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Today is the **LAST DAY** of receiving the artworks

Kuwait Times

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Govt takes oath, PM grilling deferred, MPs trade blows

Pardon bill rejected, COVID relief bills passed • Opposition slams 'black day'



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah addresses the National Assembly yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Opposition MPs gather outside the National Assembly.



MP Salman Al-Azmi is restrained by other lawmakers during a scuffle.



Bader Al-Dahoum speaks to the media outside the Assembly.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly managed to hold its crucial session yesterday with just one vote over the quorum, allowing the new Cabinet to take oath. MPs later engaged in heated exchanges and blows to cap a day of political drama. Thirty-one opposition MPs who boycotted the session described the events as a "black day in Kuwaiti democracy" and called for the ouster of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

Ghanem began the session by declaring the membership of Bader Al-Dahoum, a leading opposition MP, was

"null and void" based on a ruling by the constitutional court on March 14, which triggered a major political crisis. The Assembly, which met with 16 Cabinet ministers and just 18 MPs, hurriedly passed a number of populist laws with effectively no debate in an apparent bid to appease the Kuwaiti public, which has sympathized with Dahoum.

As the session went on in the chamber, opposition MPs, Dahoum and some supporters stood at the outside gate of the Assembly building and refused to attend the session. Assembly guards refused to allow Dahoum to enter into the Assembly, telling him they received instructions from Ghanem to stop him.

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Kuwait returns remains of missing Iraqi

KUWAIT: Kuwait handed over to Iraqi authorities the remains of a missing Iraqi found in February on Boubyan Island, Chairman of the Foreign Ministry's Prisoners and Missing Committee Rabea Al-Adsani said yesterday. Adsani told KUNA on the sidelines of the handover ceremony that this cooperation came

from Kuwait's keenness to deal transparently with humanitarian issues.

Kuwait, through the efforts of the tripartite committee and the protocols signed in this regard, as well as information provided by the British and American sides, cooperated in searching for burial sites of missing Iraqis in Kuwait, he added. Kuwait has previously more than once handed over remains found in the country to the Iraqi side, starting from 1999 till the last handover in 2013, Adsani said.

Efforts will continue to determine the fate of all missing persons, Adsani said, expressing Kuwait's hope to determine

the fate of all prisoners and missing persons in Iraq. Undersecretary of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Legal Affairs Qahtan Al-Janabi stressed in a similar statement to KUNA the continuation of cooperation between the two countries to resolve files and develop and strengthen bilateral relations.

"We are currently in Kuwait to deliver a shipment of Kuwaiti archives as well as receive the remains of the missing Iraqi," he said. Both countries have many historical and geographical ties in various fields, and this step and similar activities strengthen relations between the two countries, he added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The remains of a missing Iraqi are handed over to an Iraqi delegation yesterday. — KUNA

Jam puts focus on livestock sea transport

PARIS: The blockage of the Suez Canal has cast a light on a very delicate kind of cargo: The millions of livestock shipped each year in conditions denounced by animal rights groups. Countries from Australia to Romania and Uruguay export live ani-

mals in long voyages across the world. The journey can be deadly at times, with thousands of cattle and sheep perishing at sea in recent years.

While Egypt's Suez Canal was finally reopened to traffic on Monday, concern was running high in Romania about 130,000 sheep whose shipment had been considerably delayed by the container ship Ever Given as it blocked the waterway for nearly a week. "Every hour counts for the sheep and the fatality rate will only grow," warned Gabi Paun, EU director of Animals International.

Eleven Romanian ships were delayed and it's all but certain that their food supplies have run out, he said. "Even if the law was respected and the ships were carrying 25 percent more food ... it would nonetheless have been finished by now," Paun said. Mary Pana, the head of Romania's main association of livestock farmers and exporters, Acebop, said the nation has been sending 50,000 sheep a week to Middle East nations such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan ahead of Ramadan. Deadly incidents have put a spotlight

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UMM QASR, Iraq: This picture taken on March 14, 2021 shows imported livestock waiting on the pier at the port of Umm Qasr. — AFP

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive officials at Bayan Palace



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir also received Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

received as well the President of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Jassem Al-Saqer. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-

Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad and Saqer at Bayan Palace. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan met with Dr Istvan Gyula Soos, the Ambassador of Hungary to Kuwait (left) and Sibi George, the Ambassador of India to Kuwait, yesterday at the newspaper's offices in Shuwaikh to discuss matters of mutual concern. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KFH campaign encourages staff to get vaccinated

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched a campaign under the theme "Take your vaccine" to encourage its employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19 in accordance with standard procedures.

The campaign includes different promotions, gifts and prizes aimed at motivating employees to take the vaccine, reflecting the bank's keenness on the health of its employees and their families as well as the health of society members.

Meanwhile, the health authorities have given priority to the employees of local banks to get vaccinated as front-line workers. This should contribute

to speeding up the vaccination process, maintaining the health of employees, and thus the ability to serve customers more efficiently and without interruption.

Talal Almutairi, Deputy General Manager HR Operations and Rewards at KFH, said that the bank is keen on implementing work protocols among employees during the pandemic, while providing advanced digital platforms for internal communication and Human Resources Information Systems through which employees view various services and features that concern them. This includes providing periodic COVID-19 disclosure to ensure the employee's health status in case



Talal Almutairi

of infection, suspicion or close contact and taking the necessary measures to maintain the safety of employees and customers.

"In addition to sterilizing workplaces on a regular basis, KFH has re-designed employees' offices to meet health requirements and social distancing, in addition to designing flexible working hours in line with health precautions. Moreover, the bank provided the required tools to enable staff to work from home effectively," Almutairi added.

He pointed out that KFH keeps supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Health by using its social media channels to publish standard health instructions and recommendations, as well as awareness of the importance of vaccination and adherence to the basic preventive measures through awareness informative messages and videos.

Seeking to raise community awareness, KFH collaborates with experts and doctors to discuss health issues and clarify, through the bank's social media channels, important concepts about the current conditions. This content released by KFH through

its social media channels, which have more than a million followers, witnesses great interaction and welcome from followers and audience due to its importance and direct impact on society.

KFH maintains its commitment to its leading societal and national role by supporting various initiatives that help society and support the government efforts, while appreciating the front-line heroes, adhering to government procedures and following the official instructions related to the current exceptional circumstances.

It is worth noting that KFH has launched several initiatives focusing on employee health and wellbeing, under the theme "Better Health Leads to a Better Life and a healthier organization". KFH signed strategic partnerships with various health care providers as part of its wellbeing strategy for KFH Staff and to create a more dynamic, effective and efficient working environment. Employee health and wellbeing is now a business value of strategic importance and is fast becoming a source of competitive advantage.

Govt takes oath, PM grilling...

Continued from Page 1

Dahoum was driven to the Assembly in a motorcade of supporters, which began from his residence in the south of Kuwait, to declare their support to the opposition lawmaker who was stripped of his seat by the constitutional court because he was convicted of insulting HH the Amir in 2014. Dahoum told supporters that "he will not stop fighting against corruption" from outside the National Assembly. Unconfirmed media reports said Dahoum's brother, Mohammad, is expected to run for the seat.

The Assembly first rejected a draft law granting a general amnesty to opposition activists, a major demand of the opposition, but later passed a law to postpone repayment of bank loans for six months and a law to provide assistance to small and medium businesses harmed by the coronavirus, in addition to a law to provide financial rewards for frontline workers in the fight against the pandemic. The government had rejected all these laws in the past because of their huge cost amid a sharp drop in oil prices.

Opposition MP Osama Al-Shaheen said the government changed its mind "in order to sell the stripping off of Dahoum of his seat". He said as a result, Dahoum has become the most expensive legislator in the world, costing the government KD 1.476 billion, the cost of the three laws. The Assembly also passed a law stipulating that people accused in cases related to expressing opinion will not be detained.

As the Assembly began to debate a grilling against the prime minister, a number of opposition

lawmakers returned to the chamber and exchanged heated arguments with MPs in attendance. The exchanges developed into scuffles between several lawmakers.

The prime minister requested that grillings against him should be postponed until the end of 2022 and a vote was taken amid continued arguments. The result was declared as 29 in favor and five against. But the vote was retaken and the result was 33 out of 34.

According to the law, for a grilling to be postponed more than two weeks, the Assembly must approve it with an absolute majority of the entire Assembly membership (33 in this case) and by calling the names of MPs. The opposition said that the vote was illegal and "null and void" because it violated the constitution. Ghanem however said that it was legitimate and in line with the law.

Following the incidents, 31 opposition MPs held an emergency meeting and issued a statement in which they described the events as a "black day in the history of Kuwait's democracy". The statement said that the events in the chamber constituted a flagrant violation of the constitution and freedom of the people.

They strongly criticized the postponement of the grilling, which they described as unprecedented and in which the procedure of voting clearly violated the law. The statement said the lawmakers will not cooperate with the prime minister and the speaker and stressed that they must go for violating the constitution and the law. The chief of Awazem tribe Falah bin Jame said that he will no longer receive at his diwaniya MPs who attended the session.

The Assembly later agreed to cancel today's session and set the next session after two weeks. Meanwhile, two fresh grillings were filed yesterday - the first against Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and the other against the prime minister.

Jam puts focus on livestock...

Continued from Page 1

on the risks, including a recent one. Last week, Spanish authorities ordered 1,600 cattle en route to Turkey be put down after officials there refused to let the herd disembark because they feared an outbreak of blue tongue disease onboard. The cattle had already spent three months at sea.

In Nov 2019, a cargo vessel carrying 14,600 sheep capsized in the Black Sea after leaving from Romania. Some 180 of the animals were rescued. Those that didn't drown or were crushed to death died of thirst. Romania has been criticized in the past for transporting animals by sea in the summer heat. In 2015, thousands of sheep bound for Jordan died from thirst and the intense heat.

In 2009, a ship carrying some 30,000 sheep and cattle from Uruguay sank in the Mediterranean before reaching its destination in Syria. Dozens of crewmembers were also left dead or missing. Australia passed reforms to its live export trade in 2018 after video released by animal rights activists showed sheep - some already dead - crammed together in small, stifling pens and covered in excrement on ships heading to the Middle East.

More than 2.8 million live cattle, sheep and goats were exported in 2018 from the EU to Mediterranean basin countries, with Romania accounting for more than half. A 2020 European Commission report discovered sector monitoring gaps by several member states, such as Romania, France and Spain. The activist group Compassion in



The Lebanon-flagged livestock carrier vessel Elevation is moored at Iraqis port of Umm Qasr. — AFP

World Farming (CIWF) has complained for years about violations of regulations it judges insufficient.

A big problem is the poor design, construction and maintenance of the transport ships, according to Agathe Gignoux, the head of advocacy at the NGO's French branch. She pointed to "very steep ramps, and very low ceilings and stalls" that made it harder to feed and water the animals. In general, Gignoux added, the ships are often old and "were not built to transport animals".

The European Commission report said the ships were originally designed to carry automobiles. What's worse, Gignoux said, is that "there is no veterinary care on board" even though trips can last five to eight days on average. The EU commission pointed out that some trips last several weeks.

CIWF says the reason why animals are transported alive does not stem from problems of conservation or the need for ritual slaughter for clients in the Middle East. "Honestly, the real reason is simple, it costs more to slaughter livestock in Europe," Gignoux said. In June, the European Parliament called attention to allegations that EU laws on live animal transport were being violated and created a commission to study the situation. — 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 gives \$2 billion in bonuses to frontline COVID-19 workers

New drive-thru vaccination station near Jaber Causeway

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet on Monday approved a draft law to pay frontline workers fighting the coronavirus pandemic a total of KD 600 million (\$1.99 billion) in special bonuses for their efforts and sacrifices to tame a local outbreak that has killed 1,298 people as of Monday. The green-lit draft law will now be submitted to His Highness the Amir, pending its passage through parliament, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah said in a statement following the Cabinet's weekly meeting, presided over by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Premier briefed the Cabinet about His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's directives related to the political developments in Kuwait particularly those related to Tuesday's important parliament session. Fresh off his return from abroad for medical care, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf has stressed the "urgent need" for constructive cooperation between the Cabinet and lawmakers, a day before state ministers were due to take oath of office before parliament. Bearing the nation's best interests in mind, the government should be given adequate time to assume its immense responsibilities to bring national ambitions to fruition, particularly at this time of upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, His Highness the Amir added.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet reviewed the govern-

ment's plan of action for the 16th legislative term (2021/2022 - 2024/25). In this regard, Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada said the government's plan is designed to focus on sustained development in the face of a myriad of challenges brought by the pandemic, a notion that fits into the country's 'New Kuwait Vision 2035' economic diversification plan. The plan, which garnered Cabinet approval, comprises objectives that aim to help shape the future of Kuwait, chief among them efforts to develop human capital, improve infrastructure and allow the private sector a bigger platform to contribute towards national development, the minister explained.

Drive-thru station

On Kuwait's latest COVID-19 data, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah informed the Cabinet that hospital admissions and the number of people needing critical care remain on an upward trajectory, while the recovery rate has now reached 93 percent. Looking to accelerate the national rollout of COVID-19 shots, the Cabinet approved the Health ministry request to open a new drive-thru vaccination station near Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah Causeway, urging his compatriots and expatriates alike to get inoculated and march towards "herd immunity."

The Cabinet also looked over a report prepared by an economic affairs committee over plans to put

in place an alluring business environment in Kuwait that would allow it to improve its position in global investor rankings, calling for efforts across state bodies to achieve that goal. On the political front, the Cabinet heaped praise on neighboring Saudi Arabia for a major tree-planting drive the kingdom had unveiled, which aims to combat pollution and reduce carbon emissions, a matter that featured heavily in a recent phone call between His Highness the Amir and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. It gave due praise to Riyadh for a peace initiative the kingdom presented to end Yemen's war, including a nationwide ceasefire and the reopening of air and sea links, while it strongly condemned the "terrorist" Houthi militia's continued attacks on civilian sites in Saudi Arabia.

The Cabinet equally deplored a suicide bomb attack on a Catholic church in the Indonesian city of Makassar, emphasizing that "all forms of terrorism and violence" are vehemently rejected. In Egypt, the Cabinet expressed its sympathies over the victims of a train crash and an apartment building collapse there, which collectively killed and wounded scores of people. On a more cheerful note, the Cabinet applauded Egyptian authorities for overseeing operations to re-float a mammoth container ship that blocked the Suez Canal for almost a week, restoring traffic in one of the world's most strategic chokepoints. —KUNA

Salmi tire dump fire 'deliberate'

KUWAIT: A fire that occurred in the tire dump in Salmi yesterday was deliberate, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) announced. Firemen from the Shaqaya, vocational Jahra and backup fire stations had brought the blaze under control after isolating the burning tires, KFF explained. No injuries were reported, it added, noting that Kuwait Municipality bulldozers were used in fighting the fire. "After investigating and collecting information by the firefighters, it turned out to be a work of arson," KFF said in a statement to the press.

Later yesterday, another fire broke out in a warehouse that belongs to the Abdali Co-op Society, which prompted five fire stations to respond since the flames extended to an area of over 3,000 square meters. Firemen were able to put the fire under control as an investigation went underway to determine the cause of the fire. No injuries were reported in the incident, KFF said.

Meanwhile, a fire broke out in the basement of a paper recycling factory's warehouse yesterday, prompting Tahreer and vocational Jahra fire stations to respond. The fire was put out successfully and no injuries were reported, KFF said. Separately, Farwaniya firemen responded to a blaze in two vehicles in Ishbiliya. The vehicles were parked next to a power transformer. The fire was put out before reaching the transformer, KFF said, noting that no injuries were reported. Investigations are being carried out to determine the cause of the fire.



KUWAIT: A fire guts tires in a dump in Salmi yesterday.



A fireman battles a blaze reported in Abdali yesterday.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



More than 3,000 from 75 schools participate in largest art competition for students in Kuwait

Held under the slogan 'Frontline Heroes of Kuwait'

KUWAIT: Frontline Heroes of Kuwait is an art competition open to all students in Kuwait, which aims to encourage students' awareness and respect for Kuwait's frontline heroes, who are working hard to protect the country and people during the coronavirus pandemic. Kuwait Times invites all students and all schools in Kuwait to submit their drawings, paintings, sketches and other art work celebrating Kuwait's frontline heroes. Kuwait's frontline heroes is sponsored by Zain our strategic partner, Huawei and Al-Bahar Co.

Jury

Two jury members who are professionals in their

field will judge all entries. The decisions of the jury are final and there are no appeals of their decisions. Professional collaboration is not permitted. Associates, relatives, and others connected with the jury members may not enter the competition. Submissions will be judged on the basis of the following criteria: Imagination, creativity and art technique.

Eligibility

The competition is open to all students from six years to 18 years of age and for children in special needs schools. Each student is permitted only ONE (1) entry. The first 5 winners in each of the five categories (categories include ages 6-8; 9-11; 12-14; 15-

18 and special needs) will receive prizes. Other participants will receive merit awards and certificates.

Rules

Participation in the competition requires unconditional acceptance of the rules. All competition entries are copyright property of Kuwait Times. Submitted materials will not be returned to their authors. Winners will be announced by Kuwait Times on its website.

Closing Date

All submissions must be sent to Kuwait Times by today.

News in brief

Ramadan Apr 13: Ojairi

KUWAIT: Astronomer Dr Saleh Mohammad Al-Ojairi said the month of Ramadan will begin on April 13 according to astronomical calculations, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. He said the crescent sighting conditions will be as follows: The crescent will be born on Monday morning (April 12) at 05:32 am. Sunset on Monday will be at 6:12 pm. The moon will fade away at 6:34 pm. The moon will remain for 22 minutes after sunset and will be hard to see. The moon's disappearance after sunset means the start of the lunar month astronomically, so Tuesday, April 13 will be the first day of the holy month of Ramadan for the year 1442 AH.

Policeman 'kicked'

KUWAIT: Detectives were asked to locate and arrest a 25-year-old bedoon who escaped after the interrogator finished questioning him. A policeman said the suspect kicked him in a sensitive area and he was not able to chase him. The policeman was charged with negligence in guarding a suspect.

Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude oil up 83 cents to reach \$63.63 per barrel yesterday from \$62.80 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said. Elsewhere, the price of Brent Crude saw a 26 cents increase to reach \$64.83 pb as did West Texas Intermediate, which increased by 47 cents to \$61.44 pb.

Indian Embassy to mark 75th anniversary of India's independence

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Marking a significant milestone in the history of India, the Indian Embassy in Kuwait will today kick off a two-year-long celebration of the 75th anniversary of the country's independence. Addressing a press conference at the Indian Embassy yesterday, Indian Ambassador Sibi George said the celebrations will continue till Aug 15, 2023.

India became a sovereign independent country in 1947 on Aug 15. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 75th anniversary celebrations captioned 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' by flagging off a 241-mile march from Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi in Gujarat. Since then, all Indian missions abroad have

ACK offers diploma in nautical science

KUWAIT: The Maritime Department at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) announced that it has signed an agreement with the City of Glasgow College in the United Kingdom to offer a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Nautical Science.

The HND in Nautical Science is a two-year program conducted over a period of four semesters. It

been launching their own programs.

"Starting tomorrow, we are launching a series of activities in Kuwait with the partnership of the Indian diaspora and our friends in Kuwait. We will organize each of these events fully abiding with the protocols and guidelines of the COVID-19 pandemic," the ambassador said.

Commemorating the 75th anniversary, the embassy has scheduled four kinds of events to highlight the strength of New India and its rich cultural diversity. The embassy will hold programs to celebrate the lives and contributions of India's national heroes, conduct events to promote cooperation between India and Kuwait and build people-to-people relations.

"It is an important milestone in our relations with Kuwait as well, as this year, we will also be celebrating the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait," George said. The main official function of the 60th anniversary celebrations will be held later this year. "The celebrations of the 60th anniversary will further deepen our excellent bilateral relations," he said.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George addresses the press conference.

During the recent visit of Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah to India, Kuwait and India issued a joint statement setting up joint commission meetings at the ministerial level. "During the anniversary year, we will work towards further strengthening our longstanding dynamic partnership," the ambassador added.



was primarily designed for those intending to become licensed deck officers on merchant ships, but it also has a secondary role which is providing education for those wishing to enter a wide range of activities within the maritime field. Furthermore, the program provides a solid background for graduates who wish to further their education within a specialized maritime field.

It is worth mentioning that the City of Glasgow College is the premier maritime college in the United Kingdom, having been engaged in maritime education and training for over 50 years. This col-

laborative agreement allowed ACK to become the first institution in Kuwait to offer similar type and level of training and education.

"The signing of this agreement marks the beginning of higher level maritime education and training in Kuwait. Our partner, the City of Glasgow College is considered one of the premier establishments of its kind in the world with over 50 years of experience in maritime education and training, and ACK is delighted to be able to partner with such an institution," said Captain Liam Toner, Senior Manager of Maritime Operations and Quality at ACK.

Gulf Bank sponsors Hamad Alali's new Ramadan podcast

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced it will be the title sponsor of "Stories With Hamad," the latest show hosted by social media influencer and personality, Hamad Alali. The new show is an audio and video storytelling podcast that aims to highlight a true story or event told by those who lived it over the course of 15-minute daily segments. The show is currently scheduled to air every day during Ramadan, right after iftar, and on both ATV and YouTube.

The new podcast show, which is hosted by Hamad Alali, will consist of interviews with 30 guests and stars across various fields, with fun and beneficial content set to entertain the whole family. The 30 episodes will vary with different themes to satisfy the largest target audience, and will highlight a variety of topics including community, the arts, culture, history, youth, and sports.

"Stories With Hamad" aims to entertain with a purpose. The podcast also aims to define and document local social events that will be spoken about publicly for the first time over the course of the show. The show also aims to use storytelling techniques to bring different generations and perspectives together, and highlight the best of our local communities and the values we hold dear. The show will follow a new format similar to the trending style of podcasts across the world, with a set-up that encourages viewers and listeners to focus solely on the dialogue, and interact with the stories being told. The podcast set-up is simple and straightforward, encouraging guests to be as comfortable and as candid as can be when retelling their stories.

"Gulf Bank is excited to sponsor 'Stories With Hamad,' Hamad Alali's latest show that will be narrating one beneficial and entertaining story a day during Ramadan," said Reem Hasan, Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank. "As always during the holiest month of the year, we aim to support and highlight local initiatives that are not only shedding light on the untold histories and stories of our beloved country, but are also bringing our local communities together. We are excited to sponsor a show that will truly be unlike any other in the region, and we hope that everyone tunes in to the podcast to learn more about what makes our country and local communities that much more special."



Gulf Bank is sponsoring "Stories With Hamad" as part of a wider set of initiatives pioneered by the bank in the interest of achieving community sustainability. It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the bank.

The new podcast is hosted by Hamad Alali, an influential youth figure in the Gulf region, with over two million followers of all ages across social media (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat). Previously, and on television, Alali hosted his first local talk show program, the "With Hamad Show," for four seasons, during which he achieved the highest ratings in Kuwait and the Gulf. The show is widely considered one of the most interactive social media programs in the Gulf region, with its topics regularly trending on Twitter.

Commenting on his new podcast, Hamad Alali said: "Stories With Hamad is a social podcast with a meaningful purpose. One of the reasons why we were so determined to book that crucial time slot right after Maghreb prayer was because we were keen to target every member of the family. We are excited to launch a podcast, one of the newest talk show methods, that will cover a variety of noteworthy historical, social, artistic and sports events, told by the very people who these stories affected. The show will be accompanied by one of the largest marketing campaigns in Kuwait that includes television, social media and external advertisements. We are also very proud to have a team of more than 30 young Kuwaiti men and women across various fields who spent several months collecting information, documents and photos for each story. The show will also be accompanied by a social media competition in cooperation with our title sponsor, Gulf Bank, who we have partnered with due to our shared target audience, all members of the family."

FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition 2021



Today is the LAST DAY of receiving the artworks

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.



Biden ramps up vaccinations but warns 'war against COVID far from won'

US border agents, traffickers and migrants mix on busy Rio Grande

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LESBOS: African migrant women shout "freedom" inside the new refugee camp of Kara Tepe in Mytilene, on Lesbos on Monday. — AFP

Migrants on Lesbos want help

Asylum-seekers in Lesbos camp shout out that they are tired of incarceration

LESBOS: On a windswept hill overlooking the Aegean Sea, thousands of asylum seekers huddling in tents on the island of Lesbos are glad to see the end of winter. "The nights are very, very cold, and it's very difficult with a five-month baby," Abdelkader Ali, a 25-year-old Syrian, says inside the camp of Mavrovouni. Designed to be temporary after a fire destroyed the island's previous permanent facility of Moria, Mavrovouni has been home to over 6,000 people since September.

On a rare media tour organized during a visit to the island on Monday by EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson, asylum seekers shout out to reporters that they are tired of incarceration. "It's a prison, we cannot do anything," says Jawad, a 34-year-old Afghan who had hoped to speak to Johansson. "Free us. You must free us," chant a dozen women from Mali and the Democratic

Republic of Congo near a camp gate, under the watchful eye of Greek police.

'We are suffocating'

"We want to go to school, we want to build a family," says one of the women who has been on the island since 2019 and has seen no progress in her asylum claim. "We are suffocating here," she yells as police escort the journalists out of the camp and shut the gate.

The European Union has allocated 276 million euros (\$325 million) for the construction of new camps on Lesbos and four other Aegean islands—Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros—where nearly 14,000 migrants are hosted. "It's of the utmost importance that we don't leave people in tents for another winter," Johansson said Monday at a news conference with Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi.

Work on a new permanent Lesbos camp is expected to start in the summer, Mitarachi said, without giving a completion date. "We will not allow for a difficult winter ahead," the minister vowed.

He said Greek authorities had overcome a "big challenge" in housing asylum seekers left homeless overnight by the burning of Moria, who at the time numbered over 10,000. "Most of the work for flood prevention has been almost completed. Now electricity is coming in, hot water is there," Mitarachi said. He insisted that the temporary camp, a former army target range, is "much more decent, clean and safe than Moria ever was". "There is a check when people come in, you cannot bring knives into the camp, you cannot bring alcohol," Mitarachi said. Camp residents acknowledge that security has improved with some 300

Greek police now present, but a host of other problems remain.

"The only thing that is good here in this new camp is the security," says Raed Alobeed, 45, also from Syria. "In the old Moria camp... the violence (came in) high levels. We got victims, we got stabbing people, thieves, mafia, selling drugs." Bakari, a young migrant from Mali, says he hasn't washed in three days for lack of hot water, contradicting the minister. "We live like pigs," adds Jojo, a Congolese asylum seeker who stresses that the police only intervene to break up fights.

Compounding the sense of imprisonment, the migrants are only allowed to travel to the nearest town for groceries a couple of times per week, because of coronavirus concerns. "We make do with what they give us, two meals a day," says Jacques, another Congolese migrant. —AFP

Mozambique town deserted as IS claims control

PEMBA, Mozambique: The United States on Monday vowed to support Mozambique after a prolonged deadly assault on the key northern town of Palma by Islamic State-linked militants waging an escalating insurgency. The town was all but deserted five days after the raid was launched, its residents fleeing by road, boat or on foot.

The militants attacked the town on Wednesday, spiralling an insurgency that has spread bloodily across northern Mozambique since 2017. Dozens of people, according to the IS and the authorities, were killed in what witnesses describe as a coordinated attack, and an unknown number were still missing. It is the biggest and closest raid to a multi-billion-dollar gas project being built on a peninsula just 10 kilometers (six miles) away, by France's Total and other energy giants.

"The caliphate's soldiers seized the strategic town of Palma," IS said in a statement posted on its Telegram channels. It claimed its offensive aimed at military and government targets, killing dozens of troops and "members of Crusader states," its term for Western nationals.

"We remain committed to working together with the government of Mozambique to counter terrorism and violent extremism and defeat ISIS," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

The IS released a video purportedly showing



The OGSV Sapura Diamante (Offshore Construction Support Vessel), a pipe layer vessel used in offshore construction, is seen docked at the port of Pemba where sailing boats are expected to arrive with people displaced from the coasts of Palma and Afungi after suffering attacks by armed groups yesterday. — AFP

their commandos—about 100 armed men, mostly youths, wearing fatigues and red scarves on their heads. Several experts told AFP that the video appeared to have been shot in Mocimboa da Praia, another port held by jihadists, adding that it was not clear when it was filmed. The town of 75,000 people in Cabo Delgado province was all but emptied of its population, said civil society activist Adriano Nuvunga.

"The violence has ceased, but it is believed some of the insurgents have pulled back and some are still around in hiding," he said. Witnesses said scores of fighters had sneaked into the town ahead of the attack. "The attackers arrived a few days earlier and

hid in the homes of locals whom they paid," said one Palma resident, speaking from Mueda, where he had taken refuge.

"The attacks started along the main roads to Palma," he said. As police rushed out to try repel the invaders, the fighters inside the town mounted their own attack, according to witnesses. The United Nations condemned the assault on Palma and said it was coordinating closely with local authorities to provide assistance to those affected by the violence. "We are deeply concerned by the still evolving situation in Palma where armed attacks began on March 24, reportedly killing dozens of people," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. —AFP

nately almost always overturned." Trump accused Fauci, who leads the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, of trying to take credit for vaccine development, and "moving the goalposts to make himself look as good as possible."

The former president added that Birx, who was his coronavirus task force coordinator, was "a proven liar with very little credibility left." The bitter outburst came after Fauci told CNN how shocked he had been when Trump last April called for states to "liberate" themselves as experts pleaded with Americans to obey shutdown orders.

Birx said in an interview that—while working at the White House—she had received a "very uncomfortable" phone call from Trump after speaking publicly about the rapid spread of Covid-19.

She also said "the federal government did not provide consistent messaging to the American people and that is fault number one." The interviews with Fauci and Birx were part of a CNN documentary on the pandemic. Birx retired after a bruising time at the White House that tarnished her once stellar reputation. Fauci, 80, is now the White House's top pandemic advisor under President Joe Biden after Trump's election defeat. "Dr Fauci and Dr. Birx moved far too slowly, and if it were up to them we'd currently be locked in our basements as our country suffered through a financial depression," Trump said. He also attacked Fauci's ability to throw a baseball, described him as "king of the flip-flops," and said "Birx was a terrible medical advisor, which is why I seldom followed her advice." —AFP

Trump rages at COVID experts who criticized him

WASHINGTON: Former US president Donald Trump on Monday lashed out at two of the country's leading figures in the coronavirus battle after they criticized his handling of the pandemic.

In an angry statement, Trump described Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx as "two self-promoters trying to reinvent history to cover for their bad instincts and faulty recommendations, which I fortu-

Three women polio workers shot dead in Afghanistan

JALALABAD: Gunmen killed three Afghan women involved in a nationwide polio immunization program yesterday officials said, a day after authorities launched a new drive against the crippling disease. The three women were killed in two separate attacks in the restive eastern city of Jalalabad, officials said.

"They were all on duty going from house to house to vaccinate children," supervisor Wahidullah, who like many Afghans uses only one name, told AFP. An official at the Nangarhar governor's office confirmed the incidents. A relative of one of the victims told AFP his niece had joined the immunization program to earn some money for her family.

"Gunmen shot her dead this morning when she was on duty giving vaccines to children," said Haji Maqbool. A spokesman for the ministry of health said the vaccination drive had been temporarily suspended in Nangarhar. Polio has been eradicated across the world apart from Afghanistan and Pakistan, where distrust of vaccines is rife. Officials say the Taliban won't allow door-to-door campaigns in areas it controls. The Taliban and religious leaders often tell communities that vaccines are a Western conspiracy aimed at sterilizing Muslim children, and they also suspect immunization drives are used for spying on militant activities. The attack on the three polio workers comes amid a surge in violence across Afghanistan and despite peace talks launched between the Taliban and government last year. A wave of assassinations against high profile Afghans including journalists, activists and civil servants has particularly triggered fear across the country.

Officials have blamed the Taliban for much of the violence. The insurgent group denies it is targeting civilians. The Islamic State group also has a presence in the eastern province. —AFP

International

US border agents, traffickers and migrants mix on busy Rio Grande

Most migrants surrender in the hopes of being granted asylum in US

ROMA-LOS SAENZ, US: The sun has barely set when Mexican traffickers inflate their boat, load 15 migrants on board, yelling at the kids to stop crying, and then row in a frenzy across the Rio Grande, landing on US soil in just a few minutes.

The same scene has been playing out almost daily for two months, sometimes right through the night. In the first half hour of darkness on Sunday, four inflatable boats with about 50 undocumented immigrants from Honduras and Guatemala arrived in Roma, Texas, almost simultaneously.

US agents from the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) often converse and even exchange shouted jokes with smugglers on the Mexican side of the river, but do not try to stop them if they do not set foot on US soil. When the migrants arrive at times in the hundreds, and many of them minors traveling alone—there are sometimes no agents left on the river banks to process them.

The CBP agents will instead stop them half a mile away, at the end of a sandy trail that leads to this town of 11,000 in the Rio Grande Valley. Most migrants surrender voluntarily in the hopes of being granted asylum in the United States.

‘I have to support myself’

“Tell the agents not to hit my boat; we’re bringing children, the river is deep, we have already taken off their vests, they should pay attention!” shouts ‘Chuchi,’ a 25-year-old trafficker as he paddles over to the US side, where there are at least five other punctured inflatable boats already on the sand or in thick bushes. “Every day” there is a lot of work, ‘Chuchi’ tells AFP from his boat. “We have kids, just like you” and the work pays well, he says.

“It’s better to work here than get involved in crime, isn’t it?” says his partner, another “pollero” as human traffickers are known in Mexico. When reminded that trafficking people is also a crime, he shrugs. “I have to support myself,” he says. “I also have children; six US



Migrants from Ecuador, arriving illegally from Mexico to the US to seek asylum, disembark from an inflatable boat after crossing the Rio Grande river before turning themselves over to border patrol agents at the border city of Roma on Monday.—AFP

citizen children,” he adds. He does not give his name, and says he is afraid of getting caught. A life vest has got caught in the reeds a few feet from the US riverbank, and he does not dare get off the boat to retrieve it. “I can get off for it, but where is the ‘migra?’” he asks fearfully, using the Mexican phrase for the border agents. The “polleros” generally work in conjunction with drug cartels and in Miguel Aleman, the dangerous Mexican town facing Roma, the Gulf and Northeast cartels are active, according to Ivan Garza Junior, Roma’s police chief. The cartels often clash and bursts of automatic rifles can be heard on the US side of the border. The trafficker on the river says he works “for someone”, but does not specify who.

Nearly 100,000 undocumented immigrants, mostly from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, were

detained by CBP in February, a level not seen since the arrival of large caravans in 2019. Most were deported, said the administration of President Joe Biden, but in contrast to the policy of Biden’s predecessor Donald Trump, minors who travel alone and many families are not being expelled.

At dusk on Saturday evening, a CBP agent yelled a warning across the river to a smuggler not to cross with his migrants at that spot, because he would be stopped by the Texas state police. “So where do you want them?” the shirtless “pollero” shouted back, in a moment of ironic banter.

The CBP agent responded in kind, showing where they could land. “I’m not that keen,” replied the trafficker across the river, and lit a cigarette. “Do you want to smoke marijuana?” he shouted back.—AFP

Biden ramps up vaccinations but warns ‘war against COVID far from won’

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden’s administration announced a raft of new actions to expand the national immunization campaign and ensure that 90 percent of adults will be eligible for vaccination against the coronavirus by April 19. But he warned the “the war against COVID-19 is far from won,” and blasted people responsible for “reckless behavior we’ve seen on television over the past few weeks” that had left the world’s worst-hit country on the brink of a fresh surge. The new vaccination measures include increasing the number of pharmacies participating in a federal immunization program from 17,000 to nearly 40,000, while creating a dozen more mass vaccination sites within three weeks. It also includes \$100 million in funding to help vaccinate vulnerable and at-risk older adults and people with disabilities.

The overall goal is to ensure 90 percent of adults will have a vaccination site within five miles of where they live. The moves came after Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), highlighted worrying trends in the data that signaled the United States could soon follow Europe into another wave.

The rate of infection in the United States had been plateauing for several weeks, but is now once more on the rise, with the most recent data showing the seven-day average at close to 60,000 new daily cases. That

represents an increase of 10 percent over the prior seven-day period, while hospitalizations are up to 4,800 per day from 4,600 comparing the same timeframes. Deaths have risen three percent to around 1,000 per day.

‘Impending doom’

“I’m going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom,” Walensky, a former frontline physician who treated COVID patients earlier on in the pandemic, said in an emotional plea.

“We have so much to look forward to, so much promise and potential of where we are, and so much reason for hope. But right now, I’m scared.” Biden meanwhile called on states that have loosened mask mandates and restrictions on businesses to reverse their orders. “Please, this is not politics. Reinstate the mandate if you let it down,” he said, adding it was every American’s “patriotic duty” to wear a mask. Six states have so far lifted mask mandates and several more plan to do so in the first half of April. American health workers have now administered 143 million shots, and 16 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, including half of over-65s. The number of doses injected into arms accounts for some 26 percent of the world’s total, despite the fact the country is only four percent of the global population.



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden (right) and First Lady Dr Jill Biden use paper to trace the name of veteran Dennis F. Shine as they visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for National Vietnam War Veterans Day on Monday.—AFP

coming people back into theatres and museums. The rest of Germany is closely watching the Tuebingen model, and a string of cities and towns are planning similar experiments.

Not without controversy

The central city of Weimar has already opened shops and museums to those carrying a negative test. The small state of Saarland is going even further and wants to end its shutdown on April 6, using a combination of rapid antigen tests and hygiene precautions to open up cinemas, gyms and outdoor restaurants. But the trend is not without controversy at a time when scientists are warning that new, more contagious virus variants could see Germany’s caseload explode in the coming weeks.

Among the loudest critics is Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in a rare live television interview on Sunday urged regional leaders to stick to agreed COVID curbs. “I don’t know that testing and shopping is the right response to what is happening right now,” the veteran leader said, noting that even in Tuebingen the rate of infection was climbing despite the thousands of tests. Merkel and the premiers of Germany’s 16 federal states agreed in early March to pull the “emergency brake” and impose renewed restrictions if a region hit more than 100 new infections per 100,000 people over a seven-day period—as in currently the case across most of the country.—AFP

Brazil’s Bolsonaro overhauls cabinet amid COVID surge

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro overhauled his government Monday, changing six cabinet members including the foreign, defense and justice ministers, as the far-right leader faced mounting pressure over a deadly surge of COVID-19.

Bolsonaro, who comes up for re-election in October 2022, has drawn backlash with his handling of the pandemic in hard-hit Brazil, where the average daily death toll has nearly quadrupled since the start of the year to more than 2,600, pushing hospitals to breaking point. The shake-up comes the week after Bolsonaro replaced former health minister Eduardo Pazuello, an army general with no medical experience, with cardiologist Marcelo Queiroga, his fourth health minister of the pandemic.

While speculation had been swirling that Bolsonaro was about to fire foreign minister Ernesto Araujo, who faced criticism for the government’s problems securing more COVID-19 vaccines, many of the other changes

News in brief

Buhari to visit UK for ‘check-up’

ABUJA: Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, 78, was leaving for London yesterday for a “routine medical check-up” his spokesman said, following concerns about his health. Buhari visited London several times for check-ups between May 2016, when he was first elected, and 2017 for an undisclosed ailment. The former general simply said he had “never been so ill” and that he had received several blood transfusions. Buhari’s spokesman said the president would meet “with security chiefs first in the morning” yesterday before leaving for Britain.—AFP

Turkmen leader wins crucial seat

ASHGABAT: Turkmenistan’s autocratic president Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov received a seat in the secretive country’s new upper house, state media reported yesterday, in the latest move hinting at a succession strategy. Turkmenistan on Sunday held its first elections to a newly created senate but there were no opposition candidates. The president was elected to a seat along with 47 other candidates, said the Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper. The candidates were elected by local councils and the newspaper did not say which council had elected 63-year-old Berdimukhamedov. An official cited in a separate publication said the head of state had received 100 percent of the vote.—AFP

Mexico vows justice for Salvadoran

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday condemned the killing of a Salvadoran woman at the hands of police and vowed “no impunity” for those responsible. Victoria Esperanza Salazar “was subdued by four individuals,” Lopez Obrador said of Saturday’s incident in the Caribbean beach resort of Tulum. “She was brutally treated and murdered. It fills us with sorrow, pain and shame,” he added, speaking at the inauguration of a virtual international forum on gender equality. “All those responsible are going to be punished. They are already in the process of being prosecuted and there will be no impunity,” Lopez Obrador said.—AFP

S Africa’s party issues graft warning

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa’s embattled ruling party on Monday issued a stern warning to members facing graft or other criminal charges after an acrimonious weekend meeting. African National Congress (ANC) party talks reportedly spiraled into chaos over moves to speedily oust corruption-tainted members—some of whom are openly backed by a faction that opposes President Cyril Ramaphosa. The monthly meeting of the party’s decision-making body went into an extra day with politicians loyal to the ANC’s graft-accused secretary general, Ace Magashule, objecting to a seven-day deadline for him to resign, local media reports said.—AFP

Search on for 11 trapped in Colombia

BOGOTA: Rescuers were working against the clock to rescue 11 people trapped in a flooded illegal goldmine since last week, Colombian authorities said Monday. The group has been trapped since last Friday in a 17-meter (55-foot) deep shaft flooded in a heavy downpour. According to the National Mining Agency (ANM), rescuers were using electric pumps to remove water from the mine. “Eleven people are still missing,” Luis Velasquez, governor of the northwestern Caldas department, told reporters. “We hope that in less than 48 hours” they will have been rescued.—AFP

came as a surprise. The president named army General Luiz Eduardo Ramos as his new chief of staff, career diplomat Carlos Franca as his new foreign minister, General Walter Souza Braga Netto—the outgoing chief of staff—as defense minister, and police commander Anderson Torres as justice minister. He also appointed a new attorney general, outgoing justice minister Andre Mendonca, and government secretary, Congresswoman Flavia Arruda—the third woman in his 22-member cabinet.

‘Administration in crisis’

Two of the former cabinet members—defense minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva and foreign minister Araujo—had been in their posts since Bolsonaro took office in January 2019. Azevedo e Silva’s exit was unexpected, and speculation swirled over the reason.

Bolsonaro has been on a purge, amid growing dissatisfaction—including from allies in the business sector—over his handling of a pandemic that has now claimed more than 312,000 lives in Brazil, the second-highest death toll worldwide, after the United States. “The government is extremely fragile, as demonstrated by the instability at the top,” said professor Mauricio Santoro of Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ). “It’s safe to say there is a crisis in the administration, beyond one or two ministries.”—AFP



ISTANBUL: Turkish mathematician Tuna Altinel poses during an interview.—AFP

Stranded in Turkey, professor seeks return to France

ISTANBUL: Acquitted of terror charges after a stint in jail, a Turkish professor of a French university remains stranded in Istanbul, stripped of his passport and subjected to an opaque probe. Tuna Altinel’s colleagues view the 55-year-old as another victim of a crackdown against academia and Kurdish causes that gathered force after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan survived a coup bid in 2016. The professor of mathematical logic and set theory at Lyon’s Claude Bernard University agrees.

“I am a hostage of the Turkish state,” Altinel told AFP at his Istanbul home. Gangly, bespectacled and occasionally sporting a shy grin, the professor’s plight gained added attention as a diplomatic feud played out in the past year between Paris and Ankara. Altinel’s personal nightmare began in May 2019, shortly after he arrived for a holiday in Turkey. Instead of returning well-rested to Lyon, the French city where he has taught and lived for 25 years, Altinel discovered that he was suspected of “membership in a terrorist organization”. He was detained and tried for disseminating “terrorist propaganda” while acting as an interpreter at a pro-Kurdish meeting in France earlier that year. Released in July 2019 and acquitted in January 2020, Altinel has since learned that he is the subject of a new Turkish investigation of which he knows little about. That probe appears to have served as justification for the government’s refusal to return his travel documents.—AFP

German city reopens despite COVID surge

TUBINGEN, Germany: Germany may be battling a third wave of the pandemic but life feels almost normal in the city of Tuebingen, where anyone with a negative COVID test can enjoy a day of shopping, culture or outdoor dining. As debate rages nationwide about whether tougher measures are needed to slow surging infections, the historic university city near Stuttgart has chosen a different tack by offering free coronavirus testing centers that hand out “day passes” to those whose results come back negative. The passes then allow access to what is currently one of Germany’s most vibrant city centers.

“Customers’ eyes light up when they come in, it’s finally a bit of normality again,” said Sandra Pauli, who was allowed to reopen her home decor shop some two weeks ago. “Everyone is very happy.”

The usual rules on mask wearing and physical distancing still apply, said Pauli, who believes the rapid testing scheme “is the only way to live with the coronavirus” while keeping high street stores afloat and wel-

International

China approves radical overhaul of Hong Kong's political system

Committee to vet anyone hoping to enter HK politics for patriotism

BEIJING: Chinese leaders endorsed a sweeping overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system yesterday, creating powers to vet anyone standing for public office and slashing the number of directly elected politicians. The new measures, which bypassed Hong Kong's legislature and were imposed directly by Beijing, are the latest move aimed at quashing the city's democracy movement after huge protests.

President Xi Jinping signed the new law after it was unanimously approved by China's top decision-making body. One of the most dramatic changes is the introduction of a committee that will vet anyone hoping to enter Hong Kong politics for their patriotism.

The body will include background checks by Hong Kong's new national security apparatus and its decisions cannot be legally challenged. "The National Security Committee and the National Security Police will provide reports on every single candidate to assist the vetting by the qualification review committee," Tam Yiu-chung, Hong Kong's sole delegate on China's rubber-stamp parliament, told AFP.

When Hong Kongers are allowed to vote in limited local elections, they tend to do so overwhelmingly for pro-democracy candidates, something that has rattled authoritarian Beijing. Under the new measures, Hong Kong's legislature will be expanded from 70 to 90 seats. But only 20 of those seats will now be directly elected, down from 35. That brings direct representation down from half to less than a quarter of seats.

The majority — 40 seats — will be chosen by a reliable pro-Beijing committee. The remaining 30 will be chosen by "functional constituencies" — bodies representing certain industries and special interest groups that have also been historically loyal to Beijing. The measures were welcomed by Hong Kong's pro-Beijing government, which will no longer have to face a noisy and disruptive pro-democracy opposition in the legislature.

"The excessive politicization in society and the internal rift that has torn Hong Kong apart can be effectively mitigated," said chief executive Carrie Lam. The next legislative elections under the new system would be held in December, she added. "Hong Kong's institutions of political power and governance must always be firmly in the hands of those who love the motherland and Hong Kong," added the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, which formulates Beijing's policies for the financial hub.

'Degrading'

Opposition figures and some analysts took a less rosy view, describing the new measures as a clear move to ensure any remaining opposition to Beijing's rule is stamped out. "This whole new system is really degrading and very oppressive," Emily Lau, a former pro-democracy lawmaker said.

Lau questioned whether Hong Kongers would want to take part in future elections and warned that



HONG KONG: (Left to right) Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Permanent Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Roy Tang pose before a press conference at the government headquarters yesterday. —AFP

political unrest could explode again. "If you have so many people who are very unhappy inside, all you need is a little trigger and that would spark a lot of people," she added. Chong Ja Ian, an associate professor on politics from the National University of Singapore, said the new measures "seem to run

against the spirit of having, free, fair and competitive elections, limiting popular participation in the political process". "Certainly, giving a police force the power to oversee who can stand for elections is not seen in systems usually deemed democratic in a meaningful sense," he said. — AFP

Myanmar crackdown death toll passes 500

YANGON: The death toll in the Myanmar military's crackdown on protesters has passed 500, as armed rebel groups yesterday threatened the junta with retaliation if the bloodshed does not stop. World powers have ramped up their condemnation of the military's campaign against the anti-coup movement that is demanding the restoration of the elected government and the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Washington suspended a trade pact with Myanmar and UN chief Antonio Guterres called for a united global front to pressure the junta after more than 100 protesters were killed in a bloody weekend. Adding to that pressure campaign, a trio of ethnic rebel groups yesterday condemned the crackdown and threatened to fight alongside protesters unless the military reined in its violence.

Daily rallies across Myanmar by unarmed demonstrators have been met with tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said it had confirmed a total of 510 civilian deaths but warned the true toll was probably significantly higher. Yesterday, protesters in Yangon emptied rubbish bags in the streets as part of the latest action, while in the town of Muse in Shan state a 35-year-old protester was shot dead.

Rebel warning

Three of the country's myriad armed ethnic insurgent groups — the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army and the Arakan Army (AA) — issued



A relative cries during the funeral of a protester, who died amid a crackdown by security forces on demonstrations against the military coup, in Taunggyi in Myanmar's Shan state on Monday. — AFP

a joint statement threatening retaliation. "If they do not stop, and continue to kill the people, we will cooperate with the protesters and fight back," the statement said. If such groups take up arms, Debbie Stothard at the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) warned that the situation could degenerate into civil war.

Two dozen ethnic minority rebellions have flared in Myanmar since independence from British colonial rule in 1948, fighting over autonomy, ethnic identity, drugs and natural resources. The military has sought to cut deals with some armed groups and earlier this month took the AA off the list of terrorist organizations.

logue between Pyongyang and Washington were "undesirable", he said.

His speech prompted denunciation from Pyongyang, with Kim Yo Jong, a key adviser to her brother, calling it the "height of effrontery". She had been "struck speechless", she said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency, referring to Moon only as the South's "chief executive" and not by his name or title. Calling him "a parrot raised by America", she said he was employing "the gangster-like logic of the US".

It is a far cry from the diplomacy of 2018, when Moon visited Pyongyang and gave a speech to a vast crowd in the May Day Stadium, where at one point an image of him and Kim Jong Un was displayed across a grandstand. The Biden administration is in the final stages of a review on policy towards the North, and the new US president has repeatedly said he will look to rebuild the alliances with partners such as South Korea that suffered under his predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden has warned the North that "there will be responses if they choose to escalate" testing.

He left the door open for further diplomacy, but the White House said Monday a summit between

But over the weekend it launched airstrikes in eastern Karen state — the first such strikes in 20 years — targeting the Fifth Brigade of the Karen National Union (KNU) after the group seized a military base. An estimated 3,000 people fled through the jungle to seek safety across the border in Thailand, according to local groups. Hsa Moo, a Karen human rights activist, told AFP that the Thai authorities had pushed the people back and accused them of blocking UN refugee officials from the area. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha insisted that there was "no influx" of refugees and that the kingdom's authorities had not "scared them off with guns or sticks". — AFP



In this file photo, Kim Yo Jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister, listens to South Korean President Moon Jae-in (right) during a performance of North Korea's Samjiyon Orchestra at National Theater in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP

him and Kim was "not his intention". European members of the UN Security Council have asked for a meeting to discuss the launch. — AFP

was from COVID-19.

His deputy Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as the country's first female president, and led the ceremonies bidding him farewell. A state funeral held in the capital Dodoma, the day after the stampede, was attended by African leaders from across the continent. Magufuli was hailed for his fight against corruption and massive infrastructure projects, but was criticized for the stifling of democracy and crackdowns on the media, civil society and the opposition. His legacy is also marred by his COVID denialism, which saw Tanzania refuse to issue data or take any measures to curb the spread of the virus. Hassan has vowed to "start where Magufuli ended" and all eyes are on potential changes to the country's policies and openness regarding COVID-19. Yesterday she nominated Finance Minister Philip Mpango as her deputy, which needs to be endorsed by parliament. Mpango last month appeared in a video coughing and gasping at a press conference outside a hospital to dispel rumors he had died of COVID-19. — AFP

North Korean leader's sister slams South's Moon as US 'parrot'

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's influential sister slammed the South's president yesterday as "a parrot raised by America" after he criticized a missile test by Pyongyang. The nuclear-armed North has a long history of using weapons tests to ramp up tensions, and last week carried out its first substantive provocation since US President Joe Biden's inauguration.

The US and Japan said the weapons fired were ballistic missiles banned under a UN Security Council resolution while Pyongyang insisted they were tactical guided weapons. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who has long backed engagement with Pyongyang, made a carefully measured speech on Friday — when the South marked three deadly attacks by the North since 1999 — that did not specifically refer to the missile test. Actions that stand in the way of resuming dia-

Tanzanian police say 45 died in stampede at Magufuli tribute

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: Tanzanian police announced yesterday that 45 people had died during a stampede in Dar es Salaam on March 21 as mourners paid their last respects to the late president John Magufuli. The crush took place when thousands of grieving citizens tried to push their way into a stadium in the city to bid farewell to their leader, whose sudden death after a mysterious absence was announced on March 17.

"There were a lot of people who wanted to get in the stadium, and some were not patient. They tried to force their way in and that resulted in a stampede. Forty-five died in the accident," Dar es Salaam regional police commander Lazaro

Mambosasa said. Five of the deceased were from the same family, Mambosasa said. A woman and four children were earlier reported crushed in the accident at Uhuru Stadium, though the true toll of the stampede was not announced at the time.

Mambosasa said several dozen were also injured in the crush but most had been released from hospital. Magufuli's body was transported to the major cities of Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Zanzibar, Mwanza and Geita, before being finally laid to rest in his ancestral village of Chato, in the country's north-west, on March 26. Tens of thousands came out to pay their respects, lining roads, weeping and running alongside the casket as a military motorcade moved through the cities.

The stampede took place on the second day of tributes at Uhuru Stadium in Dar es Salaam, when the public was allowed in to pay their respects. Magufuli died aged 61 from what authorities say was a heart condition, after a mysterious absence of almost three weeks, and questions remain over the true cause of his death which the opposition says

News in brief

Italy plans quarantine on EU arrivals

ROME: Italy will impose a five-day quarantine on travellers arriving from other EU countries, both residents and foreigners, a source in the health ministry said yesterday. Health Minister Roberto Speranza will approve a new rule later in the day, the source said, although it was not immediately clear when it would come into effect nor how long it would last. Much of Italy remains under tight coronavirus restrictions as it battles a deadly third wave of infections, with the whole country facing a lockdown over the three-day Easter weekend starting on Saturday. — AFP

Cuba begins testing new vaccine

HAVANA: Cuba began vaccinating tens of thousands of health care workers with a second COVID-19 vaccine on Monday, even though it has yet to complete clinical trials. Last week, Cuba started vaccinating 150,000 health care workers with its Soberana 2 vaccine that is still in the third phase of clinical trials. And on Monday, the island nation started giving its Abdala vaccine to 124,000 health care workers. Abdala is likewise still in phase 3 of COVID vaccine trials. Cuba is also working on two other vaccines—Mambisa and Soberana 1 — that are respectively still in phase 1 and phase 2. — AFP

Syrian refugees caught in Greece

ATHENS: For the third time in three years, Syrian refugees have tried to flee from Greece by impersonating a sports team, Athens airport police said Monday. Late Sunday, nine Syrians dressed as members of a volleyball team with fake travel documents tried to board a flight to Vienna but were stopped by police. Last year 12 other Syrians disguised as handball players with fake Bulgarian passports were arrested trying to board another flight to Vienna. — AFP

Vietnam flight attendant sentenced

HANOI: A Vietnam Airlines flight attendant was handed a two-year suspended jail term for spreading the coronavirus, Vietnamese state media said yesterday. Duong Tan Hau broke his two-week home quarantine requirement and met 46 people after working on a repatriation flight from Japan in November, the country's official government website said. The 29-year-old was convicted of "spreading dangerously infectious diseases" in a court in southern Ho Chi Minh City yesterday, according to the metropolis' official mouthpiece, Phap Luat Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh. The communist nation has used extensive contact tracing and mandatory mass quarantines to keep virus numbers low. — AFP

Vote-buying risk in Bulgaria

SOFIA: The coronavirus pandemic could affect the outcome of Bulgaria's upcoming election as vote-buying—already widespread in the country—will have more impact, a report by an anti-corruption organization has warned. Between five and 19 percent of the ballots cast in Bulgarian elections since 2013 have been influenced by vote-buying or other voter intimidation practices, the Anti-Corruption Fund non-governmental organisation said late Monday. It said there was a greater risk these practices could affect the overall result in Sunday's general election in the EU country as "the bought or controlled voters will be less sensitive to pandemic risks" and more motivated to cast their ballots. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2021

Zain publishes annual sustainability report titled 'The Ten-Year Journey'

Group launches new five-year corporate sustainability strategy

KUWAIT: Zain Group, the leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the publication of its consecutive 10th annual sustainability report, entitled 'The Ten-Year Journey', which charts the sustainability agenda the company has undertaken in this area across its footprint over the last decade.

During this decade, Zain has evolved its operations by becoming a digital lifestyle service provider, establishing value-driven and purposeful activities, building resilience, adapting to market changes, addressing societal deficits, and establishing purpose driven activities centered on Meaningful Connectivity.

7,500 Zainers, we are extremely proud of the programs and initiatives we have implemented, and all the lives we have impacted for the better. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought the meaning of that mission sharply into focus and offers a profound reminder that beyond our commercial activities and providing essential connectivity, vitally important as they are, there are lives at stake, requiring all our best efforts to protect and save."

Al-Kharafi continued, "I extend my thanks to all the sustainability teams across our operations for working so tirelessly over the years in establishing Zain as the regional leader in this important

- Bader Al-Kharafi: Over 7,500 Zainers driving programs with a mission to leave the world a better place than we found it and leave no one behind
- * First Sustainability Report in the region using two reporting frameworks - GRI Standards Framework and SASB (Sustainability Accounting Standard Board) Framework
- * Corporate Sustainability Strategy (2020-2025) aims to establish purpose driven activities centered on Meaningful Connectivity leading to equitable systemic change

The 10th edition showcases how Zain continued to improve and adapt its activities to align to international best practices and report on its activities following the GRI Standards Framework. Moreover, for first time Zain also adopted the Sustainability Accounting Standard Board framework (SASB) for Telecommunications Services. Both standards were externally assured by Ernst & Young (AI-Aiban, Al-Osaimi and Partners) providing limited assurance.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and further pronounced the huge societal discrepancies exposed in many areas of life across the globe. Zain's latest report demonstrates the company's firm commitment to creating positive, long-lasting systemic change to better address the socio-economic and environmental impacts across its operating markets and to facilitate socio-economic growth. This is achieved by building relationships based on transparency and trust with all stakeholders, setting meaningful goals, and placing sustainability at the core of Zain's business activities. The company's earlier development of digitalization and sustainability programs placed it in a good position to react quickly to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with operations in each market playing pivotal roles in support of their local communities.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "Publishing our 10th sustainability report is a significant achievement, and along with over

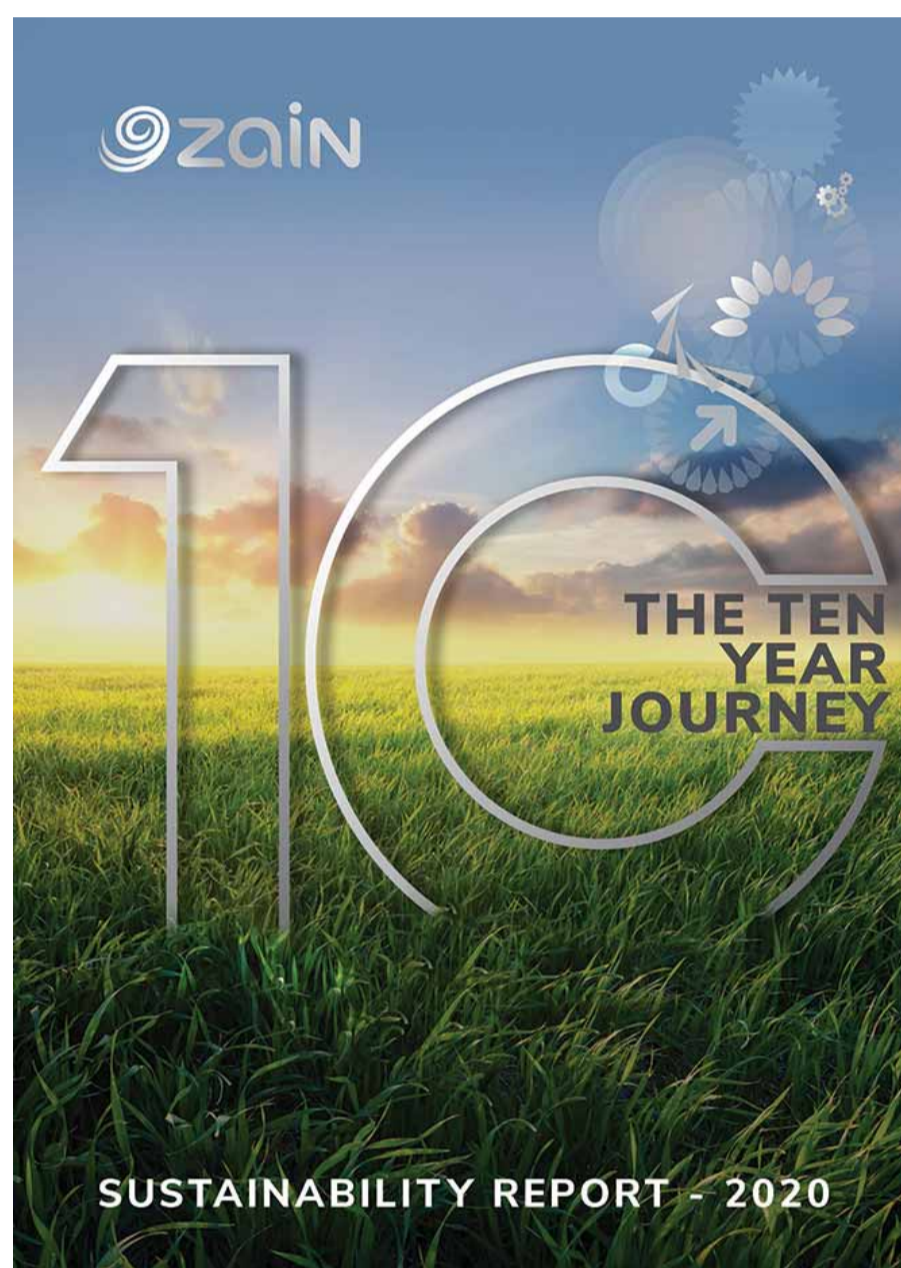
area. We have a mission to work to leave the world a better place than we found it and leave no one behind."

A new five-year corporate sustainability strategy (2020-2025)

Zain's newly-established corporate sustainability strategy is centered on four pillars which are: Climate Change, Social Business, Inclusion and Generation Youth. The strategy was created by assessing the materiality of sustainability-related topics on the business and the value it creates for society. By balancing financial returns and social values, this strategic approach aims to establish purpose driven activities centered on Meaningful Connectivity. Qualitative and quantitative targets have been embedded to ensure measurable metrics are set to assess and track the progress of Zain's sustainability-related activities.

Examples the some of Zain's 2020-2025 targets include

- Empower 16 million children and youth across Zain's footprint
 - Foster women in STEM-related fields
 - Supporting people with disabilities and increase access
 - Equip 943,000 children with digital literacy skills
 - Reach 891,000 unemployed youth
 - Target 70% of Group Suppliers and 50% of local suppliers to complete Zain's social and environmental related self-assessment questionnaire
- During 2020, Zain Group's Chief



Sustainability Officer Jennifer Suleiman set the foundation in establishing the company's new 2020-2025 Corporate Sustainability strategy. She elaborated, "This five-year strategy is based on providing access to Meaningful Connectivity to all the communities Zain serves, that ultimately leads to equitable systemic change grounded on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, ultimately creating room for development and growth."

Suleiman added, "2020 was a significant year for sustainability at Zain, but we made it even more through the COVID-19 initiatives we introduced during the course of the year. Notably, our 'B' scoring from the Carbon Disclosure Project, (the highest among all regional telcos) highlighted our leadership in addressing climate change in the industry. We continue to closely monitor the impacts of our activities on climate change and set

goals to reduce negative impacts over time. In the years ahead, we shall continue being a force for good and look forward to being an even greater champion of the issues that affect our communities the most."

Supporting the new five-year corporate sustainability strategy, in partnership with the GSMA's Mobile for Development Assistive Technologies team, Zain held two-day workshop where 70 employees from its operations were further trained on how to better create more inclusive products and services. Furthermore, to raise awareness and better educate individuals on the importance of child online safety, Zain launched a social media campaign and an internal announcement promoting tools and resources that offer tips and advice on how they can keep their children safe online. This campaign was also extended internally to over 7,500 employees across Zain's operations.

Some highlights from Zain's 2020 sustainability initiatives

To counteract the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Zain formulated a Group Crisis Response Committee led by executive management to ensure all country operations implemented appropriate measures to rapidly respond to the evolving situation. Each Zain operation created a similar committee, which then identified a unified strategy that guided the company in navigating its response to the pandemic.

Some examples of COVID-19 actions from each Zain operation

- In Kuwait, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Central Agency for Information Technology, Zain launched the Shlonik app, utilizing the latest tech solutions to monitor the compliance for all residents who recently returned to Kuwait with self-quarantine directives.
- In Saudi Arabia, Zain zero-rated all the websites of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Information, as well as official educational platforms, to enable customers to access important information and services free-of-charge. This service was applicable to all Zain customers across the Kingdom. Around 6.5 million students have subscribed to the service.
- In Bahrain, Zain provided an educational package to students for free access to all educational platforms used to complete schoolwork online.
- Zain Iraq donated 750 million Iraqi dinars (\$630,000) in support of the health care sector
- Zain Jordan offered 6,000 free lines with 200 free calling minutes and 20GB data to people returning to the Kingdom and were subject to precautionary quarantine.
- Zain Sudan provided 50,000 liters of sanitizer to hospitals across the country and public places
- Under Zain South Sudan's e-health portal, the company developed a management system that provided customers with information on COVID-19 from credible sources such as WHO, local government entities, and international medical agencies.

Examples of other sustainability initiatives

- Zain's sustainability programs continue to adapt to address the challenges resulted from the pandemic, in which the company conducted the follow activities: Further enhancing its digital financial services in Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia reaching an accumulative customer base of 312,665 active customers.
- Improving its supply chain process by updating its supplier code of conduct and increasing the completion rate of the supplier self-assessment questionnaire to reach 156 suppliers across all operations in 2020.
 - 100 female employees were certified in data science and 42 participated in a data analytics competition under Zain's WE program.
 - The company continued to provide its Basma Line+ service in Jordan, which offers a mobile package developed for the deaf/hearing impaired community to 353 customers.
 - The Zain Kids application was provided in six of Zain's markets, and witnessed a 298% increase in the number of children subscribing to it because of the rise of online education and engagement in 2020.
 - In 2020, Zain took major steps in reducing its emissions by installing a total of 370 outdoor (base station/power) solutions, 54 smaller sized generators, and upgraded 266 sites to use more efficient DC power solutions across all markets.

More detailed information and highlights of Zain's 2020 sustainability initiatives and '10-year Journey' can be downloaded by visiting <https://zain.com/en/sustainability/sustainability-report/>.



Zain HQ building

Business

OPEC+ to meet tomorrow to navigate crude price volatility

Based on 'Saudi prudence', producers adopt a cautious policy

LONDON: The OPEC+ grouping of oil producers will hold its third ministerial summit of the year via videoconference tomorrow to discuss output cuts in the face of fresh price volatility. "The expectation is that the group will hold production steady also in May given current physical oil market weakness," according to Bjarne Schieldrop, analyst at SEB.

However, he added that "Russia and Kazakhstan are likely to lift production yet another notch and the group in total is probably fine with that." The OPEC cartel's largest producer is Saudi Arabia but the OPEC+ grouping also includes Russia, which produces even more crude oil.

Under its current agreement the OPEC+ group is enforcing a drastic output cut, meaning seven million barrels that could be shipped to markets every day are being left in the ground. The aim has been to avoid oversupplying a market suffering from a collapse in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic. Without the production cuts, limited storage capacity could be saturated and the danger of a fall in prices—currently hovering around \$60 per barrel—is real.

Indeed, the two benchmark contracts, American WTI and Europe's Brent, have undergone a drastic price correction in recent weeks and have been subjected to fresh price instability over the last few days, a sign of serious market tension.

Vaccine 'chaos'

At the beginning of the year the arrival of effective



Despite different opinions on how to manage fallout from the crisis, OPEC+ has been able to unite around a very cautious policy of slow increase in capacity based on "Saudi prudence".

coronavirus vaccines had led to hopes that widespread lockdowns, and with them the collapse in demand that has been a nightmare for the cartel, might soon be over. But then came the third wave surge in Europe and the spread of the virus in key crude consumer markets such as India and Brazil.

"Oil demand trends are not only pressured by renewed lockdowns on the (European) continent but also chaos with its vaccination program," said Stephen Brennock, analyst at PVM.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) reflected this more downbeat outlook in forecasts contained in

its last report this month. It estimated that global demand could take another two years to get back to its pre-crisis levels.

Saudi 'prudence'

Despite different opinions on how to manage fallout from the crisis, OPEC+ has been able to unite around a very cautious policy of slow increase in capacity based on "prudence", a watchword of Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman. To help smaller producers, Saudi Arabia agreed to reduce its own output by an extra million barrels per day (bpd) in February, March and April. However this cut "was never going to last forever and traders are now getting increasingly worried that the kingdom will not hold on to it for much longer" says Louise Dickson of Rystad. As such Riyadh's moves at this week's meeting will be especially keenly watched.

Faced with a constantly shifting market, the OPEC+ states have agreed to an almost monthly rhythm of meetings to thrash out policy for the month to follow, rather than the twice-yearly meetings which were the norm before the pandemic. Once again the thorny subject of respect for production cut quotas will be hanging over the meeting, as well the issue of the three producers who have thus far been exempted from cuts—Venezuela, Libya and Iran. Today, the group will hold preliminary discussions in the form of its Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMCC), which is tasked with overseeing implementation of agreements. — AFP

Boeing seals large 737 MAX order as airlines eye recovery

NEW YORK: US carrier Southwest Airlines agreed to buy 100 additional Boeing 737 MAX planes, the companies announced Monday, in a vote of confidence for the aircraft after a 20-month grounding. The order, which includes options on another 155 new MAX planes, is the biggest for the model since regulators cleared it to resume service in late 2020 following two deadly crashes that sent Boeing into a crisis exacerbated by the industry downturn during the pandemic.

Southwest's order is worth \$12.5 billion at catalogue prices, which are almost never paid. The announcement means Boeing could build more than 600 new MAX jets for Southwest through 2031, Boeing said. "Southwest Airlines has long been a leader and bellwether for the airline industry and this order is a big vote of confidence for commercial air travel," said Stan Deal, president of Boeing's commercial division. "As vaccine distribution continues to pick up, people are returning to the skies and fueling hopes for a full recovery and renewed growth across our industry." Single-aisle planes like the MAX, which are ideally suited for relatively short trips, have been seen as early beneficiaries of a post-pandemic recovery in which leisure and domestic travel are seen as recovering well before international and business travel.

Staying 'all-Boeing'

Southwest said the order followed a multi-year evaluation of its flying needs, pointing to advantages

with the MAX that include a 14 percent improvement in fuel efficiency and quieter engines less disruptive to passengers. The announcement also illustrates the enduring quality of the domestic-oriented US carrier's relationship with Boeing despite a trying period during the MAX grounding.

During that lengthy strategy, Southwest Chief Executive Gary Kelly had at times criticized Boeing's handling of the MAX crisis, even hinting at times that Southwest could purchase planes from Airbus and drop its status as an all-Boeing carrier. But on Monday, Southwest said the agreement with Boeing was "cost-effective" in light of the "operational efficiencies of an all-Boeing 737 fleet," according to a press release. Southwest had been eyeing a possible Airbus A220 order, but introducing another plane would have added to maintenance and training costs.

"Today's commitment to the 737 MAX solidifies our continued appreciation for the aircraft and confirms our plan to offer the Boeing 737 series of aircraft to our employees and customers for years to come," Kelly said. Major airlines continue to burn through cash due to low travel volumes, but improvement is expected in 2021 compared with a disastrous 2020.

Southwest said it "remains cautious" on its outlook due to COVID-19 and has not finalized travel schedules beyond May. "The company will continue to plan for multiple fleet and capacity scenarios," Southwest said, adding that the MAX order gives it greater flexibility to manage "in a variety of economic environments."

Southwest said it expects delivery of 28 MAX aircraft in 2021, as well as 17 retirements of older planes. The Southwest announcement comes on the heels of earlier significant MAX orders from Ryanair, United Airlines and investment firm 777 Partners. Boeing continues to face litigation from families of victims who died in crashes on Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines flights, together claiming 346 lives. — AFP



In this file photo, a Boeing 737 Max 8 flown by Southwest Airlines sits at the gate at Baltimore Washington International Airport near Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP

US to invest heavily to boost offshore wind farms

WASHINGTON: The US government on Monday unveiled plans to bolster offshore wind farms with the goal of supplying energy to more than 10 million homes by 2030, as part of President Joe Biden's efforts to fight climate change. The objective of the initiative—which will be carried out by the departments of commerce, the interior, transport and energy—is to produce 30 gigawatts of wind power in the country by that date, the White House in a press conference.

Achieving the goal will require more than \$12 billion in investment per year along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and is expected to create tens of thousands of jobs, the administration said.

The move should cut 78 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions, the White House said. The government plans to designate an offshore wind development zone off the coasts of the New York and New Jersey. Lots will be offered for operation by the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022.

Only one offshore wind farm is currently fully operational in the United States: the Block Island Wind Farm, completed at the end of 2016 off the state of Rhode Island and capable of producing 30 megawatts. The Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) pilot project, with a capacity of 12 megawatts, saw its first phase completed in 2020. The final site is to be completed in 2026 and could supply energy to 600,000 households.

Other projects off Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and North Carolina are under development. The Biden administration plans to grant \$230 million to ports to modernize and support offshore wind projects more easily. It will also grant loans up to \$3 billion to companies in the sector. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will also share information with a specialized company, Orsted Wind Power North America, to plug any gaps in charting the oceans. The agency will also grant \$1 million for research into the coexistence between offshore wind projects and coastal communities, in particular fishermen.

The support for wind power is in stark contrast to former president Donald Trump, who repeatedly ridiculed the renewable energy source during his term, claiming it was expensive and inefficient. Since taking office, Biden has also initiated several environmental protection measures that break with his right-wing predecessor. — AFP

Product Review

A new listening experience with Huawei FreeBuds 4i

By Islam Al-Sharaha

KUWAIT: Huawei FreeBuds 4i is a pair of all-rounded earphones that are compatible with all Android smartphones. It has an elegant design and is lightweight compared to other brands and models. Several settings can be activated by the FreeBuds itself for easier use, while the battery can last for more than 10 hours on full charge depending on usage. Smart interaction, long battery life and noise cancellation are the top reasons to love the Huawei FreeBuds 4i, with a reasonable price to match!

Designed to deliver exceptionally stunning performance despite its compact design, the FreeBuds 4i wireless headset features multiple microphones on the handle that helps detect environmental noise and works with Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) algorithms to create inverted sound waves to cancel noise signals to achieve noise reduction effects.

The Freebuds 4i come in three fetching colors - white, black, and red - and are IP54 water resistant up to 1m. The compact case resembles a delightfully premium pebble. The overall build quality of the case and the earbuds is excellent. The case feels very robust, and the magnetic lid closes with a very sturdy, satisfying snap.

True Wireless Stereo (TWS) earphones have become an essential gadget for many around the globe, bringing users a convenient and comfortable experience with its innovative wireless form. Used for work or entertainment, TWS earphones allow users to free their hands and enjoy an immersive audio experience. Throughout the years, Huawei has accumulated experience and technology in the field of TWS earphones, and continues to improve user experience with innovations, bringing them a number of well-reputed audio products in the Huawei FreeBuds Series.

Huawei recently announced a new member to the Huawei FreeBuds Series, the Huawei FreeBuds 4i. To offer the convenience brought by technology to more users, Huawei FreeBuds 4i inherits the series' key features such as active noise cancellation, powerful battery life, and crystal audio quality, while also being trendy and simplistic design.

Inheriting Powerful Features

Huawei FreeBuds 4i inherits the top features of the Huawei FreeBuds Series and stands out among other earphones at the same class. For audio quality, Huawei FreeBuds 4i has a customized audible unit. Inside its compact body is a 10mm large dynamic driver that enables a wider range of amplitudes for stronger bass sounds. Moreover, Huawei's audio team has added tuning specifically for pop music, a genre loved by many. Whether it's guitars, drums, vocals, or pianos used in popular music, or powerful metal, rock, and folk songs that emphasize the expressiveness, Huawei FreeBuds 4i restores all the details, allowing users to fully enjoy the high-quality music.

In addition, Huawei FreeBuds 4i comes with powerful battery life, same as other Huawei wearables. It sports a large battery with a high energy density within its compact body. When ANC is turned off, Huawei FreeBuds 4i can offer 10 hours of continuous music playback or 6.5 hours of voice call on a full charge. Together with the charging case, it achieves up to 22 hours of music playback or 14 hours of voice call. Huawei FreeBuds 4i also supports quick charge features, providing 4 hours of audio enjoyment from just a 10-minute charge.

As a TWS earphones, its noise cancellation capability is also particularly important for work and life. Huawei FreeBuds 4i uses built-in acoustic components and algorithms to generate inverted soundwaves. This technology allows Huawei FreeBuds 4i to actively cancel out noise and achieve a more immersive audio experience for the user, whether in a quiet office, noisy café or on an airplane to offer a comfortable noise cancellation level.



More practically, Huawei FreeBuds 4i does not only support a variety of devices such as smartphones, PCs, tablets, smartwatches, etc. in Huawei's All-Scenario Seamless AI Life, but also support other brand's Android smart devices to stay connected, breaking the barriers between different systems.

Supports iOS and Android Devices for Quick Bluetooth Setup

Huawei FreeBuds 4i features Bluetooth 5.2, compatible with Android, iOS or Windows device for quick Bluetooth setup. When using the earphones for the first time, users only need to open the charging case cover, press and hold the button until the indicator light flashes white, turn on the Bluetooth of the smartphone or tablet, and select Huawei FreeBuds 4i from the list to complete the pairing.



Intuitive control experience is at the core of TWS earphones, which places higher requirements on the sensitivity of the sensors. Huawei FreeBuds 4i has built-in capacitive touch sensors on both sides of the earphones, which can determine the state by detecting the weak capacitance generated by the human body and the contact surface. It is currently recognized as a touch sensing solution with high reliability and relatively advanced technology. Huawei FreeBuds 4i can pause and play music or pick up and hang up phone calls by tapping twice on the left or right earphones. Also, holding down switches active noise cancellation on or off.

It is worth mentioning that the above interactions now support various devices from different operating system. Now Android, iOS or Windows users can enjoy an easy-to-use and efficient interactive experience. Other Android users can also download the Huawei AI Life app for more operations such as "Previous", "Next", providing more convenient features for all Android users.

For Huawei smartphones and tablets users, things are simpler. Huawei FreeBuds 4i supports proximity Bluetooth pairing. When the earphone is pairing with a new device, a pop-up window will be automatically displayed on the device's screen and the user can click to complete the pairing. There is no need to find the earphone in Bluetooth settings, saving time and effort. When using the same device for pairing in the future, users can quickly reconnect and see the battery status, so they can enjoy the wonderful world of music instantly.

Huawei FreeBuds 4i has undoubtedly improved the product line of Huawei Audio Family. With its excellent performance in smart interactions, noise cancellation, audio quality and battery life, it will help Huawei audio business continue to grow in the TWS earphones market and allow all smartphone brand users to enjoy the convenience and features brought by audio technology.

Business

KIB collaborates with Mazaya Clinic to support KRCS in fight against COVID

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to launch community-based initiatives that have a positive impact on the community, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced its collaboration with Mazaya Clinic to support Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) crisis response efforts by providing free PCR testing for individuals who may have potentially contracted COVID-19 but are unable to afford medical care. The initiative also highlights the bank's commitment to placing health and societal issues at the center of its priorities.

On this occasion, Chairman of Kuwait International Bank (KIB), Sheikh Mohammed Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, said: "We are pleased to collaborate with Mazaya Clinic in this unique initiative to encourage collective philanthropy and promote a more socially cohesive society. The initiative is also part of our concerted effort to support community members as well as vital sectors in the fight against the pandemic, primarily since strengthening the national health system calls for momentous support from private institutions at this point. That being said, KIB embarked on a benevolent initiative to support KRCS in its efforts to stand with those who cannot afford the costs of PCR tests and provide them with access to free PCR test and medical treatment."

Al-Jarrah further pointed out that KIB has spared no effort to support government alert and

response capacities since the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak in Kuwait and around the world, highlighting the key role the Bank has played in contributing towards curbing the spread in the country. He added: "Recognizing the ongoing need for support to help manage the COVID-19 response, KIB continues to support relevant entities and community initiatives that serve the public interest, which falls in line with the Bank's leading corporate social responsibility program and its strategy to protect Kuwait against the pandemic and preserve the health and safety of its people."

Commenting on the initiative, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, President of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), said: "We are proud of this collaboration between KIB and Mazaya Clinic to launch this initiative as it reinforces our core values and mission to help the country respond to the pandemic. To that end, we seek to support those in need at all times without exception, which is entirely dependent on material and moral support in order to meet the ever-increasing demands and treat patients in Kuwait, through providing PCR tests, medicines and medical supplies as needed."

Eng Ibrahim Al-Saqabi, Group CEO at Al-Mazaya Holding Company, said: "This collaboration between KIB and Mazaya Clinic backs our efforts in helping COVID-19 patients by making PCR tests available at the lowest possible cost while also



ensuring the reliability of rapid results." Al-Saqabi further lauded KIB's supportive approach towards COVID-19 patients and praised its contribution towards alleviating the increased pressure on the Clinic due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 and its overall impact on the national health system. Al-Saqabi added: "Our mission at Mazaya Clinic to roll out advanced health protocols, and collaborating with KIB seemed entirely appropriate to launch this

initiative to save lives and support patients who are unable to afford PCR tests or treatment."

It serves to note that KIB remains steadfast in its commitment to protecting the health and safety of community members and continues to support initiatives aimed at promoting social solidarity, which reflects the Bank's leading role in this area, in addition to its commitment to constantly placing social responsibility at the top of its priorities.

DHAMAN opens radiology dept, an advanced digital system

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced the opening of the Radiology Department in DHAMAN Hawalli Primary Healthcare Center (PHC), and the beginning of providing digital X-Ray services and Ultrasound examinations.



Dr Fatema Bendhafari

DHAMAN acting Corporate Director for Medical Services Dr Fatema Bendhafari said: The opening of the Radiology Department is an additional step in the context of DHAMAN completing its healthcare system and developing the medical and health services it provides to beneficiaries, as part of its plan for the first phase, which will be completed by the end of 2021 with the opening of two additional new primary healthcare centers in Fahaheel and Jahra. Bendhafari noted that the presence of the Radiology Department makes it easier for patients to conduct diagnostic radiological examinations along with the availability of family, pediatrics, dental and laboratory services, which results in acceleration of the diagnostic process and shortening the time as the attending physician can receive data and reports to determine the necessary treatment steps for the patient in record time and all these services are offered at competitive rates.

"The new Radiology Department has been equipped with the latest imaging technologies and general X-Ray services, in addition to Ultrasound services provided by qualified radiologists and technicians. This department aims to take the best possible images using the least amount of radiation to obtain a proper diagnosis for patients", said Bendhafari.

Moreover, Bendhafari explained that within the framework of digital transformation adopted by DHAMAN, digital radiology services are provided using a filmless radiology system, through the use of Picture Archiving Communication System, so images can be archived, retrieved or transmitted electronically through the web. All DHAMAN customers and other patients can benefit from the services of the Radiology Department and other departments with ease by contacting the customer service center.

Since its establishment in 2015, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) is the first Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare organization in the Middle East as it was founded based on an Amiri Directive as part of the national development Plan "New Kuwait 2035". DHAMAN handles establishing an integrated healthcare system that includes medical insurance programs, as well as building and operating a network of primary healthcare centers and hospitals that cover all areas in Kuwait while applying best professional practices to achieve sustainability in healthcare and investing in the infrastructure of the health sector based on highest international standards and recruiting over 7,000 highly qualified individuals in medical and administrative fields. The shareholder structure of DHAMAN consists of government bodies represented by Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) with 24 percent, a strategic partner from the private sector with 26 percent, and 50 percent of the Company's shares were allocated for Kuwaiti citizens through an initial public offering.

Deliveroo set for £7.6bn London IPO

LONDON: Britain's app-driven food delivery firm Deliveroo is set for London's largest stock market launch in a decade with a valuation of £7.6 billion, despite mounting criticism over its treatment of riders. Deliveroo's initial public offering due today will be priced at £3.90 per share, a source close to the matter said yesterday. That values the Amazon-backed group at the equivalent of 8.9 billion euros or \$10.5 billion. Eight-year-old Deliveroo remains on track for the City's biggest listing in 10 years thanks to COVID lockdowns boosting sales-and despite mounting concern over a business model that relies on low pay for riders.

The group "has very significant demand from institutions across the globe" for the offer, a Deliveroo spokesman told AFP separately yesterday. Yesterday's news comes one day after Deliveroo had said the IPO was eyed at a range between £7.6 billion and £7.85 billion. The group

has however been forced to trim its IPO valuation due to recent market volatility surrounding the tech sector-particularly in Europe and the United States. It had last week given an IPO market capitalization of up to £8.8 billion.

Protests and strikes

Last year, more than six million people ordered food and drink every month via the company's app from 115,000 cafes, restaurants and stores. British asset management firms Aviva Investors and Aberdeen Standard have decided against investing in Deliveroo's IPO, citing the job insecurity of its riders. Deliveroo maintains that its self-employed riders-which total around 100,000 across some 800 cities worldwide-value the flexibility the job affords, adding that on average its food couriers earn more than £10 per hour. The Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, which has taken Deliveroo to court to win bargaining rights for its riders, claims that some couriers in the north of England are earning £2 per hour, well below the UK minimum wage. Deliveroo has set aside £112 million to deal with the litigation and its possible consequences.

However, its business model has come under scrutiny, including in Britain, France and Spain, as



PARIS: In this file photo, co-founder and CEO of Deliveroo, William Shu, poses during the launch of first Kitchen Deliveroo Editions in France, in Saint-Ouen. —AFP

its freelance delivery riders complain about working conditions. The float has been overshadowed by protests, strikes and rallies in Australia, Britain and France-with more set to follow. Deliveroo's listing is meanwhile seen as a major boost to London's financial sector, known as the City, which lost its European share trading crown to Amsterdam following Brexit. — AFP



An aerial image shows the Amazon.com, Inc BHM1 fulfillment center on Monday in Bessemer, Alabama.

Voting ends on forming Amazon's first US union

BESSEMER, US: Voting concluded Monday on whether to create the first Amazon labor union in the United States, at a warehouse in Alabama, after a historic, five-month David versus Goliath battle.

Attention has now turned to ballot counting by federal officials following a contentious unionization campaign which has drawn national attention and the involvement of numerous political figures and activists. The lobbying continued to the bitter end with labor activists from around the United States meeting workers before dawn to congratulate them for their efforts.

The National Labor Relations Board, the federal agency which manages union elections, was set to begin the count yesterday. The final results could take several days or weeks, given that some ballots may be challenged based on errors in signature or other factors. "Today is the beginning of the less fun part for us" including the ballot counting and legal challenges, said Joshua Brewer, the local president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which would represent the 5,800 employees if a majority votes in favor.

"I think we're happy for the country that's really paying attention, and really (it is) just a continuation of what they were already looking at, which is a shrinking middle class or rising income inequality and so we're proud of that." The bruising months-long battle has sparked intense debate over workplace conditions at the tech and e-commerce behemoth, which has more than 800,000 US employees. Coming at a time when Joe Biden has promised

to be the country's "most pro-union president," the Bessemer effort could open the floodgates to organizing drives at other Amazon sites, as well as at other firms. Unions and political leaders have argued that Amazon employees face constant pressure and monitoring, with little job protection, highlighting the need for collective bargaining.

Amazon has argued that most of its workers don't want or need a union and that it already provides more than most other employers, with a minimum \$15 hourly wage and other benefits.

Workplace pressures

For five months, union organizers in Bessemer have been posted at the intersection outside the warehouse, making their case. "We need safe working conditions. We need to be treated with respect and equality," said Amazon employee Jennifer Bates. Sondra Hill, a 61-year-old part-time packer at Amazon, said she was hopeful about the vote. "If it doesn't work out, it doesn't stop here," she said. "I'm staying to see this happen, without this effort to unionize I would most likely leave, because people deserve better." Another employee, Lafonda Townsend, said she was initially happy with her pay; but that she is forced to eat fast on breaks "like a prisoner... because if you're one minute late, there's an hour unpaid time."

Amazon spokeswoman Heather Knox defended the company and claimed the union had misrepresented its practices. "Our employees know the truth-starting wages of \$15 (hourly) or more, health care from day one, and a safe and inclusive workplace," Knox said. "We encouraged all of our employees to vote and hope they did so." Both sides have traded accusations about tactics. Amazon acknowledged that it hosted information sessions to allow employees to "understand the facts of joining a union and the election process," including union dues. — AFP

Volvo gives all employees six-month paid parental leave

STOCKHOLM: Swedish automaker Volvo Cars said yesterday it would give its 40,000 employees worldwide the right to six-month paid parental leave in a bid to increase gender equality and attract talent. As of April 1, employees who have worked for the carmaker for at least one year will be entitled to the benefit at 80 percent of their salary.

Employees can take those weeks whenever they like during the first three years after the birth of their child. The policy is based on Sweden's national parental leave policy, one of the most generous in the world with 480 days to be shared by both parents at 80 percent of their salary up to a ceiling of around \$4,500 (3,800 euros) a month. "Most important is that we offer the same to both parents, and we want to encourage more men to take the opportunity to take their parental leave," Hanna Fager, head of Volvo Cars' human resources, said.

Other Swedish companies have previously introduced paid parental leaves for their worldwide employees, including music streaming company Spotify which in 2015 introduced a six-month parental leave with full pay. Ikea also announced similar programs in 2017 in India and the US. Volvo Cars, which said that around 75 percent of its employees were men, has been testing the policy in a pilot scheme since 2019 for sales staff in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, in which 46 percent of applicants were fathers. Fager said paid parental leave was rare in the automotive industry but also geographically.

"We have a lot of people in China and the US and this will be a big improvement compared to what is offered there today," Fager said. "Of course this will cost money but ... we see this as a long term investment," she said, adding the company expected "positive outcomes, that we attract more diverse talents, (and) that we also become a more attractive company."

Volvo said the initiative would include all legally registered parents, including adoptive, foster care and surrogate parents, as well as non-birth parents in same-sex couples. The group said it wanted to "create a culture that supports equal parenting for all genders." "When parents are supported to balance the demands of work and family, it helps to close the gender gap and allows everyone to excel in their careers," chief executive Hakan Samuelsson said in the statement. —AFP

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Lifestyle | Features

LIL NAS X 'SATAN SHOE' COLLAB TRIGGERS LAWSUIT FROM NIKE

It's been quite a few days for sneakers, Satan and the artist Lil Nas X. It started with a recently released music video that sees the 21-year-old of "Old Town Road" fame give the devil a lap dance, which resulted in the Grammy winner exchanging dissed with a sitting US governor who took issue with the seductive clip and began tweeting Bible verses at him. Then, the announcement that the rapper would collaborate with a Brooklyn company to make 666 pairs of "Satan Shoes"-black Nike Air Max 97s customized to feature a bronze pentagram, a Bible verse referring to Satan's fall and a drop of human blood mixed with red ink in the midsole-resulted Monday as many great American tales do: with a lawsuit.

Nike is suing MSCHF Product Studio, the eccentric company that linked up with Lil Nas X to create the shoe, for trademark infringement and dilution, saying in a statement to AFP that "the Satan Shoes were produced without Nike's approval or authorization, and Nike is in no way connected with this project." In federal court documents, Nike alleges that the release has prompted boycott calls against them from offended consumers, who erroneously associate the sneaker giant with the bloody soled-shoes due to their trademark swoosh symbol. The shoes



In this file photo US rapper Lil Nas X performs onstage during the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

sold out almost instantly after dropping Monday, going for \$1,018 a pair. The sale is a follow-up to MSCHF's "Jesus Shoes"-white Nike Air Max 97s, which contained holy water in the sole. Nike did not sue over that product line.

Devilish music video

Lil Nas X's collaboration on the shoes comes as he released his devilish music video for his new song "Montero (Call Me

By Your Name)"-a song whose title appears to refer to the novel and film "Call Me By Your Name," about a summer romance between two men. In the lusty clip, the rapper born Montero Lamar Hill celebrates his sexuality and queer-ness-the artist came out in 2019 — pole dancing in stilettos down to Hell to twerk on the Devil. The song, its accompanying video and the sneakers triggered pearl-clutching among many conservatives-

including the governor of the state of South Dakota.

"Our kids are being told that this kind of product is, not only okay, it's 'exclusive.' But do you know what's more exclusive? Their God-given eternal soul. We are in a fight for the soul of our nation. We need to fight hard. And we need to fight smart. We have to win," Kristi Noem tweeted Sunday. A meme king adept at Twitter trolling, Lil Nas X replied with a number of barbs mocking the outcry, along with a more to-the-point message: "ur a whole governor and u on here tweeting about some damn shoes. do ur job!"

He has continued to use the lawsuit to channel attention towards his song-though in a more earnest message, he wrote "I'll be honest all this backlash is putting an emotional toll on me. i try to cover it with humor but it's getting hard." "My anxiety is higher than ever," Lil Nas X wrote, before returning to brand. "And stream call me by your name on all platforms now!" — AFP



In this file photo Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei poses inside the Reichstag building in Berlin. — AFP

AI WEIWEI MOURNS HONG KONG FREEDOMS BUT 'PROUD' OF TIANANMEN PHOTO FURORE

When dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei secretly snapped a picture of himself showing a middle finger in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, he knew it was provocative. But he never thought that picture would be at the heart of rising censorship fears in Hong Kong 26 years later. The former British colony's reputation as a cultural gateway to China that is free of Communist Party interference and censorship has diminished over the past year as Beijing moved to silence the city's democracy movement.

Once a place where artists never had to fear a knock on the door from China's police, it is now a city where dissent is being expunged. Beijing's crackdown following huge and often violent democracy protests nearly two years ago has focused on protest leaders and the pro-democracy opposition. But it has started to bleed into the art world thanks to a sweeping new security law that criminalizes much dissent and an official campaign to ensure only "staunch patriots" run the city.

Watching from his home in Berlin, China's best known modern artist around the world says the arrival of mainland style censorship in Hong Kong is all but guaranteed. "Any sign of freedom of speech, any sign of free expression can be... declared unlawful or subversive to state power," Ai told AFP by phone. "That law was applied in mainland China but it is also being applied in Hong Kong, there's no question," the 63-year-old added.

'Fast changing world'

For Hong Kong's art community, all eyes are currently focused on the M+ Museum. A 60,000 square-meter venue set to open later this year, it boasts perhaps the finest collection of contemporary Chinese art in the world thanks in part to a massive donation by Swiss collector Uli Sigg. The museum's online catalogue lists 249 works by Ai Weiwei alone. It also has photographs by Liu Heung-shing of Beijing's deadly 1989 crackdown in Tiananmen, an event scrubbed by censors on the mainland.

But there are question marks over whether it can display its more provocative pieces given the precarious new legal and political atmosphere in Hong Kong. Pro-Beijing politicians there have already accused the museum of breaking the new security law and "spreading hatred against the country" with their collection, singling out Ai's Tiananmen picture. On Monday, a government official confirmed Ai's photo would not be displayed when the museum opens and he said he would welcome national security police to vet its collection for any possible breaches.

Ai described the curators behind M+ as "very professional" people with "creative integrity" who are dealing with "an extremely fast-changing world". But he said he now wonders whether any of his work will be displayed, including two large installations that are meant to be included in the opening. "Hong Kong's more liberal, more democratic society, is disappearing," he lamented.

'Proud'

Ai was once feted by Chinese authorities and helped design Beijing's Bird's Nest Olympic stadium. But he found himself on the receiving end of the state's wrath, especially when he criticized authorities over their handling of 2008 Sichuan earthquake, in which more than 87,000 people died. He was detained for 81 days in 2011 and eventually left for Germany four years later. The fact that his photo in Tiananmen Square is triggering Chinese authorities once more is something he welcomes. "I cannot refuse that feeling of being proud," he mused. Ai took the picture back in 1995 and it kicked off a series now known as "Study of Perspective".

Wherever Ai went in the world he would take a similar photograph with a middle finger extended, usually towards something politically powerful or culturally important. He has done it in more than 100 locations, including outside the White House, Germany's Reichstag and Russia's Kremlin. —AFP

James Blunt drives a taxi around the streets of Ibiza

The 47-year-old singer imported a tuk-tuk from Thailand to his home in Ibiza and people on the island keep mistaking him for a professional taxi driver. He shared: "It says taxi on it and people stop me and go, 'Hey mate, how much is it to Ibiza Town?' Then they go, 'Oh God, it's you!' 'Then they go, 'Oh no, man, what happened?' And I just go, 'It's five euros - let's go!'" James - who lives in Ibiza with his wife Sofia Wellesley and their two sons - thinks rickshaws are perfectly suited to the narrow streets of the island.

And the 'You're Beautiful' hitmaker has gifted a second tuk-tuk to one of his two sisters. He told Alan Carr's 'Life's A Beach' podcast: "She uses hers on the school run." James served in the British army before finding fame as a pop star, and he previously revealed he's lived all around the world during his younger years. He explained: "I was an army brat who lived on army patches - in Cyprus, Hong Kong, Germany and as far afield and exotic as Yorkshire. Every two years we'd move with my father's helicopter pilot's job and I'd knock on doors and ask, 'Do you have any children of a simi-



James Blunt

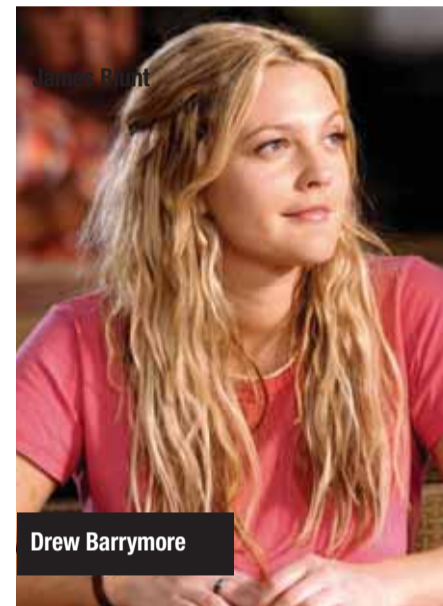
lar age?"

"If so, you'd make a best friend for two years; then never see them again. In Cyprus my best friends were Canadians. In Germany there was lots of bratwurst and chips, but in Cyprus the simple Greek food was fantastic - Mediterranean, delicious and very healthy." James also admitted to being jealous of Italian soldiers during his time in the military. He said: "The Italian soldiers I worked with had much better ration packs, even containing shots of grappa." They'd have fantastic coffee and we'd stop beside them in the armed vehicle as they brewed it and they'd offer us some, but wouldn't have dreamt of trying ours - they'd just politely laugh." —Bang Showbiz

Barrymore is launching her own lifestyle magazine

Drew Barrymore is launching her own lifestyle magazine called Drew. The 'Blended' actress has partnered with Bauer Media Group on the upcoming quarterly publication, which will boast content on beauty, travel, and food. The first issue will hit Walmart stores on June 14, priced at \$9.99, and will be available at more newsstands across the US a week later. Drew - whose brands Flower Beauty, Flower Home and Beautiful by Drew Barrymore were released in Walmart - said: "I've lined my walls with magazine tear sheets since I was like 10 years old. I have a picture of myself in my bedroom and it's like floor to ceiling and wall to wall. I've always loved magazines because of the paper and the experience. Magazines are such a huge part of my life and they're such a huge part of my inspiration for everything I do."

The 'Drew Barrymore Show' host will appear on the first cover, but it's not yet been decided if she will be on the front of every issue. Steven Kotok, president of Bauer Media, explained: "We certainly think [Drew] is our best cover, but we're going into it more with a kind of listening



Drew Barrymore

to the audience. "The reader will always decide. Clearly, she should be on the first cover and we'll figure it out from there. When you over conceive it, that's the only way to screw it up."

Like her talk show, there will be a 'Dear Drew' column for fans to send in their questions and dilemmas. She continued: "I love snail mail, so I have a 'Dear Drew' [segment] on the show. I used to say I love 'Dear Abby' and [Meers and I] came up with this notion of asking me questions and then me giving the answers so that is the origin story of 'Dear Drew.'" Drew has also teased that the magazine will be "very personal" and much like her TV show it will aim to provide some much-needed "optimism". —BangShowbiz

BTS HAVE CALLED FOR AN END TO ASIAN HATE

The K-Pop band have joined the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movement following anti-Asian violence in the US, and the group's members - Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V and Jungkook - released a joint statement in which they discussed the "pain of becoming the subject of hatred and violence". They said: "We send our deepest condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. We feel grief and anger. "We recall moments when we faced discrimination as Asians. We have endured expletives without reason and were mocked for the way we

look. We were even asked why Asians spoke in English. "We cannot put into words the pain of becoming the subject of hatred and violence for such a reason. "Our own experiences are inconsequential compared to the events that have occurred over the past few weeks.

"But these experiences were enough to make us feel powerless and chip away our self-esteem."

The 'Mic Drop' hitmakers made it clear they "condemn violence" and spent "considerable time" deciding how to make their feelings known. They continued: "What is happening right now cannot be dissociated from our identity as Asians. "It required considerable time for us to discuss this carefully and we contemplated deeply on how we should voice our message. "But what our voice must convey is clear.

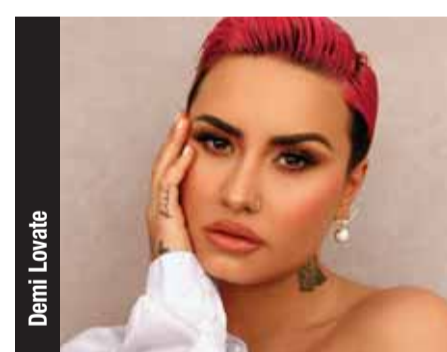
"We stand against racial discrimination. We condemn violence. You, I and we all have the right to be respected. We will stand together." Meanwhile, Megan Thee Stallion recently donated \$50,000 to support the victims of the Atlanta spa shootings. The 'WAP' hitmaker partnered with

Fashion Nova and activist May Lee to donate the money to Advancing Justice Atlanta - a non-profit organization dedicated to the rights of Asian Americans in Georgia - following the devastating shootings on March 16, which saw a gunman enter three different spas and kill eight people. In an Instagram post announcing the donation, Megan wrote: "I am heartbroken by the loss of eight individuals taken from their families on March 16 in a senseless, violent attack against Asian Americans.

"To honor the memory of these victims, @FashionNova and I have partnered with the journalist and Asian activist @mayleeshow on a \$50,000 donation to @advancing_justice_atl who work tirelessly to protect the civil and human rights of Asian Americans in Georgia and the Southeast. "We stand in solidarity with all Asian Americans in saying that enough is enough. #StopAsianHate #StandWithAANHPICommunity (sic)". —Bang Showbiz



BTS



Demi Lovato wants to adopt a child

The 28-year-old pop star assumed she'd already have children at this stage in her life, but she now doesn't see herself ever getting pregnant. The 'Cool for the Summer' hitmaker - who split from her fiancé Max Ehrlich last year - explained: "I used to [want to have kids of my own]. I think if anything, I want to adopt, more than anything." Demi and Max became engaged in July last year and, at the time, the singer was expecting to have a baby with the actor one day. However, she admits that her life hasn't gone according to the plan she created.

She told 'The Joe Rogan Experience' podcast: "I was engaged to a man last year. I totally thought that I'd be married, maybe pregnant, by now. And that's not the case ... I know that my life is not going according to my plan." At the moment, Demi is determined to adopt. But she admits that her plans could change again in the future. She explained: "Life doesn't go according to any plan. So, I could sit here and say, 'Yes, I would love to have children.' But I don't know, because that might change next week." I think in this moment, I want to adopt, for sure." —Bang Showbiz



IN TUNIS, FLAMINGOS WADE PAST WASTE IN KEY AFRICA WETLANDS

Hundreds of flamingos wade past waste in the murky waters of the vast Sijoumi lagoon, a critical wetland in the heart of Tunisia's capital threatened by overexpansion. Once set apart from the city, today half of Tunis' residents live on the banks of the "sebkha", or mudflat, where more than 100,000 birds of around 100 different species spend winter. The birds' human neighbors complain of pollution, recurrent flooding and swarms of mosquitos from the lagoon, one of North Africa's most important wetlands that became a dumping ground during decades of urbanization.

A government-led project that includes buildings, concrete embankments, and digging into the mudflat aims to control pollution and regenerate the habitat, but some environmental groups have pushed back against the initiative. Hamdi, a 31-year-old shopkeeper in the working-class district of Sidi Hassine, hopes the project will beautify the area and solve the "problem of plastic waste and flooding from rainwater". The lagoon plays a vital role not only in absorbing the overflow of water during heavy rains, but also as a breeding ground for the flocks of migratory birds that gather there at the end of winter. But as rural



Flamingoes fly over the Sijoumi mudflat, known as "Sabkhet Sijoumi", on the southern outskirts of Tunisia's capital Tunis. — AFP photos

populations flocked to Tunis, unauthorized building flourished in the former agricultural suburbs of the city and the lagoon became a dump for waste, mainly from construction.

A place to avoid

More than 1.8 million cubic meters of solid waste is estimated to have been disposed of in the lagoon since 2009, according to a government study. As a

result the 2,600-hectare lagoon has been unable to absorb as much rainwater during downpours, leading to flooding that often forces businesses and schools to close. Since 2015, Tunisian authorities have been studying a project to clean up the lagoon and protect the area from flooding, while developing its economic potential through further construction.

Around 48 percent of Tunis residents live around the lagoon, according to the

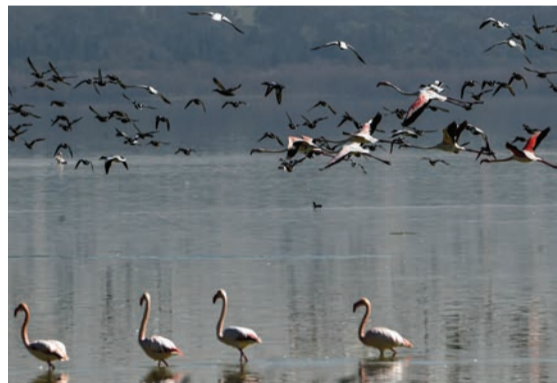
latest census from 2014, and the surrounding neighborhoods are particularly densely populated, with some 2,800 people per square kilometer. The north of the lagoon is lined with brick and concrete buildings that were erected without authorization. A part of the southern banks has remained untouched and serves as a refuge for ducks, flamingos and gulls. But most people avoid even the wild parts of the lagoon, with its olive trees and poppies at the water's edge, as the area is seen as dirty and a place to avoid. Industrial and domestic sewage spews into the lagoon and the battered wreckage of cars and trucks are piled up on the banks.

'Lung of the capital'

Given its diversity, the lagoon was added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in 2007, and it is considered the fourth most significant wetland in North Africa. Nadia Gouider, director of the government's Sijoumi lake project, said the development must be sustainable and aim to "save and support the lung of the capital". But environmental activists are concerned about the potential impact of the project, whose cost could reach 130 million euros (more than \$153 million).

The development of two business districts, Lac-1 and Lac-2, in a large marshy area nearby in the early 1990s has already caused most flamingos to flee to Sijoumi and other wetlands. Imen Rais, an expert with environmental group WWF, warned of the negative impact of wetland decline in Tunisia, underlining its importance to minimize the "phenomena linked to climate change like floods, drought and storms". Hichem Azafzaf, scientific coordinator for a bird protection association, said: "We aren't against the development project in general."

But, he added, as he scanned the lagoon from a wooden observatory through binoculars, "we are against the current version", which includes deepening the lagoon. "Many birds will be deprived of food because they can't dive deep." Gouider said this shouldn't be a problem as "only one third of the lake's surface will be deepened by about one meter (three feet), which will leave space for the birds". In any case, she added, between backfilling, illegal dumping and unregulated building, "if we do nothing, the lagoon will disappear". — AFP



Master restorer of the Sistine Chapel dies aged 92

The chief restorer of the Sistine Chapel, who revived the "dazzling splendor" of Michelangelo's frescoes, has died aged 92, the Vatican Museums said Monday. "Master Gianluigi Colalucci passed away last night," the museums said on their Instagram account. "It is thanks to his courage and talent that today the colors of Michelangelo's Vault and Last Judgment appear in all their dazzling splendor," the message said. Colalucci worked on the Sistine Chapel from 1980 to 1994, removing centuries of dust and smoke that had dulled the vivid colors of the Renaissance masterpiece.

"A sad day for the Vatican Museums

and for the world of restoration," the museums' director, Barbara Jatta, told the Vatican's news portal, Vatican News. She said she had accompanied Colalucci for a private tour of the museums "only a few days ago," so that he could be shown ongoing restoration works. He would regularly be called in to give advice, which he kept giving until "recently," for example on the recently restored Room of Constantine, Jatta said. The Vatican Museums, which include the Sistine Chapel as well as a priceless collection of ancient Roman art, are currently closed due to coronavirus restrictions. — AFP



More 'Thrones'? George R.R. Martin inks five year HBO deal

Fantasy writer George R.R. Martin has signed a five year deal with HBO, the studio said Monday, raising hopes among "Game of Thrones" fans for countless more adventures set among the dragons and warring families of Westeros. The 72-year-old, whose book series "A Song of Ice and Fire" became the record-breaking TV phenomenon "Game of Thrones," is already working on prequel series "House of the Dragon" set 300 years earlier, which is expected to air next year.

Parent company WarnerMedia confirmed a "five year, overall deal" to "develop content for HBO and HBO Max," its streaming service, in a statement to AFP Monday. The announcement did not specify what-if any-additional "Thrones" content would emerge from the deal. But the original "Game of Thrones" redefined must-watch "event TV" for the streaming generation and bagged a staggering 59 Emmys, meaning further installments are all-but certain. According to the Hollywood Reporter, the deal worth "mid-eight figures" dollars could include the saga of warrior queen Nymeria who

reigned a millennium before "Thrones" takes place-provisionally entitled "10,000 Ships."

Other projects reportedly in development include seafaring spin-off "9 Voyages" from the creators of popular TV historical drama "Rome," and a gritty underworld tale set in Westeros capital King's Landing called "Flea Bottom." A "Dunk and Egg" TV series based on Martin's novellas about a knight and his squire has long been rumored, while an animated drama spanning thousands of years has also been mooted. Outside the "Thrones" universe, WarnerMedia's statement confirmed Martin will executive pro-

duce two other HBO projects—"Who Fears Death" and "Roadmarks," both adaptations of fantasy novels from other authors.

With Martin also involved in the Netflix film adaptation of his early short story "Sandkings," the flurry of small-screen projects has raised concern among fans still impatiently waiting for the conclusion of his "A Song of Ice and Fire" series. It has been nearly a decade since the fifth installment of the seven-book series was published. — AFP



In this file photo US writer George R.R. Martin, author of the book series Game of Thrones, speaks during a conference at the Guadalajara International Book Fair in Guadalajara, Mexico. — AFP

Sports

Triple-doubles for Harden, Westbrook deliver NBA wins

Jazz, Clippers win big, Heat overwhelm Knicks

WASHINGTON: Washington's Russell Westbrook and Brooklyn's James Harden delivered impressive triple-doubles on Monday, sparking their clubs to NBA victories and making some personal history for themselves. Westbrook unleashed 35 points, a career-best 21 assists and 14 rebounds to power the Wizards over the visiting Indiana Pacers 132-124 for the 162nd triple-double of his career.

It was the first triple-double in NBA history with 35 or more points and 20 or more rebounds. Only Magic Johnson and Oscar Robertson had previously produced triple-doubles of 30 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists. "I take pride as a leader in making my teammates better. Tonight the guys helped me out making shots and keeping it moving," Westbrook said.

It was Westbrook's 16th triple-double with the Wizards, the 32-year-old US guard setting a club one-season record in only his 38th appearance for Washington. "Mindset was to go out and be aggressive and make sure I set the table for my teammates like I've been doing all year long and make sure they have confidence going into the fourth," Westbrook said. "When the fourth hits, it's time to take over." Japan's Rui Hachimura added 26 points as the Wizards (17-28) had six double-figure scorers, while Domantas Sabonis led Indiana with 35 points and 11 rebounds.

In New York, Harden scored 38 points, passed off 13 assists and pulled down 11 rebounds, while Kyrie Irving added 27 points in his return as the Nets beat visiting Minnesota 112-107. Harden delivered his 12th triple-double in only 32 games with the Nets, tying Jason Kidd's one-season club record, as Brooklyn moved a half-game back of Eastern Conference leader Philadelphia at 32-15.

Irving, who missed Brooklyn's past three games

for personal reasons, added seven rebounds, three assists, three steals and a blocked shot against the league-worst Timberwolves (11-36). Brooklyn's Kevin Durant remains sidelined for at least another week due to a hamstring injury.

Big wins

Frenchman Rudy Gobert had 18 points and 17 rebounds as the Utah Jazz improved the NBA's best record to 35-11 with a 114-75 trouncing of visiting Cleveland. Donovan Mitchell had 19 points, and Mike Conley added 18 for the Jazz, whose win streak stretched to five games.

The Los Angeles Clippers extended their win streak to six games by ripping the Milwaukee Bucks 129-105, improving to 32-16 and staying four games behind the Jazz in the Western Conference. Marcus Morris led the Clippers with 25 points, and Kawhi Leonard added 23, while Greek star big man Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 32 points.

Miami's Jimmy Butler scored 27 points, and Bam Adebayo added 20 points and 18 rebounds to spark the Heat over host New York 98-88. Julius Randle led the Knicks with 22 points. The Heat improved to 23-24 to match Boston for seventh in the East after the Celtics were beaten 115-109 by the visiting New Orleans Pelicans.

Zion Williamson led New Orleans with 28 points, eight rebounds, three assists and four steals, while Brandon Ingram added 25 points and nine assists. Jayson Tatum scored 34 points and grabbed nine rebounds for Boston, which closed the game on a 20-8 run but couldn't overtake the Pelicans. Frenchman Evan Fournier went 0-for-10 from the floor in his Celtics debut after being obtained from Orlando at the NBA trade deadline.



WASHINGTON: Russell Westbrook #4 of the Washington Wizards reacts to a play during the game against the Indiana Pacers on Monday at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. —AFP

Slovenian guard Luka Doncic scored 25 points, and Kristaps Porzingis added 20 to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a 127-106 victory at Oklahoma City. Lithuanian center Jonas Valanciunas scored 30 points and grabbed 15 rebounds to spark the Memphis Grizzlies over Houston 120-110.

Saben Lee, Saddiq Bey and reserve Hamidou Diallo each scored 19 points as the Detroit Pistons

(13-33) snapped a four-game losing streak by defeating Toronto 118-104. Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points, and Richaun Holmes added 23 points and 12 rebounds to lead seven double-digit scorers in the Kings' 132-115 victory at San Antonio. Stephen Curry scored 32 points to lead the Golden State Warriors to a 116-102 home victory over Chicago. —AFP

News in brief

Atalanta boss wins coach of the year

MILAN: Atalanta boss Gian Piero Gasperini was yesterday voted Serie A coach of the year for the second consecutive season. Gasperini won the Panchina d'Oro (the Golden Bench) following a vote of his coaching colleagues in the Italian Coaches' Association. The 63-year-old led Atalanta to a third-place finish in Serie A last season and into the Champions League quarter-finals on their debut in the European competition. Gasperini has transformed the Bergamo club since taking over in 2016, and they are in the running to qualify for the Champions League for a third consecutive season. —AFP

Kuwait, Lebanon draw

DUBAI: Kuwait and Lebanon ended their friendly football match in Dubai, Monday, with a 1-1 draw. Kuwait opened the scoring in the first half through Shabib Al-Khalidi, while Lebanon equalized in the same period through a goal by Mohammad Qadouh. Kuwait is playing several friendly matches in preparation for the Asian qualification for Qatar's 2022 World Cup and China's 2023 Asia Cup. Last Thursday, Kuwait played against Saudi Arabia, losing by 0-1. —KUNA

NBA Draft July 29

NEW YORK: The 2021 NBA Draft will be staged on July 29, one week after a possible seventh game of the NBA Finals, with the lottery for the top pick set for June 22. The league announced key dates on Monday for the annual allocation of rights for top NBA newcomers in a season forced later than usual into the year by the COVID-19 pandemic. No details were revealed about the locations for the events or that of the NBA Draft Combine, a workout session for players in front of team scouts planned from June 21-27. Teams who fail to qualify for the playoffs will be involved in a weighted lottery for the top pick on June 22, a month after the start of the NBA playoffs. The deadline for players to make an early entry application for the NBA Draft is May 30 while the deadline to withdraw such an application is July 19. —AFP

UEFA postpones match

PARIS: UEFA yesterday accepted COVID-19 hit Lyon's request to postpone their women's Champion League quarter-final second leg with Paris Saint-Germain scheduled for today. The defending champions on Monday asked European football's governing body to delay the game on Monday. Seven-time title winners Lyon are leading 1-0 after last week's first leg. PSG qualified for the last eight despite forfeiting the second leg of their last-16 tie against Sparta Prague following a coronavirus outbreak of their own. —AFP

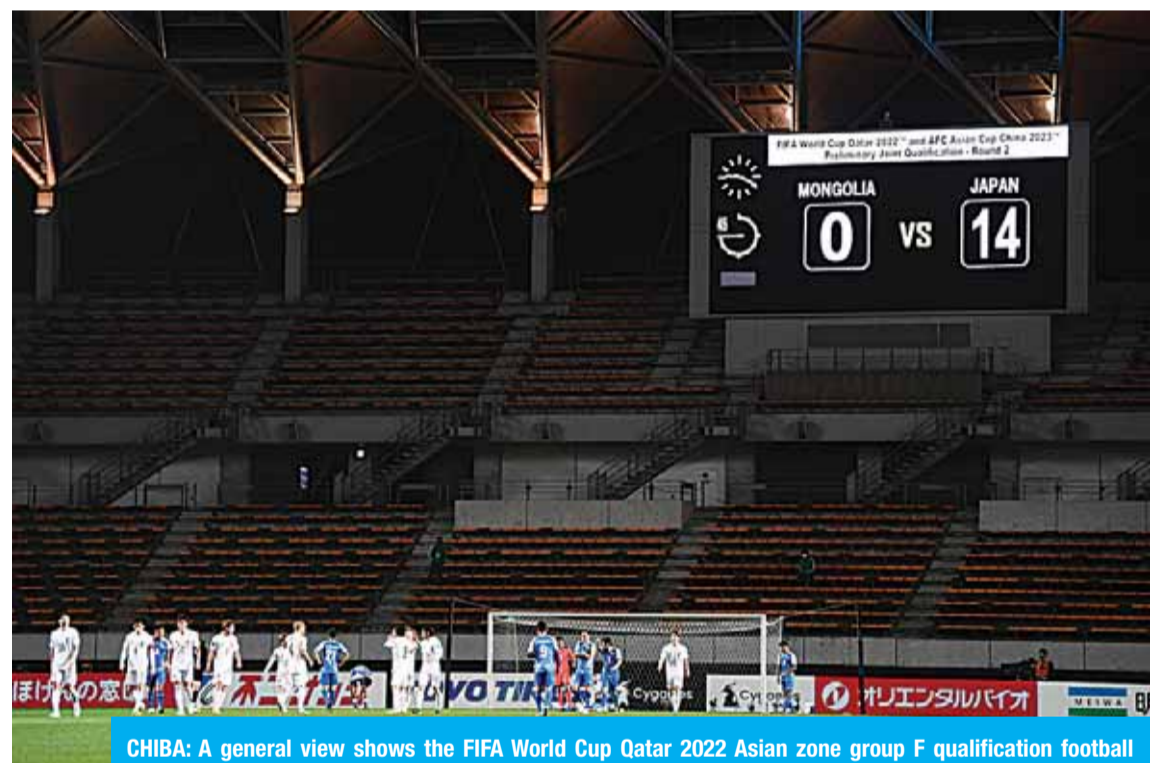
Japan hit World Cup qualifying record in rout of Mongolia

CHIBA: Japan thrashed Mongolia 14-0 yesterday to record their biggest-ever win in World Cup qualifying. Japan, who are looking to qualify for their seventh World Cup in a row, had not played a qualifier since November 2019 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the Blue Samurai showed no signs of rustiness as Southampton forward Takumi Minamino gave them the lead in the 13th minute, before four more goals before half-time put them in complete control.

Nine more after the break gave Japan a perfect record of five wins from five — with 26 goals scored and none conceded — although they have yet to formally clinch their place in the next round. The game was played behind closed doors in Japan despite Mongolia being the home team, due to virus restrictions.

Minamino started the rout when he rifled a shot past the Mongolian goalkeeper, before Yuya Osako and Daichi Kamada put Japan three up after less than 30 minutes. Another from Hidemasa Morita and an own goal from Mongolia's Khash-Erdene Tuya put Japan on easy street at half-time, and Osako made it six 10



CHIBA: A general view shows the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Asian zone group F qualification football match between Japan (white) and Mongolia at Fuku-ari stadium in Chiba yesterday. —AFP

minutes after the restart.

Substitute Sho Inagaki then scored on his debut, before two from Junya Ito and one from Kyogo Furuhashi sent Japan into double figures.

Furuhashi notched an 11th to set a new record for Japan in World Cup qualifying, before Takuma Asano, Osako and Inagaki added three more before the whistle. —AFP

stc main sponsor of triathlon championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of the first sprint distance triathlon race organized by the Kuwait Triathlon Federation for athletes in Kuwait at the Green Island.

stc released a statement expressing its excitement and appreciation to participate as a main sponsor of the first of its kind event in Kuwait, which also falls in line with stc's commitment to support local athletes and promote health awareness. The triathlon witnessed strong participation from local athletes who displayed their high levels of endurance and stamina as they completed the swimming, sprinting, and cycling legs of the race. The triathlon started at the Green Island and continued onto the Gulf Road where the Ministry of Interior had closed two lanes for the athletes to complete the cycling portion of the race.

stc confirmed that the sponsorship comes as a continuation of the various initiatives held under its extensive CSR program, encouraging the active participation of contestants in such events that fall within the sports category. The Company highlighted that its support towards these activities runs parallel with its strategic approach to enable digital transformation and drive innovation.

Through its role as a main sponsor, stc ensured that the proper safety measures and guidelines released by the Ministry of Health were met and implemented

regarding social distancing. A practice that stc applies in its main headquarters, across all its branches, and in any external initiatives it participates in to avoid the spread of infection.

Ahmed Al-Nowaibet, a member of stc's public relations team, delivered a few words to the audience regarding stc's participation in the initiative as well as stc's vision when it comes to implementing its multi-layered CSR program. Al-Nowaibet also participated in honoring the 16 winners, in addition to recognizing members of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior and Kuwait Coast Guard, alongside Rashed Essa Al-Kandari, President of the Kuwait Triathlon Federation, and Fatma Hayat, Head of the Women's Sports Committee in Kuwait.

On this occasion, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "Following our previous sponsorship of the duathlon held earlier this year, sponsoring this initiative adds to the series of activities stc has participated in since launching our new brand early 2020. Our support towards such events stems from our core values which are built on promoting a healthy competitive nature, practicing physical endurance, and embracing a teamwork like culture across all aspects of life."

Jasem took this opportunity to thank the organizers on behalf of stc for effort they have put forth to achieve the successful turnout. She also thanked all the athletes that participated in the thrilling race and commended their athletic ability



Danah Al-Jasem



in completing the challenging course. In relation to stc's CSR agenda, Jasem confirmed that stc will continue to uphold its commitment to drive the community towards participating in such events that promote health awareness and provide athletes with a platform to compete against one another.

Jasem added, "We believe that stc's sponsorship of such events, encourage organizers to continue hosting events and challenges that spark healthy competition in the community. It is essential to back initiatives that bring the community together and empower athletes to pursue their passion in an environment where they can display their athletic talents."

stc's objective through these sponsorships is to become a source of inspiration for the younger generation, encouraging them to adopt a healthier lifestyle that can assist them in building a brighter future ahead. Jasem concluded, "In line with our digital transformation strategy, where we aim to continue developing innovative communication solutions and platforms that complement the strength of our 5G network, serving the entertainment and business needs of our individual and corporate customers respectively, stc is keen to support and encourage pioneering projects and activities across various sectors, which definitely includes the sports industry."

Sports

Aguero starts long farewell as Man City exit looms

Argentine leaves after 10 trophy-laden years as club's top scorer

LONDON: Sergio Aguero, who will always be associated with a single gilded moment in Manchester City's history, is starting his long goodbye from the club with his position secure as one of the Premier League's all-time greats.

Fans in the blue half of Manchester are coming to terms with the impending departure of the 32-year-old striker, who will leave when his contract expires at the end of the season.

Aguero joined City from Atletico Madrid in 2011, three years after the club was taken over by Abu Dhabi owners, and will leave after 10 trophy-laden years as the club's record goalscorer, with 257 goals in 384 games so far.

"When a cycle comes to an end, many sensations arise," the Argentine wrote on Twitter. "A huge sense of satisfaction and pride remains in me for having played with Manchester City for a whole 10 seasons — unusual for a professional player in this day and age."

Aguero has won four Premier League titles, with a fifth looking almost certain this season for City. Pep Guardiola's side also remain in the hunt for a historic quadruple. City chairman Khaldoon Al-Mubarak has revealed a statue of the striker has been commissioned to stand alongside those currently being made to honour Aguero's former team-

mates David Silva and Vincent Kompany.

"Sergio's contribution to Manchester City over the last 10 years cannot be over-stated," said Mubarak. "His legend will be indelibly etched into the memories of everyone who loves the club and maybe even in those who simply love football."

Team-mate Kevin De Bruyne hailed him as a "City legend forever" while City defender Aymeric Laporte described him as a "class act" on and off the pitch. Aguero has struggled with injuries since having knee surgery in the close season. A hamstring problem complicated his comeback and then he had to sit out a month after a coronavirus infection.

Those factors will have played a part in City's decision not to offer him a new contract but the player himself is adamant he is far from finished, saying he is ready to face his new challenge with "passion and professionalism".

Aguero magic

Even nine years after the event, it is impossible to separate Aguero from the goal that forever earned his place in the hearts of City fans. Manchester United were seconds away from celebrating yet another Premier League title, prolonging the agony of their neighbors, who had not been crowned English champions since 1968.

But Aguero had other ideas, receiving the ball from Mario Balotelli and thundering home a finish to secure a 3-2 victory against QPR and send the Etihad into raptures. There is even a 93:20 lounge at the stadium in a nod to the timing of Aguero's dramatic title-clinching winner.

The Argentine became the club's record goalscorer when he overtook Eric Brook's 78-year landmark in 2017 and is now far out on his own. He is the highest-scoring overseas player in Premier League history and is fourth on the all-time Premier League goalscoring list, with 181 goals.

Aguero's problems with injuries and illness this season mean he has made just 14 appearances and he has scored just three times. But former City defender Micah Richards, who won the title alongside Aguero in the 2011/12 season — believes the Argentine still has a lot to offer.

"Unless you get (Kylian) Mbappe, (Erling) Haaland or (Harry) Kane, what striker are you going to get to replace him? You get another year out of him," Richards told the BBC. City have been linked with a move for Borussia Dortmund hotshot Haaland, who is one of the most coveted players in world football, and Kane could be another option.

Aguero himself is adamant his departure does not mean the end of the story for him personally.



LIVERPOOL: Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Aguero looks on after the English FA Cup quarter final football match between Everton and Manchester City at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England on March 20, 2021. —AFP

Barcelona are reported to be potential suitors and the Argentine has also been linked with Paris Saint-Germain, Juventus and Inter Milan. City, for their part, hope to have thousands of fans back in their stadium as COVID-19 restrictions are eased — in time to say farewell to Aguero and give a fitting send-off to one of their true greats. —AFP

Dzeko in autumn of career that began in rubble of Sarajevo

SARAJEVO: At 35, Edin Dzeko is both the star and old man of a Bosnia team he will lead against France in 2022 World Cup qualifying today, but he owes his long career to the time his mother would not let him play football. One day, during the bloody siege of Sarajevo, the young Dzeko asked his mother if he could go outside to play football. She said no. A bomb exploded on the pitch, killing several children.

Dzeko is in the autumn of a career in which he has won league titles in Germany and England. He has scored just seven league goals in 20 Serie A matches for Roma this season and none since he hit the winner against Sampdoria in early January. The future Wolfsburg, Manchester City and Roma forward was only six years old in 1992 when the war broke out.

Dzeko spent most of his childhood in Otoka, a soulless neighborhood on the outskirts of Sarajevo, whose 30-storey brutalist skyscrapers offered some shelter from Serbian snipers lurking in the hills above. His father, who was in the Bosnian army, recalls that local children waited for the gunfire to die down before heading downstairs to hit the ball around.

"It was risky, but the children had to play somewhere," Dzeko's father Midhad, 66, told AFP. The skinny blonde-haired lad quickly outgrew the concrete football pitch nestled between the skyscrapers, and enrolled in the academy of Zeljeznicar, one of two major Bosnian clubs.

Since its stadium was on the frontline and ploughed with trenches, children trained in a school

gym. His coach Jusuf Sehic, who died of coronavirus last year, told AFP in 2018 that he remembered a kid who "was only interested in advancing towards the goal".

Iso Ahmetovic, who is still a coach in Zeljeznicar, recalls a passing drill involving seven boys including Dzeko. Some pensioners were gawking at the exercise from behind a fence. "At that time, Andriy Shevchenko was the best player in the world. I turned around and said, 'Look at him, he's the new Shevchenko'" Ahmetovic told AFP.

'It's all in the head'

When Dzeko broke into the Zeljeznicar senior team, he was "the same height he is now (1.93m), with probably 25 kilos less", Amar Osim, the manager who guided Zeljeznicar to five national titles told AFP. "But he had exceptional qualities" and "an incredible ability to score goals", he explained.

He was "obsessed" and "wanted to become a real player", Osim recalled. Osim was one of the few to spot his potential. Dzeko, who often played as a midfielder, scored only five goals in some 40 appearances for "Zeljo", and was criticized for being too slow and having poor technique.

Jiri Plisek, a coach who had worked briefly in Zeljeznicar, persuaded the towering youngster to follow him to Czech side Teplice. After shipping Dzeko out for peanuts, former Zeljeznicar chairman was quoted saying he thought the club had "won the lottery" by selling Dzeko. But the lanky youngster was determined. His teammate at Teplice, Samir Merzic, recalls a player of "incredible self-confidence".

"He was 19 years old when we played against Sparta Prague. He was facing Tomas Repka, who had just returned from England, a gladiator. But Edin faced him without fear", Merzic told AFP. "It's all in the head," Dzeko's father Midhad said. "Edin is solid, strong, stable. He has been through a lot in life and in football. He knew how to deal with pressure



SARAJEVO: In this file photo taken on October 8, 2020 Bosnia and Herzegovina's forward Edin Dzeko (2R) controls the ball next to Northern Ireland's defenders during the UEFA Euro 2020 Play-off Semi-Final football match between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland in Sarajevo. —AFP

and how to cope," he added.

Humanitarian

Despite living abroad for 16 years, Dzeko keeps close ties with Bosnia. He does humanitarian work with his wife Amra, focusing on sick children in the poor Balkan country. In 2012, he was at Manchester City when someone reported that a seriously ill Bosnian teenager was being treated in Manchester.

"I was dozing in bed ... At one point I saw Dzeko, him, his mother and his father. At first I thought I was dreaming," Aner Zelic, who is now 24, told AFP. Dzeko took care of the boy's family financially, but above all, provided "moral support".

"Whenever he had time, he came to spend time with me in the hospital. "We played board games, PlayStation, cards. We didn't talk about my illness, but about other things, especially sports, to make me forget all that," the young man recalled. —AFP

Chelsea v Porto to be played in Seville

PARIS: Both legs of the Champions League quarter-final between Portuguese club Porto and Premier League side Chelsea will be played in

Seville, Spain, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. UEFA confirmed yesterday. The matches will be played at Sevilla's Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium, with the first leg on April 7 and the return on April 13.

Portugal was removed from the British government's list of countries on a travel ban red list earlier this month but anyone entering the UK from there is still required to self-isolate for 10 days. It is just the latest

European tie this season to be impacted by travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

Ironically the first leg of Chelsea's last-16 tie against Atletico Madrid was moved from Spain to the Romanian capital Bucharest. Spain this week eased restrictions on people entering the country from the UK for certain reasons, including participants in high-level sporting events.

Both legs of the last-16 ties

between Liverpool and RB Leipzig, and between Manchester City and Borussia Muenchengladbach, were switched to Budapest. Meanwhile the two legs of the Europa League last-32 tie between Arsenal and Lisbon giants Benfica were played at neutral venues, in Italy and Greece. Chelsea have already played at the Sanchez Pizjuan this season, beating Sevilla 4-0 in a group game in December. —AFP

Spain vs Kosovo overshadowed by diplomatic row

MADRID: Spain's 2022 World Cup qualifier against Kosovo today is more than a simple game of football, with the meeting in Seville also at the center of a diplomatic row. The controversy stems from the description of Kosovo as a "territory" by the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) when it published Spain's opening World Cup qualifying fixtures in a group also containing Sweden, Greece and Georgia.

The description was not appreciated in Kosovo, the former Serbian province of 1.8 million people which declared its independence in 2008. In response, the Football Federation of Kosovo (FFK), said in a statement that "Kosovo is an independent state" and threatened not to play the match if it was not allowed to use its national anthem and flag.

"We were prepared not to go to Spain due to the political context of this decision," FFK secretary general Eroll Salihu told AFP. Kosovo were granted full membership of UEFA and FIFA in 2016 and first appeared in competitive action in qualifying for the 2018 World Cup.

'Independence is irreversible'

Most western powers recognize Kosovo's statehood but Serbia and its leading international allies China and Russia do not. Nor does Spain, or Greece, another of their opponents on the field in the campaign to qualify for Qatar 2022. Spain and Greece, along with Slovakia, Romania and Cyprus, are the five member states of the European Union who were last week urged to recognize Kosovo by the European Parliament.

"Kosovo's independence is irreversible. Recognition by these remaining EU member states... would be beneficial to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, would enhance and consolidate the stability of the region," members of the European Parliament said.

Nevertheless Madrid has already stated the staging of tonight's game at Seville's La Cartuja stadium will not persuade it to change its position. "The staging of the match between the teams from these two federations does not under any circumstances change Spain's position not to acknowledge Kosovo as a state," Spanish diplomatic sources told AFP. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adalya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khaldiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Kaifan	24849807
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shamiya	24848913
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shuwaikh	24814507
Adan Hospital	23940620	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Nuzha	22526804
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Qadsiya	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082

Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707

NOTICE
March 23, 2021

Mr. Jinu Joseph George, son of Mr. George Joseph, resident of Ikkaramprathu House, Perumprammave PO Pathanamthitta DT, Kerala 689587 and Ms. Dora Thomas, daughter of Mr. Thomas Zachariah, resident of Cheriyil House, PO Kolakkad, Kannur, 670673 Kerala both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2. kuwa it @mea.g. ov. in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Dr. Vinod Gokwad)
First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer.

Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

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Top flight: South Korea's 18-year-old becomes world drone champion

HWASEONG: In a South Korean rice field, the teenage world drone-racing champion is preparing to defend his title in one of the planet's fastest and highest-tech sports. But at all of 18 years old, Kang Chang-hyeon fears he is quickly passing his prime to compete at top flight levels.

On the starting signal, Kang and his three teammates send their craft buzzing furiously into the air and hurtling around an obstacle course set up on the bare earth in Hwaseong, south of Seoul. The only human movement was the twitches of fingers on handsets, which the pilots use to control the aircraft while wearing virtual-reality goggles that give them a drone's-eye view of the route.

Three laps and around one minute later, the race was over and the technical analysis began in a dedicated tent, with pilots, coaches, technicians and parents poring over flight data. Like Formula One, drone-flying depends both on precision engineering and pilot skill.

Racing drones are custom-built by competitors and their teams, and reach speeds of up to 170 kilometers (105 miles) per hour. But races are so close, with timings measured in thousandth of a second. And it is a young flyer's game. Lightning-fast reflexes, visual sharpness and hours of training are the key to success, according to Kang.

He says he is already facing physical decline as a new generation of younger rivals arrives, some of them still in primary school. "Those qualities are the best in your early- to mid-teenage years," said the still pimply-faced pilot. Kang said his reflexes were "inevitably" slowing with each passing year, and he was not ruling out retirement before turning 20.

It will be "pretty tough to compete against them in my adult years," he said. "I think I may not make it past this year." One 12-year-old girl already has him in her sights. "When I first met Kang Chang-hyeon, I was in awe of him and it felt like a dream," said Jeong Ryeo-won, after taking part in a league round in the southern county of Hadong. But now

she "really wants" to beat him: "He is my role model, so I hope to compete against him at the world championships, but win."

Split second

Only three years after first flying a toy drone, Kang, at age 16, took the world title at a 2019 championship in China, where South Korean pilots dominated. "Maintaining composure is key to winning because a split-second decision can determine the outcome of a race," he said. "Minimizing your mistakes while staying calm regardless of who's ahead of you is critical."

Kang's high school in rural Hongseong county has sought to capitalize on his success by promoting itself as a specialist drone school — with Kang as its ambassador — offering lessons in piloting to attract more pupils. But the coronavirus pandemic deprived him of the chance to defend his crown at the peak of his abilities, when the Swiss-based Federation Aeronautique Internationale, the world governing body for air sports, was forced to cancel the 2020 world championships. "I could have competed really well last year," he said.

Military mission

Like other young South Korean men achieving global success, from pop stars BTS to Spurs striker Son Heung-min, compulsory military service weighs on his path. South Korea remains technically at war with nuclear-armed North Korea, and all able-bodied South Korean males must spend around 18 months in the forces before they turn 30.

The only exceptions are for Olympic medalists and Asian Games champions, along with the winners of some international classical music competitions. But Kang's skills could be of "great value" for the armed forces, said his coach Kim Jae-hong, who led the national team at the 2019 world championships.

South Korea's 555,000-strong military is heavily outnumbered by North Korea's 1.28 million troops.



HWASEONG: This picture taken on February 20, 2021 shows Kang Chang-hyeon, a teenaged drone-racing champion, posing with his drone during a training session at a rice field in Hwaseong, south of Seoul. — AFP

But the South enjoys technological superiority including, according to the defense ministry, a fleet of around 800 drones for training and experimental combat purposes.

"The drone units' monitoring mission is basical-

ly based on controlling a drone with a camera live feed, which is the same for drone racing," the coach said. "Kang and other racers can contribute greatly to its mission while maintaining their drone-control skills." — AFP



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