much okay now," Dominika Uhrakova, who lives in Southampton, England, wrote on AbScent's Facebook page. "Hang in there, don't lose hope and I'm wishing you all best of luck," the 26-year-old added. — AFP

Suicide attack on cathedral...

Continued from Page 1

DNA tests on body parts scattered at the grisly scene. "There were two perpetrators killed, one is a man and another one is a woman," Prabowo said. "They're members of the JAD group which carried out a bomb attack in Jolo in the Philippines." It was not clear if the pair were a married couple. An Indonesian militant and his wife - members of JAD - were blamed for two explosions that ripped through a Catholic church on the Philippines' Muslim-majority island of Jolo in 2019, killing worshippers at Sunday mass and security forces. Two other militants linked to that attack were shot dead by Indonesian security forces earlier this year.

One witness to yesterday's bombing described hearing two "very strong" blasts and then seeing

plumes of smoke, an attack that wounded about 20 church officials, congregants and security staff. "There were several injured people on the street. I helped one woman... who was wounded and covered in blood," Yosi, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP. "Her grandchild was also injured. There were body parts everywhere."

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said he "strongly condemned this act of terror". "Terrorism is a crime against humanity," he said. "I call on everyone to fight against terror and radicalism, which go against religious values." Amnesty International said the bombing showed "complete contempt" for human rights.

The explosion at the main Catholic cathedral in Makassar - a port city of about 1.5 million - happened just after congregants finished celebrating Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, which commemorates Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. It comes a week before Easter. In his mass for Palm Sunday, Pope Francis said he prayed for all the victims of violence, "especially those of this morning's attack in Indonesia, in front of the Cathedral of Makassar". — AFP

Deaths in Egypt building collapse...

Continued from Page 1

Cairo governor Khaled Abdel Aal toured the site on Saturday and ordered a team of experts to be formed to inspect nearby buildings for damage. Egypt has suffered several deadly building collapses and industrial fire accidents in recent years, due to the dilapidation of many premises and the failure of many constructors to respect safety and planning measures. Often developers add floors on foundations that

are not designed to support them in order to boost profits. Saturday's accident came a day after a train crash in the southern province of Sohag killed 19 people and injured more than 180 others, the latest in a series of deadly collisions generally attributed to poor infrastructure and maintenance. Also Saturday, a fire ripped through ramshackle shops near a train station in the eastern city of Zagazig, in the Sharqia governorate, without causing any deaths.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous nation, has been beset by a series of woes that began Tuesday when a giant container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal, vital for international shipping. The blockage, now in its sixth day, has stalled more than 300 cargo vessels at either end of the 193-km waterway. — AFP

Local

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed 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

Kuwait receives archives stolen in 1990 Invasion



KUWAIT: Employee at the Kuwaiti Information Ministry Essam Al-Said inspects boxes in the back of a truck containing Kuwaiti archives seized during the Iraqi invasion of the Gulf emirate in 1990, after their restitution by Iraqi authorities in Kuwait City yesterday. The books and files are among items that were stolen by invading troops during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion, which the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry received from Iraqi authorities as part of an agreement signed between the two countries. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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News in brief

Amir condolences with Egypt's leader on building collapse

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday sent a cable of condolences to Egypt's President Abdelattah Al-Sisi. In the cable, His Highness expressed sincere condolences over the victims of the building that collapsed in Cairo earlier in the day. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow mercy on the souls of victims, wishing a speedy recovery to those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. —KUNA

Curfew in Ramadan?

KUWAIT: Head of the Coronavirus Higher Advisory Committee Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah said that COVID-19 transmission is still high in all governorates, while the curfew and social distancing are allegedly "not being observed." As a result, it is possible that the curfew may continue during Ramadan. He added that supplies of vaccines are being controlled by manufacturing companies which is allegedly "slowing the vaccination process."

US Dollar at KD 0.302

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US dollar was stable at KD 0.302, while the euro dropped to KD 0.356 yesterday, compared to Thursday's rates. The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin that the sterling rose to KD 0.416, the Swiss franc dropped to KD 0.321 and the Japanese yen was stable at KD 0.003. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken on Saturday shows heavy traffic on the Fourth Ring Road. Main highways in Kuwait were heavily congested on the weekend, which has become the main gateway for people to meet their needs since the partial curfew started. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

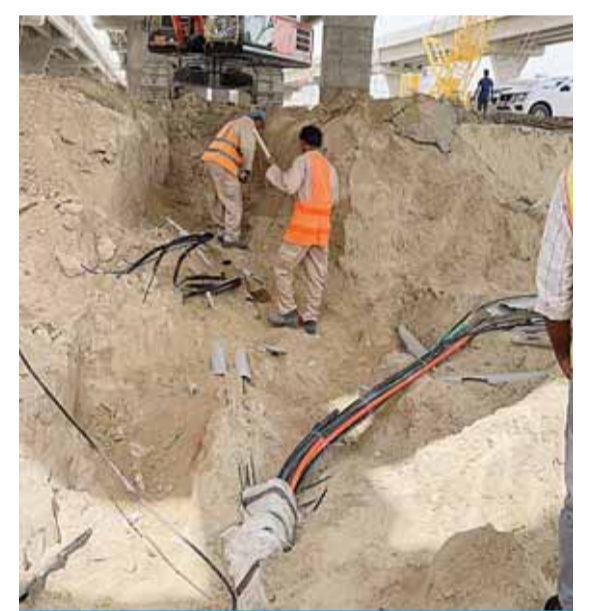
Internet service disruption case to prosecution

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology Affairs Rana Al-Fares on Saturday announced that an urgent complaint has been submitted to the Public Prosecution against those responsible for cutting cables supplying the internet earlier today and damaging it. In a press release, she added that perpetrators would be held responsible for all damages, referring to the application of penalties included in the contractor's contract.

She noted that the complaint came following issuing some reports on damage against the companies causing the cable cuts. Cutting

the cables affected the country's internet services in a manner that caused damage on several levels, which necessitated urgent legal actions, she noted.

The country's internet services suffered a severe slowdown this morning due to the cutting of a number of international cables in several directions, as a result of road networks development work. This led to the disruption of nearly 60 percent of the country's internet services. Meanwhile, Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced later the fixing of all cuts in the cables and the resumption of services in all systems across the country. Internet services were restored to STC international cable system and Mobily, as well as disrupted systems, the authority said in a statement to the press. The concerned emergency teams were present at the site since the early hours of the incident, which took place due to the development of road networks, it added. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Workers are seen at the site where the internet cable cuts were reported.

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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KES to represent Kuwait in int'l e-tournaments

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football Association (KFA) signed a cooperation agreement with Kuwait Esports Club (KES) to represent the association to participate in e-tournaments locally, regionally and internationally. KES Chairman Abdullah Al-Ali said KFA receives invitations from international bodies to participate in e-tournaments, "and we as a club are considered a specialized entity in organizing the participation process in esports tournaments and are able to participate professionally".

"This agreement adds to the club's responsibility in general and professional players in particular, as they will represent Kuwait at the international level. So we pray to Allah Almighty to help us bear this responsibility and that each player should have sporting etiquette and spirit," Ali said.

Ali said the agreement will lead to development of the environment that supports e-tournaments internationally, adding Kuwait has highly skilled professionals who can compete in international arenas. He said the agreement is an extension of



KUWAIT: KES Chairman Abdullah Al-Ali with KFA Secretary Salah Al-Qanaie after signing the agreement.

cooperation with various sports associations, which will contribute to cooperation in wider fields and play a larger role in supporting e-activities that are held in this regard.

Ali said the agreement authorizes the club to organize competitive tournaments locally to select players to represent Kuwait, prepare and organize participation in all friendly and competitive tournaments and provide complete technical support.

Zain Platinum Sponsor of 8th eGovernment Forum

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its platinum sponsorship of the eighth eGovernment Forum (EGOV8). The event, to be hosted by NoufEXPO in a virtual format, comes under the title 'Integrated eGovernment: an urgent post corona need'. EGOV8 runs from 30 - 31 March under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

This year, the forum comes in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Zain's support to the event for the fourth consecutive year affirms its keenness on actively shouldering the various local efforts that contribute to developing the nation's infrastructure and progressing national economy. This is especially true during such unprecedented times that demand doubled efforts and more collaboration between the public and private sectors to combat the pandemic's impacts on health, economic, and social fronts.

EGOV8 will feature many seminars and workshops that are set to witness the participation of prominent government officials and private sector executives. The forum's program centers around a number of topics that mainly focus on the impact of COVID-19 on government workflows, launching a program to renovate the e-government plan for the post-pandemic era, laying out the right foundations

for the business reengineering of government processes, reviewing the procedures and rules of government jobs, reviewing the basis of control, evaluation, and adherence to emerging health standards, and much more.

This year's eGovernment forum comes with a refreshed perspective in terms of form and content. COVID-19 turned EGOV8 to run virtually through advanced and specialized technology. This will help in bringing together attendees and speakers from inside and outside Kuwait. The event will also be able to benefit from speakers who could not join physically during previous EGOV events. On the content front, EGOV8 will focus on the business reengineering of government services, a necessary and essential entry point for the development of integrated eGovernment services that deliver government services to citizens and residents - wherever they are on a 24/7 basis, and without the need to visit government departments.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. The company's continuous efforts prove its full potential in triggering the digital community, and will enrich its collaborations in Telecom and IT areas with its strategic partners on multiple levels.

ZAIN

8th eGovernment Forum
مؤتمر الحكومة الإلكترونية



Optimism amid salvage efforts as megaship still stuck in Suez

Defense chiefs condemn bloodiest day since Myanmar's military coup

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LONDON: A picture shows London landmark The London Eye before being submerged into darkness for the Earth Hour environmental campaign. —AFP

Cities turn off lights to mark Earth Hour

Event highlights link between destruction of nature and outbreaks of diseases like COVID

BUENOS AIRES: From Singapore to Buenos Aires, cities around the world turned off their lights Saturday to mark Earth Hour, with this year's event highlighting the link between the destruction of nature and increasing outbreaks of diseases like COVID-19.

After starting in Asia, the call to action on climate change made its way around a planet reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. As the day came to an end, it was the turn of the Americas, where the lights dimmed at the Obelisk in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Tomorrow and the BBVA tower in Mexico City.

In London, the Houses of Parliament, London Eye Ferris wheel, Shard skyscraper and neon signs of Piccadilly Circus were among the landmarks flicking the switches. "It's fantastic news that parliament once again is taking part in Earth Hour, joining landmarks across the country and the world to raise awareness of climate change," said Lindsay Hoyle,

Speaker of the House of Commons.

In Paris, the three stages of the Eiffel Tower progressively went dark but there were few people to watch with the whole country under a 7 pm COVID-19 curfew. The giant metal tower has been shut to the public since October 30, due to the pandemic. In Rome, the lights went out at the 2,000-year-old Colosseum, while police enforcing Italy's coronavirus restrictions checked the papers of a small crowd of onlookers.

Harmful human activity

Asia-Pacific kicked off the event after night fell there, with the skylines of metropolises from Singapore to Hong Kong going dark, as well as landmarks including the Sydney Opera House. As the event crisscrossed time zones and continents, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and Moscow's Kremlin also joined the annual initiative. This year, organizers said they wanted to highlight the link between the

destruction of the natural world and the increasing incidence of diseases—such as COVID-19 — making the leap from animals to humans.

Experts believe human activity, such as widespread deforestation, destruction of animals' habitats and climate change, is spurring this increase, and warn more pandemics could occur if nothing is done. "Whether it is a decline in pollinators, fewer fish in the ocean and rivers, disappearing forests or the wider loss of biodiversity, the evidence is mounting that nature is in free fall," said Marco Lambertini, director general of the WWF, which organizes Earth Hour. "And this is because of the way we live our lives and run our economies. "Protecting nature is our moral responsibility but losing it also increases our vulnerability to pandemics, accelerates climate change, and threatens our food security," he said. In Singapore, people at the waterfront watched as skyscrapers went dark and in a nearby park, Gardens by the Bay, a group

of futuristic-looking tree sculptures had their lights turned off.

'Impact on the environment'

Earth Hour is about "more than just saving energy, it's more like remembering our impact on the environment," Ian Tan, 18, told AFP at the park. But he was not convinced the event, which has been running since 2007, made much of a difference. "One hour is not enough for us to remember that climate change is actually a problem—I don't really see (Earth Hour) as very significant," he said. In Hong Kong, people at viewing points above the city watched as lights were dimmed on hordes of closely packed skyscrapers, while in the South Korean capital Seoul, the historic Namdaemun gate went dark. In Thailand, Bangkok's ultra-popular CentralWorld mall counted down to 8:30 pm before its exterior glass displays went dark for an hour—though inside, the shopping center appeared to operate as usual. —AFP

European jihadists' children 'at risk of radicalization'

BRUSSELS: The children of European jihadists left trapped in a Syrian camp after their fathers' defeat on the battlefield now face radicalization in their turn, a Belgian expert warns. Heidi De Pauw, director of the association Child Focus, has visited orphans and widows in the Al-Hol camp in northern Syria and says it is time to bring the youngsters home.

Belgium has been one of the main sources of foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight under the banner of the Islamic State jihadist group. The group's so-called caliphate centered around Raqqa has now been overrun by western-backed forces and many militants have been slain—leaving behind their wives and children. Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander de Croo has recognized the need to bring the youngest children home to prevent a new generation of extremists growing up in camps.

His decision came as Brussels marks the fifth anniversary of the triple suicide bombing that was the deadliest peacetime attack in Belgium's history, and some here are worried. But De Pauw told AFP that the western-backed Kurdish forces that over-ran Raqqa are

losing control of the Al-Hol camp and the children held there should be protected. Very young girls are wearing full-face niqab veils and stone-throwing youths chase off "infidel" visitors.

"You'd think you were in Raqqa," De Pauw said, warning that the Islamic State group is once again in charge, particularly among the estimated 10,000 "foreigners" in Al-Hol. De Croo has said much the same—"In these camps are the terrorists of tomorrow"—and Belgian MP Georges Dallemagne says an "embryonic new Islamic State" is growing there.

Earlier this month, Belgium decided it must do what it can to bring home the youngest-children under 12 born to Belgian parents—on a case-by-case basis. According to agencies working in the camps, most of the 62,000 people languishing in Al-Hol are Iraqi and Syrian jihadists and their families. But for the past two years, there have been thousands of French, British, German, Dutch and Belgian nationals—mainly women and children—driven out of former IS stronghold Baghuz. Their section of the camp is run under the group's interpretation of Islamic law, enforced by sharia courts.



In this file photo, Dorothee Maquere, wife of French jihadist Jean-Michel Clain, sits with four of her five children at a screening area in the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor, after fleeing the Islamic State (IS) group's embattled hold-out of Baghuz. — AFP

"All the women we saw wear the black niqab, even little girls of three or four," De Pauw said. "Many women have organized Islamic schools."

De Pauw's group Child Focus took part in a mission in June 2019 to bring six adolescents back to Belgium—orphans or those thought to have been kidnapped by a parent.

But researchers estimate that there may be 40 Belgian children in the camps. Back in 2019, just two months after Baghuz fell, the women were keen

to talk to European visitors about their plight. But by last December, the mood had changed. "We immediately felt the tension," De Pauw said. "At one point the children turned on us and called us kufar, infidels, and started to throw stones," she said. "It's sad to see a nine-to-ten year radicalized to this point." No contact was possible on the later visit with the adult women, and De Pauw fears that adolescent girls are being married off young to produce a new generation of babies. —AFP

Al-Shabaab calls for attacks on US, French interests in Djibouti

NAIROBI: The leader of jihadist group Al-Shabaab has called for attacks on "American and French interests" in Djibouti, less than two weeks before the country's presidential election. In a video released late Saturday, Abou Obaida Ahmad Omar lashed out at Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999 and is set to win a fifth term in elections on April 9. The Islamist leader accused Guelleh of turning the Horn

of Africa country "into a military base from where every war against the Muslims in East Africa is planned and executed". "Make American and French interests in Djibouti the highest priority of your targets," he told followers in the video.

Djibouti's strategic location as a gateway to both Africa and the Arabian Peninsula has made it a sought-after destination for foreign military bases. The former French colony hosts France's largest contingent in Africa—some 1,500 troops—as well as the United States' only permanent base, with around 4,000 troops. Japan and Italy also have a presence in Djibouti, while China has had a port and military base in the country since 2017. Djibouti is furthermore host to a contingent of African Union troops fighting the Al-Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab in

Somalia, where the Islamists have waged a long and violent insurgency seeking to unseat the internationally-backed government.

In 2014 Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a restaurant in Djibouti, killing a Turkish man and injuring around 20 other people, including seven French nationals, six Dutch citizens, four Germans and three Spaniards. The jihadist group said it had targeted the restaurant because it was popular with "French crusaders and their NATO allies". French nationals were targeted because of what the group alleged was their government's "complicity in the massacres and persecution of our Muslim brothers in the Central African Republic and for their active role in training and equipping the apostate Djiboutian troops". —AFP

European countries tighten curbs, France 'critical'

PARIS: France, Belgium and Poland tightened curbs as coronavirus cases surged in Europe while the Philippines prepared for a giant lockdown and Chile confined over 80 percent of its population. France has admitted that the situation is "critical" and added three more departments to the 16 already under tight restrictions.

Around 20 million people in France, including those in the greater Paris region, are classed as living in high-infection zones. They are not allowed to travel further than 10 kilometers (six miles) from their home unless they have an essential reason. Checks at train stations, airports and toll-paying motorways began Saturday to enforce the travel restrictions. "About 10 police teams have been deployed against two in normal times" in Paris's busy Montparnasse station, a police officer told AFP, adding that these numbers would be increased during busy hours.

Only shops selling food, and book and music stores are open and classrooms in high schools are only running at half the capacity. Daily cases in France have nearly doubled since the start of the month and there have been more than 200,000 new cases every week.

Belgium meanwhile closed all businesses involving non-medical physical contact such as hairdressers for four weeks from Saturday. Shops offering "non-essential" services can only receive clients with appointments. Poland closed creches, playgrounds, furniture and DIY stores, as well as beauty salons and barber shops.

Social distancing in churches in the predominantly Catholic nation has also been tightened with one person allowed in every 20 square meters (200 square feet) instead of 15 square meters earlier. The Philippines announced Saturday that more than 24 million people in and around Manila will go into lockdown next week. "The virus is the enemy, not the government," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said. "While we're at home we expect the infection rates to slow." —AFP

International

Optimism amid salvage efforts as megaship still stuck in Suez

Blockade crippling international trade and causing losses worth millions of dollars

SUEZ, Egypt: Hope rose yesterday as salvage efforts would free a mammoth container ship blocking the Suez Canal for six days, crippling international trade and causing losses worth millions of dollars. The MarineTraffic and VesselFinder applications said two tugboats were on their way to the vital waterway to help the salvage operation, while experts pinned hope on a high tide to dislodge the vessel. The Italian-flagged Carlo Magno and the Dutch-flagged Alp Guard were in the Red Sea en route to the Suez Canal, the ship-tracking websites said. The MV Ever Given, which is longer than four football fields, has been wedged diagonally across the span of the canal since Tuesday, blocking the waterway in both directions. The crisis has forced companies to reconsider re-routing vessels around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, a longer and more expensive way to travel between Asia and Europe.

Billions of dollars of cargo are now stalled at either end of the Suez Canal and each passing day results in millions of dollars in losses for Egypt and commercial enterprises around the world. Several notes of optimism were struck on Saturday, including from Suez Canal Authority chief Osama Rabie, who told a news conference that the megaship could be afloat by night.

"We could finish today or tomorrow (Sunday), depending on the ship's responsiveness" to high tides, he said, adding that 14 tugboats were deployed around the stricken vessel. Rabie later told an Egyptian news channel the ship "moved 30 degrees

from left and right" for the first time late Saturday.

"It is a good sign," he said.

Hopes have been pinned on the spring high tide expected to start in the night. "If they don't manage to dislodge it during that high tide, the next high tide is not there for another couple of weeks, and that becomes problematic," Plamen Natzkoff, an expert at VesselsValue, has said.

Despite some predictions that the megaship could be refloated soon, Lloyd's List, a shipping data and news company, said Sunday there was a "surge" in the number of vessels opting to go around Africa. "Most major container lines are now diverting ships round Cape of Good Hope and warning of supply chain disruption ahead. Some are starting to reject bookings," it said on Twitter.

'Human error'

Richard Meade, an editor at Lloyd's List, added: "Sources close to the salvage operation told me this morning that optimism within the team of experts on site was rising and they were hoping that the vessel could be moved within the next 24-48 hours. But the lines have clearly made their call already." The 400-metre (1,300-foot) long, 200,000-tonne MV Ever Given, veered off course in the Suez Canal on Tuesday, with officials blaming 40-knot gusts and a sandstorm for the accident.

But Rabie on Saturday said "technical or human errors" could be behind the grounding of the



This satellite imagery released by Maxar Technologies shows tug boats and dredgers on Saturday attempting to free the Taiwan-operated MV Ever Given lodged sideways and impeding all traffic across Egypt's Suez Canal. — AFP

Taiwan-run, Panama-flagged container ship near the southern end of the canal. Almost as long as New York's Empire State Building is high, the ship is diagonally blocking the 193-kilometre (120-mile) long canal, and more than 320 ships are stalled at either end, Rabie said. Egypt is losing some \$12-14 million in revenue from the canal for each day it is closed, Rabie added, while Lloyd's List has said the blockage is holding up an estimated \$9.6 billion worth of cargo each day between Asia and Europe.

In a sign of the knock-on effects, Syrian authorities said Saturday they had been forced to ration already scarce fuel supplies, as the Suez suspension "has impacted oil imports to Syria and slowed arrival of a ship carrying fuel and oil products". And Romania's animal health agency said Saturday that 11 ships carrying livestock out of the country were affected by the blockage. NGO Animals International warned of a potential "tragedy" affecting some 130,000 animals. — AFP

Opening arguments set to begin in Floyd murder trial

MINNEAPOLIS: Opening arguments begin today in the trial of the white police officer accused of killing George Floyd, a Black man whose death was captured on video and touched off protests against racial injustice across the United States and around the world. Derek Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the Minneapolis Police Department, faces murder and manslaughter charges for his role in the May 25, 2020 death of the 46-year-old Floyd.

Chauvin, 44, who was fired from the police force along with three other officers, could be sentenced to up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge—second-degree murder.

Opening arguments are to begin at 9 am Central time (1400 GMT) in a heavily guarded Minneapolis courtroom for a trial expected to last about a month. Fifteen jurors have been selected for the high-profile case. Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill is expected to drop one juror on Monday and proceed with 12 and two alternates. The panel seated after two weeks of jury selection is racially mixed: six white women, three Black men, three white men, two mixed race women and one Black woman. Police officers are rarely convicted in the United States when charges are brought against them and the trial is being closely watched around the world.

A conviction on any of the charges—second-degree murder, third-degree murder or manslaughter—will require the jury to return a unanimous verdict. Floyd's cause of death is expected to be the central issue in the trial and a key piece of evidence is likely to be the viral video that triggered a summer of anti-racism protests. Chauvin was seen on the bystander video kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes while arresting him for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill.

While lying with his face in the street, the handcuffed Floyd complains that he cannot breathe and calls out for his mother. Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, is expected to argue that the officer was following police procedure and claim that Floyd's death was due to an overdose of the drug fentanyl and underlying health conditions.

'Just verdict'

The public has been banned from attending the trial because of the Covid-19 pandemic but it is being livestreamed. The identities of the jurors will not be revealed until after the trial but some details are known. They range in age from their 20s to their 60s and include a chemist, a social worker, an accountant and a nurse. Two are immigrants to the United States.

One is a grandmother, one is recently married and one is a single mother of two teenage boys. The jury selection process was complicated by the intensive pre-trial publicity surrounding the case and all but one of the jurors said they had seen at least some of the arrest video. Several potential jurors were excused after telling the judge they could not be fair or impartial or presume Chauvin to be innocent as the law requires them to do.

Others expressed concern for their safety. Nelson, Chauvin's attorney, asked to have the trial delayed and moved out of Minneapolis because of the March 12 announcement that the city had reached a \$27 million "wrongful death" settlement with the Floyd family. — AFP

Russian newspaper fights on despite threats and attacks

MOSCOW: Captured on a CCTV camera late at night, a man on a bicycle with a food delivery backpack approaches the offices of Novaya Gazeta, Russia's leading independent newspaper. In the grainy footage recorded in central Moscow earlier this month, the man sprays an unknown substance at the newspaper's front door, then slowly walks away, careful not to look up at the camera.

Sitting in the offices a few days later, editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov tells AFP he has no doubt the "chemical attack" was the latest attempt to silence one of the few media outlets in Russia willing to challenge the official line. "This is the use of military-grade non-lethal poisonous substances to warn the paper's staff or as revenge on them," says Muratov, a grey-bearded 59-year-old who since 1995 has served several times as Novaya Gazeta's editor-in-chief.

Several employees felt unwell after the attack and it took days of cleaning to get rid of the horrible stench, with the strip of pavement that was sprayed having to be removed. It was hardly the first attack on Novaya Gazeta, and far from the worst. Since the early 2000s, six Novaya Gazeta journalists have been killed in connection with their

Jewish community dwindles in Iraq to fewer than five

BAGHDAD: The death of Dhafer Eliyahu hit Iraq hard, not only because the doctor treated the neediest for free, but because with his passing, only four Jews now remain in the country. At the Habibiya Jewish cemetery in the capital Baghdad, wedged between the Martyr Monument erected by ex-dictator Saddam Hussein and the restive Shiite stronghold of Sadr City, an aged Muslim man still tends to the graves, but visitors are rare.

The day of Eliyahu's burial, "it was me who prayed over his grave", the doctor's sister said. "There were friends" of other faiths who prayed too, each in their own way, she added, refusing to give her name.

To hear Jewish prayer out in the open is rare now in Baghdad, where there is but one synagogue that only opens occasionally and no rabbis. But Jewish roots in Iraq go back some 2,600 years.

According to biblical tradition, they arrived in 586 BC as prisoners of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II after he destroyed Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. In Iraq, they wrote the Babylonian Talmud on the very land where the patriarch Abraham was born and where the Garden of Eden is considered by some to have been located, in the heart of the Mesopotamian marshlands.

More than 2,500 years later, in Ottoman-ruled Baghdad, Jews were the second largest community in the city, making up 40 percent of its inhabitants. Some were very prominent members of society like Sassoon Eskell, Iraq's first ever finance minister in 1920, who made a big impression on British adventurer and writer Gertrude Bell.

'Not well received'

At the start of the last century, the day of rest and prayer was Saturday, as per the Jewish tradition, not Islam's Friday, as it is today. Today, "one prays at home", said a Baghdad resident knowledgeable of the city's Jewish community, who also chose to remain anonymous.

And when people with a Jewish name deal with the administration "they will not be well received", he added. According to Edwin Shuker, a Jew born in Iraq in 1955 and exiled in Britain since he was 16,

work—their black-and-white portraits now hang together in the newspaper's office.

"It's no secret that when they killed Anna Politkovskaya I wanted to close this newspaper... This newspaper is dangerous for people's lives," Muratov says. Politkovskaya, who spent years reporting for Novaya Gazeta on rights abuses and the Kremlin's war in the North Caucasus region of Chechnya, was shot dead outside her apartment in 2006 at the age of 48. "The newspaper's journalists were categorically against this, they believed we would violate the memory of Anna Politkovskaya if we closed down... They convinced me," Muratov says. Muratov was among a group of journalists who founded Novaya Gazeta in 1993, inspired by the newfound freedoms that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Unwanted 'gifts'

One of their key early supporters was former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who donated part of his 1990 Nobel Peace Prize money to buy the new publication its first computers—one of them still on display in their office. The heady optimism of those early days is long gone. In the years since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999, critical voices have been increasingly pushed to the sidelines in Russia. But Novaya Gazeta soldiers on, publishing three times per week with reports on rights abuses and corruption despite repeated attacks. In 2018, its office received an unusual delivery of a funeral wreath and a severed ram's head with a note addressed to Denis Korotkov, who cov-



MOSCOW: Russian investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta's editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov attends an interview with AFP in Moscow. — AFP

ers the Wagner mercenary group. His investigations have shed light on Wagner's operations abroad and on its alleged ties to a Kremlin-linked businessman, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Korotkov tells AFP that despite these "gifts" and false articles written about him over the years, he does not plan to stop his work or leave the country.

"It is quite difficult to do journalism about Russia from outside Russia," he says, wearing his signature round sunglasses and smoking a pipe. If every reporter who wanted to write the truth left Russia, he says, "we would then have a lot of single-use journalists in Russia." —AFP

Without Trump, disinformation dips — for now

WASHINGTON: Twitter said it permanently suspended Donald Trump's account after the January 6 Capitol riot because there was a risk of further incitement of violence, following months of tweets disputing Joe Biden's presidential election victory. False and misleading claims about American politics have since plummeted, a trend Twitter and Facebook—which also blocked Trump but may reverse course—are keen to take credit for.

With Trump muted, a comparatively media-shy Biden in the White House, and no election cycle underway, Americans remain interested in economic recovery and a Covid-19 vaccine rollout but are not as consumed by politics as they were in 2020. It is that shift in the news cycle, rather than any fundamental change in how people spread inaccurate information, that is responsible for a lower volume of political falsehoods, experts say.

"The single most important thing was de-platforming Donald Trump," according to Professor Russell Muirhead, co-author of "A Lot of People Are Saying," a book title that plays on one of Trump's most popular sayings, used when promoting unproven theories. "It has removed a daily blizzard of misinformation from the ecosystem," Muirhead said. "Not being bombarded is helping people's misinformation immune systems to reset themselves and recover." —AFP



In this file photo former US President Donald Trump points at the end of a rally to support Republican Senate candidates at Valdosta Regional Airport in Valdosta, Georgia. — AFP



BAGHDAD: This picture taken on March 24, 2021 shows a close-up view of a marker on a grave at the Habibiya Jewish cemetery. — AFP

"there are only four Jews with Iraqi nationality who are descendant of Jewish parents" left in the country, not including the autonomous Kurdish region.

A turning point for Jewish history in Iraq came with the first pogroms in the mid-20th century. In June 1941, the Farhud pogrom in Baghdad left more than 100 Jews dead, properties looted and homes destroyed. In 1948, Israel was created amid a war with an Arab military coalition that included Iraq.

Almost all of Iraq's 150,000 Jews went into exile in the ensuing years. Their identity cards were taken away and replaced by documents that made them targets wherever they showed them. The majority preferred to sign documents saying they would "voluntarily" leave and renounce their nationality and property.

Still today, Shuker said, Iraqi law forbids the restoration of their citizenship. By 1951, 96 percent of the community had left. Almost all the rest follow after the public hangings of "Israeli spies" in 1969 by the Baath party, which had just come to power off the back of a coup. "Promotion of Zionism" was punishable by death and that legislation has remained unchanged.

Decades of conflict and instability—with the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, the invasion of Kuwait, an international embargo, the 2003 American invasion and the ensuing violence—completed the erosion of the Jewish community. By the end of 2009, only eight members remained, according to a US diplomatic cable. And the hemorrhage didn't end there. A jeweler threatened by militants who coveted his goldsmith's work went into exile, followed by Amer Moussa Nassim, grand-nephew of author and renowned economist Mir Basri, in 2011. —AFP

International

Defense chiefs condemn bloodiest day since Myanmar's military coup

Children among 90 killed as troops fire on protesters

YANGON: Defense chiefs from a dozen countries yesterday jointly condemned the bloodbath in Myanmar a day earlier, when at least 90 people—including several children—were killed after security forces opened fire on anti-coup protesters.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals ousted and detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering mass protests demanding a return to democracy. The junta on Saturday staged a major show of might for its annual Armed Forces Day as the death toll since the February 1 coup climbed to at least 423, according to a local monitoring group. The defense ministers of 12 countries including the United States, Britain, Japan and Australia condemned the Myanmar military's use of lethal force against civilians. "A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting—not harming—the people it serves," the rare joint statement said.

"We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces to cease violence and work to restore respect and credibility with the people of Myanmar that it has lost through its actions." Funerals were held Sunday for some of the victims, after the bloodiest day since the putsch.

In Mandalay, the family of Aye Ko, a father-of-four, commemorated his life at a service after he was killed overnight. "We are told by the neighbors that Aye Ko was shot and thrown into the fire," a relative told AFP. "He was the only one who fed the family, losing him is a great loss for the family." Despite the dangers, protesters hit the streets again in the cities of Bago and Monywa, and in the small town of Moe Kaung in Kachin State, according to local media. A day earlier, violence erupted across the country with the military using live rounds in nine regions, including the largest city Yangon, local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said.

By sunset, AAPP said at least 90 people had been killed. Local media, however, put the death toll higher at 114. "Junta forces shot machine guns into residential areas, resulting in many civilians, including six children between ten and sixteen years old, killed," AAPP said.

"The fact the illegitimate military regime is targeting children is a grave act of inhumanity." Rebels in eastern Myanmar's Karen state said they had been targeted in air strikes late Saturday, hours after the ethnic armed group seized a military base. Hsa Moo, an ethnic Karen



MONYWA: This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook yesterday shows protesters taking part in a demonstration against the military coup in Monywa, Sagaing region. — AFP

and human right activist said three people were killed and at least eight were injured.

It was the first air assault in years in the state, and targeted the Fifth Brigade of the Karen National Union (KNU) — one of the country's largest armed groups—which says it represents the ethnic Karen people. The junta did not immediately comment, and there was no official confirmation of any casualties.

'Harmful to state tranquility'

There was a grand parade of troops and military vehicles in the capital Naypyidaw on Saturday where junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing defended the coup and pledged to yield power after new elections. But he also issued a threat to the anti-coup movement, warning that acts of "terrorism which can be harmful to state tranquility and security" were unacceptable.

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of local resistance to the Japanese occupation during World War II, and usually features a military parade attended by foreign military officers and diplomats. The junta

announced that eight international delegations attended Saturday's event, including those of China and Russia—with a state media broadcast showing Russian deputy defense minister Alexander Fomin in the audience.

The US embassy in Yangon urged American citizens to limit their movements yesterday. "If you must travel move cautiously and ensure you have the ability to communicate with loved ones while travelling." American Citizen Services tweeted. The warning came a day after the US cultural center in Yangon had shots fired at it Saturday. Overnight, at the Miss Grand International beauty pageant in Bangkok, a tearful Myanmar contender, Han Lay, pleaded for peace. "I deeply feel sorry for all the people who have lost their lives on the streets," she said in an emotional address, before singing Michael Jackson's "Heal the World". "Please help Myanmar, we need your urgent international help right now." The Myanmar embassy in London on Sunday confirmed the ambassador met with Suu Kyi's youngest son Kim, 44, last week, who reiterated a request to speak to his mother by telephone. — AFP

China sanctions US, Canadian citizens in Xinjiang dispute

BEIJING: China announced sanctions against two Americans, a Canadian and a rights advocacy body Saturday over their criticism of Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs, but Washington said the tit-for-tat measure would only intensify the spotlight on Xinjiang. At least one million Uyghurs and people from other mostly Muslim groups have been held in camps in the north-western region, according to rights groups, who accuse authorities of forcibly sterilizing women and imposing forced labor.

The European Union, Britain, Canada and the United States sanctioned several members of Xinjiang's political and economic hierarchy this week over the allegations. China retaliated Saturday, with its foreign ministry accusing the United States and Canada of imposing sanctions "based on rumors and

disinformation". The officials targeted by Beijing, who are also banned from conducting business with Chinese citizens and institutions, "must stop political manipulation on Xinjiang-related issues, stop interfering in China's internal affairs in any form," the ministry said. "Otherwise, they will get their fingers burnt." Two members of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Gayle Manchin and Tony Perkins, as well as Canadian MP Michael Chong, and a Canadian parliamentary committee on human rights, are prohibited from entering mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, the foreign ministry said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken slammed the sanctions as "baseless", saying they would only shine a harsh spotlight on the "genocide" in Xinjiang. "Beijing's attempts to intimidate and silence those speaking out for human rights and fundamental freedoms only contribute to the growing international scrutiny of the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang," Blinken said Saturday.

Chong called the sanctions a "badge of honor". "We've got a duty to call out China for its crackdown in #HongKong & its genocide of #Uyghurs," he tweeted. "We who live freely in democracies under the rule of law must speak for the voiceless." — AFP



BEIJING: This file photo taken on March 22, 2021 shows William Klein (center left-red scarf), the acting deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Beijing, joining Jim Nickel (center right-holding hat), the charge d'affaires of the Canadian embassy in Beijing, and other diplomats outside the Beijing Second Intermediate People's Court in Beijing, during the trial of Michael Kovrig, a Canadian detained more than two years ago in China on espionage charges. — AFP

Gun ownership tempts more South Africans

HEIDELBERG, South Africa: It was the first indication a crowd was expected—a coffee trailer perched itself on the lawn of the Rooikraal shooting range south of Johannesburg. Folding chairs and cooler boxes in tow, the crowd swelled as the morning gloom lifted to be gradually replaced with a red glow over the maize plantation that nestled the range.

Dozens of people, mostly women of color weighed down by their ever-growing safety fears, gathered to practice target shooting. Africa's most industrialized nation is notorious for its terrifyingly high crime rate. At least 50 people are killed daily, according to police figures. "Is it painful to put next to your shoulders?" 21-year-old Rabina Karabo asks an instructor, pointing to a 50-calibre precision rifle.

A middle-aged woman standing behind her sipping coffee and sporting ear muffs and safety goggles exclaims: "That's a beast of a gun!" If the gun is not rested well on the shoulders "it is going to kick you like a donkey", warns the instructor. — AFP

Rwandans say 'France alone did not know' its role in genocide

KIGALI: The findings of an official French commission that Paris bears overwhelming responsibilities in the 1994 Rwandan genocide created little surprise in Kigali on Saturday, but there was a ray of hope for future ties. "Only France did not know of its role," said MP John Ruku-Rwabyoma.

"But the whole world, especially Rwandans, knew." The commission of historians set up by President Emmanuel Macron declared a "failure" on the part of France over the genocide that saw around 800,000 people slaughtered, mainly from the ethnic Tutsi minority. After years of accusations France did not do enough to halt the massacres, the MP urged the French government to make a "clear apology".

"Now the next step for France is to accept that they have to pay reparations to the victims," he added. With genocide remembrance events starting on April 7, the memorial site in Kigali was full of students, tourists and locals on Saturday. Jean Dushimimana, 29, was in the genocide museum's section documenting France's role. "There is nothing that they (France) can pay back for what they did," said the computer engi-

News in brief

Demo against virus law in Denmark

COPENHAGEN: Hundreds gathered in central Copenhagen on Saturday to protest against a controversial virus law and Denmark's plan to create so called "corona passports". Marching through the streets, the crowd of mostly younger people, lit fireworks during a march which was described as mostly peaceful. Police told the Ekstrabladet newspaper that some 600 people had gathered and one person was arrested for throwing firecrackers towards police officers. Organized by Danish anti-restriction group "Men in Black," the main issue for the protesters was a new provision to the penal code that calls for a doubled sentence for a crime that "has a background in or is connected to the COVID-19 epidemic". — AFP

Bolsonaro to pay compensation

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has been ordered to pay compensation to a journalist for making degrading remarks against her, according to a court document on Saturday. According to the decision by a Sao Paulo court, Bolsonaro will have to pay 20,000 reais (about \$3,500) to Patricia Campos Mello, a reporter with the respected daily Folha De S. Paulo. The judge ruled in a March 16 decision that the far-right leader had "damaged the honor of the complainant, causing moral damage." Bolsonaro can appeal the decision. — AFP

Total halts work in N Mozambique

JOHANNESBURG: French energy giant Total has suspended its gas operations in northern Mozambique following a brazen jihadist attack close to its site that left several people dead, the company said Saturday. "The remobilization of the project that was envisaged at the beginning of the week is of course now suspended," it said in a statement, referring to their Wednesday announcement of a resumption of work in the area. Militants have seized control of the town of Palma in the northern province of Cabo Delgado following raid launched on Wednesday. — AFP

French police scare Afghan migrants off

ROME: Afghan migrants accused French police of driving them back across the border with Italy by firing into the air, a media report said, while French gendarmes denied the charge. A Turin prosecutor who handles child protection cases was asked to look into the affair after an 11-year-old Afghan girl was hospitalized in a state of shock, the Ansa news agency reported. Her mother told Red Cross workers that on March 25, she and her husband and daughter had left temporary housing near the French border and were on a path when French police arrived. — AFP

Two arrested for killing Libya militia

BENHAZI: Libyan authorities Saturday announced increased security measures in second city Benghazi and the arrest of two suspects in connection with the killing of a militia leader wanted by the International Criminal Court. Security is precarious in Benghazi with frequent tit-for-tat violence and executions. Mahmoud al-Werfalli, a member of forces loyal to eastern military strongman Khalifa Haftar, was shot dead Wednesday along with his cousin in the city, cradle of the country's 2011 revolution. Oil-rich Libya descended into chaos after the NATO-backed uprising that ousted and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with rival militias and administrations vying for power. — AFP



DHAKA: Police personnel march towards activists from Hefazat-e Islam as they block a road during a nationwide strike following deadly clashes with police over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, in Narayanganj yesterday. — AFP

Violence breaks out in fresh Bangladesh protests

NARAYANGANJ: At least a dozen people were reported injured in clashes between police and Islamist demonstrators in Bangladesh yesterday, the third day of protests against the visit of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Five people died on Friday, and another six the next day, after police shot at demonstrators in several major districts across the Muslim-majority nation of 168 million people. The protesters—mostly from the hardline Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam—were angry at the visit of Modi as Bangladesh marked 50 years of independence, accusing him of stoking communal violence against Muslims in his country.

At one new protest in Narayanganj just outside the capital Dhaka, Hefazat supporters chanted "action, action, direct action" as they blocked the key highway linking Dhaka with the port city of Chittagong. Hundreds of demonstrators burnt furniture and tires on the roads as they chanted anti-Modi slogans and called on authorities to investigate the shootings. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets after the protesters barricaded parts of the highway. A police spokesman said they had since left the road. Prothom Alo, the country's biggest Bengali-language daily, said at least 15 people were injured in the Narayanganj clashes.

Hefazat spokesman Jakaria Noman Foyez told AFP thousands of its supporters joined demonstrations at its headquarters at Hathazari outside Chittagong, which is home to a top Islamic seminary. The Islamist group has a nationwide network, and it has held large protests in the past demanding that Bangladesh introduce blasphemy laws. Protests were also held in the northeastern city of Sylhet, the eastern district of Brahmanbaria and in Bosila, a Dhaka suburb, but there were no reports of violence, local media reported. As Bangladesh celebrated independence, human rights groups criticised the government for what they described as growing authoritarianism, including forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Other groups—including students, leftists and other Islamist outfits—had also staged protests against Modi's visit on Friday and Saturday. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2021

Goldman Sachs dustup hits nerve as pandemic blurs work-life line

Boundaries disappear between work and leisure and work and life

NEW YORK: A revolt by junior Goldman Sachs bankers over work weeks that can stretch to as long as 105 hours has inspired both schadenfreude over discontent at the storied investment bank and wider debate about the future of work after the COVID-19 pandemic. The erosion between office and home boundaries during the pandemic means many white-collar workers can relate on some level to the complaints, even if the plight of elite young bankers seeking riches does not inspire sympathy. The issues underlying the Goldman Sachs controversy are "reflective of a broader problem," said Temple University sociologist Kevin Delaney, author of "Money at Work: On the Job with Priests, Poker Players and Hedge Fund Traders."

"People feel the boundaries have disappeared between work and leisure and work and life. A lot of people are struggling with it because they are not sure when they are allowed to take time off." In the wake of the dustup, Goldman Sachs Chief Executive David Solomon has urged staff to respect a firm-wide policy of not working on Saturdays, and praised the young staffers for speaking up.

The gripes were felt beyond Goldman's corner of Lower Manhattan. Citi Chief Executive Jane Fraser this week announced "Zoom-Free Fridays" and urged workers to take their vacation time, adding that she planned a few days off "knowing I will come back with a fresher brain." Jennifer Moss, a syndicated columnist who specializes in workplace issues, praised the moves, but said employers will need to follow through if they want to maintain their staff after the pandemic.

The upheaval of the past year-along with efforts to improve diversity at top firms-creates the potential for improving work culture. But experts caution change is not easy. "It needs to be this mind shift, but this is a great start," Moss told AFP. "It's a legacy of overwork that's been institutionalized."

Beyond self-care

Compared with other options, being overworked

could be viewed as a preferable plight during the pandemic. Government data show millions of people in the United States remain out of work. The coronavirus itself has also infected or killed many "essential" workers such as supermarket staff, transit workers, nurses and others who cannot telecommute. But among those still with jobs, mental burnout is on the rise.

In a February article in the Harvard Business Review, Ross said the disruption has been especially pronounced for younger staff. One millennial quoted in the story said they encountered professional roadblocks as well as negative health effects from diminished opportunities to exercise.

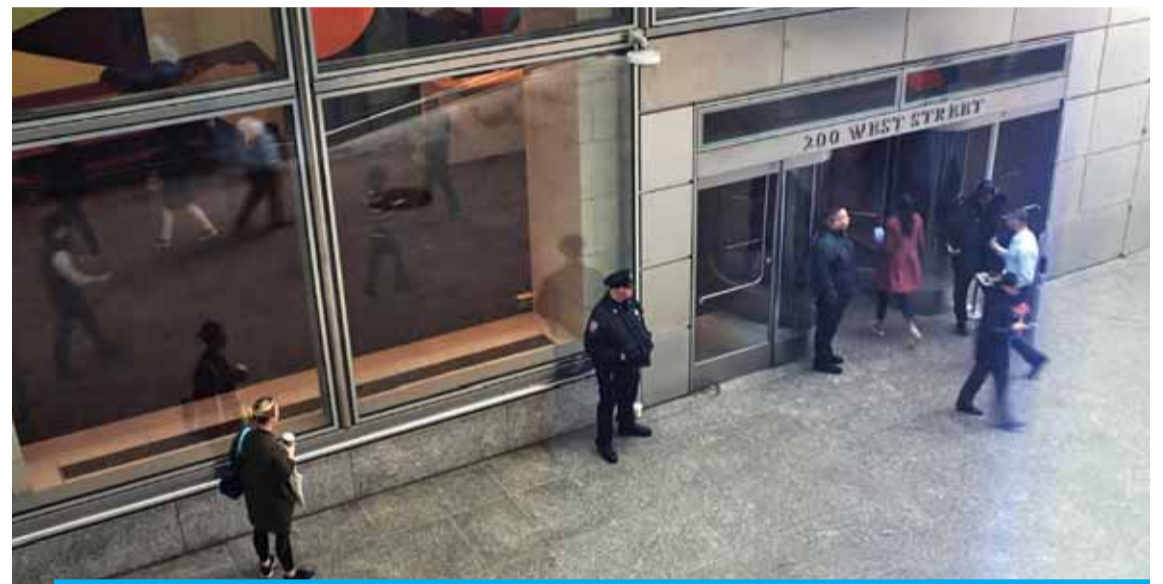
A survey of 1,500 workers showed 85 percent reported their well-being had declined and 55 percent said they felt like they had not been able to balance their home and work life, according to Ross. Possible steps to remedy the situation include establishing a manageable workload and a mental health resource page for staff as part of a strategy to destigmatize the issue.

Solutions must go beyond self-care steps such as yoga and meditation apps. Moss argues, adding "we desperately need upstream interventions, not downstream tactics."

Will it change?

All of the young Goldman bankers felt their work hours had negatively impacted relationships with friends and family and also created unrealistic deadlines. Most also reported feeling as though they experienced workplace abuse and were shunned in meetings, according to an 11-page presentation complete with statistics and graphs, not unlike what the bank would prepare for a client.

"There was a point where I was not eating, showering or doing anything else other than working from morning until after midnight," said one of the staff members surveyed. A Goldman Sachs employee who has been with the firm for about three years told AFP



NEW YORK: People walk outside of the Goldman Sachs New York headquarters in New York City. — AFP

that the pandemic had indeed made work more grueling, and that first-year employees can suffer especially from the lack of opportunities to interact with senior employees.

But the employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said work weeks of 95 hours or more are not a surprise. "When you take a job in investment banking, you know that you're going to be working long hours," the person said. "The hours get better over time, but that's a function of figuring out how things work and becoming more efficient." That the staffers spoke up is characteristic of a generation who "were encouraged to raise their hands," said Paul McDonald, senior executive director for human resources consulting firm Robert Half, adding that younger employees expect a more collaborative work

culture. McDonald anticipates employers will be more open to flexible work formats once the pandemic ends, including combining time at the office and working from home. "Employers are meeting the employees more today than I've ever seen," he said. "But they're not making excuses for the work that needs to get done."

But how much high-powered organizations like Goldman actually want to change remains an open question. Making money is Goldman's core mission, an "ever-expanding" goal that orients all of its incentive structures, Delaney, the Temple University sociologist, said. Goldman is also a client-facing business with a 24-hour global orientation, adding to the pressure. "Change will be hard because there's a lot pointing in the other direction," he said. — AFP



SYDNEY: Australia's unemployment rate fell to 5.8 percent in February — down from its peak of 7.5 percent in July — but the Treasury estimates between 100,000 and 150,000 jobs could be lost as a result of the JobKeeper scheme ending.

Australia ends virus wage subsidy despite job loss warnings

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday ended a pandemic wage subsidy scheme despite official warnings that up to 150,000 people could lose their jobs as a result.

The so-called JobKeeper scheme, which initially saw Aus\$1,500 (around US\$1,150) a fortnight paid to staff via their employers, was announced last March after Australia imposed a nationwide shutdown that left thousands queuing outside unemployment offices. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the program had been an "economic lifeline" that has achieved the aim "of saving lives and saving livelihoods" over the past year.

He told reporters in Melbourne there was "no doubt that there will be some businesses that will continue to do it tough" but the subsidies were always designed to be "temporary". Australia's unemployment rate fell to

5.8 percent in February—down from 7.5 percent in July—but the Treasury estimates between 100,000 and 150,000 jobs could be lost as a result of the change.

Australian Council of Trade Unions president Michele O'Neil said many more workers were likely to see their hours and pay slashed. "1.1 million workers face an uncertain future without the JobKeeper wage subsidy, which has prevented catastrophic job losses during the pandemic and is now being ripped away," she said. "Cutting off JobKeeper while so many workers are still reliant on it is both cruel and counter-productive to our economic recovery."

At the height of the crisis, the scheme was supporting almost four million jobs. Officials twice extended the program over the past 12 months, albeit at lower rates as the spread of COVID-19 was brought under control and the economy began to recover. Australia has been relatively successful in managing the coronavirus—recording roughly 29,000 cases and less than 1,000 deaths to date—with recent outbreaks linked to border quarantine facilities generally being quashed quickly. Its economy tipped into recession in the first half of 2020 but grew 3.1 percent in the September-December quarter. —AFP

revealed in its recent annual results statement. Online sales ballooned 158 percent compared with 2019, the British group added. Garnier, 55, said Kingfisher is well placed to benefit further even after government restrictions are lifted, with office workers likely to some extent continue working from home.

"When you spend more time at home, the house itself becomes more important so you're going to allocate it a bigger budget," the Frenchman said. "You may need to set up a proper office... so working from home is going to be positive for our sector."

'Click-and-collect'

Kingfisher, which employs around 80,000 staff across Europe, plans to open smaller stores in city-center locations. "We will have more stores... but smaller sizes," said Garnier, who has led Kingfisher since 2019. Such locations will enable fast delivery of goods to customers and allow them to benefit from "click-and-collect" service, he noted. "When you are at home tinkering and you need a part or (paint)brush, you can't

Palau president visits Taiwan to open travel bubble

TAIPEI: Palau's leader flew into Taiwan yesterday as the two coronavirus-free allies prepare to launch a travel corridor and boost their pandemic-hit tourist sectors. A charter flight carrying President Surangel Whipps landed at Taoyuan international airport for the start of a four-day visit and to kick off what the two sides are billing as Asia's first travel bubble.

Whipps will meet Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, attend a Palau tourism promotional event as well as visit shipbuilding and aquaculture companies, Taipei's foreign ministry said. He is set to return to Palau on Thursday with a group of 110 Taiwanese tourists on the first of weekly vacation flights.

The plan is to eventually have 16 flights a week on the route, a major lifeline for Palau's economy that before the pandemic relied on tourism for more than half its gross domestic product. "The main reason we are going is really to open up the travel corridor because tourism is our biggest economic driver and it's important to get the tourism back in operation," Whipps told Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) in a recent interview.

"I think it's important to demonstrate to the world that this can work." Palau, which lies about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) east of the Philippines, is one of the few places on Earth never to have recorded a COVID-19 case. The travel bubble is partly due to Palau's special relationship with Taiwan.

It is one of only 15 nations worldwide to offer Taipei diplomatic recognition in the face of China's long-standing claim that Taiwan is part of its territory. Whipps said strict measures would be enforced to protect Palau's 18,000-strong population. Taiwanese visitors must undergo pre-flight coronavirus checks, they can travel only in tour groups and are barred from making individual excursions.

Contact with Palau locals will be kept to a minimum,

always wait eight days" for a delivery. Kingfisher operates in eight countries, with the vast majority of its operations in the UK and Ireland where it has more than 1,000 stores under the Screwfix and B&Q brands. Its next biggest market is France with 214 Castorama and Brico Depot outlets. Kingfisher is based also in Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey—bringing its total number of stores to around 1,400.

DIY for the young

Official data Friday showed that British monthly retail sales jumped 2.1 percent in February on strong demand for home improvements and garden items. Compared with Kingfisher stores in mainland Europe, the "notable nuance in England is the importance given to the garden", said Garnier, whose stores sell plants alongside power tools. He noted that the pandemic has led to the emergence of a new breed of DIY enthusiasts—people under 35 years old "who have taken pleasure in the new skills acquired". In the US, home-improvements giant Home Depot recently posted a 15-



Palau President Surangel Whipps waves after arriving at the Taoyuan International Airport yesterday. — AFP

with tourists staying at designated hotels, eating in separate restaurant areas and allowed to shop only at set times. Taiwan—population 23 million—has been hailed as an example in containing the virus, with fewer than 1,020 confirmed cases and 10 deaths. Taiwanese officials said the 110 slots in the first tour group to Palau were sold out. Whipps has acknowledged no system is foolproof but said Taiwanese health authorities had calculated that the chance of COVID-19 reaching Palau via the travel bubble was one in four million.

Democratic Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by authoritarian China, which views the island as its own territory and has vowed to one day seize it. Beijing has poached seven of Taiwan's diplomatic allies while ramping up military and economic pressure since Tsai's 2016 election win because she rejects its stance that Taiwan is part of China. Whipps told CNA he had rebuffed Beijing's overtures to switch recognition after he won the presidential election last year. "I told them, you know, I believe that we should be free to choose who our friends are," he said. "We value the relationship that we have with Taiwan and nobody should tell us that relationship should be severed." Palau is among four remaining Asia-Pacific countries that officially recognize Taipei over Beijing, along with the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu. — AFP



Kingfisher CEO Thierry Garnier sitting in the company's office in London. — AFP

percent jump in annual net profits to \$12.3 billion (10.5 billion euros). While Garnier said Brexit has not posed "any particular difficulty" for Kingfisher, competition from online giant Amazon is an issue he wants governments to address. In a joint letter earlier this year, he joined other business leaders in calling on UK finance minister Rishi Sunak to slash taxes on commercial property. "The tax systems in many countries have not been adapted for the Internet world and emergence of e-commerce," Garnier said. — AFP

Kingfisher: The DIY giant building on back of COVID

LONDON: The coronavirus pandemic has caused the permanent closure of bricks-and-mortar retailers worldwide but European home-improvements giant Kingfisher is looking to expand, chief executive Thierry Garnier told AFP in an interview.

Kingfisher, along with rivals, have been allowed to keep stores open during the virus outbreak, enabling customers to purchase goods and collect online orders which have soared over the past year. Kingfisher's sales jumped seven percent in 2020 to £12.34 billion (\$16.92 billion, 14.31 billion euros) as lockdowns saw people making improvements to their homes, the company

Business

Conservative Alabama could become home to Amazon's first union in US

'No longer the perfect place for companies to do business'

BIRMINGHAM, US: Poor and conservative, the state of Alabama seemed like the perfect place for companies to do business without having to deal with labor unions. That is, until a handful of Amazon employees stood up to the world's richest person and demanded representation at the bargaining table.

It comes to a head this week: Today is the deadline for employees at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama to vote on establishing the first union on US soil at the massive tech company. The case is being closely watched because it could pave the way for further unionization in the United States at one of the world's most powerful companies. Bernie Sanders, the independent senator and progressive darling, said here Friday during a visit to endorse the unionization drive that he was very encouraged by it.

"This is historically a very anti-union state. That's why I am incredibly moved and impressed by courage of these workers," Sanders said Friday outside the regional headquarters of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. It would represent the 5,800 workers at the Amazon warehouse in nearby Bessemer if the employees vote to unionize. The rapper Killer Mike, who also paid a visit to support the Amazon workers, noted that the Reverend Martin Luther King held his first civil rights rallies not in Atlanta, the city he is most associated with, but in Birmingham, the capital of Alabama.

"This is very much a tradition of Alabamians, to be organizing on behalf of the larger population," the rapper said. The RWDSU union took part in civil rights marches along with King in the 1960s and with John Lewis, another icon of that movement, in Selma, Alabama. In the 1920s and 30s Alabama did see strong bursts of pro-union sentiment, mainly in steel factories around Bessemer, said historian Michael Innis-Jimenez.

But otherwise "the reputation of Alabama being anti-union is pretty well deserved," said Innis-Jimenez of the University of Alabama. "We have the only Mercedes plant in the world that is not unionized and



BIRMINGHAM, Alabama: A person holds "Vote Union Yes!" signs during a protest in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate and the unionization of Amazon.com, Inc. fulfillment center workers at Kelly Ingram Park. — AFP

that's in Tuscaloosa," he added. In Alabama, management can fire a worker without even having to give a reason, he said. Historically, industries in the northeast moved to the south because labor here is cheaper and workers were easier to fire and less likely to unionize, he said. Amazon opened the Bessemer facility a year ago for the same reason it set up others around the country: to meet red hot demand for Amazon's online retail services. But Amazon never expected 3,000 workers at the plant to sign an agreement in principle with the RWDSU to form a union. Two factors set this case apart from, say, the non-union Mercedes plant: a union with roots here, one which took part in the civil rights movement, and workers who are mainly African American.

One of them, Darryl Richardson contacted the union late last year. He was sick of living in fear of being fired for nothing, of work breaks that were too

short, of a frenetic pace on the job and what he called an overall lack of respect for workers. "I know what the union can bring," said 51-year-old Richardson, who has four kids. He has worked doggedly to convince colleagues to vote for the union in the interest of job security and other benefits.

Make history

Richardson said he used to work for a company that was a Mercedes subcontractor and went from making \$12.50 to \$23.50 an hour in the space of a few years. "And that's the union," he said. Amazon pays the Bessemer workers at least \$15 an hour, which is double the minimum wage in Alabama. At the start of the pandemic it also paid its people an extra \$2 an hour in hazard pay but withdrew this perk three months later.

That decision was among the factors that triggered the pro-union movement at the warehouse, said Joshua Brewer, president of the local branch of the union, as was the feeling that the workers were not properly protected against the coronavirus. "Generally when you have a company like Amazon, that was coming to Bessemer to bring this new advanced facility with all these great jobs, you don't really see that kind of problem. But within four months, workers had had enough," said Brewer.

In response to employee complaints carried in the press, Amazon touted what it called the high rates of pay at the warehouse and perks such as health insurance from day one of employment. These kinds of arguments worked well with younger workers who are less familiar with the world of labor unions. But the mood that has taken root at Bessemer is now galvanizing Amazon workers elsewhere in the US, the union and local elected officials say. "This movement couldn't happen anywhere else than here, where people died in the streets for the right to vote," said Christopher England, chairman of the Alabama Democratic Party. "No better place in the world to hold Jeff Bezos accountable than Alabama," said England. "We're going to make history again." — AFP

Business Editorial

Middle East's 'green money' push intensifies

By Badar Chaudhry

What are the chances that fossil fuel operators in the historical epicenter of black gold thought five years ago that they'd be financing so much green energy today? The answer is very, very few. Even the optimists thought it'd take longer for this fundamental switch in energy economics.



But already, this 'new normal' is becoming very familiar. Every day, news headlines report on more and more ambitious multi-year, multi-investor renewable energy projects or green financings. This new status quo says it is abnormal not to be proactive in the energy transition, rather than the reverse narrative, which has persisted for nearly four decades.

Financial flows?

Changing attitudes across the board - governments, corporates, academia, and society - reflect a deep-rooted strategic change. For one, solar PV is expected to generate \$182 billion investment in the renewables market in the Middle East by 2025, according to Frost & Sullivan. This also represents a staggering 18-fold growth in current capacity. And in the short-term, the International Energy Agency suggests the Middle East and North Africa to add 4.12GW of renewables capacity this year, after only 1.86GW in 2020 - more than doubling in just twelve months. Meanwhile, Kuwait is nearing completion of the region's biggest import terminal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) - considered the 'cleanest' fossil fuel and a vital bridge in the new energy basket. What does this tell us? Eager investors with deep pockets who are confident that the massive push for a greener energy marketplace is here to stay.

The same mentality applies to hydrogen - coined the 'new oil' of the 21st century - as it experiences a 'real dawn' of increased scalability after a few false starts over the last decade. According to a Platts Analytics' hydrogen project database, the Middle East and Africa have many renewable-based green hydrogen projects set to come online within the next five years. One such mega-development is the \$5bn NEOM renewable ammonia project in Saudi Arabia - earmarked as the world's largest green hydrogen project - and Oman's Sohar port's plans to support a large-scale renewable hydrogen project. And ADNOC, Mubadala and ADQ have signed a deal to establish the Hydrogen Alliance, helping the UAE's capital become a lead producer and exporter.

All this financial appetite really pays off, particularly when it comes to improving economies of scale with manufacturing and market price points. For example, high cost has long burdened the growth of the hydrogen market. But investors' growing interest - in large part spurred by broader societal and governmental demand for a greener future - means that low-carbon hydrogen may break even with grey hydrogen as early as 2028, a cost of about \$35-50 per ton of carbon dioxide equivalent, according to the Hydrogen Council. This is at least two years earlier than the timeline expectations that many stakeholders voiced this time last year.

Balance sheets bruised - temporarily

Of course, energy stakeholders have not emerged from 2020 unscathed by the economic pressure of the pandemic-triggered recession. The total committed and planned investments in the MENA from 2020-2024 could exceed \$792 billion - an 18 percent decline from the \$965bn in the five-year outlook in 2019, according to Apicorp. Each country has had to balance their books. For example, Kuwait cancelled its 1.5GW Al-Dabdaba tender and Saudi Arabia has extended project deadlines due to COVID-19. And there are many questions still unanswered - all of which can significantly impact financial flows in energy.

The jury is still out on whether globalization 4.0 - which was accelerating pre-pandemic - will start to reverse, as cost-cutting measures potentially drive a long-term trend for more regional cooperation. If so, what impact will this have on energy supply chains, innovation centers, and import-export dynamics? Question marks also remain over the US-China relationship, Brexit, and instabilities in the Middle East - all of which impact the economic picture for both 'old' and 'new' energy. And the usual and long-running weak spots still need strengthening, including better support for new market entrants, especially entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and fully addressing energy subsidy removals.

Yes, there is a lot of work to do - but the market has good reason to be positive. Consider that the aforementioned projects are still progressing despite the impact of the most globally disruptive pandemic in a century and the lowest oil prices ever recorded. Plus, assuming black swans stay clear, oil prices are likely to stay relatively close to the current range of \$40-\$60/bl, again giving energy stakeholders and investors a general go-ahead to plan their finances in the year ahead - a coveted hint of certainty in a year that may be as unpredictable as 2020.

Note: Badar Chaudhry is Senior Vice President, Sector Head - Energy, Mashreq Bank

Stocks rally on upbeat economic data

NEW YORK: Stock markets rose Friday after German, UK and US economic data provided a brighter outlook for major economies worldwide. London, Paris and Frankfurt extended a global rally heading into the weekend, buoyed by upbeat UK retail data and strong German business sentiment.

US stocks were helped by government data that showed no sign of rising inflation in February, soothing fears that the world's biggest economy could overheat. Both the Dow and S&P 500 closed the week out at all-time highs. Oil prices also bounded higher at the end of a rollercoaster week.

"Economic recovery optimism is boosting equity indices higher as we head towards the weekend," said OANDA analyst Sophie Griffiths. "Better-than-forecast US initial jobless claims, rebounding UK retail sales and stronger-than-expected German business sentiment are boosting" markets, she added.

In the United States, a Commerce Department report also said that prices grew less than expected at 0.2 percent in February, easing concern that government stimulus measures would cause inflation and force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates sooner than expected. "This period of hesitation and rotation going on since mid-February is coming to an end," said Karl Haeling of LBBW, who expects a strong April for stocks.

In Asia, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Mumbai and Taipei had each added more than one percent to get the day off to a good start. Even the widely-commented on blockage of the Suez Canal, a major transit route for global trade, failed to seriously dent market sentiment.

"We don't foresee any long-lasting implications," Capital Economics analysts said. "Countries will source commodities from elsewhere or draw down stocks until the canal reopens," they explained. Others pointed to the accident as having contributed to higher crude oil prices, however.

Meanwhile, European traders tracked efforts to get vaccination programs rolling to stem another wave of infections. Germany and France are among the countries that have come up with new containment measures, raising concerns the eurozone will take longer to emerge from the pandemic-induced economic crisis. — AFP

Code	Company Name	Change (%)	Price
1 6839	船井電機	+20.46%	88
2 6413	理想科	+8.84%	1.52
3 6920	レーザーテック	+7.46%	13.96
4 7731	ニコン	+6.43%	1.04
5 6564	ミダック	+6.36%	4.7
6 3464	プロパティA	+5.96%	2.3
7 2533	オエノンHD	+5.70%	4
8 7202	いすゞ	+5.42%	1
9 6951	日電子	+5.27%	4
10 4671	ファルコHD	+5.2%	1

TOKYO: A pedestrian walks past an electronic quotation board displaying Japanese companies' stock prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo on Friday. — AFP



LONDON: People walk along the southern bank of the River Thames with the office towers of the City of London. Britain and the EU have reached a joint post-Brexit agreement on the regulation of financial services, the UK finance ministry announced on Saturday. — AFP

UK and EU agree on post-Brexit financial services regulation

LONDON: Three months after Britain exited the EU, London on Friday reached a cooperation agreement on financial services with Brussels but despite this first step rivalries between the two sides remain. The memorandum of understanding, which is still to be signed, will "create the framework for voluntary regulatory cooperation" and establish a regulatory forum which will "serve as a platform to facilitate dialogue on financial services issues", Britain's finance ministry said.



Rivalries still remain

London and Brussels reached a last-gasp free trade agreement on December 24, just days before Britain was due to leave Europe's single market and customs union on January 1. But the culmination of months of tense talks saw both sides agree to push back a decision on the finance sector, leaving it in limbo. International banks took an early gamble to prepare for the worst and the possibility of a "hard Brexit" by strengthening their European operations, which allowed for a smooth transition when Britain left the customs union.

'Mutual benefit'

"The relationship is more one of competition than cooperation at the moment," Sarah Hall, professor of economic geography at the University of Nottingham, told AFP. While the particulars of the agreement have not yet been released, the full text of the memorandum should be published once it is signed before an end of March deadline set by the UK and the European Union.

The City does not expect an ambitious agreement

between the two sides, given the importance of the financial services sector to the British economy: it contributes about seven percent of GDP and 10 percent of the country's tax revenues amounting to £76 billion. The memorandum is also not anticipated to address the crucial issue of equivalence, which allows London-based firms to operate on the European continent.

For equivalence to be agreed, it has to be granted in 40 separate areas of activity and these can easily be revoked. For the time being, the EU has only granted two to Britain, while London has granted the EU equivalence in 17 areas. One of these, for example, allows European investors to use British clearing houses and another concerns securities deposits.

Brussels' approach to London in this regard has been less favorable than the 21 equivalences it has with the United States, the 19 it has with Japan and its 15 with Singapore. Miles Celic, chief executive of TheCityUK, which represents financial services firms, said "securing equivalence determinations from the EU has mutual benefit, especially as economies seek to recover from the pandemic".

He added in a recent statement that the delay already had "the unintended consequence of driving more European financial activity to non-European centers, such as New York".

Hall said Brussels had taken a hard line because the EU fears that the UK will end up diverging from European rules. "It seems clear that both the UK and the EU are currently working to support their own financial services sectors," she explained.

In an indication of the tensions between the two sides, the Governor of the Bank of England Andrew Bailey has not hesitated to criticize the EU's demands on several occasions. The loss of the European Economic Area (EEA) cross-border financial passport, which allowed UK companies to offer their services across Europe, has started to have an effect on the UK finance sector.

Amsterdam has overtaken the British capital in European equity trading. Some six billion euros departed London for the EU on the first day of trading after Britain departed the single market. It is still difficult to assess the damage to Britain, especially as the pandemic has blurred financial outcomes. However, Britain is already planning its fightback with an easing of stock market rules aimed at attracting start-ups, leading the charge on green finance and pivoting towards markets in Asia while potentially mulling other measures to attract investors. — AFP

Business

Pandemic upsurge hits Europe's hopes for return to recovery

ING revises down eurozone growth forecast to 3.0% this year

PARIS: An upsurge in new coronavirus cases is forcing governments across Europe into new, damaging lockdowns that threaten to delay a much hoped-for return to growth, economists say.

The plan was that mass vaccination programs would turn the tide on the pandemic, allowing locked-down consumers free rein after months penned up at home. Instead the virus has embarked on a third wave which is proving more difficult to bring under control. French President Emmanuel Macron warned Thursday that the European Union would have to do more and beef up its already massive 750 billion euro (\$885 billion) virus recovery fund as a result.

The EU had made a major effort after the first wave last year, Macron said, but "following the second and third waves... we will no doubt have to add to our response". In September, as the economy picked up sharply after a rapid reverse in the first wave, expectations were high that by the middle of this year it would be solidly back on track, thanks especially to the vaccine rollout.

123 billion euro delay

Just a couple of weeks ago, European Central Bank head Christine Lagarde was even talking about a "firm rebound in activity in the second half of the year". Now the EU's strongest economies—Germany, France and Italy—have reimposed restric-

tions and the vaccine program in Europe is mired in a blame game over supplies. Credit insurer Euler Hermes estimates that the EU is now seven weeks adrift of its target to have 70 percent of the population vaccinated by the end of the summer, compared with five weeks in February. It estimates the delay will cost the bloc's 27 member states some 123 billion euros this year. "If you compare us with the US, where the outlook is so much more positive, we are falling further behind on the recovery because of this third wave," said Charlotte de Montpellier, economist with Dutch bank ING.

'Two speed' Europe

ING now expects eurozone growth of 3.0 percent this year, down more than half a percentage point from its previous estimate. Most of the growth will also come from the third quarter, slightly later too, ING added. Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics, said he does not expect the bloc to return to pre-pandemic activity levels before the second half of 2022, a year behind the US. "We are revising down our forecast for eurozone GDP growth due to the resurgence of virus cases, slow pace of vaccination and extension of lockdowns," Kenningham said.

"The outlook has deteriorated," said Chris Williamson, chief economist at IHS Markit. The key Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) compiled by IHS



A graffiti reading "The Future is Europe" is pictured in front of the European Commission Headquarters in Brussels on Friday. — AFP

Markit for March showed Germany, Europe's strongest economy, doing better than France and the northern countries generally doing better than their southern partners—Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal—which risk seeing their key tourist industries shackled for yet another year. Standard and Poor's howev-

er has decided to keep its eurozone growth forecast unchanged at 4.2 percent for 2021, citing the positive factor of cheap credit. At the same time, the economy and Europe's people have adapted to the restrictions, lessening the impact, said Sylvain Broyer, chief S&P economist for Europe. — AFP

KFH first Kuwaiti bank to launch digital signature

KUWAIT: Following successful technical tests, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched, as the first bank in Kuwait, a digital signature service in personal financing products that includes the electronic handling of all paper documents for personal finance transactions. The new service enables KFH customers to electronically sign any required document using any device and anywhere as well as complete the entire financing request automatically in accordance with the terms and conditions.

Group General Manager Retail Banking at KFH, Khaled Yousif Al-Shamlan said that this initiative reinforces KFH leadership in implementing the digital transformation strategy. He added that the bank has been a pioneer in promoting investment in the financial technology "FinTech" and digital banking services, while ensuring that they are provided to customers at the highest standards of efficiency and quality. Al-Shamlan appreciated the fruitful cooperation with the Public Authority for Civil Information, praising the efforts made in the technical arrangements that led to successfully completing the electronic link with PACI at an advanced level of coordination and cooperation.

Al-Shamlan explained that KFH has succeeded in automating the whole process of financing request, including digital signature by customers, automatically and in a fast and secure manner. Consequently, the customers can apply for financing request through fully automated process and without the need to visit KFH branches. He confirmed that the new developed financing request reinforces KFH leadership in providing digital solutions and reflects the digital transformation and financial inclusion, ensuring best services with the utmost speed, accuracy and safety. In line with the current exceptional circumstances and social distancing requirements, the new service also guarantees continued access to KFH services, taking into account the health safety of customer and employee. This contributes to moving the wheel of the economy and areas of financial development.

Al-Shamlan pointed out that the personal financing service is linked to a number of important economic activities in the local market and is considered one of the basic requirements of customers and an important element in the relationship between the bank and the customer. "Through converting paper transactions into smart files with the possibility of digital signature and automating all points of contact with the customer, KFH aims at delivering many benefits, most notably: reducing the time of transaction in a way that enhances customer engagement and loyalty and ability to face competition by providing services at a high level of flexibility anywhere and anytime. This helps keep the customer in constant contact, bringing KFH closer to its customers while meeting their aspirations and needs in accordance with the highest quality standards," he said. Al-Shamlan praised the success of the administrative, legal and technical arrangements along with all concerned departments in these areas, stressing that all precautions were taken to ensure safety elements in digital signatures in terms of verifying the authenticity and legitimacy of signatures.

He stressed the importance of this service as a unique qualitative leap, adding that the digital signature is a pioneering technological service, featuring multiple advantages and flexibility in application and development to serve customers and enhance their banking experience.



Khaled Al-Shamlan

Only two days left to enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah's draw for KD 1,000,000

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced that there are only two days left to participate in this year's semi-annual Al-Danah account draw, with Wednesday, March 31 being the last day to enter for a chance to win the millionaire prize of KD 1,000,000. The semi-annual draw is scheduled to be held on July 15, 2021 in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and from Ernst & Young.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, encouraged both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of the country to take advantage of this opportunity, saying: "There are only two days left to deposit and enter the draw for a chance to become Gulf Bank's first millionaire of the year! As we have previously announced, and as part of our new draw scheme, we are excited to be rewarding two millionaires per year with the Al-Danah account, and will be giving away a yearly grand prize of KD 1.5 million to one winner, and a semi-annual prize of KD 1 million to the other. Today, I would like to remind all Gulf Bank customers of this opportunity, and to encourage everyone to participate by opening and depositing into an Al-Danah account online through the Gulf Bank app, or by visiting one of our branch-

es. We are wishing everyone the best of luck!"

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and its many advantages for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the higher the balances in an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through

monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Deposit more for more chances to win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

KPMG Kuwait's Managing Partner highlights SME situation

KUWAIT: The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected the way small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operate in Kuwait. The economic impasse created by the outbreak has primarily troubled business liquidity. Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae, Managing Partner, KPMG in Kuwait, talks about the small businesses' situation in the country and how they should benefit from the pandemic-induced conditions.

"The measures undertaken during the lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic have influenced businesses in terms of demand (revenue), supply chain (material and end-product delivery) and operational continuity (manpower/resource constraints), while operational costs (salaries, rents, etc.) continue to exist," says Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae. He further adds "B2C businesses, especially the food and beverage and retail sectors, were highly impacted.

However, the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) businesses have, overall, done exceptionally well as people continued to stock up on supplies. Most of the FMCG businesses and others moved to online/delivery models to counter the situation." However, there were also many other issues connected with low demand from downstream businesses and manpower availability. The Higher Steering Committee for Economic Stimulation report, as of June 2020, stated that the visits to restaurants, entertainment sites, etc. dropped by approximately 75 percent, and about 26 percent of the companies observed a revenue slump of almost 80 percent. Due to lower revenues, the primary concerns of SMEs revolve around access to liquidity, loan repayment and bankruptcy evasion.

To initiate recovery, SMEs should focus on their financials and constantly monitor cash flows. Moreover, they should concentrate on improvement opportunities in the medium term

and realign their business model in the long term. Along with understanding their core competency, they should also try and adjust to the market dynamics by rolling out three-month budgets and plans. Some of them might also opt for redefining their business strategies or restructuring their operations.

SMEs should also consider other sales channels such as e-commerce. With restrictions placed around visiting physical stores, consumers are opting digital channels and SMEs should take benefit of this accelerated growth to maximize reach. SMEs may also think about offering discounts to attract sales and associating with third parties to manage logistics. Moreover, SMEs should focus on non-discretionary expenses and cut avoidable costs, wherever possible. They may also opt for an installment plan for payments (e.g. rents), use technology/automation for reduced turnaround and thereby decrease the operational cost.

To help the SMEs, the government announced a stimulus package through the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK). This package assists SMEs with their working capital requirements via soft loans (capped @ max 2.5 percent, interest with flexible repayment terms). In addition, the government relieved entities from paying social security contributions for a period of six months starting March 2020.

KPMG has also been working with various SMEs and funds since long including the former Kuwait Small Projects Development Company (KSPDC) and Industrial Bank of Kuwait (IBK) Small Industries Fund, and now with the Kuwait National Fund (KNF) and banks. Mentioning how KPMG is supporting SMEs, Dr. Rasheed Al-Qenae added, "KPMG has been actively working with SMEs in Kuwait in terms of guiding and assisting them. We have also released a few 'Thought Leadership' or insight papers on social media platforms to help SMEs navigate their challenges."

Our advisors are also helping SMEs with cash flow projections, liquidity position and funding needs. This helps them in arranging loan applications according to the bank requirements for the CBK stimulus package. KPMG is committed towards developing a strong community of small business owners, which further helps in overall economic growth of the country.



Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae

Sidra Capital's USD private finance funds achieve target returns

JEDDAH: Sidra Capital, a sharia-compliant asset management firm headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and regulated by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), has announced healthy annual returns on two of its US dollar-denominated funds: the USD income fund, which generated above-target returns of 8 percent, and the US dollar Mutajara Fund, which met its targeted return of 5 percent for 2020.

The returns are especially impressive in light of global challenges such as disruptions in supply chains in certain markets and other challenging market conditions stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Performance of our trade finance funds in 2020 showcased the resilience of our private finance strategy in the face of the external shocks brought about by the pandemic," Hani Baothman, Chairman of Sidra Capital, said. "Despite the challenges, our private finance transactions did not experience a single default, and the funds offered an excellent alternative investment asset class that provides hedging to portfolios and protects investors' wealth from market fluctuations."

The Sidra Income Fund is a US dollar-denominated private fund focused on supporting infrastructure supply chain transactions in Asia. The fund is designed to capitalize on the infrastructure boom in Asia and aims at achieving stable, high-yield returns uncorrelated to the stock market and global commodity prices. Specializing in natural commodities, the Sidra Income Fund offers sharia-compliant, top-tier, income-generating asset classes for risk-averse investors. It aims at achieving stable, high yield returns uncorrelated to the stock market and global commodity prices while contributing positively toward the social and economic development of the communities that the invested companies operate in.

The Sidra Mutajara Fund, also US Dollar-denominated, combines Shari'ah-compliant money market investment with structured trade finance products in order to achieve liquidity, steady performance and above-benchmark returns. The fund is regulated by the Saudi Capital Market Authority (CMA) and provides investors with quarterly distributions and the option of liquidity through the quarterly exit feature. The Sidra Mutajara Fund plays an important role in financing growth in the real economy.

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File photo shows boats and houses in the city of Varenna, on Lake Como in Lombardy. — AFP photos



File photo shows boats and houses in the city of Varenna, on Lake Como in Lombardy.



File photo shows a deserted Piazza Martiri dell'Olivetta in Portofino, south of Genoa.

FROM VENICE TO LAKE COMO, ITALY'S TOURIST GEMS FIGHT TO STAY AFLOAT

Just over a year into the pandemic, Venice remains a ghost town. Portofino, a colorful playground for the jet-set on the Ligurian coast, and Varenna on the shores of Lake Como are also deserted. The coronavirus has taken a heavy toll on tourism in Italy, the world's fifth-most visited destination—and with a third wave now under way, there is no obvious end in sight. The collapse in the number of tourists to Italy was jaw-dropping last year, with only 25.5 million foreign visitors spending at least one night in the peninsula, versus 65 million in 2019 — a drop of more than 60 percent.

That corresponded to revenue of only 17.45 billion euros (\$20.6 billion), 26.85 billion euros less than the prior year, according to new figures from the Bank of Italy. "The situation is really dramatic and everything must be done to revive a sector so vital for our country," said the president of the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Carlo Sangalli. Nearly 100,000 companies in Italy's tourism sector are at risk of bankruptcy, according to the research institute Demoskopika, with a potential loss of 440,000 jobs.

'No George Clooney'

"The year 2020 was catastrophic for



File photo shows the Grand Canal is pictured from the Accademia bridge in Venice, as the carnival is being cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

us," said Marina Denti, owner of a leather store in Varenna, a picturesque fishing village on Lake Como. She is still sorely lacking in foreign customers, especially big-spending Americans, an absence that saw her turnover drop by 80 percent last year. "Even George Clooney doesn't

come anymore with this pandemic," she said, referring to the area's most famous homeowner, proprietor of an opulent villa on the other side of the lake, in Laglio. Before coronavirus swept across the country and beyond, tourism accounted for nearly 14 percent of gross domestic

product for Italy, the eurozone's third-largest economy.

The collapse of this key economic driver, with hotels and restaurants closed for months on end, helped plunge the country last year into the worst recession since World War II. To try to get things moving again, Italian railroads are offering "COVID free" high-speed rail links between Rome and Milan beginning in early April, a first in Europe. All staff and passengers will be tested before boarding. The airline Alitalia launched a similar initiative last year on some domestic and international flights. The mayors of Venice and Florence, cradles of art and history, meanwhile have joined forces to demand urgent aid from the government, claiming that without these two cities back on their feet, Italy will not recover.

Bleak outlook -

"Deprived of tourists, Venice has become a dead city like Pompeii, it's sad when you walk down the street," said Anna Bigai, one of the city's tour guides, who has only done a dozen guided tours over the past year. Throughout Italy, overnight stays of foreign tourists fell by 54 percent to 184.1 million in 2020 and the outlook for 2021 remains bleak.

"International tourism in Italy should not return to pre-pandemic levels before 2023," warned the director of the national tourism agency, Giorgio Palmucci. Even Portofino, a popular destination for celebrities and billionaires from all over the world, has not been spared. Its Rolex and Christian Dior stores remain desperately empty, waiting for the return of rich foreign customers. "In 2020, we had the worst year in a decade," sighed Emanuela Cattaneo, owner of a wine bar on the port, lamenting the absence of American and English customers. Still, a few rare foreign tourists have enjoyed the unusual calm. Rainer Lippert from Heidelberg, Germany, came to Milan, where he and his family were admiring the view from the roof of the city's Gothic Duomo.

"It's fantastic to be here when there are not so many people around," he said. "Given the circumstances it's the best choice we could make." As if to hammer home the challenges faced by Italy's tourist sites, within days of Lippert's visit, the Duomo was once again closed for coronavirus restrictions. — AFP



Musicians make a Manhattan storefront their stage

After a year that saw concert venues go dark and stages moved online, an empty storefront in New York has offered a glimmer of hope to artists and audiences ravenous for live music. Musicians across the genres are performing pop-up concerts on Manhattan's Upper West Side for lucky passersby: on a recent morning it was Beethoven and Debussy that harmonized with a city soundscape normally dominated by car horns, construction work and pigeon coos. It marked the first time Michael Katz, a cellist, was able to play with piano accompaniment in a year; Spencer Myer performed on a white Steinway in an experience he said musicians worldwide have been "starved for."

Perhaps more importantly, the "Musical Storefronts" shows provide an opportunity to interact with an audience, even if they're watching through a window from the sidewalk instead of seated in any number of the city's storied halls. "It's really a reciprocal relationship that we need," Katz said. "Being able to bring the music to people like we did today is really something unique and special." The location of performances isn't broadcast—organizers don't want large crowds gathering for social-distancing reasons—but the series, which began in late winter, will run through the spring, offering ample opportunity to catch a show.

Runners with dogs, parents pushing strollers and elder New Yorkers out for afternoon walks were among the audience members who stopped by for the recent program that also included Mendelssohn

and Boulanger. "We're trying to have some of everything... from classical musicians to people from Broadway, jazz; we've had experimental improvisers," said Kate Sheeran, who directs the Kaufman Music Center behind the series. Along with entertainment, the project aims "to really showcase the artistic engine of New York City, and shed light on the fact that artists need work, and this issue needs attention."

Food, water and music

The rapid spread of Covid-19 gripped the largest US city more than a year ago, leaving more than 30,000 residents dead and crippling the livelihoods of many more. Musicians were among those hard-hit, reduced to virtual performances and online lessons as the viral spread grounded tours and closed venues—some forever. "Our industry has been really devastated, and especially performing artists; lives have been impacted severely," Sheeran told AFP.

"We hope that this sheds a light on that, in addition to providing joy for both the artists and the audience." A few months after New York's vaccination campaign kicked off, more than a third of adults have received at least one dose—and there's hope in the air for musicians eager to get back onstage. "One of the lessons from the pandemic is just how much people just hunger for and need music and theater and dance and any sort of live art that you can encounter personally," Katz said.

"It's something people need, the same way that they need food and water. It's not just entertainment. It's not just a commodity." For Terry Lieberman, who stopped by to soak in the classical show, the series is a balm as the pandemic slogs on—and a testament to New York's resilience. "New York is always like that—they always improvise when something bad happens," Lieberman said from behind her floral mask. "They always rally, and they come back, and this is just wonderful." — AFP

BELARUS BLASTS EUROVISION BAN AS 'POLITICALLY MOTIVATED'

Belarus has been rejected from participating in this year's Eurovision Song Contest in the Netherlands, with Minsk denouncing the decision as "politically motivated." The European Broadcasting Union said late Friday that "regrettably, Belarus will not be participating" in the May contest in the Dutch city of Rotterdam even after it had submitted a new entry following problems with the original. "It was concluded that the new submission was also in breach of the rules of the competition that ensure the Contest is not instrumental zed or brought into disrepute," the EBU said in a statement on its website, without elaborating.

The group selected to represent Belarus, Galasy Zmesta, offered a first song titled "I Will Teach You," which had prompted a backlash from the Belarus opposition for featuring lyrics like "I will teach you to toe the line". Belarus has been gripped by political unrest since last August, after its strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko claimed a sixth presidential term in a vote the opposition and Western diplomats said was rigged. The election results triggered mass street protests which were met with a violent crackdown that resulted in thousands of protesters detained, at least several protesters killed, and hundreds sentenced to lengthy prison terms.



The European Union then imposed sanctions on Lukashenko and his allies. While Galasy Zmesta's second song was more nuanced, the group's leader was cited as saying by RIA Novosti early Saturday morning that the meaning of its fable about a bunny rabbit, domestic chickens and a fox "is very obvious". This came after Belarus's national broadcaster slammed Eurovision on its Telegram channel late Friday. —AFP



Thailand to lift tourist quarantine for popular beach island

Thailand on Friday announced plans for an experimental quarantine-free model in ultra-popular beach destination Phuket, as the kingdom attempts to resuscitate its pandemic-battered economy. Thailand has imposed massive restrictions visitor arrivals in order to stem coronavirus, but discouraging tourism has led to its economy recording the worst performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The impact has reverberated across the country's services sectors—bruiser entertainment, retail, hotels and restaurants.

Thailand's tourism tsar announced Friday that Phuket—renowned for its sandy beaches and sapphire waters—will be used as a test. Tourists who have been vaccinated will be allowed to travel there without mandatory hotel quarantine. Yuthasak Supasorn, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, said the "Phuket sandbox model" would begin some time from July onwards. Foreign visitors will be required to have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine,

a certificate signifying negative test results, and to download a mobile tracking application.

Yuthasak also confirmed that six tourism-reliant cities will have slashed quarantine times for vaccinated travellers beginning next month—including beach resorts Krabi, Ko Samui and Pattaya. Arrivals will undergo a seven-day quarantine period and will be permitted in areas around their hotels—a marked difference for current visitors who are required to stay confined to their rooms for two weeks. The plans still require final approval by the government. Some 40 million tourists were expected to arrive in 2020, but only 6.7 million managed to enter the kingdom, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. Thailand's tough approach has kept the coronavirus largely in check—the kingdom has registered about 28,500 cases in a population of 70 million. — AFP



Chadwick Boseman's wife Taylor Simone Ledward delivers a teary and heartfelt message about the importance of colon cancer screenings as she accepts his award for Outstanding Actor in Motion Picture.



In this screengrab, D-Nice, winner of Entertainer of the Year category speaks at the 52nd NAACP Image Awards Virtual Press Conference. — AFP photos

BOSEMAN'S WIFE DELIVERS EMOTIONAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AT NAACP IMAGE AWARDS

Chadwick Boseman's wife Taylor Simone Ledward encouraged people to get screened regularly for cancer after accepting a posthumous accolade on behalf of her husband at the NAACP Image Awards. The late actor - who died last year as a result of complications related to colon cancer - won two gongs at the awards ceremony on Saturday night including Best Supporting Actor and

with colon cancer and 40 percent more likely to die from it. The age for routine screenings has recently been lowered to 45, if you are 45 years of age or older, please get screened. "Don't put it off any longer, please get screened. This disease is beatable if you catch it in the early stages and don't have any time to waste even if you have no family history." Elsewhere, Eddie Murphy was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame. The 'Coming 2 America' star said: "I've been making movies for 40 years now. And yeah, 40 years, I know, 40 years ... This is the perfect thing to commemorate that, to be brought into your Hall of Fame."

The annual ceremony - which celebrates black excellence in film, television, music, and literature - was hosted by Anthony Anderson and even featured an appearance from US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Biden said: "For more than 100 years the NAACP has advanced essential motion in a central motion that everyone is created equal and is going to be treated equally. And it has for more than 50 years, NAACP awards help us see exactly that." During the virtual ceremony, basketball star LeBron James was handed the NAACP President's Award.

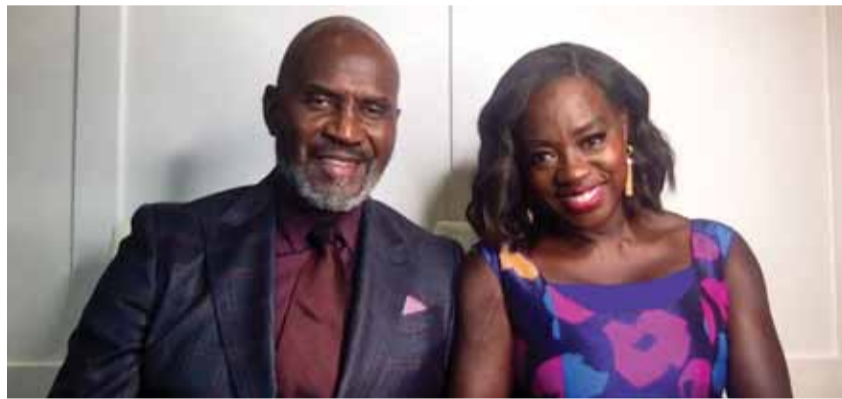
Announcing this year's winner, Derrick Johnson, NAACP President and CEO, said: "LeBron James, 'the chosen one.' A name befitting an individual so keenly aware of the platform he has built with his athletic skills. "And yet, like all black athletes, he is all too familiar with the risks involved with raising his voice against systemic racism. But just as he has done on the court, he rises to the occasion on behalf of our communities and lends himself to the need for progress and true equality." — BangShowbiz



In this screengrab, Issa Rae, winner of Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series category speaks at the 52nd NAACP Image Awards Virtual Press Conference.

Best Actor, and Taylor used the opportunity to urge people to take better care of their health. She said: "As always, all honor and glory to the most high God. He would thank his mom and dad, and he would give honor to the ancestors." Taylor observed that while the late actor had an "uncommon" talent, the manner of his death "is not uncommon at all". She explained: "He was an uncommon artist and an even more uncommon person, but the manner that we have lost him is not uncommon at all, not in our community."

"Black people in this country are 20 percent more likely to be diagnosed



In this screengrab, Julius Tennon and Viola Davis, winner of Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series and Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture categories speak at the 52nd NAACP Image Awards Virtual Press Conference.



In this screengrab, Tabitha Brown, winner of Outstanding Social Media Personality category speaks at the 52nd NAACP Image Awards Virtual Press Conference.



Beyonce winner of Outstanding Female Artist.



Phylicia Rashad winner of Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture.



Octavia Spencer winner of Outstanding Actress in a Television Movie, Limited-Series or Dramatic Special.



Drake winner of Outstanding Male Artist



In this screengrab, Rege-Jean Page, winner of Outstanding Actor in a Drama Series category speaks at the 52nd NAACP Image Awards Virtual Press Conference.



Eddie Murphy inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame.

NAACP Image Awards winners

- Entertainer of the Year**
D-Nice
- Outstanding Motion Picture**
Bad Boys For Life
- Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture**
Chadwick Boseman - Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
- Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture**
Viola Davis - Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
- Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series**
Issa Rae - Insecure
- Outstanding Actor in a Drama Series**
Rege-Jean Page - Bridgerton
- Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series**
Viola Davis - How To Get Away With Murder
- President's Award**
LeBron James
- Hall of Fame Award**
Eddie Murphy
- Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture**
Chadwick Boseman - Da 5 Bloods
- Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture**
Phylicia Rashad - Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey
- Outstanding Animated Motion Picture**
Soul
- Outstanding Character Voice-Over Performance - Motion Picture**
Jamie Foxx - Soul
- Outstanding Documentary (Film)**
John Lewis: Good Trouble
- Outstanding Documentary (Television)**
The Last Dance
- Outstanding Comedy Series**
Insecure
- Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series**
Anthony Anderson - Black-ish
- Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series**
Deon Cole - Black-ish
- Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series**
Marsai Martin - Black-ish
- Outstanding Drama Series**
Power Book II: Ghost
- Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series**
Method Man - Power Book II: Ghost
- Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series**
Mary J. Blige - Power Book II: Ghost
- Outstanding Television Movie, Limited-Series or Dramatic Special**
Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker
- Outstanding Actor in a Television Movie, Limited-Series or Dramatic Special**
Blair Underwood - Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker
- Outstanding Actress in a Television Movie, Limited-Series or Dramatic Special**
Octavia Spencer - Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker
- Outstanding News/Information (Series or Special)**
The New York Times Presents The Killing of Breonna Taylor
- Outstanding Talk Series**
Red Table Talk
- Outstanding Male Artist**
Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later
- Outstanding Female Artist**
Beyonce - Black Parade

Sports

Photo of the day



Cooper Webb competes in the AMA Supercross Series in Daytona Beach, Florida. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Mitchell's hot start fuels Jazz, Clippers beat 76ers

Popovich third NBA coach to reach 1,300 regular-season wins

LOS ANGELES: Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored 35 points and handed out seven assists as the Jazz boosted their NBA-leading record Saturday with a 126-110 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies. With Mike Conley taking the night off to rest a hamstring injury, Mitchell took charge early. He made his first five shots on the way to scoring 28 first-half points — his most ever in a half.

He erased an early 8-2 deficit with a three-pointer and a drive to the basket for a three-point play, and his three-pointer at the buzzer to end the half put the Jazz up 70-53. Jordan Clarkson came off the bench to add 28 points and Rudy Gobert added 16 points and 14 rebounds for Utah, who pushed the lead to as many as 30 in the third quarter.

Joe Ingles added 15 points and seven assists and the Jazz notched their fifth straight victory and 33rd of the season. The Los Angeles Clippers, chasing Utah and the Phoenix Suns in the West, won their fifth straight game, 122-112 over the Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers.

Kawhi Leonard led the Clippers with 28 points, Paul George added 24 and Terrence Mann chipped in 23 off the bench. "Just being aggressive," Mann said of the key to the Clippers' win over the Sixers, who were missing star big man Joel Embiid as he continues to recover from a bone bruise in his knee. "Guys getting downhill, setting the tempo right off the jump. That's what we've been doing for the past five games."

In New Orleans, Zion Williamson scored 38 points and the Pelicans rallied to beat the Dallas Mavericks 112-103. The Mavericks, missing ailing forward Luka Doncic and center Kristaps Porzingis who rested on the second night of a back-to-back, led 95-94 with less than four minutes remaining. But the Pelicans roared home on an 18-8 scoring run that included 10 points from Williamson.

Two days after being traded by Orlando, center Nikola Vucevic made his Chicago debut in the Bulls' 120-104 loss to the San Antonio Spurs. Vucevic scored 21 points with nine rebounds and four assists, struggling defensively against Jakob Poeltl who led the Spurs with 20 points, nine rebounds and three blocked shots.

DeMar DeRozan added 17 points for the Spurs, who ended a four-game losing streak and made coach Gregg Popovich just the third NBA coach to reach 1,300 regular-season victories after Don Nelson (1,335) and Lenny Wilkens (1,332).

Barty, Tsitsipas, Rublev advance in Miami as Halep withdraws

MIAMI: World number one Ashleigh Barty looked sharp in a straight-sets victory over Jelena Ostapenko Saturday at the Miami Open, where men's second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas cruised past lucky loser Damir Dzumhur. Defending champion Barty defeated the former French Open champion from Latvia 6-3, 6-2 to set up a fourth-round clash with former world number one Victoria Azarenka.

Greece's Tsitsipas — ranked fifth in the world but seeded second behind world No. 2 Daniil Medvedev in the Masters 1000 event that is missing top-ranked Novak Djokovic, world number three Rafael Nadal and No. 4 Dominic Thiem as well as Roger Federer and Andy Murray — was untroubled in a 6-1, 6-4 over Bosnian lucky loser Damir Dzumhur. Tsitsipas, coming off a runner-up finish at Acapulco last week, hit 10 of his 18 winners off his forehand and committed only nine unforced errors as he relentlessly pressured his opponent.

"There isn't much I can tell you. It was a great match," Tsitsipas said. "I started the match very strong, breaking him twice and taking a big lead in the score, and I think the things worked out by themselves after that. "I created lot of opportunities with my serve, finding the right angles and executing it perfectly. Even with my second serve I felt like I did a lot of damage, not giving him a chance to press first and apply pressure with his shots."

The three-time Grand Slam semi-finalist next faces Japanese 28th seed Kei Nishikori, who outlasted Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene 7-6 (8/6), 5-7, 6-4. Rain was the only thing



SALT LAKE CITY: Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz dunks against the Memphis Grizzlies on March 27, 2021 at Vivent Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. —AFP

New York's Alec Burks and RJ Barrett scored 21 points to lead the Knicks to a 102-96 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks, who were without two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo. Antetokounmpo, nursing a sprained left knee, was joined on the sideline starters Khris Middleton, Jrue Holiday and Donte DiVincenzo.

The Knicks, without Julius Randle because of a thigh injury, also lost center Mitchell Robinson to a broken right foot in the first quarter. Robinson, only recently returned from a broken hand, was hurt when he came down awkwardly while trying to defend Brook Lopez.

He stayed in the game for a few more minutes before limping off, the Knicks announcing the X-ray results shortly thereafter. "Mitchell's been terrific for us," coach Tom Thibodeau said. "You hate to see it. You feel for Mitchell because all the work that he's put in."

Beal exits, Wizards win

The Washington Wizards, fueled by a triple-double from Russell Westbrook, beat the Detroit Pistons 106-92, but also saw league scoring leader Bradley Beal exit early with a right hip injury. Westbrook scored 19 points with 19 rebounds and 10 assists, his 15th triple-double of the season matching the franchise record established by Darrell Walker. Beal finished with 17 points and six assists, before departing after a hard fall in the third quarter.

One day after blowing a 19-point third quarter lead in a loss to Minnesota, the Houston Rockets bounced back with a resounding 129-107 victory over the Timberwolves. Kevin Porter scored 25 points for the Rockets and Kelly Olynyk added 16 in his first game for Houston since arriving from Miami in the trade for Victor Oladipo. —AFP



MIAMI GARDENS: Ashleigh Barty of Australia returns a shot during her women's singles third round match against Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia on Day 6 of the 2021 Miami Open presented by Itau at Hard Rock Stadium on Saturday in Miami Gardens, Florida. —AFP

that slowed down men's fourth seed Andrey Rublev in a 6-1, 6-2 victory over American Tenny Sandgren. Rublev, up 6-1, 5-2, was unable to convert three match points before the players had to leave the court for the second of two rain delays, but he wasted no time in closing out the match when play resumed.

Rublev, who took his tour-leading number of 2021 match

wins to 17, didn't face a break point, his dominance on full display as he held serve for a 4-1 lead in the opening set with a love game that lasted just 59 seconds. Canadian Denis Shapovalov also had to wait out the delay to finish off a hard-fought 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-4 victory over Ilya Ivashka. Shapovalov survived 11 double faults but persevered to win in three hours and 18 minutes.

Star-studded Nets land free agent Aldridge

NEW YORK: The Brooklyn Nets, already stocked with the superstar trio of Kevin Durant, Kyrie Irving and James Harden, have landed NBA free agent forward LaMarcus Aldridge, ESPN reported Saturday. The US sports network, citing Aldridge's agent, said the seven-time All-Star was headed to Brooklyn after completing his buyout with San Antonio, which came after the Spurs failed to trade him before the league deadline on Thursday.

The Miami Heat were reported to be the "front-runner" to land Aldridge, but agent Jeff Schwartz told ESPN on Saturday that he would sign with Brooklyn, who are in second place in the Eastern Conference behind the Philadelphia 76ers. The Nets had already nabbed free agent Blake Griffin, the former number one NBA draft pick, after his exit from the Detroit Pistons.

The Spurs confirmed this month that they had "mutually agreed" to part ways with 35-year-old Aldridge, who had been with the team for six seasons. "He's been a great teammate, there was no problem there," coach Gregg Popovich said at the time. "We just think this is a win-win for both LaMarcus and the club."

San Antonio explored trade options but couldn't get a deal done before the deadline. Aldridge averaged 13.7 points and 4.5 rebounds in 25.9 minutes per game this season. But he missed eight of San Antonio's last 11 games before the All-Star break with hip and quadriceps injuries and came off the bench on the other three. —AFP

Chen wins third straight figure skating world title as Hanyu slips

STOCKHOLM: American Nathan Chen landed five quadruple jumps in the men's free skate on Saturday to overhaul faltering Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu and collect a third consecutive world title. Chen, who started the day in third, was impeccable in his routine, scoring 222.03 for a total of 320.88 to apply pressure to the Japanese pair, 17-year-old Kagiyama Yuma and Hanyu, who followed.

Kagiyama scored a personal best of 190.81 for 291.77, but last man Hanyu put his hand on the ice at the end of his first two jumps and scored 182.20 for a total of 289.18. Chen added to his 2018 and 2019 world titles. The 2020 event in Montreal was cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's amazing, the fact I'm able to be here at this world championships after this unprecedented year, it's amazing, I'm elated right now," Chen said on the ice at the victory ceremony. Chen needed to make up eight points on Hanyu who was skating last, and opted for a routine that included a daunting five quads.

"I just tried to remind myself to enjoy being here," Chen said. "I don't know how many more world championships I'll be able to compete at, so just every single one that I can be at just to embrace this moment. I'm very lucky to be here and I remind myself that and in doing that I'm able to be a lot more calm."

Chen landed all his quads with elegant athleticism, starting with a Lutz and following that with a flip, a Salchow and two toe loops. Chasing Chen's huge score, Hanyu, the double Olympic champion, wobbled several times to slide to third.

Kagiyama, skating to the "Avatar" soundtrack, succeeded with a quad Salchow, quad toe-triple toe and quad toe as well as four more strong triples. He only stumbled on a triple Axel and triple loop. "I wanted to make sure I landed on the podium. That's what I've trained for," said Kagiyama, making his debut at the worlds.

For Hanyu, it was back to training to iron out the problems in his performance. "It was very exhausting and it was like I was losing my balance," said the Olympic champion. "I realized that there were a lot of jumps one after another that were not clean."

He added: "I don't know when the next competition might be, but I just want to go back to practice, to train on my quad Axel and continue to work to land it." In ice dancing, Russia's Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalov claimed the title, filling the vacuum caused by the absence of four-time winners Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron. European champions Sinitsina and Katsalov won with a score of 221.17 points.

America's Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue (214.71) were second with Canada's Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier (214.35) filling out the podium. French stars Papadakis and Cizeron opted to skip the tournament to focus on preparing for the Winter Olympics in Beijing next year. —AFP



STOCKHOLM: US' Nathan Chen performs during the men's free skating event at the ISU World Figure Skating Championships in Stockholm on Saturday. —AFP

Sports

Ronaldo fumes after World Cup qualifying winner denied, Belgium held

PARIS: Cristiano Ronaldo threw his captain's armband to the ground in anger after being controversially denied an injury-time winner as Portugal blew a two-goal lead against Serbia in World Cup qualifying on Saturday, while Romelu Lukaku's 59th international goal salvaged Belgium a 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic. The Netherlands saw off Latvia 2-0 after their opening Group G defeat by Turkey, who backed up that performance with an impressive 3-0 victory over Norway.

Portugal drew 2-2 in Belgrade, despite Ronaldo believing he had scored the winner in the third minute of stoppage time when the ball appeared to cross the goalline before Stefan Mitrovic cleared. But without technology in use, the goal was not awarded and a fuming Ronaldo was then booked for his protests.

At the final whistle he stormed from the pitch, throwing his captain's armband to the ground. "I always give and will give everything for my country, that will never change," Ronaldo later posted on his Instagram page. "But there are difficult times to deal with, especially when we feel that an entire nation is being harmed."

Portugal coach Fernando Santos told RTP: "We scored a goal that was not given when the ball went in. In a match of this level, that isn't possible." Portugal had appeared to be cruising to three points in Belgrade when 2-0 up through Liverpool striker Diogo Jota's first-half double. But Nemanja Radonjic's half-time introduction proved crucial for Serbia as he set up Aleksandar Mitrovic and Filip Kostic to net in the first 15 minutes of the second period.

Belgium, the world number one-ranked side, sit behind the Czech Republic on goal difference in the early Group E standings. Lukas Provod put the Czechs ahead shortly after half-time in Prague with a magnificent long-range strike, his first international goal. Ten minutes later, Lukaku collected Kevin

De Bruyne's pass, turned his marker and drilled the ball under goalkeeper Tomas Vaclik for his 19th goal in his last 16 games for Belgium.

Luxembourg stunner

Roberto Martinez's men almost took the lead 14 minutes from time, but after Lukaku teed up De Bruyne, the Manchester City midfielder smashed a low shot against the post. "If you look at Czech Republic's results these last months, we knew that it would be a tough game," Belgium captain Jan Vertonghen told VTM. "They created the good chances, won almost every second ball. But at home we are stronger."

In the other Group A game, Luxembourg pulled off a shock 1-0 win over a lacklustre Republic of Ireland in Dublin. Ireland were toothless in attack and the visitors made them pay in the 85th minute with Dynamo Kiev forward Gerson Rodrigues's winner. It was only Luxembourg's sixth victory in World Cup qualifying since their first involvement in 1934.

Frank de Boer's Netherlands gave the 5,000 fans allowed into the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam something to cheer as Steven Berghuis's 32nd-minute curling effort and Luuk de Jong's second-half header saw off Latvia. "We know that goal difference will be important in these qualifiers," said De Boer, who also saw De Jong and Davy Klaassen hit the woodwork in the first World Cup qualifier to be refereed by a woman — France's Stephanie Frappart. "We deserved to win with at least five goals. We tried everything."

Human rights protest

The Netherlands players followed Norway and Germany by protesting in support of human rights in Qatar, where the 2022 World Cup finals will be held. Fenerbahce midfielder Ozan Tufan scored



BELGRADE: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo holds his captain armband moments before he threw it to the ground and left the pitch at the end of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group A football match between Serbia and Portugal at the Rajko Mitic Stadium, in Belgrade, on Saturday. —AFP

twice as Turkey beat a dangerous Norway side.

Leicester center-back Caglar Soyuncu also enjoyed a fine performance as he netted the second goal and helped keep Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Braut Haaland quiet. "Last year we've qualified for Euro 2020 and now we're fighting for a spot in the World Cup," Soyuncu told uefa.com. "We want to be there."

Russia, World Cup quarter-finalists on home soil

three years ago, moved top of the early Group H table with a 2-1 victory over Slovenia, who had started their campaign by beating 2018 runners-up Croatia. Croatia struggled to find their best form again, but Mario Pasalic's header five minutes before the break helped Zlatko Dalic's men edge out Cyprus 1-0 in Rijeka. Slovakia are already struggling in their bid to qualify, after being held to a 2-2 home draw by minnows Malta. —AFP

Irish captain Coleman seeks the calm after the Luxembourg storm

DUBLIN: Ireland must pick themselves up and "keep going through the storm" said captain Seamus Coleman after minnows Luxembourg inflicted a humiliating 1-0 defeat on them in their 2022 World Cup qualifier.

Whatever the end destination is after coming through the storm it is pretty much certain it won't be Qatar for the 2022 finals which the Irish last reached in 2002. Ireland sit bottom of Group A without a point, four behind leaders Serbia and Portugal who drew 2-2 in Belgrade.

They had opened their campaign with what was generally viewed as a decent performance in the 3-2 defeat by Serbia. Luxembourg's win — just their sixth in World Cup qualifiers — is probably their finest result since they drew 0-0 with France in a 2018 World Cup qualifier in Toulouse.

Qatar are the next opposition for Stephen Kenny's side when they play them in a friendly in Hungary tomorrow. A win for the Irish would at least give former Ireland Under-21 boss Kenny his first win in 11 games.

However, with his contract lasting only till the

end of the qualifiers and group favorites Portugal awaiting them on September 1 some are already speculating on his successor. Ireland have not won a competitive fixture since beating Gibraltar 2-0 in a Euro 2020 qualifier in June 2019.

Kenny said the loss was "unacceptable" but added he did not fear for his immediate future. "No, I don't, no. I don't at all," said the 49-year-old Irishman. Their fortunes have slumped dramatically since qualifying for the Euro 2016 finals.

Coleman captained the Irish when they lost honorably 2-1 in the last 16 clash with eventual finalists France, who went on two years later to be crowned world champions. The Everton stalwart admitted Saturday's loss was his most embarrassing moment in football but they had to move on. "The only thing we can do is keep your head down, keep going through the storm," he said. "You've got to be resilient in this game and you've got to take what's coming as professionals."

Coleman said it was up to him and other senior players to lift the spirits of the younger generation. "You've got to take what's going and hope the younger lads aren't tainted by that," said Coleman. "As senior players, we have to take it on the chin and take the deserved criticism. But it will take a while to get over that one. It's embarrassing, full-stop."

Players who enjoyed happier times with Ireland were scathing about the performance. One of those was Kevin Kilbane, a key player in the team that



DUBLIN: Luxembourg's striker Gerson Rodrigues (left) celebrates with teammates at the final whistle during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 group A qualification football match between Ireland and Luxembourg at Aviva Stadium in Dublin on Saturday. —AFP

reached the last 16 of the 2002 World Cup going out to Spain on penalties.

"Embarrassing. Awful. Out worked, outfought, out passed & outclassed by LUXEMBOURG. Another WC without qualification," said Kilbane. Arguably Ireland's most embarrassing defeat was neatly summed up by the legendary Irish television commentator George Hamilton in his sign off. "The sky over Dublin 4 (the area of Dublin where Lansdowne Road is situated) weeps tears of pain." —AFP

Favorite Mystic Guide powers to Dubai World Cup triumph

DUBAI: Favourite Mystic Guide romped to an impressive victory for Godolphin under Luis Saez in the \$12 million Dubai World Cup at Meydan on Saturday. The four-year-old American colt, priced at 6/4, sat in a handy position for the majority of the 10-furlong race before sweeping past long-time leader Hypothetical and powering away from his rivals. "I can't believe it, that was our plan," Saez said. "I knew he was going to give me that kick and he did."

The Japanese-trained Chuwa Wizard finished strongly to take second place, with Magny Cours snatching third from Hypothetical. Saez, whose mount Maximum Security was famously stripped of the Kentucky Derby in 2019 for interference, claimed one of the biggest wins of his career.

"Today he proved he is a champion and I know he is going to get better and better," added Saez. "What a nice horse, he has all the ability. It's an honor for me. This was my dream as a little kid and I can't believe I'm here now. It's a dream come true."

Mystic Guide, trained by Michael Stidham, secured victory by three-and-three-quarter lengths. The race was run in a sombre atmosphere after the death of prominent racehorse-owner Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum earlier this week. "I want to start by giving my condolences on the passing of Sheikh Hamdan," said Stidham, who claimed the biggest success of his career. "I am so happy to be here and the horse performed to his capability. It's a beautiful thing."

The start was delayed as both Frankie Dettori's ride Great Scot and the fancied Military Law had to be withdrawn. Earlier in the day, British trainer John Gosden enjoyed a brilliant Group One double as Mishriff won the Sheema Classic and Lord North took the Dubai Turf. "He's the horse who's going to make my career hopefully," said jockey David Egan,



DUBAI: Mystic Guide, ridden by Luis Saez (left), competes in the \$12 Million Dubai World Cup at Meydan racecourse on Saturday. —AFP

who also guided Mishriff to victory in the world's richest race at the Saudi Cup last month. "He brought me to that next level by winning the Saudi Cup and this is just the icing on the cake." —AFP

Yates wins in Catalonia as Ineos dominate

BARCELONA: Adam Yates won the Tour of Catalonia yesterday with teammates Richie Porte and Geraint Thomas completing an all Ineos Grenadiers podium atop Barcelona's Montjuic. This trio held on to the first three places despite efforts to dislodge them in the 133 kilometre closing stage around Barcelona, principally by home team Movistar's Alejandro Valverde.

Yates topped the general classification by 45sec from Porte with Wales' 2018 Tour de France champion Thomas third at 49s. Unable to break the status quo over the final six circuits of the category two Montjuic climb

Spain's Valverde had to settle for fourth place, 1min 03sec behind.

Colombia's bike exchange rider Esteban Chaves won both points and mountain jerseys while Deceunick Quick-Step tyro Joao Almeida of Portugal was best young rider Belgian Thomas De Gendt, riding for the Lotto-Soudal team, claimed the seventh stage, coming home alone, 22 seconds clear of Matej Mohoric.

De Gendt was part of a breakaway at the foot of the category three Creu d'Ordal climb before going it alone with Slovenia's Mohoric on the last lap of Montjuic. In third on the day came Hungarian Attila Valter, the Groupama rider crossing the line 1min42s back. Yates was going one better after his runner-up finish in the race in 2019 for his first victory since the UAE Tour in February of last year. —AFP



BARCELONA: Team Ineos' British rider Adam Yates (center) competes in the final stage of the 100th Volta Catalunya 2021, a 133-km race starting and finishing in Barcelona, yesterday. —AFP

Footballers must change mindset over brain injuries: Union

LONDON: Football faces a huge challenge in tackling the issue of brain injuries — including changing the mindset of players who are prepared to stay on the pitch until they "cannot walk any more". That is the warning from John Mousinho of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), speaking at a time of growing concern over the potential long-term health risk to players.

A 2019 study carried out in Scotland found that professional footballers were three-and-a-half times more likely to die from neurodegenerative disease compared with members of the general population. England 1966 World Cup winner Bobby Charlton recently became the latest high-profile former player to be diagnosed with dementia.

Mousinho, who plays for Oxford United in English football's third tier, told this week's virtual Sports Resolutions conference that the game was lagging behind rugby in giving information to players about the risks of repeated heading of the ball and concussions. But he said there was growing awareness of the problem — the PFA partly funded the study in Scotland and is supporting other research projects.

Dawn Astle, the daughter of England forward Jeff Astle, who died in 2002 at the age of 59 from a neurodegenerative condition caused by repeated heading of a ball, has campaigned for better recognition of the link between football and dementia.

She was scathing about the lack of action from football authorities when she gave evidence this week to a committee of British lawmakers that is investigating concussion in sport. "For almost 20 years now football has failed to act and failed to protect its players — men, women, children, all at risk potentially," Astle said.

"I think football doesn't want to think it can be a killer," she added. "I know it can be because it's on the bottom of my dad's death certificate." Mousinho, who sits on the management committee of the players' union, believes it is easier to change the organization's attitude than that of the footballers it represents.

Footballers' DNA

"If you ever see a footballer who sustains something that either is concussion or close to concussion, anyone who watches football knows what their reaction is," he said. "They don't want the physio on for starters and if the physio comes on they are waving them away immediately. They don't want extensive treatment or to be assessed properly — they want to carry on."

Mousinho said a refusal to accept injury was part of a footballer's DNA. "That, unfortunately, is the nature of professional footballers," he said. "They are hot-wired from a very young age to disregard not just brain injuries but all sorts of injuries. I'm guilty of this throughout my career. Obviously, anyone who plays sport at a decent level knows you basically play until you cannot walk any more. That is the case really with brain injuries and I think that we downplay it far too much as footballers."

Rugby allows temporary replacements under its Head Injury Assessment protocols, which involve checks in the calm setting of a medical room. The Premier League, by contrast, is trialing permanent concussion substitutes, which can take place after an on-field clinical assessment. The PFA would like to see temporary substitutes in football. —AFP

Conway, Sodhi lead New Zealand cruise in first Bangladesh T20

HAMILTON: An unbeaten 92 from Devon Conway and a four-wicket burst from Ish Sodhi ensured New Zealand romped to victory by 66 runs in the opening Twenty20 against Bangladesh in Hamilton yesterday.

Conway, whose rollicking innings included 11 fours and three sixes, shared in a 105-run stand with debutant Will Young (53), as New Zealand posted an impressive 210 after winning the toss and electing to bat.

Mohammad Naim made an enterprising start to the Bangladesh reply with two boundaries off the opening over from Tim Southee. But once the tourists reached 39 in the fifth over the innings fell apart as first Lockie Ferguson removed Naim for 27 and then Sodhi suffocated the momentum with his four wickets in eight deliveries.

At the end of their 20 overs Bangladesh were 144 for eight and Sodhi had the impressive figures of four for 28. New Zealand went into the match without six frontline players including Kane Williamson and Trent Boult and stand-in captain Tim Southee said it was pleasing to see the new blood perform with the bat.

"Devon is just carrying on what he's done at this level, making it look extremely easy," Southee said with Conway now having four fifties and a 65.42 average from 12 Twenty20s. "It's great to be able to see guys come in and perform. If you had five or six guys out a few years ago we would be scratching around but there's a number of guys now knocking on the door."

'Let ourselves down'

A disappointed Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah pointed the finger at a mediocre batting display from his side and called for a big improvement before game two in Napier tomorrow. "We have let ourselves down in our batting department," he said. "Ish (Sodhi) is an experienced cam-



HAMILTON: Bangladesh's Mahmudullah plays a shot in front of New Zealand's wicketkeeper Devon Conway during the first Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. — AFP

paigner, he uses conditions really well, the ball was gripping a little bit here but we can't make the same mistakes again and again."

After the Sodhi rout, Afif Hossain (45) and Mohammad Saifuddin (34 not out) stretched the innings with a 63-run stand for the seventh wicket but they were unable to lift the scoring rate enough to threaten the New Zealand total. The one disap-

pointment for New Zealand was Finn Allen's much anticipated debut.

The exciting 21-year-old had set the New Zealand domestic scene alight with an average of 56 at a stunning strike rate of 194 in the domestic Twenty20 competition. But when he made the step up to the international arena he was bowled first ball in the opening over from Nasum Ahmed.

When Nasum, also on debut, came back for his second spell, with the innings into its seventh over, he snapped up the wicket of Martin Guptill for 35. Nasum was denied a third wicket when Conway was caught by Shoriful Islam on the square leg boundary but replays indicated Shoriful's foot touched the rope, which resulted in a six for Conway to bring up his half-century. — AFP



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